



“Don't pretend to be my friend!” When an informal brand communication style backfires on social media



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ABSTRACT

Social media are now essential platforms for marketing communications, and the volume of consumer-brand interactions on these platforms is exploding. Even so, it remains unclear how brands should communicate with consumers to foster relationships and, in particular, to gain their trust. A fundamental decision in this regard is the choice of a communication style, specifically, whether an informal or a formal style should be used in social media communications. In this paper, we investigate how adopting an informal (vs. formal) communication style affects brand trust and demonstrate that using an informal style can either have a positive or negative effect on brand trust, depending on whether consumers are familiar with the brand or not. We further show that these effects occur because consumers expect brands to behave according to social norms, such that the use of an informal style is perceived to be appropriate for familiar brands and inappropriate for unfamiliar ones.

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1. Introduction

More than a billion consumers worldwide are using social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter (Facebook, 2015; Twitter, 2015). Consumers spend most of their online time on social media sites (The Economist, 2015). This massive adoption of social media represents a great opportunity for brands to connect, interact, and build relationships with consumers. As a result, most brands now use social media for marketing communications (Simply Measured, 2015), and the number of daily consumer-brand interactions on these platforms is exploding (Forrester, 2014).

Although social media have become major communication platforms for both consumers and brands, marketers struggle to develop sustainable consumer-brand relationships on these platforms. Recent research suggests that marketers' attempts to nurture relationships with their consumers through social media are far from effective (Fournier & Avery, 2011). Not only do consumers resist brand advertising in their social spaces, but they also use these platforms as a convenient place to attack brands on a massive scale (Fournier & Avery, 2011; Van Noort & Willemsen, 2011). In this context, building brand trust with existing and potential consumers has been identified as a crucial first step in fostering relationships on social media (Gleeson, 2012; Porter & Donthu, 2008), and brands apparently continue to fall short in

this regard (Gleeson, 2012). In the absence of brand trust, consumers feel vulnerable and are reluctant to open up to brands (Schoenbachler & Gordon, 2002).

Developing brand trust is especially crucial when interacting with consumers who are unfamiliar with the brand because these consumers usually have little upon which they can base their expectations of the brand's trustworthiness (Sparks & Areni, 2002). These initial encounters become quite prominent as consumers increasingly look to social media to form opinions about new and unfamiliar brands (Knowledge Networks, 2011). In such situations, non-verbal cues, such as communication style, play a central role in reducing uncertainties and influencing assessments of the brand's trustworthiness (Berger & Calabrese, 1975; Keeling, McGoldrick, & Beatty, 2010). The way brands communicate with consumers is thus decisive in shaping brand trust and, subsequently, determining whether the relationship will progress beyond the initial encounters (Keeling et al., 2010). However, few researchers have examined how communication style affects brand trust, and even fewer have done so in the context of social media.

Notably, brands appear to employ a predominantly informal style in their social media communications (Beukeboom, Kerkhof, & de Vries, 2015). An informal communication style is defined as “common, non-official, familiar, casual, and often colloquial, and contrasts in these senses with formal” (McArthur, 1992). It is common, for example, for brands to refer to their consumers by their first name (e.g., “Hi John!”) and to use emoticons (e.g., “☺”) and/or abbreviated expressions (e.g., “Thanks”). Brands employ an informal style because they believe that it conveys closeness and fosters consumer-brand relationships.

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However, there is no evidence that using an informal style is the optimal way to communicate with all consumers. Given the prevalence of the informal communication style, the lack of research on its effects on key aspects of consumer-brand relationships, such as brand trust, is striking.

Thus, in this paper, we investigate how employing an informal (vs. formal) communication style affects brand trust in a social media context. Across three experiments, we demonstrate that the effects of an informal style on brand trust depend on whether consumers are familiar with the brand, such that the use of an informal style increases (decreases) trust in brands with which consumers are familiar (unfamiliar). In addition, we investigate the mechanism underlying the observed effects and show that the perceived appropriateness of the communication style mediates these effects. Specifically, whereas consumers regard the use of an informal style as more appropriate when they are familiar with a brand, they expect a more formal communication style when the brand is new to them. Our research offers marketers theoretical guidance for interacting with consumers in social media settings and, ultimately, for fostering consumer-brand relationships.

2. Brand communication style and consumer behavior

Although research on how marketers communicate with consumers on social media is limited, considerable prior research has examined how particular aspects of brand communication (e.g., figurative language, assertive language, or language that implies closeness) in an advertising context affect consumer behavior (Kronrod & Danziger, 2013; Kronrod, Grinstein, & Wathieu, 2012; McQuarrie & Mick, 1999; Phillips & McQuarrie, 2009; Sela, Wheeler, & Sarial-Abi, 2012). These studies demonstrate that the way a message is communicated considerably affects consumer response and provide some guidelines regarding the choice of an appropriate communication style. However, all these studies are set in an advertising context and might not apply to social media settings. The key difference between advertising and social media communication is the directionality of communication (i.e., bi-directional vs. uni-directional). In social media settings, brands and consumers engage in conversations via two-way communication. Conversations involve communicational rules that differ from one-way communication in two major ways. First, conversation is a process of interpersonal turn taking. Participants in a conversation exchange messages that are linked sequentially (Thomas, 1992). This type of exchange implies that brands on social media need to adapt and coordinate their communication based on prior messages from individual consumers. Second, an advertisement is the result of a carefully deliberated, step-by-step process, including design, copywriting, and production. In contrast, brand communication in social media settings is much more spontaneous and strongly resembles interpersonal communication. As a result, findings from advertising research might not directly transfer to social media settings, and the effects of brand communication style need to be explicitly investigated in this new context.

Among the few researchers who have studied brand communication style in two-way communication settings, Kelleher (2009) examined how consumers perceive brand communication via online blogs and introduced the concept of the “conversational human voice”. Conversational human voice is defined as “an engaging and natural style of organizational communication as perceived by an organization’s publics based on interactions between individuals in the organization and individuals in the public” (Kelleher, 2009). The author found that frequent visitors to a brand’s online blog were more likely to perceive the brand to be communicating with a conversational human voice, which, in turn, was related to trust, satisfaction and commitment (Kelleher, 2009; Kelleher & Miller, 2006). Although conveying perceptions of conversational human voice seems to be a promising way of communicating with consumers on social media, the concept suffers from a lack of conceptual clarity and does not provide precise operational guidelines for how a brand can articulate such a communication style.

It thus remains unclear which specific communication style a brand should best use in a social media context and, in particular, which aspects of language (such as vocabulary, punctuation, use of pronouns, etc.) result in the most favorable consumer response.

The current research addresses this issue by focusing on an informal communication style, a style that brands predominantly employ in their social media communications. While an informal style might share some similarities with the concept of conversational human voice, as they both aim to convey openness to dialog, the two also differ in many aspects. An informal communication style reflects a more objective, concrete, and operationalizable communication style rather than subjective perceptions. Consequently, compared to the concept of conversational human voice, the study of an informal style offers firmer guidance on how marketers can best compose their messages to consumers. The present research thus extends the limited literature on brand communication in two-way communication settings by investigating how the use of an informal communication style in a social media context influences brand trust. In doing so, we provide a clearer and more thorough understanding of which communication style brands should employ when interacting with consumers in social media settings.

