

Effects of Social Context and Linguistic Formality in Consumer Behavior: A Conceptual
Framework and Empirical Investigation

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Abstract

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This dissertation is a two-fold examination of the persuasiveness of language formality in brand communication. The first section reviews the extant literature on language formality, organizes a framework of how persuasiveness is impacted by interpersonal aspects of social context (i.e., contextual tenor), and proposes marketing applications of tenor to guide future consumer research on leveraging the persuasiveness of language formality. The second section is an empirical investigation of how topical marketing applications of tenor—social needs in the form of social exclusion experiences and consumer-brand relationships in the form of whether a consumer is a new or existing customer of a brand—interact with brand language (in)formality to impact consumer engagement. Three lab experiments and a field experiment with Twitter data find that informal brand language, which brands often employ to presumably enhance perceptions of closeness, backfires with new customers who feel socially rejected but not those who feel socially included.

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INTRODUCTION TO DISSERTATION

Language is an essential component of how brands convey meaning to consumers and, in turn, how consumers receive such meaning. The style of language reflects how a message is expressed in a given social context but is independent of its content (Halliday 1989; Schindler and Bickart 2012). A fundamental dimension of language style is its level of formality (Grice 1975; Heylighen and Dewaele 2002). Linguistic formality is defined as the extent of adherence to standard grammatical form (Labov 1972); for example, less formal language style may include use of slang, abbreviations, excessive punctuation, and emojis (Morand 2000; Schindler and Bickart 2012). In recent years, brands have increasingly been using an informal language style when communicating to hopefully engage consumers in a more relatable, persuasive manner (Beukeboom, Kerkhof, and de Vries 2015; Luangrath et al. 2017b; McCrae 2017). However, consumers are not always receptive to brands using such informal style (e.g., Gretry et al. 2017). Indeed, research has only begun to study how brand communication can backfire when language is not appropriately calibrated for its audience by examining consumer-brand relationships (Aggarwal 2004; Gretry et al. 2017; Sela, Wheeler, and Sarial-Abi 2012). The existing focus on only one aspect of social context presents a gap that this dissertation addresses. Thus, the present work examines the interactions between three key interpersonal aspects of social context—characteristics of the brand, the consumer, and their relationship—to help marketers dissect when and why informal language can be persuasive. This dissertation examines language in brand communications with a two-fold approach. First, I propose a conceptual model of language to guide marketers when to communicate informally or formally due to varied meaning informed

by interpersonal aspects of social context. Second, I test parts of this conceptual model with empirical data.

Berger's (2014) review of marketing communications proposed a call for further systematic research on "not just what people talk about but *how* they talk" (p. 602)—in other words, a call for research on language style in marketing. In branding, style is often synonymous with voice or tone (Barcelos et al. 2018; Kelleher 2009); the present examination focuses on style as it specifically relates to written language. Recent marketing literature examines specific language attributes, such as when assertive language (e.g., "Just do it") is perceived as effective in advertising (Kronrod, Grinstein, and Wathieu 2012a, 2012b) or how the use of dispreferred markers (e.g., "I'll be honest...") in online reviews affect product evaluations (Hamilton, Vohs, and McGill 2014). However, prior focus on discrete language attributes in a message is piecemeal and thus may not fully capture the audience's impressions of the message, as language is processed at the holistic, gestalt level (Krahn 2014; Peters 1977). Therefore, this dissertation builds on the extant literature and frames language through the holistic lens of formality. More recently, consumer researchers have begun to propose frameworks of language from the perspectives of branding (Carnevale, Luna, and Lerman 2017), information processing (Pogacar, Shrum, and Lowrey 2018), and paralanguage (Luangrath, Peck, and Barger 2017b). The present work contributes to this call for systematic study of brand communications by proposing a framework of language from the perspective of formality and applications of social context. This framework unpacks how various language attributes vary by level of formality, how interpretation of formality is affected by aspects of social context, and how formality affects consumer responses to marketing communications. While marketing scholars have acknowledged the importance of social context in language, this dissertation further delineates

social context into three key aspects and empirically applies the aspects to marketing communications.

In the first half of this dissertation, I propose a framework of when informal (vs. formal) language style may be more persuasive in brand communications and suggest propositions for future research. The framework is based on Halliday's (1989) systemic functional linguistics (SFL), a semiotic perspective where the function of language is to create meaning and such meaning is influenced by social context. The advantage of applying this model is that it concretely defines aspects of social context: *field*, *tenor*, and *mode*. In brief, in a given social context, *field* is the content or subject matter, *tenor* is the nature of the relationships between actors, and *mode* is the form or medium the language takes. This framework then extends linguistic theory and contributes to marketing theory by applying the aspect of *tenor* to the context of brand communications, which can help guide predictions of contextual moderators that affect consumer perception. SFL does not standardize what constitutes field, tenor, and mode, due to the infinite applications of what social context is in different domains of study (Giménez-Moreno and Skorczynska 2013; Pearce 2005). Therefore, organizing the aspects of context and language in applications relevant to consumers interpreting marketing communications is vital to bridging theory and practice. Brand communication style reflects who the brand is and informs consumer perceptions and subsequent persuasion. Persuasion can be characterized by consumer engagement actions such as buying from the brand, learning about the brand, communicating with the brand, and spreading word-of-mouth about the brand (Barger, Peltier, and Shultz 2016). From a managerial view, this framework allows marketers to craft more effective messages to consumers based on relevant contextual factors (e.g., consumers' social needs, consumer-brand relationship).

In the second half of this dissertation, I empirically examine the effectiveness of using a more (vs. less) formal language depending on consumers' social need state (i.e., whether they feel social rejection or inclusion). This investigation shows that consumer responses to brand language style is influenced by both characteristics of the brand and of the consumer. Whereas prior research has investigated characteristics of the consumer related to the brand relationship (e.g., commitment to the brand, Zemack-Rugar, Moore, and Fitzsimons 2017), the present investigation examines characteristics of the consumer unrelated to the brand (i.e., social need state unrelated to the brand). Prior research has shown that excluded individuals are generally more receptive to signals of connection (e.g., friendly, intimate verbal and nonverbal cues) and behave in the service of connection (DeWall, Maner, and Rouby 2009; Maner et al. 2007; Mead et al. 2011; Pickett, Gardner, and Knowles 2004). Although informal language can signal connection (Sela et al. 2012), it can potentially hurt consumer perceptions of the brand (Sela et al. 2012). Building from the present social context of language style framework, this dissertation predicts that rejected individuals may actually be less receptive to such signals of connection. This dissertation further proposes that informal communication style may particularly lower consumer engagement for such individuals with no established relationship with the brand. Supporting this theorizing, a field study with Twitter data, three experiments, and a single-paper meta-analysis observe that when a consumer feels socially rejected (vs. included), they may feel closer to, and thus engage more with, a brand that communicates with them using more formal (vs. informal) language.

Formality in Communication Style

Communication can be organized broadly through content and style (Williams and Spiro 1985). Content is the information a message provides; style is *how* the message is expressed (Schindler and Bickart 2012). For example, in a marketing email entitled “This sale = a must-see!!”, the content of the message is conveying that the company is announcing a sale; whereas, the style of the message is using colloquial language (i.e., “=” in lieu of “is”, multiple exclamation marks)—perhaps to convey a friendly, excited tone. Formality in language is an overarching way to categorize style based on how clear intended meaning is conveyed based on the social context (Heylighen and Dewaele 2002; Li et al. 2016). This view of formality suggests that more formal language style uses words and expressions to avoid ambiguity, where one can understand the full meaning through explicit expression and without reference to implicit knowledge (i.e., where additional context is not needed). Formal style follows the Gricean maxim of manner, where an expression should be as clear, brief, and as orderly as possible in order to avoid any ambiguity (Grice 1975). Formal style is characterized by features such as impersonal pronouns, lengthier word choice, and correct grammatical structure (Levin, Giles, and Garrett 1994). On the other hand, more informal style includes the ambiguities of social context (e.g., understanding of slang or appropriateness of casual language) depending on the social relationship or role between the speaker and the receiver (Grice 1975; Heylighen and Dewaele 2002). Thus, communicating with an informal style may risk the message being misunderstood by a heterogenous audience (Grice 1975; Heylighen and Dewaele 2002). Avoiding ambiguity allows those in the social interaction to successfully understand one another (Grice 1975). In this view of formality, formal language should be more persuasive than informal language.

However, current marketing praxis seems to not focus on the ambiguity avoidance facet of formal language style. Recent trends in marketing communications reflect a preference for marketers to use informal language characteristics when communicating with consumers (Beukeboom, Kerkhof, and de Vries 2015; Luangrath et al. 2017b; McCrae 2017). Another facet of formality is its relationship with interpersonal closeness, such that informal style typically signals closeness more than formal style (Heylighen and Dewaele 1999; Huang, Yen, and Zhang 2008; Levin, Giles, and Garrett 1994; Morand 2000). This desire to enhance or maintain closeness with customers may explain why brands employ informal language style. Indeed, informal language also emulates how consumers communicate with one another, particularly on social media (McCrae 2017). Despite this trend, not all brand communications successfully persuade consumers with such tactics (Gretry et al. 2017). Therefore, it is worth examining contextual factors that impact when informal (vs. formal) language is successfully received by consumers.

There is an inherent relationship between formality and social context, such that linguists posit that certain levels of formality are typically used in certain social contexts. Specifically, early sociolinguists developed and framed formality on a typology of five levels of style (Halliday 1989; Hymes 1979; Joos 1961; Quirk 1985), ranging from most formal to least formal. More contemporary linguistics describe formality on an infinite continuum, such that any given context is different from another and cannot be accurately categorized into a specific level (Pearce 2005). However, the classic typology of five levels nonetheless serves as useful benchmarks of formality given the introduction of increasingly specific levels (Giménez-Moreno and Skorczynska 2013); the following is a brief description of each notable level from most to least formal. At the most formal level is the *frozen* register, which reflects the strictest adherence

to slow-to-change written forms such as legal writing or Homerean epic poetry. The *frozen* register is rarely used in everyday communications and would be considered overly verbose; the following four registers are more relevant to interpersonal communications (Joos 1961). Next exists the *formal* register, which is a style adhering to contemporary grammatical norms often used in professional oral or written monologue contexts such as formal speeches and published articles. Next is the *consultative* register, which exists for oral or written dialogue between individuals who are acquaintances who do not share much contextual knowledge (e.g., professional consultations or formal debates). Then is the *casual* register, which is used in informal oral or written dialogue between individuals who know each other (e.g., conversations in casual workplace settings). Finally, the least formal level is the *intimate* register, which is used in intimate contexts and require understood nonverbal communication (e.g., conversations between family and close friends). While formality is considered a continuous construct (Biber 1988; Crystal and Davy 2006), such a continuous view of formality makes operationalization of language characteristics difficult to characterize (e.g., the use of an exclamation mark could be considered a characteristic at the casual or intimate register). Therefore, I will dichotomize formality to examine language characteristics as either formal or informal, thereby reducing the confounding between the level of formality in the language itself and the level of formality in a given social context. In marketing literature, this dichotomization is operationalized through various stylistic features (e.g., Gretry et al. 2017), such that communications that use more professional features adhering to grammatical standardization are deemed formal (i.e., collapsing the formal and consultative registers) and those that use more casual or colloquial features are deemed informal (i.e., collapsing the casual and intimate registers).

In terms of specific language attributes, there has been no comprehensive gold standard for what constitutes formal and informal language. This, in part, is due to the contextual nature of linguistic formality: creating meaning is not a static process and what is deemed formal and informal changes. In general, formal language style can be defined as any stylistic element that adheres to standard grammatical norms (Labov 1972). For example, each element in the following sentence adheres to standard grammar: “Thank you for shopping with us.” However, specifics of informal style shift due to innovations in medium (e.g., Internet-derived slang and paratextual features) and differences in participants (e.g., generational, cultural, or subcultural slang and colloquialisms) (Crystal 2001). For instance, the earlier sentence written in an informal style may be written as “thx 4 shopping w us!”, “THANKS FOR SHOPPIN’ WITH US!!!”, or other such permutations depending on what informal characteristics are in vogue at the time. Attributes of informal style can be broadly categorized into textual and paratextual features. Textual features include the words and syntax—e.g., the choice of using “thank you” versus “thanks”. Paratextual features include punctuation variation and new media uses of capitalization and other elements that supplement or replace textual features—e.g., capitalizing all words or using multiple exclamation marks for emphasis (see Luangrath et al. 2017b for a comprehensive discussion of paralanguage). Table 1 summarizes common operationalizations of formal and informal language cues, separated by word choice and grammar, and shows the comparative effects of formal versus informal cues on receivers’ perceptions of the speaker (e.g., closeness, warmth, competence). The next section defines the three aspects of social context that influence how receivers perceive formality.

Insert Table 1 about here

A Contextual Theory of Formality in Language Style: Field, Tenor, Mode

Effective and clear communication inherently requires participants to be attentive to the given social context (Grice 1975). People have an innate desire to make sense of their surroundings and communication is a critical part of this process (Grice 1975). Communication—specifically, language style—should thus align with the expectations and norms of a context (Grice 1975). For example, an individual can be greeted by one of their friends with a jovial “Hey buddy!” In this scenario, the two are friends and the friendly greeting is understood and appreciated. However, if the individual is greeted by a stranger on the street in the same way, they could interpret the greeting as unusual and intrusive. In this situation, the same expression does not confer the intended meaning. Grice’s study of language style (i.e., the maxim of manner) is defined by how clear and appropriate the style is for a given context. Although Grice (1975) pioneered the distinction between language itself and the intended meaning of the language (i.e., its implicature) and that implicature is based on context, he does not explicitly define what a communication or social context entails beyond his cooperative principle of discourse. The principle is defined by three characteristics: that participants have a common goal, that their contributions are mutually dependent, and that there is mutual understanding that transactions continue in “appropriate style” (Grice 1975). Furthermore, while Grice acknowledges that participants do not always adhere to such “appropriate style”, such failures to adhere is only defined through actions (i.e., violating, opting out, clashing, and

flouting the maxims) without detailing when or why such failures would occur (Grice 1975). Without a more concrete definition of context, effective language style becomes tautological. For instance, a brand may communicate with a consumer in an informal style in a marketing email. The brand does not receive an immediate response from the consumer and will only know whether the chosen communication style was effective if the consumer engages with the brand (e.g., asking customer service a question, clicking through to visit the website, purchasing a product). With the Gricean understanding of social context, this stylistic choice could reflect adhering to or flouting a maxim. Without further understanding of the brand's and consumer's motivations, underlying characteristics, and notions about their relationship—more specific elements of a given social context—it is unclear whether informal language style is received as expected.

Context consists of various elements within a social interaction (Halliday 1989). In other words, a specific context is defined by every aspect of the surroundings and knowledge of the surroundings that can be used for interpretation. Context can be broken down into the following aspects: field, tenor, and mode (Halliday 1989). Communication cannot be fully interpreted without all three aspects of context. However, certain aspects of context affect interpretation of communication style over others. One aspect is the field, which encompasses the content or subject matter of the social interaction. In a marketing communications context, I posit that the field would include the type of product or type of brand, which can be expressed through the content of an advertisement, customer service interaction, or product features. In other words, field in and of itself can be seen as the aspect of context directly affecting language content but not necessarily style. Field may indirectly affect consumer perceptions of language style, due to qualitative differences in the subject matter (e.g., hedonic vs. utilitarian nature of the products).

However, field does not dictate whether a brand communicates in a style expected of the subject matter. For example, Nike, a brand with an exciting personality, may be expected to communicate with informal language attributes, but field would only dictate that Nike conveys information about athletic gear and lifestyle.

Tenor, another aspect, is the role of relationships between the actors, that is, any participant in the context. Specifically, this involves the nature of the actors (e.g., social needs and individual differences), their relationships with each other, and their social roles. Applied in a marketing communications context, I posit that tenor would include brand characteristics (i.e., brand voice), how participants related to each other (i.e., social distance and social power), and consumer characteristics (i.e., social needs and individual demographic differences). Such applications will be discussed in length in the conceptual framework section (p. 14). Importantly, the tenor is the aspect of context that primarily determines what language style is used and how the style is interpreted (Halliday 1989; Shen 2012). Tenor negotiates the interpersonal meaning between the actors, thereby influencing the strategies used (e.g., formality) to communicate effectively (Halliday 1989). This is because the actors have different levels of shared knowledge in a given context. Specifically, actors have differing levels of knowledge about themselves, others in the interaction, the topic at hand, and the surroundings. Because actors may lack contextual knowledge, formality is required to reflect the highest level of shared knowledge (Heylighen and Dewaele 2002).

The relationship and shared knowledge between actors can vary based on their social distance and status (Lukin et al. 2011). For example, consumers' relationships with brands can vary on closeness when brands communicate to existing (vs. non-) customers (Sela et al. 2012) and status when customers who spend enough money to reach a VIP tier may be more valuable

to brands than customers who do not (Fombelle et al. 2015). In an intimate context, an informal, colloquial language style is used primarily to provide contextual meaning. For example, a conversation between close friends or family often includes colloquialisms, which are created from repeated interactions and develop shared meaning. These colloquialisms either do not make sense out of context or are inappropriate for the context. A person without the same prior relationship are unable to fully understand the intent of the expressions without more information. In a context where there is less shared knowledge or ability to provide contextual meaning, formal language is employed. For example, a mission statement is a formal context that involves a brand communicating to the public. Here, the communication context is unidirectional, such that the brand communicates to an audience that cannot respond with their input, questions, or knowledge. Additionally, the audience can be heterogenous in their background knowledge, where some may be experts on the company policies and mission but others may be hearing the content for the first time. In such situations, the brand must preempt any misunderstanding by using unambiguous, precise language to convey exactly what they mean. Anecdotes may be considered informal and unclear, because they rely on subjective personal experience that the audience may not understand. Jargon cannot be used, because it requires deeper understanding of the topic. Therefore, formal style should typically be used when communicating with a large, diverse, or unknown audience (Joos 1961). However, formal style is not always used in practice with such an audience. For instance, brands often communicate with informal style on social media (Beukeboom, Kerkhof, and de Vries 2015; Luangrath et al. 2017b; McCrae 2017)—this leads to discussion of the final aspect of context.

The third aspect, mode, is the form language takes based on the context. In other words, mode encompasses how and why language is transmitted. It primarily reflects differences in

language form based on the channel or medium of communication, where information can be conveyed in an oral or written form and can be face-to-face or mediated by technology (Mackiewicz 2008; Halliday 1985; Tannen 1982). There is also within format variation, where written communication can be synchronous (e.g., livestreams or chatbots), which is more spontaneous and interactive, or asynchronous (e.g., emails or articles), which allow for meticulous editing (Berger and Iyengar 2013; Crystal 2001; Mackiewicz 2008). Mode may also vary on the direction of participation (Lukin et al. 2011). In two-way participation (i.e., a dialogue), all actors may participate, such as in social media posts or customer service interactions. In one-way participation (i.e., a monologue), one actor communicates to an audience that may not communicate back, such as in a television commercial or search ad. The mode also refers to the rhetorical mode, which reflects the form of a social interaction. People interact with others for a variety of reasons such as asking for recommendations, requesting help, providing information, or persuading others. In a marketing communications context, I posit that mode involves media varying on the type of channel (e.g., social media vs. in-store customer service), synchrony of the channel (e.g., live chat vs. delayed email responses), direction of participation (e.g., brands and consumers interacting on Twitter vs. consumers watching a brand's commercial), and rhetorical purpose (e.g., advertisements, mission statements, customer service responses). Mode may also contribute to differences in language style due to the inherent form of the medium or rhetorical purpose (but not the roles of the participants in the context). The discussion of the effects of mode on language style is relatively brief and would be a fruitful avenue for future research. Because the focus of this dissertation is on the interpersonal aspects of context, the field and mode are kept constant. In the empirical component of this dissertation, hedonic products were selected as the contextual field, because informal language style is often

employed in brand communications and expected to be received positively for such products (Das et al. 2019; Kronrod and Danziger 2013). This serves as a more conservative test of the hypotheses, since prior research suggests that informal language style should be received positively and increase consumer engagement for hedonic product brands. Additionally, online platforms were selected as the contextual mode, because online modes allow for greater variance in language formality and that informal language characteristics are used in the real world (Crystal 2001).

While tenor may be the primary determinant of language style (Halliday 1989; Shen 2012), there may be conflicting aspects of tenor on receivers' interpretations. For instance, a consumer may not be an existing customer of a brand, reflecting a distant relationship; however, they may be incidentally socially excluded and thus have a high need for a close relationship. Based on prior theory, the consumer-brand relationship may suggest that the consumer may be more receptive to the brand using more formal language (Aggarwal 2004; Gretry et al. 2017; Sela et al. 2012), but the consumer's social needs may suggest that an informal style could be more effective (DeWall et al. 2009). Therefore, it is important to delineate concrete applications of tenor in marketing communications to help guide predictions of how brands can optimally communicate with consumers. Examining such applications of tenor allows researchers to see the interactive effect of three interpersonal perspectives on brand communications: the brand, the consumer, and the relationship between them. This interactive view lends greater richness to literatures that have either solely focused on characteristics of the brand (e.g., brand personality; Aaker 1997; Aaker, Vohs, and Mogilner 2010), the consumer (e.g., felt social exclusion; Dommer, Swaminathan, and Ahluwalia 2013; Mead et al. 2011), or the relationship (e.g., relationship norms; Aggarwal 2004; Gretry et al. 2017). In the following sections, I review the

relevant applications of tenor, ways they may interact with formality in language style to influence interpersonal meaning and generate novel insights to unexplored areas. Such areas include unexplored interactions of context (e.g., consumer-brand relationships and consumers' social needs) as well as new communications contexts (e.g., artificial intelligence and natural language processing).

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Applications of Tenor in Marketing Communications

The prior sections introduce context and linguistic formality and how they relate to effective communication, suggesting that informal language is more persuasive than formal language if it successfully enhances interpersonal closeness. Notably, predictions that arise from tenor in general interpersonal contexts may not apply to marketing communications contexts. Three such aspects are described further. First, while consumers may have relationships with brands that imitate types of interpersonal relationships, many consumer-brand relationships are based in exchange and consumption, where the relationship expectations are more clear-cut than in interpersonal relationships (Valta 2013). Even if a consumer has a relatively close relationship with a brand, this relationship cannot be equated to an intimate interpersonal relationship due to the transactional nature of a marketplace (versus interpersonal) relationship (Aggarwal 2004; Swaminathan and Dommer 2012). A gap thus exists in how consumers may respond to brands that communicate using informal language—informal language, which may be received positively in interpersonal contexts, may be received negatively in marketing contexts.

Second, marketing communications contexts utilize media that do not exist in interpersonal communication, such as the use of artificial intelligence in lieu of human communication, leading to unique downstream consequences. At the same time, existing research on tenor in non-marketing contexts have yet to be applied to marketing concepts, such as how different applications of tenor influences consumer perceptions of brands and subsequent engagement. Prior research from linguistics and psychology on perceptual cues examines specific thin-slices of different interpersonal contexts (Ambady, Bernieri, and Richeson 2000, for a review). For example, the types of interpersonal relationships examined are often teacher/student or employer/employee relationships and the effects examined are often teaching or workplace performance (Ambady et al. 2000). Such specific interpersonal contexts would not directly apply to marketing communications contexts—that examine different applications of field (e.g., ad copy, customer service interactions), tenor (e.g., different consumer-brand relationships), and mode (e.g., social media).

Third, prior research often either examines characteristics of the speaker, receiver, or relationship (Ambady et al. 2000; Peracchio and Luna 2006) but would benefit from further examinations of how these aspects interact to affect perceptions of language style. For example, code-switching (i.e., using minority language) instead of majority-only language in advertising may positively influence bilingual consumers' attitudes towards a brand (Luna, Ringberg, and Peracchio 2008). However, this stream of research primarily examines consumer characteristics (e.g., saliency of bicultural identity, Luna et al. 2008) but could benefit from examining interactions with brand characteristics. For example, luxury brands that attempt to code-switch may be seen as disingenuous by bilingual consumers and may foster negative attitudes. Other streams of marketing research related to language have primarily examined how field (e.g.,

product or brand type) moderate reactions to language style (Barcelos et al. 2018; Das et al. 2019; Kronrod et al. 2012a; 2012b). For instance, brands often use informal language (Sweldens, Van Osselaer, and Janiszewski 2010) and, depending on the type of brand or product, consumers may or may not receive it well (Das, Wiener, Kareklas 2019; Gretry et al. 2017; Sela et al. 2012). However, I posit that applications of tenor are more relevant to message style, because tenor, unlike field and mode, directly involves the participants within the context. Tenor affects perceptions of the communicator, which is relevant to marketing communications and outcomes for brands. There has been recent research on one application of tenor, consumer-brand relationships, suggesting that informal (vs. formal) language is more effective for existing customers (vs. non-customers) (Gretry et al. 2017; Sela et al. 2012). However, such research could benefit from examining interactions with consumer characteristics. For example, consumers with a high need for connection may not receive such language the same way as consumers with a low need for connection.

The following sections thus contribute to the marketing literature by applying tenor in ways to lend insights on perceptions of brands based on their language style and effects on consumer engagement. The following section will 1) discuss how tenor manifests in marketing communications, 2) integrate findings from consumer behavior literature, and 3) make predictions that extend the existing work in consumer behavior through the lens of linguistic formality. The following framework also sheds light on potential underlying psychological processes and unexamined interactions of language and context. While language style in marketing communications has become increasingly important (Berger 2014), less is known about factors that can influence consumer perceptions of formality in language style and the underlying processes. The empirical work that follows in the second half of this dissertation is

the first to empirically examine interactions of different applications of tenor. Each of the following applications of tenor most relevant to marketing will be individually discussed: 1) brand voice, 2) social distance and social status, 3) social needs, and 4) individual demographic differences. Such applications were compiled from existing marketing literature on brand language or important characteristics studied in marketing practice. The applications can be categorized as focus on brand characteristics (i.e., brand voice), consumer-brand relationship characteristics (i.e., social distance and social status), or consumer characteristics (i.e., social needs and individual demographic differences). Each section will then conclude with propositions for future research.

Brand Voice

The first aspect of tenor to be discussed is the nature of the speaker in a communication context. In B2C marketing communications contexts, a brand communicates to consumers, but the brand may communicate as different versions of themselves. One such instance is when a brand uses its corporate voice or its spokescharacter's, or mascot's, voice. Voice, or tone of voice, differs broadly by its level of humanness (Barcelos et al. 2018). Applied to language characteristics, different versions of brand voice should have distinct levels of formality. Having two distinct voices is commonplace practice for any brand that has a spokecharacter or a distinct brand personality (Luangrath, Peck, and Barger 2017a). For example, on Twitter, Geico has two accounts, one corporate account (@GEICO) and one mascot account (@TheGEICOGecko); Coca-Cola has multiple accounts, including one corporate account for the parent company (@CocaColaCo) and one brand account for the product (@CocaCola). Initial research shows that informal language is used more frequently by a brand mascot's Twitter account than its corporate

Twitter account (Luangrath, Peck, and Barger 2017a). This seems to be explained, in part, due to how a corporate brand voice using informal language may decrease perceptions of its competence and increase perceptions of warmth (Luangrath, Peck, and Barger 2017a). This finding may also be explained by more general perceptions that corporate communication should be more professional and less personal than spokesperson communication, as spokespersons are designed to be personable and marketable. Future research should also examine the underlying role of perceived authenticity and brand personality typicality on persuasion.

P1: Brands using a corporate voice will be more persuasive when using formal language; whereas, brands using a spokesperson voice will be more persuasive when using informal language.

Given advances in artificial intelligence technology, another increasingly important dimension of “who is communicating” is whether a brand is communicating with a consumer as a human or artificial agent, particularly in the customer-service interaction space. Indeed, when communicating with human (Grandey et al. 2005) or artificial (Wunderlich and Paluch 2017) customer service agents, consumers are attuned to the agents’ verbal (i.e., language style) and nonverbal (i.e., body language) emotional display. Calibrating the optimal level of emotionality in language is difficult. For instance, there is an inverted U-shaped relationship on perceptions of emotionally arousing tone and subsequent helpfulness in written online reviews, such that moderately arousing language is perceived as more helpful than not arousing or extremely arousing language (Yin, Bond, and Zhang 2017). Since informal language includes emotionally expressive elements such as emojis and punctuation repetitions for emphasis (e.g., Derks et al. 2008; Vandergriff 2013), this inverted U-shape relationship may also apply to language

formality. Even in the asynchronous mode of online reviews, where reviews may be meticulously edited before posting, writers have difficulty calibrating their language style to be optimally received by their audience. This difficulty may be exacerbated in a synchronous dialogue mode like online customer service chat, where agents must respond to a customer in real time. This inverted U-shaped pattern may hold true for other attributes of formality in style, such that highly formal language may be perceived as too distant or not appropriately enthusiastic (e.g., “Your patronage is appreciated”), but highly informal language may be perceived as inauthentic (e.g., “omg tysm for shopping w us!!! 😊”).

This pattern may be particularly true when the language is generated by artificial intelligence. For instance, when communicating with online customer service, consumers are more attentive to how authentic brand tone is when generated by artificial intelligence than by human employees (Wunderlich and Paluch 2017). This may be due to the higher quality of interactions with human employees, who are able to comprehend and address consumer questions better than current AI technology (Wunderlich and Paluch 2017). On the other hand, consumers are often frustrated with incorrect responses from AI interactions. In other words, due to the lower satisfaction with AI (vs. human) agents, consumers are more attuned to AI agents’ communication style for a more satisfactory customer service interaction. Consumers are well-practiced in detecting variances in language style in this current age where artificially generated information is abundant. For instance, when browsing news article titles, consumers detect titles to be clickbait spam when they contain highly informal language (Biyani, Tsioutsoulis, and Blackmer 2016). Furthermore, recent research suggests that consumers feel more connected to AI agents that use a more informal, human language style than those that use a more formal,

machine-like style (Araujo 2018). Therefore, even when the consumer is aware that the agent is AI-based, they might not prefer machine-like language.

P₂: Brands communicating to consumers in a customer-service context will be more persuasive when using moderately informal language (vs. extremely informal or extremely formal language). This effect will be stronger for AI- (vs. human-) generated voices.

Social Distance and Social Status

The next aspect of tenor to be discussed is the nature of the relationship between the speaker and the audience in a communication context. Consumer-brand relationships may vary based on social distance, often based on how much consumers know about the brand or whether they have purchased from the brand in the past (e.g., Gretry et al. 2017; Sela et al. 2012). While much research has shown that relationship closeness may affect the types of message content shared (e.g., controversy levels: Chen and Berger 2013; content valence: Dubois, Bonezzi, and De Angelis 2016), future research should examine how relationship closeness may affect how consumers respond to differences in messages' language style. Recent research suggests that informal (versus formal) language is received positively by consumers with close brand relationships but backfires in distant consumer-brand relationships due to perceptions of brand trustworthiness (Gretry et al. 2017; Sela et al. 2012). Other recent research suggests other processes for this pattern. In online customer service contexts, agent's use of emojis (an increasingly popular type of informal paratextual characteristic) affects perceptions of competence and warmth, thereby driving consumer satisfaction (Li, Chan, and Kim 2019). These effects are moderated by relationship norms, which could be viewed as another way to gauge

social distance. Indeed, communal (vs. exchange) norms generally exist between those closer (vs. more distant) interactants (Aggarwal 2004). Specifically, Li et al. (2019) find that in consumer-brand relationships with communal norms, use of emojis increases perceptions of warmth and subsequent satisfaction; whereas, in consumer-brand relationships with exchange norms, use of emojis decreases perceptions of competence and subsequent satisfaction. Such research may generalize to informal language characteristics beyond emojis and marketing communications contexts beyond satisfactory customer service interactions. For instance, using slang may be more persuasive in advertisements by brands that foster communal relationships, but may backfire for brands that foster exchange relationships. In other words, brands in low social distance contexts would be more persuasive when using informal language, but brands in high distance contexts may be more persuasive when using formal language.

P3: Brands with low (vs. high) social distance will be more persuasive when using informal (vs. formal) language.

Another dimension of consumer-brand relationships is the relative social power or status between the communicators. Prior work has examined differences in communication content between those with high or low power. One stream of research finds that those with higher power communicate with and are more persuaded by information conveying competence, whereas those with lower power communicate with and are more persuaded by information conveying warmth (Dubois, Rucker, and Galinsky 2016). While this research did not specifically examine how communication style factors into these effects, persuasion would likely be enhanced by a fit between content and style (Sparks and Areni 2008). In other words, this stream of research would suggest that for those with higher social power, the persuasiveness of content

conveying competence could be enhanced by a formal style conveying competence; whereas, for those with lower social power, the persuasiveness of content conveying warmth could be enhanced by an informal style conveying warmth. Another related stream of research on politeness tactics supports the account that style would affect audience perceptions of the communicator based on a relative difference in social power. Specifically, more polite tactics (e.g., use of honorifics, impersonal pronouns) are used more frequently by those with low social power (e.g., workplace subordinates); whereas, less polite tactics (e.g., use of slang, personal pronouns) are used more frequently by those with high social power (e.g., workplace superiors; Morand 2000). This could be because more polite (vs. less polite) language signals and maintains more (vs. less) social distance (Stephan, Liberman, and Trope 2010). Subordinates may use more polite language to acknowledge the relative power difference, whereas superiors may use less polite language to decrease perceptions of a power difference. Politeness and formality are highly correlated concepts (Culpeper et al. 2003), such that less polite tactics are often characteristics of informal language style. Therefore, for message recipients who expect communication style to reflect power differential norms, those with high (vs. low) social power may be seen as more persuasive when using informal (vs. formal) language. Future research is needed to test whether these tactics are indeed received positively due to their respective ability to maintain expected social power. The conflicting predictions of formality and social power from the two streams of literature could be due to a focus on expectations of the communicator (e.g., expectations of communicator warmth or competence; Dubois et al. 2016b) or, when there is a perceived difference in social power, on social power differential norms (e.g., expectations of social distance; Stephan et al. 2010). For instance, if consumers find a brand's status to be the salient characteristic when viewing an advertisement, they would likely focus on perceptions of

whether the brand communicated in a way expected of the brand. However, if consumers find the brand status as it relates to their own perceived status to be the salient characteristic when viewing an advertisement, they would likely focus on perceptions of whether the brand communicated in a way expected of their perceived relationship.