3. Informal communication style and brand trust

An informal communication style is characterized by the use of common, non-official, casual, and often colloquial language (McArthur, 1992). Unlike a formal style, which reflects written language, an informal style is generally associated with spoken language (Biber, 1986) and involves the use of linguistic features generally associated with a conversation (Fairclough, 1994). For example, saying, “Great! Thanks. That’s what we like to hear.” is more informal than saying, “Thank you for the comment. It is appreciated.”

Due to the lack of research on the informal style in the brand communication literature, we base our conceptualization on prior research in critical discourse analysis that highlighted a shift toward informalization of public discourses (e.g., (Fairclough, 1992, 1994, 1996). In his pioneering and influential work, Fairclough (1992, 1994, 1996) observed that contemporary societal changes (e.g., globalization, democratization, and informatization) have influenced public discourse. He identified a key discursive effect: discourses are becoming more informal. Specifically, speakers strategically use an informal style to convey perceptions of closeness with their audience. This style softens hierarchical relationships of power, reduces social distance between interlocutors and, hence, is likely to foster trusting relationships (Delin, 2005).

Trust is a fundamental dimension on which the quality of relationships is assessed (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Trust has been shown to be the sine qua non condition for brand loyalty, behavioral intentions (Morgan & Hunt, 1994), and long-term orientation (Geyskens, Steenkamp, & Kumar, 1998). Furthermore, more recent research emphasizes that gaining consumers’ trust is especially crucial for successful consumer-brand interactions in the social media context (Gleeson, 2012; Porter & Donthu, 2008). Therefore, we focus on brand trust when investigating the effect of an informal communication style on consumers’ responses to brands in a social media context. We define brand trust in terms of the perceived predictability of the brand’s behavior: it is the consumer’s confidence that the brand will act as expected (Rempel, Holmes, & Zanna, 1985; Scanzoni, 1979).

Based on the aforementioned research, marketing managers might conclude that the use of informal language should generally improve consumer-brand relationships, as reflected by higher brand trust. However, drawing on role theory (Sarbin & Allen, 1968; Schewe, 1973; Solomon, Surprenant, Czepiel, & Gutman, 1985), we propose that this strategy might not always be effective and that consumers’ familiarity with the brand plays an important role in this sense.

4. Role theory

Role theory posits that successful social interaction depends on whether relationship partners behave appropriately according to their specific social role in a relationship (Sarbin & Allen, 1968; Schewe, 1973; Solomon et al., 1985). That is, when interacting with each other, individuals must understand the nature of their relationship, locate themselves in this relationship, determine the role appropriate to that location in that type of relationship, and behave accordingly (Schewe, 1973). Successful interactions thus depend on a shared understanding of behavioral norms, and social partners evaluate the degree to which the behavior of the other partner is (in)appropriate given their relationship (Sarbin & Allen, 1968; Schewe, 1973; Solomon et al., 1985). If the adopted behavior is consistent with social expectations, it increases trust in the relationship; if not, trust is reduced (Mandler, 1982; Meyers-Levy & Tybout, 1989).

A critical role is whether someone is familiar or unfamiliar with the other person, for example, whether he or she is a stranger, an acquaintance, or a friend. Specifically, prior research suggests that different degrees of acquaintance between people entail different social norms; hence, people interact differently depending on the degree to which they are familiar with each other (Little, 1965; Willis, 1966). For example, research on interpersonal distance in face-to-face interactions has revealed that strangers stand farther apart than acquaintances (Little, 1965; Willis, 1966) and acquaintances stand farther apart than friends (Little, 1965). The appropriate distance between communicators plays a significant role in shaping the quality and tone of their interaction and helps maintain a level of intimacy that is comfortable, appropriate, and safe (Kaitz, Bar-Haim, Lehrer, & Grossman, 2004).

From a communication style perspective, the adoption of a formal style is perceived as more appropriate for people who are unfamiliar with each other, whereas an informal style is preferred for more acquainted people. Specifically, the literature on politeness suggests that polite, formal language signifies interpersonal distance (Stephan, Liberman, & Trope, 2010). People address strangers more formally than friends, and the use of polite, formal language helps maintain a certain distance (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

5. The moderating effect of brand familiarity

We propose that this interpersonal theory also applies to consumer-brand relationships. Prior research has shown that consumers tend to relate to brands in ways that mirror their interpersonal relationships and that they use norms of social relationships as guiding principles in their interactions with brands (Aggarwal, 2004; Fournier, 1998). This tendency to attribute and apply social, human beliefs to brands is known as brand anthropomorphism (Aggarwal & McGill, 2007). Prior work on consumer-brand relationships demonstrated that brand anthropomorphism often underlies consumers' responses to brand communication; that is, consumers often act toward brands as they would toward people (e.g., Aggarwal, 2004; Aggarwal & McGill, 2012; Sela et al., 2012). While these findings on brand anthropomorphism have been demonstrated mainly in a one-way communication (advertising) context, brand anthropomorphism is even more likely to naturally occur in the context of social media, where brands' communication is much more similar to human communication. Accordingly, because consumer-brand interactions on social media mirror interpersonal interactions, consumers will expect brands to also respect social norms and to behave in accordance with these expectations. Specifically, depending on whether consumers are familiar or unfamiliar with a brand, they will expect the brand to adopt an informal or a formal communication style, respectively. If the brand does not communicate appropriately, it will likely reduce consumers' trust in that brand.

This idea that brand familiarity affects consumers' judgment and evaluation of brands has also been shown in the marketing literature (Aggarwal, 2004; Aggarwal & McGill, 2012). For example, Campbell and

Keller (2003) showed that consumers respond differently to the repetition of an advertisement sponsored by a familiar vs. an unfamiliar brand. They found that repetition of an advertisement from an unfamiliar brand decreases consumers' attitudes toward the brand more quickly than when the ad is from a familiar brand. In a similar vein, Sela et al. (2012) demonstrated that customers and non-customers of a brand react differently to pronoun variations (i.e., "we" vs. "you and the brand") used in advertisements of that brand. Specifically, they showed that existing customers, but not noncustomers, have more favorable attitudes toward a brand when the message referred to the brand and the consumer as "we" rather than as "you and the brand". Although these studies were not conducted in the context of social media, they shed light on the importance of brand familiarity as a relational aspect that is likely to influence consumers' response to the brand's communication style. Brand familiarity is defined as the extent of a consumer's direct and indirect experience with a brand (Kent & Allen, 1994) and therefore reflects the consumer's degree of acquaintance with the brand.