P_{4A}: Brands with high (vs. low) social power will be more persuasive when using formal (vs. informal) language.

P_{4B}: When there is a relative social power differential between consumer and brand, brands with high (vs. low) social power will be more persuasive when using informal (vs. formal) language.

Threatened Social Needs

Although linguistics research on tenor describes the actual social positions between communicators (i.e., relative differences in distance and power), an implied dimension of tenor is also the audience's social needs, as demonstrated in the discussion preceding Propositions 4A and 4B. The need to connect with others is a fundamental human need (Baumeister and Leary 1995), but the strength of the need may vary based on an individual's social status within a group. Specifically, social exclusion experiences strengthen the need to connect. When an individual feels excluded, they have a desire to regain social homeostasis (Baumeister and Leary 1995; Maner et al. 2007). Recent work has examined how experiencing social exclusion can encourage consumption decisions that help alleviate the feelings of threat to social connection (Dommer et al. 2013; Mead et al. 2011; Mourey, Olson, and Yoon 2017). However, there is little work examining how excluded individuals would respond to brands attempting to connect with them. Prior work suggests that excluded individuals respond more favorably to visual cues that

signal connection (e.g., anthropomorphic products) than included individuals (Chen, Wan, and Levy 2017). Therefore, it should follow that excluded individuals would also respond more favorably to verbal cues that signal connection (e.g., informal language characteristics). On the other hand, feeling excluded may increase negative perceptions of someone attempting to communicate in order to distance themselves from further potential rejection (Sommer and Bernieri 2015). Thus, informal language attempting to facilitate interpersonal closeness may backfire, as such language may be perceived as inauthentic (Gretry et al. 2017). Future research is needed to reconcile when consumers with threatened social needs (i.e., those socially excluded) may respond more or less favorably to different communication styles and to clarify the underlying processes that motivate such responses.

P5: Consumers with threatened (vs. met) social needs will be more persuaded by brands using informal (vs. formal) language.

Individual Demographic Differences

Another aspect of tenor that affects interpersonal meaning in communication are demographic variables of consumers, particularly their gender and age. Females tend to use informal language more frequently than males (Newman et al. 2008). This variation is context dependent and particularly true in contexts with less constraint on communication norms (i.e., those that allow for greater variation in communication style; Newman et al. 2008). Therefore, gender likely interacts with social distance of communicators, as well as various aspects of mode (e.g., synchrony and richness of the communication medium). For instance, research on individuals' writing style when sharing emotions on personal blogs showed no significant variation in gender and other demographics (Rodríguez-Hidalgo, Tan, and Verlegh 2017).

However, research on other contexts such as personal emails (Colley and Todd 2002) and online product reviews (Moore and McFerran 2017) do find gender differences in language style. Thus, these predictions are likely to be amplified in modes that allow for greater variation in style (i.e., online modes such as email or online forums). From this body of research on gender differences in language style, it can also be inferred that audience response may depend on the gender of the receiver as well. For instance, males may be more receptive to brands communicating in a more formal language style, whereas females may be more receptive to brands communicating in a more informal language style. Given the importance of market segmentation by gender (Kim, Lehto, and Morrison 2007), future research should empirically test these predictions on differences in language style perception based on gender and its interactions with contextual mode and communicator-audience demographic matching.

P₆: Female (vs. male) consumers will be more persuaded by brands using informal (vs. formal) language, particularly 1) in contextual modes that allow greater variation in style (i.e., more media rich modes) and 2) when the gender of the brand representative and consumer matches.

Consumer age is another individual demographic difference that may also impact language use and perception. Younger people tend to use more informal language than older people, whereas older people tend to use longer, more complex words than younger people (Pennebaker and Stone 2003). Age differences may be particularly salient in societies like Japan, where hierarchical norms are more prominently proscribed (Lauwereyns 2002). In line with linguistic style matching based on gender (Ireland and Pennebaker 2010; Moore and McFerran 2017), there is a chance that individuals may also prefer language style based on age matching.

Therefore, it would be worth examining whether younger consumers indeed prefer brands using informal language and older consumers prefer brands using formal language. Additionally, brands communicating in an informal language style may be perceived as more youthful and those communicating in a formal style may be perceived as older.

P7: Younger (vs. older) consumers will be more persuaded by brands using informal (vs. formal) language, particularly 1) in cultures with particularly hierarchical norms and 2) when the age of the brand representative and consumer matches.

Tenor, Perceptions of the Communicator, and Interactions between Applications

Aspects of tenor in marketing may affect consumer reactions to language through their perceptions of the communicator. Many of the discussed applications of tenor represent differences in closeness of the relationship between brand and consumer, particularly social distance, social power, and social needs. Stephan, Liberman, and Trope (2010) suggest that formal language characteristics signal and reinforce greater interpersonal distance and informal language characteristics signal and reinforce greater interpersonal closeness. However, as discussed in the prior sections, various applications of tenor should moderate the effect of formality on perceptions of interpersonal closeness and, ultimately, persuasion. Specifically, when such applications of tenor heighten interpersonal closeness (e.g., existing consumer-brand relationship, low status differential, high feelings of social acceptance), informal language may be perceived as enhancing closeness. Conversely, when such applications of tenor lower interpersonal closeness (e.g., no consumer-brand relationship, high status differential, low feelings of social acceptance), informal language may be perceived as reducing closeness. In the next section of this dissertation, I empirically examine perceptions of consumer-brand closeness

as an underlying process of the interaction between brand language formality and several applications of tenor on brand engagement.

P8: Consumer-brand closeness mediates the effect of brand language formality and contextual tenor on persuasion. Specifically, when aspects of contextual tenor facilitate closeness, informal brand language increases perceptions of consumer-brand closeness, thereby increasing persuasion. However, when aspects of contextual tenor facilitate distance, formal brand language increases perceptions of closeness, thereby increasing persuasion.

Furthermore, the prior sections summarize how each aspect of context may affect marketing communications and consumer perceptions of communication style. However, marketing communications contexts do not exist in a clean vacuum. Thus, in any given type of communications context, various aspects likely interact with each other. For example, consumers with different social needs or have a dispositional preference for more or less formal communication styles may respond to a brand email differently depending on whether they have purchased from the brand before or not. The next section of this dissertation tests an example of how different aspects of tenor can interact, namely, consumers' social needs and the type of consumer-brand relationship (see Figure 1 for full model; empirically examined components asterisked). Because prior marketing research on language primarily examined differences in field, that is, brand and product characteristics (e.g., Sela et al. 2012; Kronrod et al. 2012a; 2012b), there is a dearth of research on how consumer characteristics may also impact perceptions of brand language style. Understanding interactions in tenor (i.e., consumer

characteristics) is important, because tenor impacts the use and perception of language style above and beyond field (Halliday 1989; Shen 2012).

P₉: When consumers do not have an existing relationship with a brand, consumers with low (vs. high) social needs will be more persuaded by brands using formal (vs. informal) language. The effects will be attenuated when consumers have an existing relationship with a brand.

Insert Figure 1 about here

Conclusion

This framework sets out to extend and apply Halliday's (1989) theory of functional linguistics to the context of brand communications. This framework then focuses on the aspect of tenor, organizing marketing applications into characteristics of the brand, the consumer, or their relationship. This section concludes with propositions for future research involving each application of tenor, potential underlying mechanism, and interactions between applications. Importantly, the next step in validating the propositions in this framework is to empirically examine the various applications of tenor discussed.

In the section that follows, I present a set of experiments that begins to unpack Propositions 8 and 9 empirically. Specifically, I examine two applications of tenor, consumer social needs in the form of social exclusion experiences and consumer-brand relationships in the form of whether a consumer is an existing customer or not, and their interactive effects with

brand language formality on consumer engagement. Additionally, I explore the effects of a common individual difference important in marketing, gender. Finally, I examine perceptions of consumer brand closeness as the mediator.

EMPIRICAL INVESTIGATION OF CONTEXTUAL TENOR ON CONSUMER RESPONSES TO BRAND COMMUNICATION STYLE

The present research examines when and why consumers may be more or less receptive to different styles of communication. As my framework posits, reception of informal language is influenced particularly by the tenor of a social context (i.e., the nature of the relationship of those within a context). In the following empirical investigation, I primarily examine the interaction between two aspects of tenor: threatened social needs and the nature of consumer-brand relationships. Specifically, how consumers respond to informal (vs. formal) brand communication style may vary based on consumers' threatened social needs and their pre-existing relationship with the brand. The present research examines consumers' social exclusion experiences, a primary threat to social needs that motivates consumers to restore social homeostasis (Baumeister and Leary 1995; Maner et al. 2007). One such way to restore social homeostasis can be through engaging with brands; common ways to engage include: communicating with the brand (e.g., visiting the brand's website, responding to brand emails and social media posts) and about the brand (e.g., spreading word-of-mouth), and ultimately purchasing from the brand (Barger, Peltier, and Schultz 2016). However, consumers may respond differently to brand communication style depending on the recalled social exclusion experience, as being rejected or ignored threaten different social needs (Williams 2007; Lee and Shrum 2012). Furthermore, whether or not consumers have an existing relationship with a brand should also change how consumers perceive brand communication style (Gretry et al. 2017; Sela et al. 2012), such that the effects may be particularly salient to new customers since they do not have prior brand knowledge.

Thus, the current research investigates when and why consumers may engage less with brands that communicate in an informal (vs. formal) style depending on their recalled social exclusion experiences and relationship with the brands. As a conservative test of the effects, I keep the other aspects of social context within domains where informal language style is common and generally elicit positive outcomes (Das et al. 2019; Kronrod and Danziger 2013): field as brands in hedonic product categories (pilot study and Study 2: skin and haircare; Study 2: clothing) and mode as online communication platforms (lab: email; field study: Twitter).

Threatened Social Needs and Responses to Brand Communication

It is evident that humans are inherently social beings and have a strong need to connect with others (Baumeister and Leary 1995). A desire for connection influences how consumers respond to visual cues. For instance, socially excluded individuals—those with a high need to connect—prefer anthropomorphic products more than included individuals, because such products signal social connection (Chen et al. 2017). Such desire for connection should likely also influence how consumers respond to verbal cues that modulate social connection. Formality in language style serves as such a verbal cue; informal language is typically used to signal closeness, whereas formal language is typically used to signal distance (Heylighen and Dewaele 1999; Stephan et al. 2010). This extant research examines formality from the perspective of the communicator and what style is typically used in certain contexts. However, the present research examines formality from the perspective of the message recipient and whether an informal style indeed enhances social closeness and is more persuasive than a formal style.

The experience of social exclusion—that is, when one is either rejected or ignored by others—is a primary threat to belonging (Leary 2005; Molden et al. 2009; Williams 2007). The

resulting social pain from such threats is akin to physical pain (Eisenberger et al. 2003; MacDonald and Leary 2005). Because being socially excluded is so viscerally painful, people are motivated to restore their sense of social homeostasis. Indeed, the social reconnection hypothesis suggests that people who have experienced social exclusion are motivated to seek social bonds with novel others (Maner et al. 2007). Excluded individuals desire connection with novel others in lieu of existing connections, because existing connections are often the source of exclusion (Maner et al. 2007; Mead et al. 2011). In interpersonal settings, novel others in the form of new acquaintances can restore excluded individuals' sense of belonging (Maner et al. 2007). However, individuals are becoming increasingly isolated (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Brashears 2006; Wang, Zhu, and Shiv 2012) and may not be able to restore their social homeostasis through connecting with other individuals. In such cases where other individuals are unavailable, consumers may turn to products and brands.

Prior research in marketing has proposed several solutions for socially excluded consumers to restore their sense of belonging with their existing social connections. One such solution is to strategically purchase or consume products that increase their chances of being accepted by their peers (Dommer et al. 2013; Mead et al. 2011). Another is to use anthropomorphic products to alleviate their need to engage with one's existing current social connections (Mourey et al. 2017). Yet, while excluded individuals desire to connect with novel (vs. existing) individuals in interpersonal contexts (Maner et al. 2007), how excluded consumers respond to novel connections in the marketplace with brands may differ, given differences between interpersonal and brand relationships (Aggarwal 2004; Swaminathan and Dommer 2012; Valta 2013). Given the importance of calibrating marketing communications to increasingly specific target audiences (Summers, Smith, and Reczek 2016), marketing research

would benefit from understanding how excluded consumers respond to brand communication. It is presently unclear how excluded consumers' desire for connection would influence responses to informal (vs. formal) language. Furthermore, it is unclear whether such consumers would respond differently to novel brands and brands with which they have an existing relationship. On one hand, excluded consumers may respond positively to any brand, regardless of their relationship, so long as the brand serves as a means to restore their sense of belonging (Mead et al. 2011; Dommer et al. 2013). In other words, prior research might predict that any brand attempting to connect would be received favorably by excluded consumers. On the other hand, excluded individuals tend to react more positively to novel (vs. known) others (Maner et al. 2007). In other words, excluded consumers may respond more positively to brands with which they have (or do not have) a relationship. This could be the case since the only information known about a novel other is their attempt to connect with the excluded individual, whereas perceptions of known others are colored by information about the existing relationship.

However, both views ignore the dependency on aspects of social context to interpret language. It is evident that language does impact consumer perceptions of brands (e.g., Gretry et al. 2017; Kronrod et al. 2012a; 2012b; Sela et al. 2012), but it is unclear how language may be perceived differently by excluded individuals. There has been no research on how language affects perceptions of brand communication by excluded (vs. included) consumers. The only research involving social exclusion and language focuses on how excluded individuals perceive language attributes directly cuing exclusion (for a review, see Kerr and Levine 2008). For instance, using an aggressive tone (Kerr and Levine 2008), using dehumanizing language (Andrighetto 2016), or speaking in a language the receiver cannot understand (Hitlan et al. 2006) is perceived as excluding by those excluded. Although it is valuable to establish what language

serves as explicitly exclusionary cues in interpersonal relationships or organizational behavior, marketing communications are inherently different—tailored to enhance consumers’ perceptions of a brand and would typically not use explicitly exclusionary language. Thus, it is worth examining how non-exclusionary language attributes impact excluded consumers’ perceptions. The present work is the first to fill this important theoretical gap in a marketplace where there is pervasive online communication by brands that are not well-known to consumers. Specifically, I propose that whether a consumer feels socially excluded or included is an important consideration for *how* brands communicate to non-customers and existing customers. Next, I delineate how socially excluded (vs. included) individuals would typically receive informal (vs. formal) language and predict when they would be more or less likely to engage with a novel brand (Hypothesis 1). Then, I discuss the differential social needs of being rejected versus being ignored and predict how exclusion experience type moderates perceptions of communication style on brand engagement (Hypothesis 2). I subsequently discuss the underlying process of self-brand closeness (Hypothesis 3) and the moderating effects of consumer-brand relationship (i.e., when a customer has an existing relationship with a brand vs. when they do not; Hypothesis 4).

Socially excluded individuals are more attuned to social cues (Pickett, Gardner, and Knowles 2004), and are more responsive to cues that signal acceptance (e.g., a smiling face; DeWall et al. 2009). Therefore, it would logically follow that socially excluded individuals would respond more favorably to verbal cues that signal acceptance (e.g., informal language style that close others tend to use). However, such prior work does not account for the nature of the relationship between the excluded individual and the one delivering social cues. Although these prior studies suggest that excluded individuals are more receptive to anyone signaling acceptance (e.g., a stranger smiling), the present research posits that this may not be the case in a

marketing context. From a relationship norm perspective, a consumer-brand relationship may have different norms than in an interpersonal relationship (i.e., a clearer egocentric profit motive; Valta 2013). For example, in an interpersonal relationship context, a stranger smiling at an excluded individual may signal unclear norms, since there are aspects of distance (i.e., the person is a stranger) and closeness (i.e., the smile representing selfless concern). In a marketing context, a brand sending a friendly-sounding email to an excluded individual may signal norms of distant relationships, since an excluded consumer may view the brand action as ultimately self-serving, regardless of how friendly it sounds (Campbell and Kirmani 2000). Indeed, excluded individuals tend to be less trusting of others compared to included individuals (Williams 2007). Furthermore, consumers tend to trust brands less when informal brand communication violates expectations (Gretry et al. 2017). Therefore, for those more attuned to social cues (i.e., socially excluded individuals), brands communicating in a way that violates expected norms (i.e., distant brands communicating informally) should be perceived negatively. Thus, I predict that consumers feeling socially excluded would be less likely to engage with brands that communicate in an informal (vs. formal) style.