Taken together, the above-mentioned studies suggest that the degree of familiarity with a brand is an important moderator that is likely to influence consumers' responses to the use of an informal communication style. Specifically, whereas consumers may regard the use of an informal style as more appropriate when they are relatively familiar with the brand, they should generally expect a more formal communication style when the brand is new to them. This is because, when one partner feels some distance from the other, which is usually the case in a first encounter, behavior that is more formal in nature is considered more appropriate and comfortable (Kaitz et al., 2004). These differences in expectations of appropriate communication, in turn, are likely to influence brand trust. Brand trust reflects the consumer's confidence that the brand will act as expected (Rempel et al., 1985). Because trust is based on consistency with expectations, we expect that a brand communication style that is (in)consistent with consumers' expectations should (decrease) increase their brand trust (Mandler, 1982; Meyers-Levy & Tybout, 1989). Building on the literature above, we hypothesize that the relationship between an informal communication style and brand trust differs depending on whether consumers are familiar vs. unfamiliar with the brand, such that the use of an informal style (decreases) increases consumers' trust in (un)familiar brands. These effects occur because consumers expect brands to behave according to social norms, such that the use of an informal style is perceived to be appropriate for familiar brands and inappropriate for unfamiliar ones.

H1. For brands with which consumers are familiar, the adoption of an informal (vs. formal) communication style on social media increases consumers' brand trust.

H2. For brands with which consumers are unfamiliar, the adoption of an informal (vs. formal) communication style on social media reduces consumers' brand trust.

H3. In a social media context, informal communication style and brand familiarity jointly impact consumers' brand trust such that an informal communication style increases consumers' trust in familiar brands. In contrast, an informal communication style decreases consumers' trust in unfamiliar brands.

H4. In a social media context, the perceived appropriateness of the communication style mediates the interaction effect of an informal communication style and brand familiarity on brand trust.

Three experiments test these hypotheses. A pilot study provides a robust operationalization of an informal (vs. formal) communication style within the specific context of social media. Experiments 1 and 2 then examine the effect of the use of an informal communication style on trust in the case of familiar and unfamiliar brands, respectively. Experiment 3 directly examines the joint impact of communication style and brand

familiarity within the context of one brand and tests the mediating role of the perceived appropriateness of the communication style.

6. Pilot study

To the best of our knowledge, we are the first to manipulate informal communication style. Therefore, we conducted a pilot study to determine what, exactly, an informal style conveys in terms of linguistic features and to operationalize this concept in our experimental studies. Based on a review of prior research on communication and critical discourse analysis, we identified 14 important linguistic features of the informal style (see Table 1 for details; Biber, 1986; Delin, 2005; Pearce, 2005). Because prior research exclusively concerned communication in an offline context, we also conducted a qualitative pretest to gain further insight into the operationalization of an informal (vs. formal) style in the specific context of social media. Sixty-three undergraduate students (64% female, $M_{\text{age}} = 21$ years) were asked to (1) describe what informal and formal communication styles meant to them and (2) provide examples of informal and formal brand communication in social media settings. We found that the informal style was most often described as being “personal” (13%), “not distant” (16%), and “friendly” (11%) and that it entails the use of first names, abbreviations, and emoticons. A formal style, by contrast, was associated with the observance of strict language rules (e.g., correct grammar and spelling; 34%). No other description was used frequently (all other frequencies < 8%).

Table 1 provides the list of linguistic features that we used to manipulate an informal/formal style in our subsequent studies. In a pretest, we examined participants' perceptions of the level of informality of this manipulation. We exposed 29 undergraduate students to a fictitious brand's social media page that featured interactions between the brand and six consumers (see Appendix A). Participants were randomly assigned to one of the two conditions (informal style vs. formal style),

Table 1
List of the linguistic features used to manipulate the informal style.

Linguistic features	References	Examples from existing brand messages on social media
Informal vocabulary	Survey study; Biber (1986), Delin (2005)	“Great”, “Awesome”
Informal punctuation	Survey study; Delin (2005)	“...”, “!”
Contraction	Survey study; Biber (1986), Delin (2005), Pearce (2005)	“Thanks”, “That's”, “We're”
Use of first name	Survey study; Pearce (2005)	“Hi John”
Emoticons	Survey study	“;-)”, “☺”, “☹”
Lexical bundles	Pearce (2005)	“That's what we like to hear”, “That's awesome”
Common verbs	Pearce (2005)	“Check out” vs. “Visit”
First- and second-person pronouns	Biber (1986), Pearce (2005)	“You”, “we”, “us”
Sound mimicking	Biber (1986), Delin (2005)	“Awww”, “soooo”
Active vs. passive voice	Biber (1986), Pearce (2005)	“More information can be found on” vs. “You can find more information on”
Verb omission	Biber (1986)	“There are no hotels in” vs. “No hotels in”
Common expression vs. formal expression	Survey study; Pearce (2005)	“Waiting for you” vs. “Looking forward to hosting you”
Adverbial expressions of stance	Biber (1986), Pearce (2005)	“Sure”
Discourse markers	Biber (1986), Pearce (2005)	“And”, “So”
Present tense vs. conditional tense	Pearce (2005)	“Do” vs. “Would”

after which they responded to a four-item measure concerning the degree to which the brand communicates in an informal way (i.e., “communicates in an informal/unofficial/casual/easygoing way”; 7-point scales; $\alpha = 0.95$). Participants in the informal condition indicated that the communication style was significantly more informal than did the participants in the formal condition ($M_{\text{Informal}} = 6.15$, $M_{\text{Formal}} = 3.51$; $F(1,27) = 11.66$, $p = 0.00$). The results of the pilot study thus indicate successful manipulation of an informal/formal communication style.

7. Experiment 1: effect of an informal style on brand trust for familiar brands

The objective of the first experiment was to test whether the use of an informal style positively affects brand trust when consumers are familiar with the brand (Hypothesis 1). We employed an existing hotel brand and examined participants' brand trust when the brand interacts with consumers through either an informal or formal style on a popular social networking site, Facebook.

7.1. Method

In Experiment 1, we employed a one-factor between-subjects design, with communication style (informal vs. formal) serving as manipulating factor. A total of 79 US residents (36.7% female, $M_{\text{Age}} = 32$ years) recruited from Amazon's Mechanical Turk online panel participated in an online experiment for payment. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the two conditions (informal vs. formal style) and were told that they would be reading an excerpt from the Facebook fan page of a popular hotel brand, Hampton. Participants then viewed an excerpt from a simulated Hampton Facebook page that featured interactions between the brand and six consumers (see Appendix B). While the actual brand presents itself on their Facebook page as “Hampton by Hilton”, we purposefully chose to use the brand name “Hampton” without reference to Hilton to avoid confounding effects of preexisting perceptions of the parent brand, Hilton. The manipulation of the informal communication style was based on the results of the pilot study. We manipulated the style such that content across scenarios was not influenced. We also ensured that our communication style manipulation was consistent with existing brand communication practices on social media by using expressions from real brand posts on social networking sites. Participants then completed a questionnaire that included measures of brand trust, manipulation checks, and control variables. The study concluded with a brief demographic section.

7.2. Measures

We assessed brand trust using the commonly employed scale developed by Morgan and Hunt (1994): “I feel that I can trust Hampton/I feel that Hampton can be counted on to help me and other consumers/Hampton appears reliable” (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). Participants rated their trust in the brand both before ($\alpha = 0.92$) and after ($\alpha = 0.94$) being exposed to the communication style stimulus. As a manipulation check, participants rated the informality of the employed communication style on three items: “formal/informal” (7-point semantic differential scales), “Hampton communicates in a casual way”, and “Hampton communicates in an easygoing way” (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). We averaged the three items to form an informality index ($\alpha = 0.93$). Participants also indicated how familiar they were with the brand prior to being exposed to the communication style stimulus (i.e., 1 = not at all familiar, 7 = very familiar). In addition to the primary measures of interest, we also asked participants to indicate their initial attitudes toward the brand (i.e., 1 = “dislike/unfavorable/bad,” and 7 = “like/favorable/good”; $\alpha = 0.93$) and their involvement with the product (i.e., “important/of concern to me/useful to me”; $\alpha = 0.94$; Zaichkowsky, 1985) as control variables. Product involvement yielded no significant effects ($p > 0.10$), and

including this covariate in the analysis did not influence the results. We therefore do not discuss this variable further. The study concluded with a brief demographic section.

7.3. Results

7.3.1. Manipulation checks

As intended, participants were very familiar with the brand ($M = 5.59$). Brand familiarity did not differ across the two conditions ($M_{\text{Informal}} = 5.66$, $M_{\text{Formal}} = 5.53$; $p = 0.65$), and including it in the analysis as a covariate did not influence the results. To increase the reliability of the data, 15 participants who were unfamiliar with the brand (i.e., brand familiarity < 4) were eliminated from the dataset, leaving a final sample of 64 participants (40.6% female, $M_{\text{Age}} = 32$ years).

In addition, we conducted an ANOVA with the perceived informality of the communication as a dependent variable and the style manipulation as an independent variable. Participants in the informal condition indicated that the communication style was significantly more informal than did those in the formal condition ($M_{\text{Informal}} = 6.05$, $M_{\text{Formal}} = 4.07$; $F(1,62) = 32.51$, $p = 0.00$).

7.3.2. Brand trust

To test the effect of an informal style on brand trust, we conducted an ANOVA with brand trust serving as the dependent variable, the style manipulation as an independent variable, and initial brand trust and attitudes (i.e., brand trust and attitudes before being exposed to the communication style stimulus) as covariates. The results revealed that the informal style had a significant effect on brand trust. Specifically, when controlling for initial brand trust and attitudes,¹ participants in the informal condition had more trust in the brand than did those in the formal condition ($M_{\text{Informal}} = 6.01$, $M_{\text{Formal}} = 5.47$; $F(3,60) = 4.60$, $p = 0.04$). This result supports [Hypothesis 1](#).

7.4. Discussion

Consistent with prior research, Experiment 1 demonstrates that the use of an informal style (vs. a formal style) in the social media context increases trust in brands with which consumers are familiar ([Hypothesis 1](#)). We expect that the informal style will have the opposite effect on brand trust if consumers are unfamiliar with the brand ([Hypothesis 2](#)). Experiment 2 tests this prediction.

8. Experiment 2: effect of an informal style on trust for unfamiliar brands

The second experiment was designed to examine how an informal brand communication style influences consumers' trust in unfamiliar brands. We employed a fictitious hotel brand and examined participants' brand trust when the brand interacts with consumers in either an informal or formal style on a popular social networking site, Facebook.

8.1. Method

In Experiment 2, we employed a one-factor between-subjects design, with communication style (informal vs. formal) serving as manipulating factor. Seventy-six US residents (43.4% female, $M_{\text{Age}} = 49$ years) recruited from Qualtrics participated in an online experiment for payment. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the two conditions (informal style vs. formal style) and were asked to imagine that, while searching for a hotel for a vacation trip, they came across a new hotel chain, Silver Hotel, and decided to visit its social media page to find out more about the hotel. Participants then viewed an excerpt from a

simulated Silver Hotel Facebook page that featured interactions between the brand and six consumers (see Appendix A). We employed the fictitious Silver Hotel brand to ensure brand unfamiliarity and to maximize internal validity. The manipulation of the informal communication style was identical to that of Experiment 1. Participants then completed a questionnaire that included measures of brand trust, manipulation checks, and control variables. The study concluded with a brief demographic section.

8.2. Measures

We used the same brand trust measures as in Experiment 1 ($\alpha = 0.95$). As a manipulation check, participants rated the informality of the communication style ($\alpha = 0.60$) and their familiarity with the brand on the same measures as in Experiment 1. Finally, product involvement was used as a control variable, and we measured it with the same items as in Experiment 1 ($\alpha = 0.91$). Product involvement did not influence the results, and we therefore do not discuss it further.

8.3. Results

8.3.1. Manipulation checks

As intended, participants were very unfamiliar with the brand ($M = 1.12$). Brand familiarity did not differ across the two conditions ($M_{\text{Informal}} = 1.15$, $M_{\text{Formal}} = 1.08$; $p = 0.59$). In addition, we conducted an ANOVA with the perceived informality of the communication as the dependent variable and the style manipulation as an independent variable. Participants in the informal condition indicated that the communication style was significantly more informal than did those in the formal condition ($M_{\text{Informal}} = 4.41$, $M_{\text{Formal}} = 3.39$; $F(1,74) = 9.43$, $p = 0.00$).

8.3.2. Brand trust

To test the effect of an informal style on brand trust, we conducted an ANOVA with brand trust serving as the dependent variable and the style manipulation as an independent variable. The results revealed a significant effect of the informal style on brand trust. Participants in the informal condition had less trust in the brand than those in the formal condition ($M_{\text{Informal}} = 5.05$, $M_{\text{Formal}} = 5.70$; $F(1,74) = 5.66$, $p = 0.02$), thus supporting [Hypothesis 2](#).

8.4. Discussion

The results of the second experiment show that, for unfamiliar brands, the use of an informal style decreases a consumer's brand trust. Establishing brand trust is crucial in the early stages of a relationship, as consumers' propensity to trust an unfamiliar brand determines whether their relationship with the brand will extend beyond the initial interaction.

These results, together with those from Experiment 1, suggest that the distinction between informal and formal language is important because it influences the development of consumers' trust in brands. The effect has been shown to be either positive or negative, depending on whether consumers are familiar (Experiment 1) or unfamiliar (Experiment 2) with the brand. We propose that these effects occur because consumers expect brands to behave according to social norms, such that the use of an informal style is perceived to be appropriate for familiar brands and inappropriate for unfamiliar brands ([Hypothesis 4](#)). Experiment 3 was designed to test this prediction.

9. Experiment 3: understanding the interaction effect of an informal style and brand familiarity on brand trust

In Experiment 3, we directly examined the interaction effect of an informal communication style and brand familiarity within the context of one brand, thereby testing [Hypothesis 3](#). In addition, we investigated the process underlying this effect. Specifically, we tested whether the

¹ This effect remains statistically significant when not controlling for initial brand trust and attitudes ($M_{\text{Informal}} = 6.00$, $M_{\text{Formal}} = 5.47$; $F(1,62) = 6.15$, $p = 0.02$).

perceived appropriateness of the style mediates the interaction effect of an informal style and brand familiarity on brand trust (Hypothesis 4). That is, depending on the degree of familiarity with a brand, consumers expect the brand to behave according to social norms such that the use of an informal style is perceived to be appropriate for familiar brands and inappropriate for unfamiliar brands. Finally, Experiment 3 further extended our findings to a more utilitarian, low-involvement domain, the toothpaste category. We employed an existing toothpaste brand and examined participants' brand trust when the brand interacts with consumers on a popular social networking site, Facebook.