Because included individuals' connection needs are not threatened, and, in fact, very much met, individuals may be less attuned to relationship norms between themselves and the brand than if their connection needs are threatened (i.e., excluded individuals). Instead, they may rely on more general heuristics of brand communication, such as what is typical in brand communication. Typical brand communication is often expressive and uses more informal language attributes (Sweldens, Van Osselaer, and Janiszewski 2010), which typically enhances consumer perceptions of the brand and intentions to engage with the brand (Beukeboom, Kerkhof, and de Vries 2015; Kelleher 2009; Kelleher and Miller 2006). Thus, I predict that

included individuals would be more likely to engage with brands that communicate in an informal (vs. formal) style. Formally,

H1: Brand communication using an informal (vs. formal) communication style will decrease (increase) brand engagement for excluded (included) individuals.

PILOT STUDY

The purpose of this pilot study is to test whether exclusion experiences in general (i.e., either experiences of being rejected or being ignored) interact with communication style to influence brand engagement. Specifically, I hypothesize that informal (vs. formal) style will be received more positively for those included but more negatively for those excluded.

Method

One hundred ninety-four MTurk participants (47.9% female, $M_{\text{age}} = 35.2$) were randomly assigned to a condition in a 2 (recalled experience: excluded vs. included) x 2 (communication style: informal vs. formal) between-subjects design. Participants were told that they would be participating in two ostensibly different studies: a writing task and a brand communication task. They first reported their gender and the first initial of their first and last name (to be used in the communication style manipulation), ostensibly to identify them without having to record their full name. Participants' initials were used to enhance realism in the brand email stimuli. Next, they recalled and wrote about a time when they were either ignored or rejected by their friends, family, or someone they care about or included by their friends, family, or someone they care about (the exclusion manipulation; Lee and Shrum 2012; Chen, Wan, Levy 2017). Afterwards,

they answered a manipulation check for exclusion (i.e., ignored, rejected, included) and measures of mood (i.e., positive, negative), on 7-point scales (1 = not at all; 7 = very).

In the second ostensible study, participants were asked to imagine that they had subscribed to a skin and hair care company's email listserv and read a welcome email from this company that was written with formal or informal language (the communication style manipulation; full stimuli in Appendix A). The manipulations followed several style characteristics detailed in Table 1. For example, the formal condition included formal honorifics in the opening and closing lines (i.e. "Dear Mr./Ms. X-----," "Regards, The École de Chimie Team") and the informal condition included informal honorifics (i.e. "Hey X-----!", "Cheers, The EDC Team"). The "X" in the opening line was replaced with either the participants' last name initial (formal condition) or first name initial (informal condition). The formal condition also used longer, more formal words and formal grammar and sentence structure. The informal condition used less formal words (i.e. abbreviations) and informal grammar (i.e. contractions, exclamation marks, emoticons) and sentence structure (i.e. sentence fragments; Levin et al. 1994; Luangrath et al. 2017b). I did not use a real company and instead created the company name, École de Chimie, to avoid issues with prior knowledge and likeability. The email stimuli were pretested to determine that one was more formal than the other with 79 MTurk participants. Formality of the email message was measured on two 7-point scales (1 = informal/very casual, 7 = formal/not very casual, $r = .54$; Gretry et al. 2017). The pretest showed that the formal email message was significantly more formal than the informal email message ($M_{\text{formal}} = 3.98$, $M_{\text{informal}} = 3.19$, $F(1,77) = 6.28$, $p = .01$).

After participants viewed the brand email message, they rated their purchase intentions ($\alpha = .97$), intentions to communicate with the brand ($\alpha = .97$), and intentions to visit the brand's

website ($\alpha = .98$). Each were measured on three 7-point scales (1 = very unlikely/very improbable/no intentions; 7 = very likely/very probable/extremely high intentions; see Appendix C for all lab study measures). A composite of purchase intentions, communication intentions, and intentions to visit the company's website was then created to represent brand engagement intentions. In this and the following studies, an exploratory factor analysis revealed that all three items loaded on a single factor with eigenvalues greater than one and explaining over 77% of the variance (across studies, $\alpha > .82$). They also rated their attitude toward the email ($\alpha = .96$) and the École de Chimie brand ($\alpha = .95$). Each were measured on three 7-point scales (1 = very negative/very unfavorable/dislike a lot; 7 = very positive/very favorable/like a lot). Next, participants answered manipulation checks by indicating the extent to which they wrote an experience where they were excluded by others and included by others (1 = not at all, 7 = very much). They also answered the same two formality questions as in the pretest ($r = .69$). Finally, participants answered demographic questions and were thanked.

Results and Discussion

Manipulation Checks. For all manipulation check measures, 2 (experience) x 2 (communication style) ANOVAs were conducted. As expected, those who recalled an exclusion (vs. inclusion) experience reported that they were significantly more excluded ($M_{\text{excluded}} = 5.54$, $M_{\text{included}} = 2.04$, $F(1,190) = 154.22$, $p < .001$) and significantly less included ($M_{\text{excluded}} = 2.50$, $M_{\text{included}} = 6.22$, $F(1,190) = 212.10$, $p < .001$). There were no other significant effects ($F_s < 2.71$, $p_s > .10$). As expected, the formality manipulation check yielded a significant communication style main effect, such that the informal message was deemed less formal than the formal

message ($M_{\text{informal}} = 3.08$, $M_{\text{formal}} = 4.30$, $F(1,190) = 31.54$, $p < .001$). There were no other significant effects ($F_s < .17$, $p_s > .67$).

Engagement Intentions. A 2 (experience) x 2 (communication style) ANOVA was conducted on engagement intentions. There were no significant effects ($F_s < 1.84$, $p_s > .17$). However, the experience x communication style interaction was explored ($F(1,190) = 1.80$, $p = .18$, $\eta^2 = .01$; see Table 2 for a summary of lab study results). Lending initial support to Hypothesis 1, planned contrasts revealed that included individuals who read an informal email message had marginally higher engagement intentions than those who read a formal email ($M_{\text{informal}} = 4.60$, $M_{\text{formal}} = 4.00$, $F(1,190) = 3.72$, $p = .06$; see Figure 3). As expected, there were no differences in communication style for those in the exclusion condition ($M_{\text{informal}} = 4.39$, $M_{\text{formal}} = 4.39$, $F(1,190) = .00$, $p = .99$).

Insert Table 2 and Figure 4 about here

Supplemental Analyses. Because demographic measures (i.e., gender) were also captured, I examined its potential moderating role. Although I had not explicitly hypothesized differences, gender may moderate engagement intentions because males and females typically use and process language differently such that males prefer formal, less expressive styles and females prefer informal, more expressive styles (Newman et al. 2008; Shaywitz et al. 1995). I conducted a 2 (experience) x 2 (communication style) x 2 (gender) analysis for the engagement intentions composite. There was a gender main effect ($M_{\text{male}} = 4.00$, $M_{\text{female}} = 4.70$, $F(1,186) = 10.24$, $p = .002$). There were no other significant effects ($F_s < 2.36$, $p_s > .12$). Perhaps that rejected

individuals may be more sensitive to contextual nuances than included individuals (Pickett, Gardner, and Knowles 2004) and that different social exclusion experiences (i.e., rejected vs. ignored) were not parsed out in this study, gender effects may have only emerged under conditions of rejection. The studies that follow will explicitly examine gender differences for more specific social exclusion experiences.

Discussion. In this pilot study, I find initial partial support for Hypothesis 1, such that informal (versus formal) language increases engagement intentions for those who recalled an inclusion experience. I suspect that there was no effect of formality in the exclusion condition, because I did not tease apart the type of exclusion experience participants recalled. A key difference in exclusion experiences is whether an individual was rejected (actively excluded) or ignored (passively excluded) (Lee and Shrum 2012; Molden et al. 2009). It may be important to parse out such experiences, as rejected and ignored individuals may behave differently (Lee and Shrum 2012).

Differential Social Needs and Perceptions of Communication Style

Not all exclusion experiences are the same—there are different types of social exclusion experiences that threaten different needs. Specifically, being rejected threatens belongingness needs and being ignored threatens self-efficacy needs (Lee and Shrum 2012; Molden et al. 2009). Belongingness needs reflect the desire to form and maintain interpersonal relationships (Baumeister and Leary 1995), which helps facilitate connecting with novel others (Pickett, Gardner, and Knowles 2004). Self-efficacy needs include needing to perceive a sense of control as well as a sense of meaningful existence (Lee and Shrum 2012). In other words, being rejected

threatens needs that are focused on interpersonal relationships; whereas, being ignored threatens needs that are focused on one's sense of self. The defining characteristic of rejected individuals is that they are explicitly given negative social feedback (Molden et al. 2009). Thus, those rejected primarily feel a loss of social connection and are motivated to connect with novel others (Maner et al. 2007; Molden et al. 2009). However, because they are sensitive to negative feedback, rejected individuals would be more likely to be receptive to social cues appropriate to the nature of a novel connection (i.e., formal language). On the other hand, those ignored are deprived of positive social feedback (Molden et al. 2009). Thus, to restore a sense of control and meaningful existence, they behave in ways that draw attention to them (e.g., conspicuous consumption; Lee and Shrum 2012). Therefore, ignored individuals would be likely to engage with brands regardless of how they communicate, because such behaviors (e.g., responding to a brand message, leaving positive reviews, buying a product) would make them feel more visible to brands. Therefore, ignored individuals are less likely to attend to social cues like communication style and may engage with brands regardless of how they communicate.

I specifically predict that rejected individuals, whose social connection needs are most saliently threatened, will be more attuned to how novel others communicate with them. Specifically, I expect that rejected individuals would be more likely to engage with such brands that communicate in a formal (vs. informal) style. However, ignored individuals, with threatened self-efficacy needs, may focus more on the self and less on how novel others attempt to communicate. Therefore, I expect that the effects of communication style would be attenuated for ignored individuals, such that ignored individuals are likely to engage with a brand regardless of communication style. Formally,

H2: Brand communication using an informal (vs. formal) communication style will decrease brand engagement for rejected individuals, but there will be no difference for ignored individuals.

I further expect this effect to be mediated by consumer perceptions of self-brand closeness. Because contextual tenor affects interpersonal meaning (Halliday 1989), I posit that perceptions of relationship closeness are what fundamentally underlie consumers' engagement intentions. Psychological closeness is defined as the perceived connection toward another (Aron, Aron, and Smollan 1992). While informal language typically increases perceptions of psychological closeness (Fitzsimons and Kay 2004; Stephan, Liberman, and Trope 2010), how social exclusion experiences interact with language formality may yield differing perceptions of a novel brand. Because rejected individuals are more attuned to social context (Pickett, Gardner, and Knowles 2004), I expect that rejected individuals will feel more distant to a novel brand (i.e., a distant other) that communicates in an informal style. Since informal language styles are typically used in closer relationship contexts (Joos 1961), a distant brand would violate relationship expectations (Aggarwal 2004) or may lower relationship trust (Gretry et al. 2017). On the other hand, included individuals should feel closer to brands that communicate in a more expressive, intimate manner. Since brands often communicate informally (Sweldens, Van Osselaer, and Janiszewski 2010), which typically enhances evaluations of the brand (Beukeboom, Kerkhof, and de Vries 2015; Kelleher 2009; Kelleher and Miller 2006), informal language should serve as a positive heuristic for included consumers. Included (compared to excluded) consumers may rely more on such heuristics because their social needs are met and thus process information more automatically (Pickett et al. 2004). Because they accept their

social status quo, included individuals do not need to constantly scan for inclusion cues (Bless et al. 1996; Leary 1999). Thus, I expect that those who are included will feel closer to a brand that communicates in an informal (vs. formal) style. Finally, I do not expect self-brand closeness to be a significant mediator for ignored individuals, since ignored individuals are more focused on their own actions (Molden et al. 2009) and less focused on the actions of others (e.g., how brands communicate with them). Formally,

H3: The interactive effect of recalled exclusion experience and communication style is mediated by perceptions of self-brand closeness for rejected and included (but not ignored) individuals.

An important moderator to consider is when consumers have an existing relationship with the brand. One possibility is that those rejected will be more likely to engage with a known brand when it communicates informally (vs. formally). When a consumer has a prior relationship with a brand, they would likely view the brand as a close other. From a psychological closeness perspective, consumers would thus expect known brands to communicate as close others would (i.e., informally; Joos 1961). Alternatively, they may be unaffected by the language used in a simple message. This is because having a prior relationship increases the level of knowledge—and affects subsequent perceptions and associations—that a consumer has about a brand (Hoyer and Brown 1990; Keller 1993). Such strongly-held knowledge is central to consumer inferences about the brand and subsequent decision-making (Kardes et al. 2004). Indeed, in conversation, people are prone to actively monitor strangers but rely on their existing beliefs when communicating with friends (Savitsky et al. 2011). Therefore, when consumers have a relationship with a brand (i.e., consumers have purchased from the brand in the past), their brand

knowledge serves as more relevant information than other, more recent cues (e.g., one instance of brand communication). Furthermore, higher levels of brand knowledge strengthen favorable attitudes towards the brand (Keller 1993). Therefore, prior customers should have positive evaluations of a brand regardless of brand communication style. Consistent with this account, existing customers (versus non-customers) of a brand should be less affected by brand communication style because prior knowledge of the brand should serve as a stronger cue impacting perceptions and decision-making. Therefore, I expect that the predicted effects will be mitigated for a brand with whom a consumer has a prior relationship. Stated formally,

H4: The interactive effects of recalled experience and communication style on brand engagement intentions will be moderated by prior relationship with the brand (i.e., those who have purchased from a brand before or not). Specifically, the predictions of H1-H3 will only hold when the consumer has no prior relationship with the brand.

Overview of Studies

I first present two lab studies testing the effects of two applications of tenor—social needs (operationalized as social exclusion experience) and consumer-brand relationship—on consumer responses to formality in brand communication style (these empirically tested components are starred in the conceptual framework in Figure 1). The operationalizations of formality in the lab studies reflect the various operationalizations denoted in Table 1. Then, I present a field study with Twitter data, examining whether the basic effect manifests in tweets from twenty brand accounts. Figure 2 summarizes the hypotheses in a conceptual model.

Insert Figure 2 about here

Study 1 elucidates the effects for excluded individuals by examining two types of exclusion experiences (being rejected or ignored; Hypothesis 2). Additionally, Study 1 illuminates the underlying process by measuring the mediating effect of self-brand closeness (Hypothesis 3). Study 2 extends the findings in two ways: 1) examining the effects of communication style of brands close to the consumer by measuring whether participants are existing customers to a brand or not (Hypothesis 4), and 2) examining the effects in a different product category (i.e., varying field) to determine the generalizability of the effects. Since the product category examined in the pilot study and Study 1 is typically more relevant to female consumers (skincare), Study 2 examines another category relevant to both genders (clothing). I expect the effects to hold across product categories, since they both are hedonic categories in the fashion and beauty industry. Hedonic products were selected as the contextual field, because informal language style is often employed in brand communications and expected to be received positively for such products (Das et al. 2019; Kronrod and Danziger 2013). This serves as a more conservative test of the hypotheses, since prior research suggests that informal language style should be received positively and increase consumer engagement for hedonic product brands. Additionally, the lab studies and field study are set in online contextual modes (email and Twitter), because online modes allow for greater variance in language formality and that informal language characteristics are used in the real world (Crystal 2001). To enhance external validity, Study 3 tests the primary effect for how prior customers engage with brands in the field

using real brand Twitter data. Finally, I present a single-paper meta-analysis of the three lab studies to validate the consistency of the effects in Hypotheses 1 and 2.

STUDY 1: DIFFERENTIAL EXCLUSION EXPERIENCES

Study 1 examines the differential effects of being rejected vs. being ignored (Hypothesis 2). Since being rejected threatens connection needs more saliently than being ignored, I expect that, for rejected individuals, an unknown brand communicating using formal language would be received more favorably than those using informal language. I also examine self-brand closeness as the underlying process.

Method

Three hundred forty-three MTurk participants (51.6% female, $M_{\text{age}} = 37.3$) were randomly assigned to a condition in a 3 (recalled experience: rejected vs. ignored vs. included) x 2 (communication style: informal vs. formal) between-subjects design. The experimental setup of this study was similar to the pilot study with one change. Instead of recalling an exclusion experience, where the exclusion condition was separated into two conditions: ignored vs. rejected (Lee and Shrum 2012). Participants then answered the same measures as in the pilot. As in the pilot, a composite was created for brand engagement intentions ($\alpha = .82$). Additionally, near the end of the survey, participants answered a measure of self-brand closeness adapted from the Inclusion of Others in Self (IOS) scale (Aron et al. 1992). Specifically, they answered the extent to which they currently identify with the brand, such that higher scores indicate higher perceptions of closeness between themselves and the brand.