9.1. Method

The experiment was a 2 (communication style: informal vs. formal) \times 2 (brand familiarity: familiar vs. unfamiliar) between-subjects design. A total of 152 Dutch individuals (54.6% female, $M_{Age} = 26$ years) participated in the experiment. We manipulated brand familiarity by employing a toothpaste product made by Procter and Gamble that is marketed in different countries under several brand names (Procter & Gamble, 2015). We used two different existing brand names, one with which the participants were familiar and one with which they were unfamiliar. A pretest confirmed that participants in the high-familiarity condition were significantly more familiar with the brand than were participants in the low-familiarity condition ($M_{Familiar} = 5.12$, $M_{Unfamiliar} = 1.42$; $F(1,40) = 71.48$, $p < 0.00$). Participants were informed that they would be reading an excerpt from the Facebook fan page created by the respective toothpaste brand. Participants then viewed an excerpt from a simulated brand Facebook page that featured interactions between the brand and four consumers (see Appendix C) and were asked to report their trust in the brand. The manipulation of the informal communication style was similar to that in the previous studies.

9.2. Measures

We used the same brand trust measures as in our previous studies ($\alpha = 0.89$). As manipulation checks, participants rated the informality of the communication style on the same measures as in our previous studies ($\alpha = 0.90$). We measured brand familiarity with a two-item scale: "I am very/not at all familiar with the brand"; "I am very/not at all knowledgeable about the brand" (7-point semantic differential scales; $\alpha = 0.95$). For the mediating variable, participants rated the appropriateness of the brand communication style on three items: "meets my expectations"/ "corresponds to how I expect it to communicate with me"/ "is appropriate" (7-point scales; $\alpha = 0.93$). In addition to the primary measures of interest, we also asked participants to indicate their attitudes toward the brand ($\alpha = 0.88$) and their involvement with the product ($\alpha = 0.82$) as control variables using the same items as in our previous studies. We conducted a 2 (communication style: informal vs. formal) \times 2 (brand familiarity: familiar vs. unfamiliar) between-subjects ANOVA on brand trust with brand attitudes and product involvement as covariates. Including these covariates in the analysis did not dilute the focal two-way interaction ($p = 0.01$). As a result, this variable will not be discussed further. Finally, to verify that our manipulations of the informal and formal styles did not differ in terms of perceived realism, we included a realism check in the study. The results revealed that participants perceived our manipulation of brand communication style to be realistic ($M = 4.53$ on a seven-point scale anchored by 1 = "Not realistic at all"; 7 = "Very realistic"; $t(151)_{diff\ from\ 4} = 4.64$, $p = 0.00$) and that the perceived realism did not differ between the formal and informal conditions ($M_{Informal} = 4.68$, $M_{Formal} = 4.37$; $F(1,148) = 1.91$, $p = 0.17$). The study concluded with a brief demographic section.

9.3. Results

9.3.1. Manipulation checks

As we intended, participants in the informal condition indicated that the communication style was significantly more informal than did those in the formal condition ($M_{Informal} = 5.09$, $M_{Formal} = 3.21$; $F(1,151) = 113.73$, $p < 0.00$). Similarly, participants in the high-familiarity condition were significantly more familiar with the brand than were participants in the low-familiarity condition ($M_{Familiar} = 5.22$, $M_{Unfamiliar} = 1.53$; $F(1,151) = 263.46$, $p < 0.00$).

9.3.2. Brand trust

We conducted a 2 (communication style: informal vs. formal) \times 2 (brand familiarity: familiar vs. unfamiliar) between-subjects ANOVA in which brand trust served as the dependent variable. The results revealed a marginally significant effect of brand familiarity on brand trust ($F(1,151) = 3.45$, $p = 0.06$), such that participants in the familiar condition had more trust ($M_{Familiar} = 5.00$) in the brand than those in the unfamiliar condition ($M_{Unfamiliar} = 4.71$), which is consistent with past research that indicates that the better we know a person, the better we can predict that person's future behavior and, hence, the more we trust that person (Doney & Cannon, 1997). There was no significant main effect of the communication style on brand trust ($F(1,151) = 0.68$, $p = 0.80$). Importantly and more interestingly, there was a significant two-way interaction effect of communication style and brand familiarity on brand trust ($F(1,151) = 9.25$, $p < 0.00$). Fig. 1 depicts these findings. Specific planned contrasts revealed that, while participants in the familiar condition had more trust in the brand when exposed to the informal (vs. formal) style ($M_{Informal} = 5.23$, $M_{Formal} = 4.78$; $F(1,151) = 3.92$, $p = 0.05$), participants in the unfamiliar condition had less trust in the brand when exposed to the informal (vs. formal) style ($M_{Informal} = 4.44$, $M_{Formal} = 4.97$; $F(1,151) = 5.38$, $p = 0.02$).

9.3.3. Mediation analysis

Hypothesis 4 stated that the interaction effect of informal communication style and brand familiarity on brand trust is mediated by the perceived appropriateness of the brand's communication style. In line with recent research (Kim, 2013; Kim & Kramer, 2015), we tested this mediation hypothesis following the steps suggested by Hayes (2013). Specifically, we used PROCESS Model 8 with perceived appropriateness of the brand communication style as the mediator (5000 resamples; Hayes, 2013). First, the model regressed perceived appropriateness of the style on informal style, brand familiarity, and their interaction. The informal style \times brand familiarity interaction predicted the perceived appropriateness of the style ($\beta = 0.74$, $t = 1.95$, $p = 0.05$). Second, the model regressed brand trust on perceived appropriateness of the style, informal style, brand familiarity, and the interaction of the last two

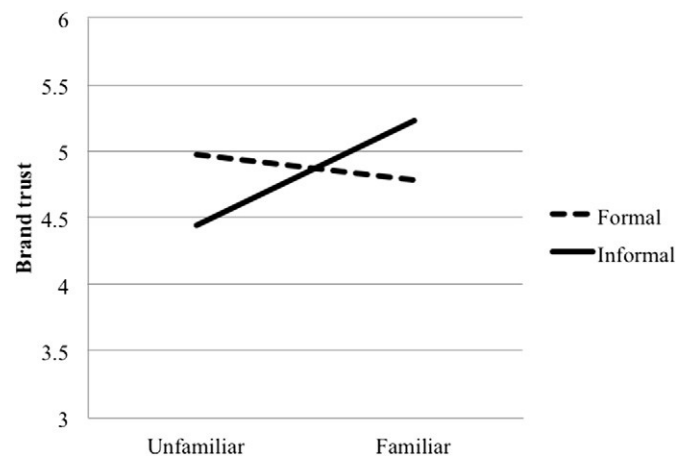


Fig. 1. Effect of informal style and brand familiarity on brand trust (Experiment 3).

factors. Perceived appropriateness of the style predicted brand trust ($\beta = 0.34$, $t = 5.31$, $p = 0.00$). Third, and most important, bootstrapping analysis revealed that perceived appropriateness of the style mediated the interactive effect of informal style and brand familiarity on brand trust, as the 95% confidence interval (CI) did not include zero (effect = 0.25, 95% CI = 0.01 to 0.57). Fig. 2 depicts the results of the mediation analysis.