Results and Discussion

Manipulation Checks. For all manipulation checks, 3 (experience) x 2 (communication style) ANOVAs were conducted. There were significant exclusion main effects for each of the exclusion manipulation checks (rejected: $F(2,337) = 852.94, p < .001$; ignored: $F(2,337) = 568.06, p < .001$; included: $F(2,337) = 660.85, p < .001$). Planned contrasts show that those who recalled an experience being rejected ($M_{\text{rejected}} = 6.42$) reported that they were significantly more rejected than those ignored ($M_{\text{ignored}} = 5.89, F(2,337) = 14.29, p < .001$) and those included ($M_{\text{included}} = 1.17, F(2,337) = 1349.83, p < .001$). Those rejected ($M_{\text{rejected}} = 5.13$) also reported that they were significantly less ignored ($M_{\text{ignored}} = 6.47, F(2,337) = 65.77, p < .001$) than those ignored and more ignored ($M_{\text{included}} = 1.21, F(2,337) = 541.49, p < .001$) than those included. Additionally, those rejected ($M_{\text{rejected}} = 1.67$) reported that they were significantly more included ($M_{\text{ignored}} = 1.40, F(2,337) = 2.76, p = .01$) than those ignored and less included ($M_{\text{included}} = 6.56, F(2,337) = 885.66, p < .001$) than those included. No other effects were significant ($F_s < 2.34, p_s > .12$). In other words, exclusion was successfully manipulated. As expected, the formality manipulation check yielded a significant communication style main effect, such that the informal message was deemed less formal than the formal message ($M_{\text{informal}} = 2.72, M_{\text{formal}} = 4.14, F(1,337) = 92.30, p < .001$). No other effects were significant ($F_s < .38, p_s > .68$).

Engagement Intentions. A 3 (experience) x 2 (communication style) ANOVA was conducted for engagement intentions. There was a significant experience x communication style interaction ($F(2,337) = 3.51, p = .03$). Planned contrasts revealed that in the rejected condition, those who read an informal email message had lower engagement intentions than those who read a formal email ($M_{\text{informal}} = 3.71, M_{\text{formal}} = 4.39, F(1,337) = 5.60, p = .02$; see Figure 3A). There were no differences in communication style for those in the ignored condition ($M_{\text{informal}} = 4.22,$

$M_{\text{formal}} = 4.38$, $F(1,337) = .35$, $p = .56$). The pattern in the included condition was directionally consistent with Hypothesis 1 and the pilot study but not significant ($M_{\text{informal}} = 4.55$, $M_{\text{formal}} = 4.18$, $F(1,337) = 1.82$, $p = .18$). There were no other significant effects ($F_s < 1.38$, $p_s > .25$). The results supported Hypothesis 2, such that the type of exclusion matters and that rejection (but not being ignored) decreases receptiveness to informal style.

Insert Figure 3A about here

Supplemental Analyses. Once again, I examined gender as potential moderator and conducted a 3 (experience) x 2 (communication style) x 2 (gender) analysis for the engagement intentions composite. There was an experience x communication style interaction ($F(2,331) = 3.19$, $p = .04$), qualified by a marginal experience x communication style x gender interaction ($F(2,331) = 2.67$, $p = .07$; see Figure 3B). There were no other significant effects ($F_s < 1.91$, $p_s > .16$). The effect in the rejected condition is moderated by gender, such that males (but not females) who read an informal (vs. formal) email message had lower engagement intentions (males: $M_{\text{informal}} = 3.49$, $M_{\text{formal}} = 4.52$, $F(1,331) = 6.86$, $p = .01$; females: $M_{\text{informal}} = 3.92$, $M_{\text{formal}} = 4.19$, $F(1,331) = .41$, $p = .52$). Although that females are typically more attuned to social cues than males (Hall 1978), males tend to be more affected by social cues in their subsequent judgments than females (Mehu, Little, and Dunbar 2008). Thus, the results reflect that male participants are more affected by language style on their subsequent engagement intentions. Furthermore, the effect for males is consistent with prior literature, since males (vs. females) typically communicate in and prefer more formal, less expressive styles (Newman et al. 2008).

Unexpectedly, there was also a marginally significant effect in the ignored condition, such that females (but not males) who read an informal (vs. formal) email message had lower engagement intentions (females: $M_{\text{informal}} = 4.10$, $M_{\text{formal}} = 4.77$, $F(1,331) = 3.46$, $p = .06$; males: $M_{\text{informal}} = 4.40$, $M_{\text{formal}} = 4.00$, $F(1,331) = 1.04$, $p = .31$). There were no significant effects in the included condition (females: $M_{\text{informal}} = 4.65$, $M_{\text{formal}} = 4.42$, $F(1,331) = 1.38$, $p = .24$; males: $M_{\text{informal}} = 4.40$, $M_{\text{formal}} = 3.92$, $F(1,331) = .42$, $p = .52$). In sum, the results find that males (but not females) are less likely to engage with brands communicating informally (vs. formally) when rejected (but not when ignored or included). Therefore, in conditions where individuals are particularly attuned to social cues (i.e., when feeling rejected; Pickett, Gardner, and Knowles 2004), informal language would be expected to backfire more for rejected males (vs. females). Although the pilot did not have similarly significant gender effects, Study 1 parsed out exclusion experiences, showing that different exclusion experiences may be perceived differently by males and females.

Insert Figure 3B about here

Perceptions of Self-Brand Closeness. A 3 (experience) x 2 (communication style) ANOVA was conducted on perceptions of self-brand closeness. There was an experience x communication style interaction ($F(2,337) = 4.45$, $p = .01$; see Table 3 for a summary of results in Studies 1-2). Planned contrasts revealed that in the rejected condition, those who read an informal (vs. formal) email message had lower perceptions of self-brand closeness ($M_{\text{informal}} = 2.00$, $M_{\text{formal}} = 2.77$, $F(1,337) = 7.67$, $p = .01$). There were no differences in self-brand closeness for those in the ignored condition ($M_{\text{informal}} = 2.52$, $M_{\text{formal}} = 2.42$, $F(1,337) = .13$, $p = .72$) or

included condition ($M_{\text{informal}} = 2.92$, $M_{\text{formal}} = 2.60$, $F(1,337) = 1.46$, $p = .23$). There were no other significant effects ($F_s < 2.15$, $p_s > .12$).

Insert Table 3 about here

Moderated Mediation: Engagement Intentions. I examined whether self-brand closeness perceptions mediated the effect of communication style (1=informal, 0=formal) and experience (indicator coded by the macro into two variables: 0=included, 0=rejected, 1=ignored (W1); 1=included, 0=rejected, 0=ignored (W2)) on the engagement intentions composite using Hayes' (2013) PROCESS macro (model 8; 5,000 bootstrapped samples). The effect of formality on the rejected and included (but not the ignored) conditions are expected to be mediated by self-brand closeness, I chose the multi-categorical experience variable to be indicator coded such that the rejected condition is the reference group. I observed evidence of moderated mediation. Specifically, supporting Hypothesis 3, those who recalled being rejected felt less connected to a brand, and subsequently decreased their engagement intentions, when the brand communicated in an informal (vs. formal) style ($b = -.50$, $S.E. = .18$, 95% CI: $-.85, -.15$; see Figure 4). However, self-brand closeness perceptions did not mediate for those who recalled being included or ignored (included: $b = .21$, $S.E. = .16$, 95% CI: $-.12, .52$; ignored: $b = .06$, $S.E. = .17$, 95% CI: $-.27, .39$). The effect in the included condition is in the predicted direction but not significant, such that informal (vs. formal) style increased connection. Because included individuals may process information more heuristically, they may behave in ways that maintain the expected status quo (i.e., engage more with brands that communicate typically: in an informal style) but

may not internalize why they do so (i.e., does not strongly affect their feelings of connection to the brand).

Insert Figure 4 about here

Discussion. Supporting Hypothesis 2, I found that informal (versus formal) language decreases engagement intentions for those who recalled a rejection experience. Furthermore, supporting Hypothesis 3, this effect is driven by lowered perceptions of self-brand closeness. As expected, I do not see this effect in the ignored condition, since those ignored are expected to be less sensitive toward social cues like language style. Interestingly, I do not find the predicted reversal to be significant in the inclusion condition. The weaker effect in the inclusion condition could be because included individuals have their belongingness needs met and are less attuned to nuances in social cues compared to those with belongingness needs threatened (i.e., rejected individuals).

Thus far, the pilot study and Study 1 examined communications with an unfamiliar brand. Yet, whether a consumer has an existing relationship with a brand or not should affect the consumer's perceptions of brand communication. Research in brand relationship norms suggests that consumers expect unfamiliar brands to communicate more formally than familiar brands (Gretry et al. 2017). Because the pilot study and Study 1 both incorporated stimuli of a created (and not real) brand, there is inherently no prior consumer-brand relationship. I thus saw support for Hypothesis 2 – that rejected non-customers, who are particularly sensitive to relationship-related cues, engaged more with the brand that communicated formally (vs. informally).

In the next study, I extend the prior findings by examining whether having purchased from a real brand in the past affects consumer evaluations of the email message. I expect that brand email communication style would be less influential on existing customers (Hypothesis 4), since their prior experiences with the brand would have a stronger, positive influence on their perceptions. Additionally, in Study 2, I extend the generalizability of the predicted effects by examining clothing brands, a different product category than in prior studies that may be equally relevant to both males and females. Specifically, I expect Hypothesis 1-3 to generalize to the clothing category, since it is also a hedonic category, where informal language style is often employed in brand communications and expected to be received positively for such products (Das et al. 2019; Kronrod and Danziger 2013). Due to the category's relevance to both genders, I expect the effects of gender to be more significant, such that males are less likely to engage with brands that communicate informally (vs. formally). Furthermore, since people pay less attention to communication cues when speaking with those they have a prior relationship (vs. those they do not) (Savitsky et al. 2011), I expect there will not be gender effects for brands of existing customers, as both genders should be less influenced by a known brand's communication style.

STUDY 2: PRIOR VS. NON-CUSTOMER

Method

Four hundred seventy-nine MTurk participants (54.7% female, $M_{\text{age}} = 36.3$) were randomly assigned to a condition in a 3 (recalled experience: rejected vs. ignored vs. included) x 2 (communication style: informal vs. formal) x 2 (prior customer, a measured variable: yes vs. no) between-subjects design. After participants completed the same writing task and emotion

items as in Studies the pilot study and Study 1, participants were asked to think about and write down the name of a clothing company. Participants were then asked to imagine that they had subscribed to the recalled clothing company's email listserv and read a welcome email written with informal or formal language, adapted from the pilot study and Study 1 with clothing category attributes (the communication style manipulation; full stimuli in Appendix B).

After participants viewed the company email message, they answered the same three brand engagement measures as in the pilot study and Study 1 (i.e., purchase intentions, intentions to communicate with the brand, intentions to visit the brand's website). Additionally, they answered their intentions to recommend this brand to a friend on the same 7-point scales as an additional measure of brand engagement. A composite of these items was created to represent brand engagement intentions. An exploratory factor analysis revealed that all four items loaded on a single factor with eigenvalues greater than one and explaining over 75% of the variance ($\alpha = .89$). They then answered the same self-brand closeness measures and manipulation checks as in the prior studies. Next, to measure whether they were prior customers to the recalled brand or not, participants answered whether they have purchased clothing from the recalled brand before (yes/no). This was the prior customer variable, meant to capture an existing customer relationship or not. Finally, participants answered demographic questions and were thanked.

Results and Discussion

Manipulation Checks. For all manipulation check measures, 3 (experience) x 2 (communication style) ANOVAs were conducted. There were significant exclusion main effects for each of the exclusion manipulation checks (rejected: $F(2,473) = 355.00, p < .001$; ignored: $F(2,473) = 324.54, p < .001$; included: $F(2,473) = 361.99, p < .001$). Planned contrasts show that

those who recalled an experience being rejected ($M_{\text{rejected}} = 6.49$) reported that they were significantly more rejected than those ignored ($M_{\text{ignored}} = 5.03$, $F(2,473) = 63.68$, $p < .001$) and those included ($M_{\text{included}} = 1.80$, $F(2,473) = 669.26$, $p < .001$). Those rejected ($M_{\text{rejected}} = 4.70$) also reported that they were significantly less ignored ($M_{\text{ignored}} = 6.35$, $F(2,473) = 78.15$, $p < .001$) than those ignored and more ignored ($M_{\text{included}} = 1.78$, $F(2,473) = 250.59$, $p < .001$) than those included. Additionally, those rejected ($M_{\text{rejected}} = 2.06$) reported that they were significantly more included ($M_{\text{ignored}} = 1.76$, $F(2,473) = 2.72$, $p = .01$) than those ignored and less included ($M_{\text{included}} = 6.13$, $F(2,473) = 487.97$, $p < .001$) than those included. There were no other significant effects ($F_s < 1.26$, $p_s > .26$). In other words, exclusion was successfully manipulated. As expected, the formality manipulation check yielded a significant communication style main effect ($M_{\text{informal}} = 2.99$, $M_{\text{formal}} = 4.17$, $F(1,473) = 79.10$, $p < .001$). No other effects were significant ($F_s < .83$, $p_s > .44$).

Engagement Intentions. A 3 (experience) x 2 (communication style) x 2 (prior customer) ANOVA was conducted on engagement intentions. There was a significant experience main effect ($F(2,467) = 4.04$, $p = .02$) and prior customer main effect ($M_{\text{yes}} = 4.38$, $M_{\text{no}} = 2.84$, $F(1,467) = 76.12$, $p < .001$), qualified by an experience x communication style x prior customer interaction ($F(2,467) = 4.17$, $p = .02$). Examining the contrasts of the experience main effect, those ignored ($M_{\text{ignored}} = 3.97$) engaged with the brand significantly more than those rejected ($M_{\text{rejected}} = 3.37$, $F(1,467) = 7.18$, $p = .01$) or included ($M_{\text{included}} = 3.49$, $F(1,467) = 5.02$, $p = .03$). While this result was not explicitly hypothesized, it is in line with the theorizing that ignored individuals are less attuned to nuances of social cues and may be likely to seek connection regardless of communication style. For non-customers, planned contrasts revealed that in the rejected condition, those who read an informal (vs. formal) email message had marginally lower

engagement intentions ($M_{\text{informal}} = 1.94$, $M_{\text{formal}} = 2.88$, $F(1,467) = 3.03$, $p = .08$; see Figure 6A). There were no differences in communication style for those in the ignored condition ($M_{\text{informal}} = 3.18$, $M_{\text{formal}} = 3.57$, $F(1,467) = .47$, $p = .50$). In the included condition, those who read an informal (vs. formal) email message had marginally higher engagement intentions ($M_{\text{informal}} = 3.17$, $M_{\text{formal}} = 2.32$, $F(1,467) = 3.02$, $p = .08$). However, for existing customers, regardless of recalled experience, communication style did not significantly affect engagement intentions (rejected: $M_{\text{informal}} = 4.55$, $M_{\text{formal}} = 4.13$, $F(1,467) = 2.00$, $p = .16$; ignored: $M_{\text{informal}} = 4.50$, $M_{\text{formal}} = 4.62$, $F(1,467) = .19$, $p = .66$; included: $M_{\text{informal}} = 4.13$, $M_{\text{formal}} = 4.33$, $F(1,467) = .47$, $p = .49$; see Figure 6B). These results support Hypothesis 4.

Insert Figures 6A and 6B about here

Supplemental Analyses. Gender was once again examined as potential moderator for engagement intentions. Considering the results from Study 1, I expected gender to moderate the effects for non-customers feeling rejected, such that males (but not females) would be less likely to engage with brands that communicate informally (vs. formally). First, I conducted a 3 (experience) x 2 (communication style) x 2 (gender) x 2 (prior customer) analysis for the engagement intentions composite. There was a prior customer main effect ($M_{\text{yes}} = 4.37$, $M_{\text{no}} = 2.81$, $F(1,455) = 74.72$, $p < .001$), an experience main effect ($M_{\text{rejected}} = 3.32$, $M_{\text{ignored}} = 3.99$, $M_{\text{included}} = 3.45$, $F(2,455) = 4.85$, $p = .01$), qualified by an gender x prior customer interaction ($F(2,455) = 3.78$, $p = .05$) and an experience x communication style x prior customer interaction ($F(2,455) = 4.13$, $p = .02$). No other effects were significant ($F_s < 2.19$, $p_s > .11$); however, the

experience x communication style x gender x prior customer interaction was worth further examination ($F(2,455) = 2.19, p = .11$; see Figure 6C).

Replicating Study 1, rejected males (but not females) who read an informal (vs. formal) email message had lower engagement intentions (males: $M_{\text{informal}} = 2.05, M_{\text{formal}} = 3.47, F(1,455) = 4.23, p = .04$; females: $M_{\text{informal}} = 1.75, M_{\text{formal}} = 1.99, F(1,455) = .08, p = .78$). Interestingly, the effect in the included condition is also moderated by gender, such that females (but not males) who read an informal (vs. formal) email message had higher engagement intentions (males: $M_{\text{informal}} = 3.11, M_{\text{formal}} = 2.79, F(1,455) = .23, p = .63$; females: $M_{\text{informal}} = 3.24, M_{\text{formal}} = 1.63, F(1,455) = 4.82, p = .03$). This could be the case, because females typically communicate in and prefer informal, more expressive styles (Newman et al. 2008). As expected, the effect in the ignored condition was not affected by gender (males: $M_{\text{informal}} = 3.80, M_{\text{formal}} = 3.37, F(1,455) = .21, p = .65$; females: $M_{\text{informal}} = 2.83, M_{\text{formal}} = 3.70, F(1,455) = 1.43, p = .23$). Furthermore, as expected, there were no significant effects in any conditions for existing customers ($F_s < 1.51, p_s > .22$). Therefore, the results from the pilot study and Study 1 suggest that rejected males (but not females) are less likely to engage with a brand that communicates informally (vs. formally) with which they do not have a prior relationship. However, there were inconsistencies in effects for females across the pilot study and Study 1, which could be due to females' higher sensitivity to differences in the studies' contexts (Hall 1978; Newman et al. 2008). For instance, females may hold more specific expectations of the skin/haircare versus clothing categories and of simulated versus real brands they chose. This is an interesting finding that future research could pursue to further understand the variability in female response.