9.4. Discussion

In Experiment 3, we brought together the findings of Experiments 1 and 2 by investigating the interaction effect of communication style and brand familiarity on brand trust within the context of one brand and using a different brand category. The results again demonstrate that the use of an informal brand communication style increases (reduces) consumers' trust in familiar (unfamiliar) brands. We thereby provide evidence in support of our theorizing that communication style interacts with brand familiarity to impact consumers' trust in the brand (Hypothesis 3). Furthermore, we found evidence that the effect of an informal style on trust was mediated by the perceived appropriateness of the brand communication style, thereby supporting Hypothesis 4.

10. General discussion

Social media use has been exploding, and social networking sites have become essential platforms for marketing communications (Simply Measured, 2015). The sheer volume of daily consumer-brand interactions on these platforms has highlighted the need for guidance concerning how brands should communicate with consumers to foster relationships and, in particular, to gain their trust. However, little academic research is available to help marketers understand the best practices for communicating with consumers through such platforms. The present research takes a first step toward addressing this issue and offers some guidelines for communicating with consumers in social media environments. Specifically, across three experiments, we investigated the role of informal communication style on brand trust. Brand trust is considered a milestone in building consumer-brand relationships in social media environments (e.g., Gleeson, 2012; Porter & Donthu, 2008). Experiment 1 provides evidence that, when communicating to consumers who are already familiar with a brand, the use of an informal style increases trust in that brand. Experiment 2 shows the opposite effect on brand trust for consumers who are unfamiliar with the brand. Experiment 3 jointly tests these two findings within the context of one brand and provides evidence for the moderating role of brand familiarity on the effect of an informal style on brand trust. In addition, Experiment 3, which explored an underlying mechanism as well, shows that the effects of the informal style on brand trust are mediated by the perceived appropriateness of the brand communication style.

10.1. Theoretical implications

Our research contributes to current marketing research in a number of ways. First, we extend the emerging body of work on brand communication on social media (Beukeboom et al., 2015; Kelleher, 2009; Kelleher & Miller, 2006; Schamari & Schaefer, 2015; van Noort & Willemsen, 2011) by studying the effects of an informal communication style on brand trust in a social media context. We contribute to this stream of literature by providing a clearer and more precise understanding of how brands should communicate when interacting with consumers in social media settings.

In addition, in contrast with prior research suggesting that an informal style has a positive influence on consumer-brand relationships (Delin, 2005; Fairclough, 1992, 1994, 1996), including brand trust, the present work indicates that use of an informal communication style can actually harm a brand if this style is inconsistent with recipients' expectations. Indeed, we find that the effects of an informal style on brand trust depend on whether consumers are familiar with the brand, such that the use of an informal style increases (decreases) trust in brands with which consumers are familiar (unfamiliar). Finally, although prior studies on this topic have been conducted exclusively with well-known brands (Beukeboom et al., 2015; Kelleher, 2009; Kelleher & Miller, 2006; Schamari & Schaefer, 2015; van Noort & Willemsen, 2011), the current research examines both familiar and unfamiliar brands and shows that the degree of acquaintance with a brand moderates the relationship between an informal communication style and brand trust.

The present study also contributes to the literature on consumers' relationships with brands and their reactions to expectation-(in)congruent brand behaviors (e.g., Aggarwal, 2004; Sela et al., 2012). Specifically, in a social media context, we validate and illustrate the notion that people tend to relate to brands as they relate to people in general (Aggarwal, 2004; Fournier, 1998). Consumers appear to apply their social expectations to brands and expect brands to respect behavioral social norms. Relying on role theory (Sarbin & Allen, 1968; Schewe, 1973; Solomon et al., 1985), we demonstrate that, whereas consumers regard the use of an informal style as more appropriate when they are relatively familiar with a brand, they generally expect a more formal communication style from a brand that is new to them. By adopting socially expected communication styles in different situations – namely, an informal communication style with familiar consumers and a formal communication style with unfamiliar ones – brands are likely to increase consumers' (initial) trust in the brand. Although we focused on social media as a specific two-way communication context, we believe that our results are applicable to other two-way communication contexts (e.g., e-mails) for which consumer-brand interactions mirror interpersonal relationships.

Finally, our research contributes to the literature on language by being the first to experimentally manipulate an informal style. We

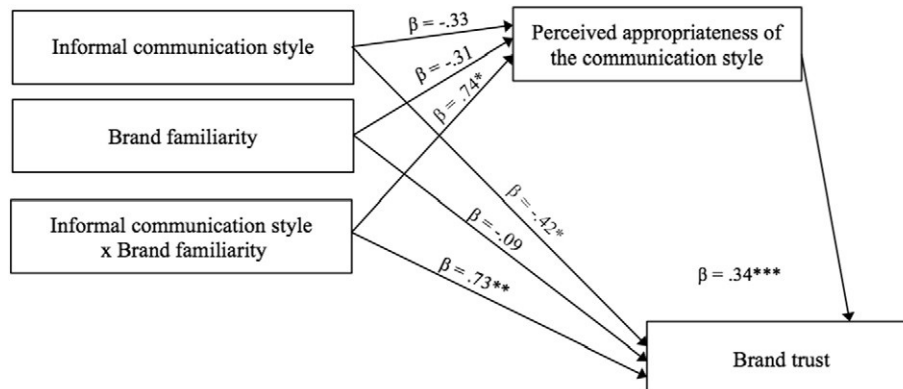


Fig. 2. Result of mediation analysis (Experiment 3). Note: * $p < 0.05$. ** $p < 0.01$. *** $p < 0.001$.

offer a robust operationalization of an informal (vs. formal) communication style within the new context of social media, an operationalization that can be used for further research on this topic. In a pilot study, we identified 15 linguistic features for the operationalization of an informal communication style. We then tested the proposed operationalization in our experiments and demonstrated a successful manipulation of the informal communication style.