Insert Figure 6C about here

Perceptions of Self-Brand Closeness. A 3 (experience) x 2 (communication style) x 2 (prior customer) ANOVA was conducted on perceptions of self-brand closeness, yielding a significant prior customer main effect ($M_{\text{yes}} = 3.09$, $M_{\text{no}} = 2.23$, $F(1,467) = 20.51$, $p < .001$), qualified by a significant communication style x prior customer interaction ($F(1,467) = 4.15$, $p = .04$) and a significant experience x communication style x prior customer interaction ($F(2,467) = 3.12$, $p = .05$). Consistent with Hypothesis 3 and Study 1, for non-customers, planned contrasts revealed that in the rejected condition, those who read an informal (vs. formal) email message had significantly lower perceptions of self-brand closeness ($M_{\text{informal}} = 1.19$, $M_{\text{formal}} = 2.60$, $F(1,467) = 5.93$, $p = .02$). There were no differences in communication style for those in the ignored condition ($M_{\text{informal}} = 2.43$, $M_{\text{formal}} = 2.72$, $F(1,467) = .23$, $p = .63$) or included condition ($M_{\text{informal}} = 2.17$, $M_{\text{formal}} = 2.25$, $F(1,467) = .02$, $p = .89$). However, for existing customers, those in the rejected condition who read an informal (vs. formal) email message had significantly higher perceptions of self-brand closeness ($M_{\text{informal}} = 3.35$, $M_{\text{formal}} = 2.66$, $F(1,467) = 4.51$, $p = .03$). This result supports prior research on how informal language reflects closeness for those with an existing relationship (Morand 2000; Sela et al. 2012). There were no differences in communication style for those in the ignored condition ($M_{\text{informal}} = 3.15$, $M_{\text{formal}} = 3.24$, $F(1,467) = .08$, $p = .78$) or included condition ($M_{\text{informal}} = 3.02$, $M_{\text{formal}} = 3.09$, $F(1,467) = .05$, $p = .82$). That perceptions of self-brand closeness only mediated the effect for those rejected reflects how rejected individuals have a salient need for connection compared to those ignored or included

(Molden et al. 2009). In other words, rejected individuals should engage more with a brand if they feel close to the brand, thereby alleviating their deficit in connection.

Moderated Mediation: Engagement Intentions. I examined whether self-brand closeness perceptions mediated the effect of communication style (1=informal, 0=formal), experience (indicator coded by the macro into two variables: 1=included, 0=rejected, 0=ignored; 0=included, 0=rejected, 1=ignored), and prior customer (1=yes, 0=no) on the engagement intentions composite using Hayes' (2013) PROCESS macro (model 12; 5,000 bootstrapped samples). As in Study 1, where the effect of formality on the rejected (but not the included or ignored) condition is expected to be mediated by self-brand closeness, I chose the multi-categorical experience variable to be indicator coded such that the rejected condition is the reference group. I observed evidence of moderated mediation for non-customers.

Specifically, supporting Hypothesis 3, non-customers who recalled being rejected felt less connected to a brand, and subsequently had lower engagement intentions, when brands communicated in an informal (vs. formal) style ($b = -.82$, $S.E. = .27$, 95% CI: -1.39, -.31; see Figure 7). However, existing customers who recalled being rejected felt closer connection to a brand, and subsequently increased their engagement intentions, when brands communicated in an informal (vs. formal) style ($b = .40$, $S.E. = .17$, 95% CI: .06, .74). While this result was not explicitly hypothesized, this flip in the rejection condition for existing customers is logical given the prior work on how rejected individuals are receptive to cues that signal connection (Pickett, Gardner, and Knowles 2004) if the cue is sincere (i.e., consumers expect more familiar brands to communicate more informally (Gretry et al. 2017). Indeed, reflecting how consumers may be less reliant on recent cues (such as a brand email) for known brands, the effect in this condition is not as strong as the effect for the rejected non-customers. Self-brand closeness perceptions did

not mediate for those who recalled being included or ignored, regardless of whether they did not have a relationship (included: $b = -.04$, $S.E. = .30$, 95% CI: $-.62, .54$; ignored: $b = -.17$, $S.E. = .43$, 95% CI: $-1.04, .65$) or had a relationship (included: $b = -.04$, $S.E. = .18$, 95% CI: $-.41, .32$; ignored: $b = -.05$, $S.E. = .19$, 95% CI: $-.41, .32$). All conditions (except for those included without a prior relationship) reflected Hypothesis 3. As in Study 1, the effect for those included without a prior relationship with the brand is in the predicted direction but not significant—they may behave in ways that maintain expectations (i.e., engage more with brands that communicate informally) but may not internalize why they do so (i.e., does not affect their feelings of connection).

Insert Figure 7 about here

Discussion. I find additional support for Hypotheses 1 and 2, such that informal (versus formal) language increases engagement intentions for those who recalled being included; whereas, formal (versus informal) language increases engagement intentions for those who recalled being rejected. As expected, I do not see this effect in the ignored condition. Additionally, supporting Hypothesis 3, I find further support that this effect is driven by heightened perceptions of self-brand closeness. Importantly, supporting Hypothesis 4, this effect only holds true for non-customers and is attenuated for those who have purchased from the brand before. This finding supports my theorizing that other cues override communication style when consumers have had prior experience with a brand. However, it is worth further examination whether prior customers will always respond positively to any brand communication. The social

closeness perspective would suggest that prior customers would engage more with known brands that communicate informally (vs. formally). Therefore, the final study examines real brand Twitter data to enhance the external validity of the effects. Measuring the user engagement with brand Twitter accounts should serve as a robust test of the primary effect for prior customers; users who are involved enough to engage with a brand are likely have prior experience with the brands.

STUDY 3: BRAND TWITTER DATA

The purpose of this study is to test that the primary effect occurs in the field using secondary data. Specifically, I examine online brand communications on Twitter.com in the form of brand tweets (textual content limited to 280 characters). The popular social media platform is commonly used in research to study online brand communication (Luangrath et al. 2017a; Villarroel Ordenes 2019). I examine whether informal (vs. formal) brand tweets receive fewer retweets from consumers with fewer (vs. more) Twitter followers than the number of accounts that they follow, which serves as a proxy for social exclusion (Phung et al. 2013).

Method

Sample and Measure of User Engagement. Five thousand five hundred eight tweets from twenty large national brands were collected for analysis: Coca-Cola, Ford, Walmart, Tesco, McDonald's, Amazon, Disney Parks, Nike, Aflac, Cheerios, Cheetos, Energizer, Forest Service, Fritolay, Geico, Kellogg's, Progressive, Starbucks, Tootsie Roll, and Denny's Diner. These

brands have a strong Twitter presence and have been used in prior marketing research (Luangrath et al. 2017a; Villarroel Ordenes 2019). Specifically, for each brand, the most recent 500 tweets were collected through a Python program employing the Twitter REST API. The data was downloaded in JSON format and saved using UTF-8 encoding to preserve all textual symbols. A total of 9512 tweets were collected ranging from February 23, 2016 – April 30, 2019; 5508 of the scraped brand tweets had measures of engagement, which were used in the cleaned dataset for analysis. In line with prior research, user engagement is measured with number of retweets per tweet (Gong et al. 2017; Peters et al. 2013; Villarroel Ordenes 2019; see Appendix A.1 for a visualization).¹

Proxy Measure for Social Exclusion. Information about each user who retweeted a brand tweet was collected. Specifically, as a proxy for extent of social exclusion felt by each user, 1) the number of followers the user had and 2) the number of accounts the user followed were collected (see Appendix A.2A-B). The measure of social exclusion was then created by dividing the first number by the second number. In line with prior research, those with fewer (more) followers than accounts followed can be deemed as less (more) socially connected and supported (Phung et al. 2013). For example, if user X follows many accounts but not many accounts follow them back, they may feel disconnected and excluded even if their network size is technically large. However, if a user Y follows a few accounts and many accounts follow them back, they likely feel more connected and included than user X even though their network size is smaller. Furthermore, rejection is an active form of exclusion and ignoring is a passive form of exclusion (Molden et al. 2009). This measure could reflect feelings of rejection more than being ignored,

¹ For robustness, I also measured brand engagement with number of favorites per tweet. The results were not significant. It is possible this occurred because favoriting a tweet is considered a weaker, more passive measure of engagement (Peters et al. 2013; Villarroel Ordenes 2019).

since following an account back or not is an active behavior (i.e., there are prompts on Twitter to follow an account back once a user follows an account and individuals are able to decline following an account; see Appendix D.2C). Due to issues of increased bot activity on Twitter in 2018, the platform increased restrictions on its API on September 10, 2018. Specifically, for a given tweet, information from only the 25 most recently engaged users can be collected. Although this is not the full population of users engaged with the scraped brand tweets, information about 29,161 users was ultimately collected and used in the analyses. While there are other proxies of social exclusion in this dataset (i.e., social network size), the use of a follow-back ratio serves as a better proxy for relative exclusion than total network size, as total network size does not necessarily reflect levels of network participation or support (Phung et al. 2013).²

To account for issues in the dataset, the final measure was also dichotomized at a meaningful point (1) such that those with fewer followers than accounts followed were categorized as socially excluded (ratio < 1, 0; $n = 20,181$) and those with more followers than accounts followed were categorized as socially included (ratio > 1, 1; $n = 8923$). The primary issues were: 1) the operationalization of exclusion is not based on network size, rather it is whether users have more or fewer accounts following them back, 2) the uneven distribution of exclusion, such that 31% of users were relatively socially included (i.e., had more users following them back than they follow) and 69% of users were relatively socially excluded (i.e., had fewer users following them back than they follow), and 3) the existence of a long right tail, such that users with a very high follow-back ratio included celebrities, other brand accounts, and

² Separate sets of regressions were conducted with 1) number of followers, 2) number of accounts followed, and 3) total network size (total number of followers and accounts followed) as the social exclusion proxy and did not yield significant main or interactive effects.

regular Twitter users; a follow-back ratio of such magnitude does not necessarily represent feeling significantly more included³ (see Appendix D.2D for distribution).

Operationalizations of Tweet Content Formality. Consistent with prior research (Humphreys and Wang 2018), the Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC) software was employed to code the contents of the brand tweets. LIWC compares each word in a given corpus (here, the content of each tweet) against a user-defined dictionary of nearly 6,400 items (Pennebaker et al. 2015). Each word in the dictionary corresponds to one or more psychological or linguistic categories (e.g., emotional tone, grammatical dimensions, informal language). The LIWC categories focused upon here are 1) informal language, and 2) informal punctuation (see Appendix D.3A-B). First, informal language is captured by the following LIWC dimensions: swear words, netspeak, assent (i.e., conversational words of agreement such as “okay”), nonfluencies (e.g., “hm”, “umm”), and fillers (e.g., “imean”, “youknow”). The LIWC language categories reflect the word choice operationalizations of informality in Table 1 (i.e., swear words and assent as examples of personal language; netspeak, nonfluencies, and fillers as examples of abbreviations). Next, informal punctuation is captured by the following LIWC dimensions: exclamation marks, dashes, and apostrophes (Bloch 1996; Krahn 2014; Morand 2000; Vandergriff 2013; Waseleski 2006; see Table 1). These punctuation marks are the grammatical components from Table 1 that can be captured by LIWC.

LIWC reports the percentage of words that reflect each category. The degree of using a category is reflected is on a scale of 0-100, representing percentage of the words in a given tweet that reflect the category, such that higher numbers represent greater informal language and

³ The results did not differ when such accounts were excluded from the analyses. 72 observations (i.e., users with a follow-back ratio that exceeded +1SD from the mean) were excluded (N = 10,032).

punctuation. For example, the abbreviations “btw” and “lol” are defined as “netspeak,” which is one dimension of the informal language category in the LIWC 2015 dictionary. If “lol” appeared once in a corpus of 10 words, then the informal language score would be 10%. The reliability of each dimension has been demonstrated through comparisons of ratings generated by LIWC and validated by human coders (Pennebaker et al. 2007). The reliability for informal language is high ($\alpha = 0.84$); there is no reported reliability of the punctuation category, as each punctuation mark is categorized as standalone categories and should thus have perfect reliability (Pennebaker et al. 2015).

Finally, presence of emojis was captured (see Appendix D.3C). Because LIWC cannot recognize emojis due to UTF-8 encoding, two judges independently coded each tweet for whether they contained emojis or not (0 = no emojis; 1 = presence of emojis). Interrater reliability was high ($r = 1.00$). Unlike other punctuation (e.g., exclamation marks), where a higher percentage of use reflects greater informality, the mere presence (vs. absence) of emojis changes perceptions of style (Das, Wiener, and Kereklas 2019). Perhaps because it is a visual (vs. verbal) character than punctuation, the mere presence of emojis elicits stronger reactions (Das et al. 2019). In this dataset, I expect that language characteristics will be a stronger operationalization of informality than punctuation characteristics and presence of emoji, since some punctuation characteristics may be used for functional and not stylistic reasons (e.g., a dash used in a telephone number or an apostrophe used for a possessive and not an abbreviation). Additionally, judges only coded for presence of emojis and not the types of emojis used. Different emojis (e.g., faces, animals, objects) may convey different meanings in addition to being informal stylistic elements (Luangrath et al. 2017a), but the present focus is on emojis as a stylistic element and not its content. However, I expect a similar pattern of results for each of the

three operationalizations of informal style (i.e., language characteristics, punctuation characteristics, presence of emoji).

Procedure. To test Hypothesis 1, regressions of language formality and extent of social exclusion on brand engagement (number of retweets) were conducted. Separate regressions were conducted for extent of social exclusion as a continuous measure and dichotomized (1 = included, 0 = excluded). Separate analyses were conducted with style defined as either 1) the informal language category (continuous), 2) the informal punctuation category (continuous), or 3) an emoji dummy variable (0 = no emojis; 1 = presence of emojis), with the first operationalization expected to be the most precise. The analyses were conducted separately due to the low correlations between the three operationalizations (see Table 5A). The low correlations could be due to the limitations of LIWC in 1) only defining language categories as informal, 2) only counting occurrence of punctuation but not distinguishing whether marks (i.e., dashes and apostrophes) serve as a marker of informal style, and 3) not including a category for emojis. Because there could be differences in engagement due to tweet type (i.e., an original brand tweet likely generates more engagement than a brand's response to a user), tweet type was controlled (0 = original tweet; 1 = response to a user). Because different brands use certain informal language characteristics more frequently than others (see Table 4), brand account was also controlled to minimize potential brand effects. Results without controls did not meaningfully change (see Table 5B with the continuous follow-back ratio and Table 5C with the dichotomized follow-back ratio).

Insert Tables 5A-5C about here

Results and Discussion

First, I examined the focal regression where the informal language category was the independent variable and the continuous follow-back ratio. The results were not significant when follow-back ratio was entered as a continuous variable (interaction of brand communication style and social inclusion: $b = .01, t = .26, p = .79$). However, exploring the interaction, for those who are relatively socially excluded (-1 SD), increased informality in a tweet decreases number of retweets ($b = -8.73, t = -5.53, p < .001$; see Figure 8A). For those who are relatively socially included (+1 SD), there is no significant difference ($b = -5.17, t = -.76, p = .45$). Because of the distribution issues in the raw continuous follow-back ratio, I then conducted the regressions with the dichotomized ratio.

Next, I examined the focal regression where the informal language category was the independent variable and the follow-back ratio was dichotomized. I find the coefficient of the interaction of brand communication style and social inclusion is positive and significant ($b = 7.52, t = 2.24, p = .03$). Lending partial support to Hypothesis 1, for those who are socially excluded, increased informality in a tweet significantly decreases number of retweets ($b = -11.07, t = -5.83, p < .001$; see Figure 8B). Although types of social exclusion are not parsed out in this data, not having as many accounts follow a user back could be considered a more active form of rejection than being ignored, as users are initially prompted to follow accounts back and users are notified when they gain a new follower. For those who are socially included, there is no significant difference ($b = -3.55, t = -1.27, p = .20$). A possible explanation for the null effect is that socially included individuals tend to be less attuned to nuances in social cues than socially excluded individuals, and thus may not respond differently to communication style. As expected,

the other two regressions with informal punctuation and emojis as independent variables did not yield significant interactions but replicated the results directionally (see Table 5B). This field study lends real world evidence that brand engagement may decrease with informal language use when a user is relatively excluded (but not included) in the social network. Although data on whether users follow the brand on Twitter or have purchased from the brand before were not collected, it is logical to assume that most users who engage with brands on Twitter have some prior experience with them. Therefore, this field study suggests that informal language may generally backfire for those who feel rejected.