10.2. Managerial implications

Our research informs marketers of the importance of the style of a message, beyond its content. We thus challenge the conventional wisdom that “content is king” (Rooney, 2014) and argue that it is not merely what we say but also how we say it that matters. Specifically, we offer useful insights into how brands could best converse with consumers on social media. For many brands, the adoption and use of social media constitute a trial-and-error process. Our research shows that people respond differently to the same brand communications depending on how they relate to brands. The efficiency of communications will be significantly enhanced if marketers adhere to conversational norms consistent with the expectations of their audience. Accordingly, our findings suggest that, while using an informal brand communication style is likely to be successful among existing customers, consumers who are unfamiliar with that brand might perceive it to be overly personal because they find an informal style inappropriate. Therefore, brands interacting with consumers who are relatively new to them (e.g., a new brand or an existing brand addressing a new market segment) are advised to use a more distant and formal communication style. A considerable number of consumers have their first encounter with a brand via social media (Knowledge Networks, 2011). This first encounter can take place in two major ways: the brand may be new to the market, or the brand may have been available on the market for a while, but many consumers may have yet to encounter it. Considering the first scenario, many new businesses (and, hence, new brands) enter the market every year. In the US, 730,632 new businesses were registered in 2012, and the number of new businesses that register is increasing every year (The U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). In addition, approximately 23.1 million consumers use social media to discover new brands or products (Knowledge Networks, 2011). Concerning the second scenario, a considerable segment of consumers (22.5 million) are relatively new to a brand (e.g., have never seen or used it) when visiting the brand's social media page (Knowledge Networks, 2011). In addition, the effects of a brand communication style are particularly salient during the initial contact between a brand and a consumer, which is when first impressions are made (Sparks & Areni, 2002). During initial contacts, consumers have little upon which to base their expectations of the brand's trustworthiness. In the absence of concrete, experience-based information, the brand's communication style plays a crucial role in determining brand trust and, subsequently, whether the relationship with the brand will progress beyond the initial contact.

Our research is especially relevant to community managers, who are typically responsible for managing communications on social media. Developing insights into how consumers respond to specific communication styles is crucial, as the survival of a social media strategy depends on the community manager's ability to acquire new members and to transform them into contributors and ambassadors of the brand's online community. We advise community managers to employ an informal (vs. formal) communication style when conversing with consumers who are familiar with (vs. new to) the brand. Our findings are especially relevant to community managers who are responsible for new brands. Given their limited resources and the absence of brand equity, it is important to pay attention to details (such as communication style) that can have significant effects on the initial market response. Our findings can thus help community managers fine-tune their dialog with consumers to engage in natural and appropriate conversations with them. By gaining insight into how to successfully converse with consumers,

community managers can establish a foundation for longer-lasting relationships with them.

10.3. Limitations and directions for further research

This research also has certain limitations that offer avenues for future investigations. First, in our studies, we instructed participants to read some consumer-brand interactions on social media to form a perception of a new brand. This might be considered goal-directed behavior, as it is extrinsically and instrumentally motivated. However, consumers may end up on a brand community page with different goals; some may be more focused on the production than on the consumption of content (e.g., expressing a complaint), while others may be more hedonic (Novak, Hoffman, & Duhachek, 2003). For example, consumers with a hedonic goal might base their perception of the brand primarily on its ability to provide a pleasurable experience. In this case, an informal style might be appreciated. An exploration of consumers' goals when interacting with a brand through its online community and how these goals alter the effect of brand communication style on consumer-brand relationships (e.g., brand trust) is therefore an important avenue for further research. A related area of future investigation would be to allow participants to explore how it feels to interact with brands instead of passively reading consumer-brand interactions. We expect that such a setup would provide even stronger evidence of the joint impact of brand familiarity and informal communication style on brand trust.

Second, the present research focuses on brand familiarity to examine how the ways consumers relate to brands influence their expectations regarding the brand's language. We chose to focus on brand familiarity because it constitutes a central dimension on which representations of social relationships vary (Little, 1965; Willis, 1966). Of course, consumers may relate to brands in many different ways beyond this taxonomy (familiar vs. unfamiliar). For example, consumers may conceive of brands as committed partners, casual friends, or flings (Fournier, 1998). They may also form communal relationships with some brands and exchange relationships with others (Aggarwal, 2004). More recently, Aggarwal and McGill (2012) suggested that they might think of brands as partners, whereby brands coproduce benefits with consumers, or as servants, whereby brands work for consumers to create benefits. In addition, the expected communication style is also likely to differ depending on the brand's personality. Consumers might expect brands with different personalities to use language with different levels of informality. For example, consumers might expect brands with a competent or efficient personality (e.g., Tiffany & Co) to use a more formal communication style, whereas brands with a more cheerful or exciting personality (e.g., Toys R Us) might be expected to employ a more informal communication style. However, in the case of unfamiliar brands (the focus of our research), brand personality is not strongly present in the mind of the consumer (Johar, Sengupta, & Aaker, 2005) and, thus, is less likely to influence consumers' expectations regarding communication style. Thus, there seems to be no shortage of research opportunities to investigate the different ways in which consumers relate to brands and how they influence consumers' expectations regarding brand communication style.

Third, several factors may moderate the effects of brand communication style and warrant additional research. Prior research has shown that consumption context (Kronrod & Danziger, 2013; Kronrod et al., 2012), product category, people's affiliation with the brand (Sela et al., 2012), and communication style congruence (Ludwig et al., 2013) all moderate the relationship between language use and consumer behavior. For example, research drawing on Communication Accommodation Theory (Giles & Smith, 1979) posits that greater congruence in communication styles leads individuals to perceive a common social identity

and elicits more credibility and trust (Chung, Pennebaker, & Fiedler, 2007; Pickering & Garrod, 2004). If so, the negative effect of an informal style on brand trust is likely to be mitigated when consumers find this style congruent with their internal attitudinal or emotional standards. Future research should also investigate how other individual differences influence consumers' responses to a brand's informal communication style. For example, the need for affiliation is an individual's desire for social contact or belongingness (Veroff & Veroff, 1980). It would be worthwhile to examine how the distinction between a high versus low need for affiliation influences individuals' responses to an informal style employed by familiar vs. unfamiliar brands. For example, we could reasonably expect that for individuals with a high need for affiliation, the warmth and closeness induced by the use of an informal style would result in a positive consumer response toward unfamiliar brands.

Finally, in our studies, we manipulated communication style as a binary variable (very informal vs. very formal). People who are exposed to a communication style that is very informal or very formal are more likely to respond strongly to (in)congruent language in brand communications compared with people who are exposed to moderate language variations (Sela et al., 2012). Future research could explore the effects of an informal style by operationalizing it as a continuous variable. It would be particularly interesting to investigate the effect of using a moderate informal/formal style on brand trust and determine the level of informality resulting in the most favorable consumer response.