Insert Figures 8A and 8B about here

SINGLE PAPER META-ANALYSIS OF LAB STUDIES: TEST OF HYPOTHESES 1-2

Because linguistic phenomena, particularly in written language contexts (e.g., brand emails), tend to have smaller effect sizes and require large sample sizes for adequate statistical power (Newman et al. 2008), and considering limitations in sample size in the present set of studies, I conducted a Single Paper Meta-analysis (SPM) to further test the validity and consistency of the effects (McShane & Böckenholt 2017). The SPM methodology provides important benefits for study summary, theory testing, and replicability.

Across three laboratory studies, the SPM is expected to support that included consumers are more likely to engage with brands when language is informal (vs. formal) (H1) and rejected consumers are less likely to engage with brands when language is informal (vs. formal) (H2). A

SPM with two factors, 2 (rejection vs. inclusion) x 2 (informal vs. formal), was conducted on the three studies. I included the pilot study in the SPM even though the exclusion condition does not distinguish between feeling rejected vs. ignored in order to examine whether the overall interaction effect robustly upheld the predicted pattern of results. The ignored condition was not included in this version of the SPM, as the analysis does not allow different designs across studies.⁴

Insert Figure 9A about here

Figure 9A plots the effects across the three studies and the overall SPM effect. Specifically, effect estimates are given by the squares for single-study estimates and the vertical bars for SPM estimates; 50% and 95% intervals are given by the thick and thin lines, respectively. The average sample size per condition in each study is given by the size of the squares. The plot shows two contrasts (1 = informal; -1 = formal): 1) the simple effect of formality in the inclusion condition and 2) the simple effect of formality in the rejection condition. The first and second contrasts are of particular interest as they relate to the primary hypotheses (Hypothesis 1 and 2, respectively). Supporting Hypothesis 1, the first contrast in the SPM finds that formal (vs. informal) language enhances engagement for included individuals

⁴ While this SPM is imperfect, it accounts for more information than alternate versions (see Figures 9B-D). Indeed, a SPM with only Studies 1 and 2 replicated the predicted results. Additionally, a SPM with only Studies 1 and 2, including all three exclusion conditions (rejected, ignored, included), replicated the predicted results. As expected, the simple effect of formality in the ignored condition was nonsignificant. Finally, a SPM of all three studies, where the rejected and ignored conditions were combined in Studies 1-2, also replicated the predicted results.

(effect = .51, S.E. = .21, $z = 2.41$, $p = .01$, 95% CI: .10, .93). Supporting Hypothesis 2, the second contrast in the SPM finds that informal (vs. formal) language enhances engagement for rejected individuals (effect = -.47, S.E. = .22, $z = -2.16$, $p = .03$, 95% CI: -.89, -.04). In other words, the SPM suggests that both contrasts attain statistical significance in the expected directions. Thus, these results strengthen the support for Hypotheses 1-2.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Given the recent popularity of brands using informal language, particularly in online mediums (Beukeboom, Kerkhof, and de Vries 2015; Luangrath et al. 2017b; McCrae 2017), researchers and marketing practitioners alike have been studying what brands should say to consumers. However, despite the recent breadth of research in *what* brands and consumers say, the current challenge is to examine “not just what people talk about but *how* they talk” (Berger 2014, p. 602). While consumer researchers have begun to examine the effects of discrete language style attributes (e.g., variation in pronouns: Sela et al. 2012; use of assertive language: Kronrod et al. 2012a; 2012b), it is presently unclear on how such discrete attributes might be integrated into linguistic theory. Indeed, researchers argue that language is so integral to marketing communications that brand linguistics should be situated as a subdiscipline of consumer behavior; as such, language effects should be examined systematically (Carnevale, Luna, and Lerman 2017). This dissertation provides a response to these calls in two parts: first, by creating a novel framework of how and why social context shapes the effect of language style in brand communications; second, by examining parts of the framework with three lab experiments, empirical data with a field study with Twitter data, and a single-paper meta-

analysis, suggesting that when a consumer feels socially rejected (vs. included), they may feel closer to, and thus engage more with, a brand that communicates with them using more formal (vs. informal) language.

Theoretical Implications

In the first part of the dissertation, the conceptual framework contributes to marketing theory in several ways. Specifically, this framework extends and applies Halliday's (1989) theory of functional linguistics, which examines language based on the meaning inferred from aspects of a given context, to the context of brand communications. The framework applies the three aspects—field, tenor, mode—to brand communications contexts in concrete ways. For example, field in marketing would include brand type and product type, as they are characteristics that lead to differences in communication content. Such applications are useful to organizing various streams of language research within marketing, since extant literature examines varied interpersonal contexts where there is no gold standard to the applications of these aspects (Giménez-Moreno and Skorczynska 2013; Pearce 2005). Furthermore, it is necessary to build a framework within marketing, given that marketing contexts differ from interpersonal contexts (Aggarwal 2004; Swaminathan and Dommer 2012; Valta 2013), thereby leading to potential differences in downstream results.

This framework then focuses on the aspect of tenor, as it is the aspect of context that most influences interpretation of language style (Halliday 1989; Shen 2012), parsing out marketing applications as either characteristics of the brand, the consumer, or their relationship. While recent marketing research has examined a few of these applications (e.g., Gretry et al. 2017; Sela et al. 2012), the present framework systematically lays out applications yet to be explored. This

framework concludes with propositions for each application of tenor, potential underlying mechanism, and interactions between applications. Such propositions invite rich avenues for future research in emerging communications contexts (e.g., use of artificial intelligence in customer service) and to reexamine previously studied contexts in a new light (e.g., the interaction of consumer characteristics and consumer-brand relationship characteristic).

In the second part of the dissertation, the empirical component examines a question borne from the conceptual framework: how do different aspects of context interact with one another? More specifically, because tenor influences interpretations of language style, how do different aspects of tenor interact with one another? Thus, the empirical component of this dissertation tackles two common aspects in marketing: consumers' social needs (i.e., whether they feel socially excluded or included) and consumer-brand relationship (i.e., whether a consumer is an existing customer or not). The present empirical research sheds light on how the need to connect impacts consumer responses to brand language formality. The pilot study yields partial support for Hypothesis 1, such that informal (versus formal) language increases engagement intentions for those who recalled an inclusion (but not) experience. There likely was no effect of formality in the exclusion condition, because type of exclusion experience was not distinguished.

Study 1 extends the findings by disentangling two primary types of social exclusion: being rejected versus being ignored. Consistent with the differential need threat hypothesis that being rejected threatens belongingness needs (Lee and Shrum 2012; Molden et al. 2009; Williams 2007), I find that those who recall being rejected are more attuned to communication style than those who recall being ignored. Specifically, I find that those who recall being rejected are less likely to engage with brands that communicate informally (versus formally), but such effects are attenuated for those who recall being ignored. Study 1 also replicates my initial

finding that those who recall being included are more likely to engage with brands that communicate informally (versus formally). Furthermore, Study 1 finds process evidence that self-brand closeness drives the interactive effect of recalled experience and brand communication style.

Study 2 extends my findings with two managerially-relevant differences: 1) by examining whether a consumer is an existing customer to the brand or not, and 2) by modifying brand stimuli to be clothing-specific to test generalizability to other product categories. Specifically, consistent with prior work on brand knowledge (Keller 1993), I find that the effects are attenuated for brands that are well-known (i.e., brands participants have purchased from in the past). Study 2 finds further support that self-brand closeness is the underlying mechanism for these effects.

Study 3 enhances the external validity of the basic effect with real world brand data from Twitter, such that brand tweets containing informal (vs. formal) language decreases number of retweets received by individuals who are relatively socially excluded. Because the users who engage with brands likely have some prior experience with the brands, this finding suggests that the backfire effect of informality on rejected individuals may extend beyond non-customers.

The present empirical research contributes to the literature in several ways. First, the findings challenge assumptions of how people respond to communication after exclusion. Prior literature would suggest that excluded individuals, particularly rejected individuals, are motivated to reconnect with others (Maner et al. 2007). In line with that notion, such individuals should be particularly receptive to others who seem like they want to connect (i.e., those who communicate in a friendly, informal manner). However, this work challenges the assumption that rejected individuals would be more receptive to informal communication style. Specifically,

unknown or new brands communicating in an informal style may violate expectations of rejected individuals and may in fact decrease consumers' engagement with the brand.

Second, this work extends the research on how feelings of social exclusion affect how consumers respond to language cues. Prior work in social psychology has shown that those who are excluded are more attuned to positive cues of potential inclusion, such as detecting smiling faces in a crowd more quickly than those who are not excluded (DeWall et al. 2009). I show that rejected individuals evaluate formal language more positively than informal language (which is often perceived as friendlier). The differences in findings lie in the context, such that, contrary to prior work that examines immediate perceptual responses to visual cues for potential inclusion, my work focuses on reflecting on a prior exclusion experience and extends novel stimuli to a marketing context, where consumers respond to verbal cues by unknown brands attempting to connect.

Third, the present work sheds further light on the literature on self-brand closeness, such that informal communication style (typically associated with implying closeness; Sela et al. 2012) may actually lower self-brand closeness when the brand is unknown or new for rejected individuals. Unlike prior literature that suggests informal language may be effective for known brands, my findings suggest that communication style may be less valuable for known brands when the consumer feels rejected. This finding works within the framework of primacy-based assimilation, such that subsequent communication interactions do not update perceptions of a brand, rather they are strongly based on first impressions of the brand.

Fourth, this work explores the moderating effects of consumers' gender on their perceptions of formality. The current set of studies finds that informal language may particularly backfire with males (vs. females) when feeling rejected. This finding reflects prior research on

how male language use tends to be more formal than females' (Newman et al. 2008). However, it would be worth examining how gender interacts with other applications of tenor, such as product type. More expressive, informal language is typically more persuasive for hedonic categories (Kronrod and Danziger 2013); indeed, these findings are beyond typical language fit and certainly more related to social needs—social connection and perhaps others. Rejected males could be less persuaded by informal language in the beauty-related categories examined at present for gender normative reasons. Perhaps males would find informal language more persuasive in more typically heteromasculine product categories. While there is abundant work on how gender affects language style (e.g., Newman et al. 2008), there is a surprising dearth in research on how gender affects perceptions of language style. This exploratory finding contributes to this research stream and hopefully engenders further inquiry on gender differences.

Practical Implications

The findings from the present research are of practical importance for practitioners and lend themselves to future applications. The present findings are particularly important for marketers and social media managers when calibrating language of brand emails and other online personal brand communications. Specifically, they should consider sending welcome emails with a more formal style for rejected individuals but a more informal style for included others. There are various proxies to measure consumer feelings of social exclusion that brands can tap into. For example, brands with access to consumer social media information can determine a potential customer's social network size, whether they recently moved, and public social media engagement (such as retweets or favorites as in the field study).

Additionally, the conceptual framework may have direct managerial use, due to the applications of tenor being concrete industry measures. Indeed, marketing managers may look to the different applications of tenor to systematically pick and choose which contextual aspects are relevant to their brand when determining a new marketing communications strategy. For instance, some brands may have different product types or several demographic target markets, whereas other brands focus on a specific product category and have a specific consume demographic. With this framework, marketing teams can adjust the relative importance of researching certain aspects accordingly.

Furthermore, using tools such as Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC) or VADER (Hutto and Gilbert 2014), brands can scrape such public social media for key words related to rejection or inclusion. Brands also can differentiate and screen consumers based on whether they have data on prior purchase behavior. For those who have purchased in the past, the language style in subsequent personal brand communication may matter less. However, for those who have not purchased from the brand in the past (i.e., most consumers), the first line of communication is an important heuristic that will impact consumer engagement and purchase intentions. Additionally, it would be worth examining whether customers who have not purchased from a brand recently would respond to a personal brand communication similar to potential customers. Another potential way brands can tap into consumers' feelings of social exclusion is by asking consumers to recall such experiences into advertisement copy, thereby making rejection or inclusion more salient to the consumer.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

While this dissertation created a framework focusing on tenor and the empirical examination kept field and mode constant, future research can extend the present work by examining the interactions between field, tenor, and mode. The distinction between all aspects is ultimately necessary to fully understand how brands should communicate with consumers (Halliday 1989). For instance, prior work suggests that consumers respond more positively to formal language for brands selling utilitarian (vs. hedonic) products to existing customers (vs. non-customers) (Sela et al. 2012). Future research could examine other applications of field and mode. The interpretation of style would likely differ in communication mediums that typically have less variation in language style, such as print catalogues, instruction manuals, or automated email scripts. Such mediums could heighten consumer scrutiny over language style characteristics that do not reflect typical form, perhaps suggesting that formal style should always be used. On the other hand, examining the interaction between such modes and tenor may still suggest that assumptions about typicality and subsequent evaluation may differ depending on consumer social need or demographic differences.

A limitation of the empirical examination is how social needs are operationalized. Specifically, types of social exclusion were manipulated by recalls of prior experiences. However, responses to social exclusion may differ based on when it occurs (Williams 2007). Distress is most salient following immediate exclusion (Williams 2007), which may lower brand connection regardless of language style. Furthermore, others may suffer from chronic social exclusion, which could either increase one's baseline of social connection needs, such that those consumers become chronically attuned and easily persuaded into connection, or decrease one's baseline by resigning themselves to not being receptive to any connection. Examining temporal

differences in social needs is a fruitful area for future research to help marketers understand when consumers are most open and receptive to new communications.

Another direction for future research is to examine conflicting language style attributes within a message. Since language is processed at the holistic, gestalt level (Krahn 2014; Peters 1977), it would be worth examining whether such conflicts in style lower brand evaluations or whether certain style attributes are given more weight than others. For instance, brands using certain pronouns (i.e., “we” instead of “you and I”) in marketing messages may be better received by consumers that expect closeness (Sela et al. 2012), but other language attributes in the message may negate the closeness implied by the pronouns (e.g., calling the customer “ma’am” instead of her first name). Furthermore, the field study has shown how informal language characteristics yield stronger differences in brand engagement compared to informal punctuation or use of emojis. Considering that Twitter is an online social platform that lends itself to stylistic variation (Crystal 2001), it would also be worth examining whether differences in primarily paratextual style attributes hold stronger weight in other contextual modes (e.g., print advertising, mission statements).

Finally, although formality as a construct has long been theorized by linguists (Joos 1961; Labov 1972), this work is one of the first to operationalize it in the context of brand communication. Therefore, there is much potential future research to clarify nuances in what formality looks like in other marketing contexts (e.g., consumer word-of-mouth, charitable appeals, broadly-consumed brand communication). Given that prior research has shown that brand communications yield different effects than in charitable communications (Aaker et al. 2010) or consumer word-of-mouth (Kronrod and Danziger 2013), such differences in contextual field would likely yield differing effects. For example, rejected consumers may engage more

with charitable organizations that communicate informally (vs. formally), because of charitable organizations are viewed as warmer than for-profit organizations (Aaker et al. 2010).

In closing, while there has been increased attention paid to informal language in marketing praxis, the body of consumer research examining the persuasiveness of informality in brand language is comparatively small and nascent. This dissertation presents a framework of language formality based on social context and initial test of topical contextual aspects, hopefully spurring further investigation in this rich area of language style. In an age where brands use informal language as pervasively as consumers themselves, it is worth remembering that perceptions of language are highly nuanced and not all brands may benefit from this strategy. Know thyself, thy audience, and thy relationship.