Acknowledgements

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Appendix A. Communication style manipulation (pilot study; Experiment 2)

Formal condition	Informal condition
 <p>Silver Hotel Silver Hotel in Miami.</p> <p>Rob This is cool! I want to go there!</p> <p>Silver Hotel Thank you for the comment.</p> <p>Emma I went to this hotel all the time when I went to Miami. I like to go to the Silver Hotel for a little pampering! Love the breakfast!</p> <p>Silver Hotel Thank you for conveying this positive experience.</p> <p>Elizabeth I've stayed in this hotel - one of my favorites. That was a few summers ago - I think you might have just opened this location - gorgeous hotel, and couldn't be a better location in Miami!</p> <p>Silver Hotel Thank you. This comment is appreciated.</p> <p>Paul Do you have hotels in Glasgow?</p> <p>Silver Hotel There are no Silver Hotels in Glasgow.</p> <p>Annouk Wooooooo... Lets go try there!</p> <p>Silver Hotel Thank you for the comment. Silver Hotel is looking forward to hosting you.</p> <p>Jill Staying this weekend at your hotel in Paris ... I hope they have croissants!</p> <p>Silver Hotel Croissants are provided in the Silver Hotels.</p>	 <p>Silver Hotel Silver Hotel in Miami!!</p> <p>Rob This is cool! I want to go there!</p> <p>Silver Hotel Great! Thanks Rob. That's what we like to hear 😊</p> <p>Emma I went to this hotel all the time when I went to Miami. I like to go to the Silver Hotel for a little pampering! Love the breakfast!</p> <p>Silver Hotel Thanks Emma for sharing your experience with us! That's cool you had a good time! 😊</p> <p>Elizabeth I've stayed in this hotel - one of my favorites. That was a few summers ago - I think you might have just opened this location - gorgeous hotel, and couldn't be a better location in Miami!</p> <p>Silver Hotel Awww! Thanks Elizabeth! We're flattered!! 😊</p> <p>Paul Do you have hotels in Glasgow?</p> <p>Silver Hotel Hi Paul! Soooo sorry, no hotels in Glasgow.</p> <p>Annouk Wooooooo... Lets go there!</p> <p>Silver Hotel Ahah Annouk! We're waiting for you 😊</p> <p>Jill Staying this weekend at your hotel in Paris ... I hope they have croissants!</p> <p>Silver Hotel Hi Jill! That's awesome! Sure, we have croissants for you 😊</p>

Appendix B. Communication style manipulation (Experiment 1)

Formal condition

Hampton

Hampton in Miami.



Rob This is cool! I want to go there!

Hampton Thank you for the comment.

Emma I went to this hotel all the time when I went to Miami. I like to go to Hampton for a little pampering! Love the breakfast!

Hampton Thank you for conveying this positive experience.

Elizabeth I've stayed in this hotel - one of my favorites. That was a few summers ago - I think you might have just opened this location - gorgeous hotel, and couldn't be a better location in Miami!

Hampton Thank you. The comment is appreciated.

Paul Do you have hotels in Glasgow?

Hampton There are no Hampton hotels in Glasgow.

Annouk Wooooooo... Lets go there!

Hampton Thank you for the comment. Hampton is looking forward to hosting you.


Jill Staying this weekend at your hotel in Paris ... I hope they have croissants!

Hampton Croissants are provided in Hampton hotels.

Informal condition

Hampton

Hampton in Miami!!



Rob This is cool! I want to go there!

Hampton Great! Thanks Rob. That's what we like to hear 😊

Emma I went to this hotel all the time when I went to Miami. I like to go to Hampton for a little pampering! Love the breakfast!

Hampton Thanks Emma for sharing your experience with us! That's cool you had a good time! 😊

Elizabeth I've stayed in this hotel - one of my favorites. That was a few summers ago - I think you might have just opened this location - gorgeous hotel, and couldn't be a better location in Miami!

Hampton Awww! Thanks Elizabeth! We're flattered!! 😊

Paul Do you have hotels in Glasgow?

Hampton Hi Paul! Soooo sorry, no hotels in Glasgow.

Annouk Wooooooo... Lets go there!

Hampton Ahah Annouk! We're waiting for you 😊

Jill Staying this weekend at your hotel in Paris ... I hope they have croissants!

Hampton Hi Jill! That's awesome! Sure, we have croissants for you 😊

Appendix C. Communication style manipulation (Experiment 3)

Unfamiliar condition:

Formal condition

Informal condition

Crest. Crest

White mint: for a fresh smile.

Like · Comment · Share

68 people like this.

Write a comment...

Lisa Sten I would love that...

Crest Dear Ms Sten. Thank you for the comment. It is appreciated. Best regards.

Nick Oaker do you have different tastes??

Crest Dear Mr Oaker. We offer several flavours. For further details please visit the following website: <http://crest.com/products>. Best regards.

Thom Densing I live in Geldermalsen. Can I buy it at every grocery store?

Crest Dear Mr Densing. The product is not yet sold at every grocery store in Geldermalsen. We apologize for the inconvenience. Best regards.

Rachel Trail Awesome!!! You could also consider having colorful toothpaste for kids.

Crest Dear Ms Trail. Thank you for the recommendation. It has been passed along to Crest's management team. Best regards.

**NOTE: Profile pictures and last names have been edited for privacy reasons.*

Crest. Crest

WOAH! White mint: for a fresh smile.

Like · Comment · Share

68 people like this.

Write a comment...

Lisa Sten I would love that...

Crest Awww great... Thanks Lisa. That's what we like to hear. 😊

Nick Oaker do you have different tastes??

Crest Hi Nick. Sure, we've a bunch of flavours. Check out our website for more details <http://crest.com/products>.

Thom Densing I live in Geldermalsen. Can I buy it at every grocery store?

Crest Hi Thom. Soooo sorry, not every grocery store sells it yet in Geldermalsen.

Rachel Trail Awesome!!! You could also consider having colorful toothpaste for kids.

Crest Thanks for the tip Rachel. We're happy to pass it along to our management team for you. 😊

**NOTE: Profile pictures and last names have been edited for privacy reasons.*

Familiar condition:

Formal condition

Oral-B Oral-B

White mint: for a fresh smile.

Like · Comment · Share

68 people like this.

Write a comment...

Lisa Sten I would love that...

Oral-B Dear Ms Sten. Thank you for the comment. It is appreciated. Best regards.

Nick Oaker do you have different tastes??

Oral-B Dear Mr Oaker. We offer several flavours. For further details please visit the following website: <http://oralb.com/products>. Best regards.

Thom Densing I live in Geldermalsen. Can I buy it at every grocery store?

Oral-B Dear Mr Densing. The product is not yet sold at every grocery store in Geldermalsen. We apologize for the inconvenience. Best regards.

Rachel Trail Awesome!!! You could also consider having colorful toothpaste for kids.

Oral-B Dear Ms Trail. Thank you for the recommendation. It has been passed along to Oral-B's management team. Best regards.

*NOTE: Profile pictures and last names have been edited for privacy reasons.

Informal condition

Oral-B Oral-B

WOAH! White mint: for a fresh smile.

Like · Comment · Share

68 people like this.

Write a comment...

Lisa Sten I would love that...

Oral-B Awww great... Thanks Lisa. That's what we like to hear. 😊

Nick Oaker do you have different tastes??

Oral-B Hi Nick. Sure, we've a bunch of flavours. Check out our website for more details <http://oralb.com/products>.

Thom Densing I live in Geldermalsen. Can I buy it at every grocery store?

Oral-B Hi Thom. Soooo sorry, not every grocery store sells it yet in Geldermalsen.

Rachel Trail Awesome!!! You could also consider having colorful toothpaste for kids.

Oral-B Thanks for the tip Rachel. We're happy to pass it along to our management team for you. 😊

*NOTE: Profile pictures and last names have been edited for privacy reasons.

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