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FIGURES

FIGURE 1: Conceptual Framework of Formality and Contextual Tenor on Consumer

Engagement

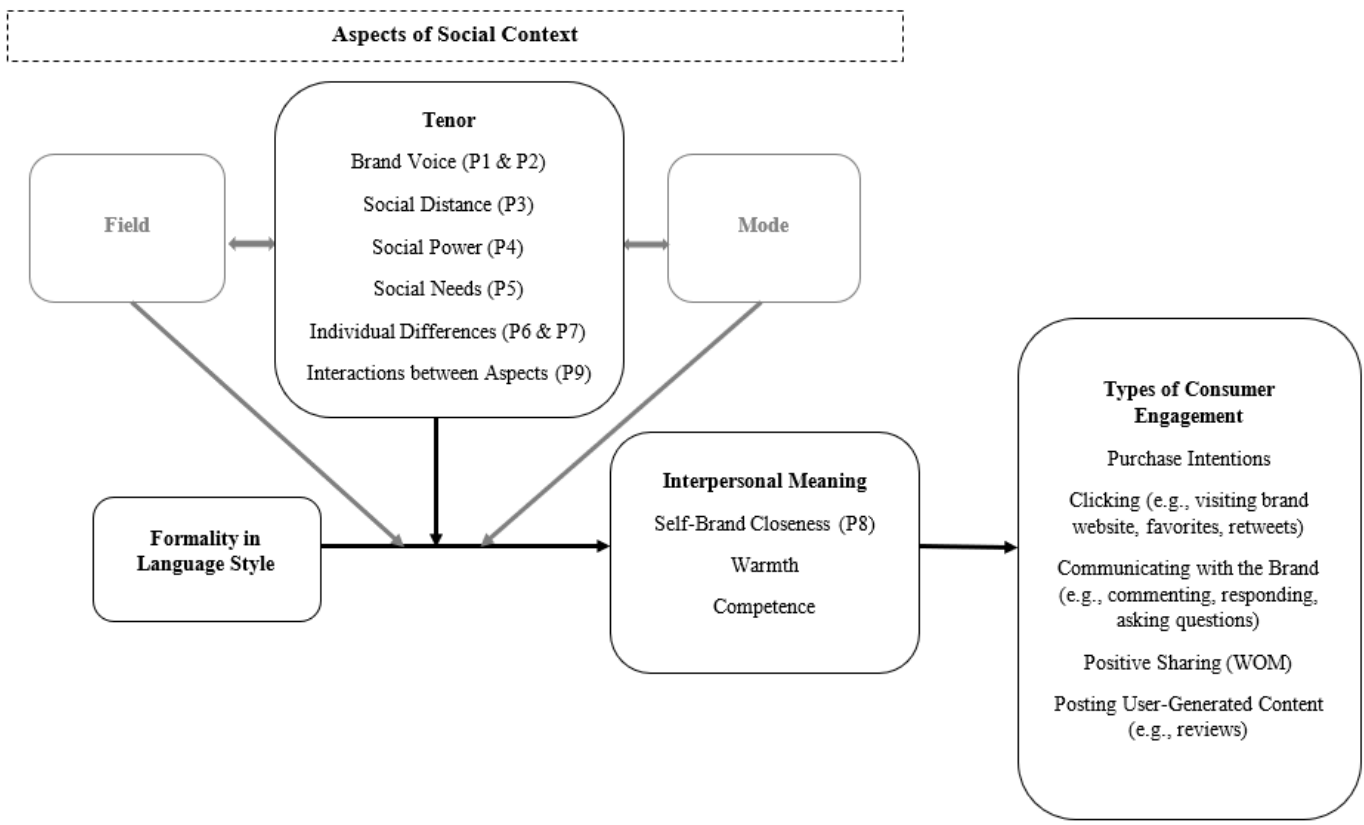


FIGURE 2: Empirical Conceptual Model

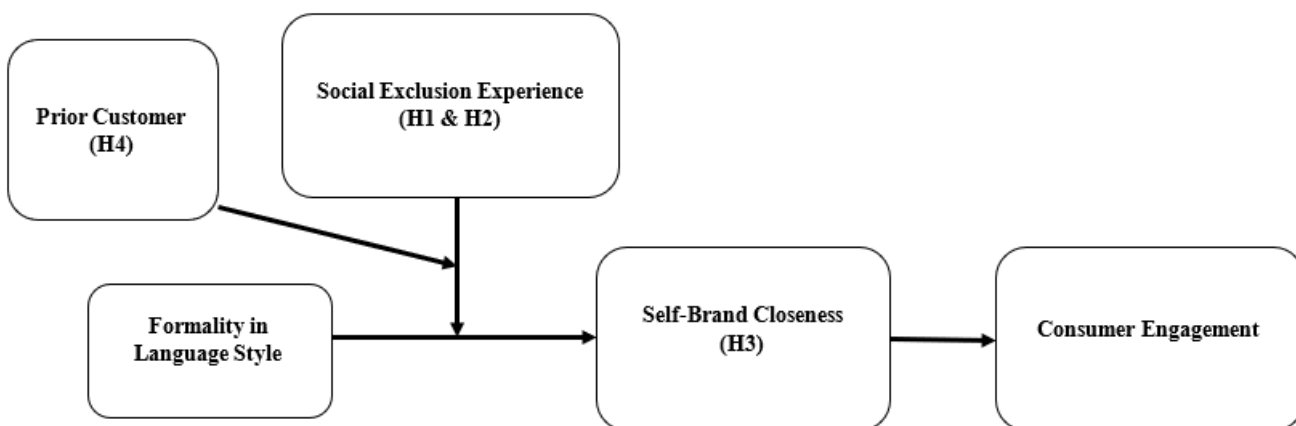


FIGURE 3: Recalled Experience x Communication Style on Brand Engagement Intentions
(Pilot Study)

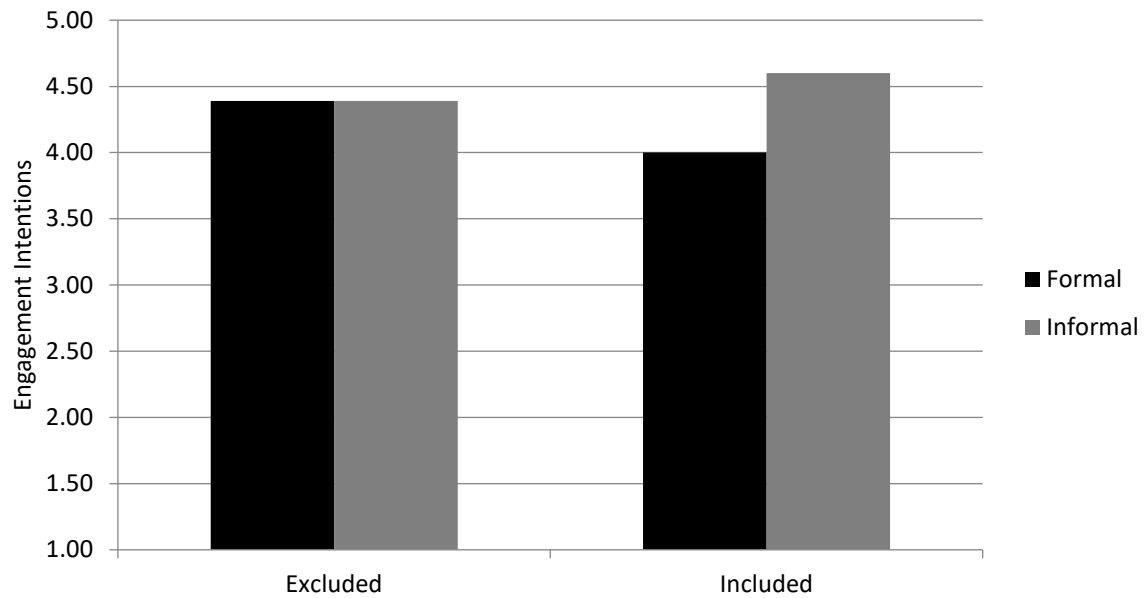
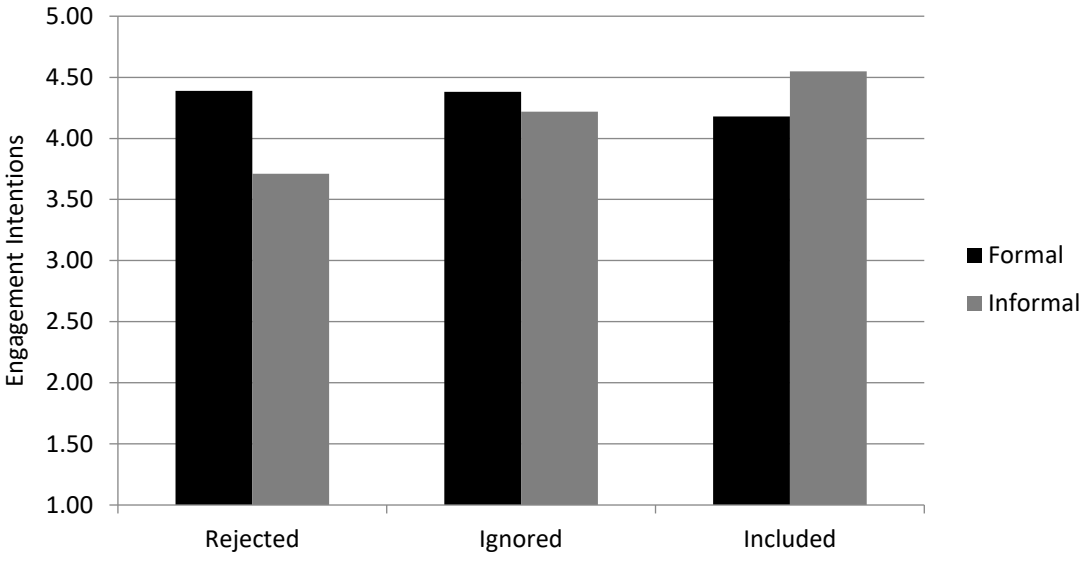


FIGURE 4: Recalled Experience x Communication Style on Brand Engagement Intentions

(Study 1)

A. Without Gender



B. With Gender as Moderator

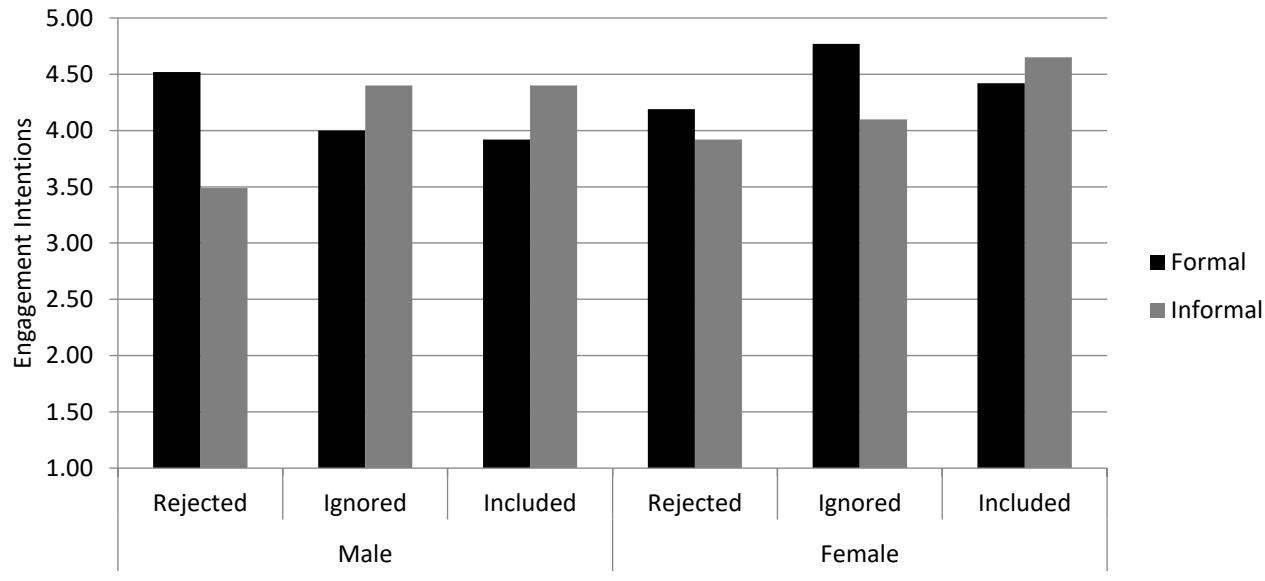
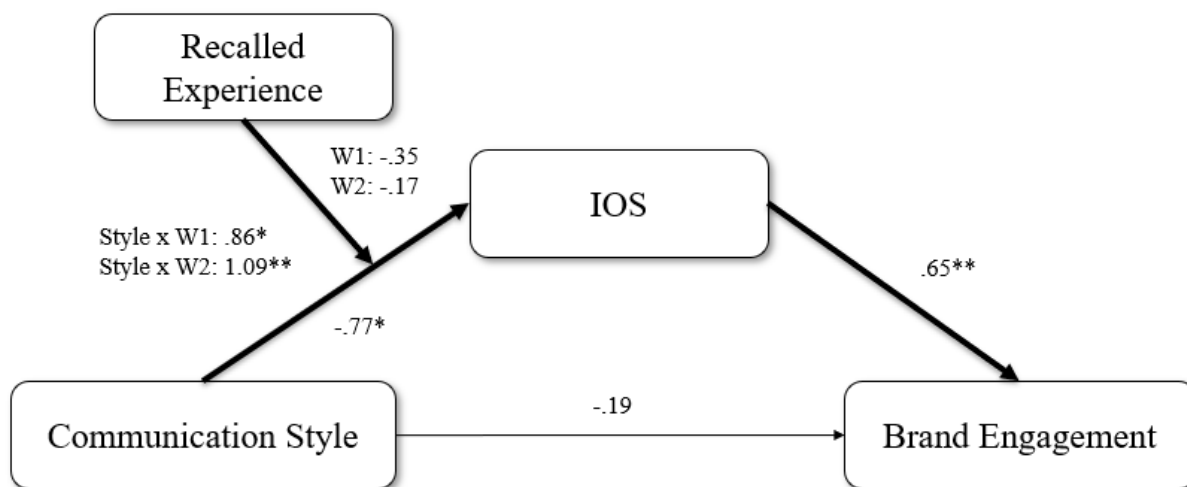


FIGURE 5: Self-Brand Closeness Mediation (Study 1)



Communication Style: 1 = informal; 0 = formal

Recalled Experience Dummy 1 (W1): 0=included, 0=rejected, 1=ignored

Recalled Experience Dummy 2 (W2): 1=included, 0=rejected, 0=ignored

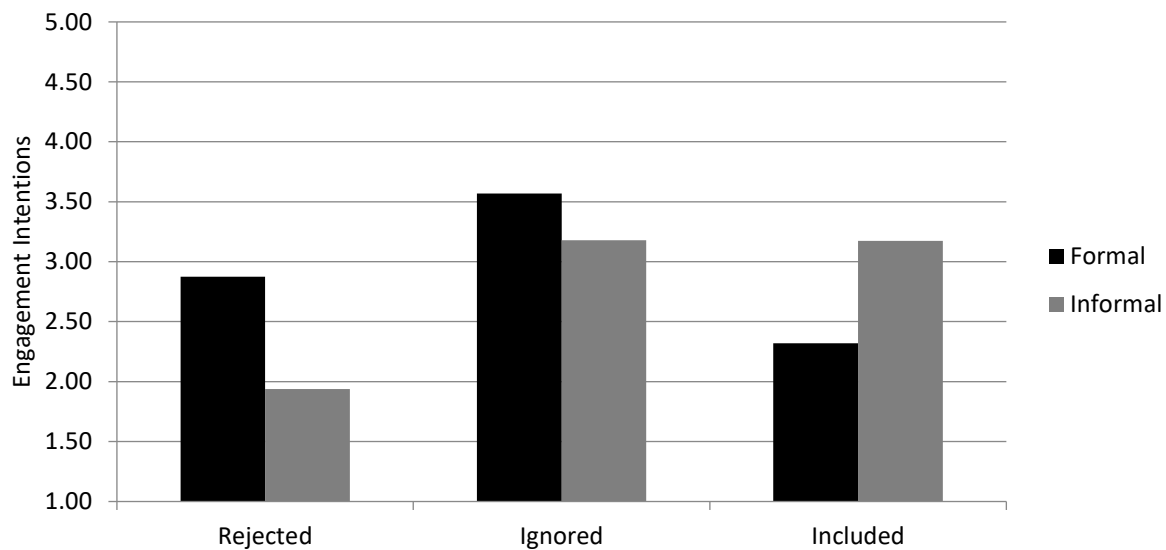
+ $p < .10$

* $p < .05$

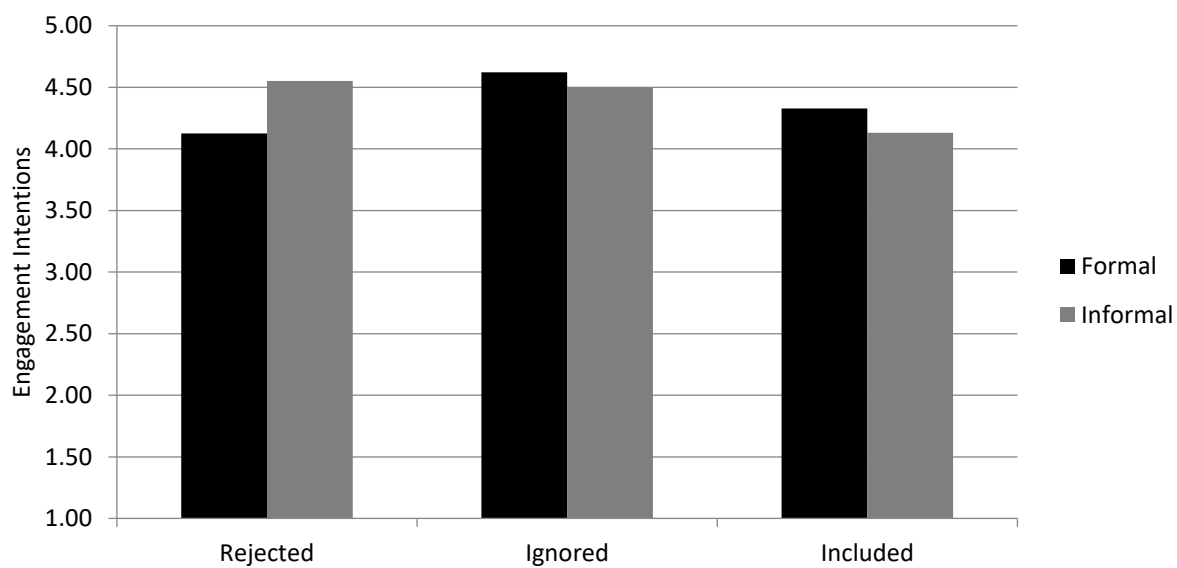
** $p < .01$

FIGURE 6: Recalled Experience x Communication Style on Brand Engagement Intentions
(Study 2)

A. Non-Customer Condition



B. Prior Customer Condition



C. Gender as Moderator

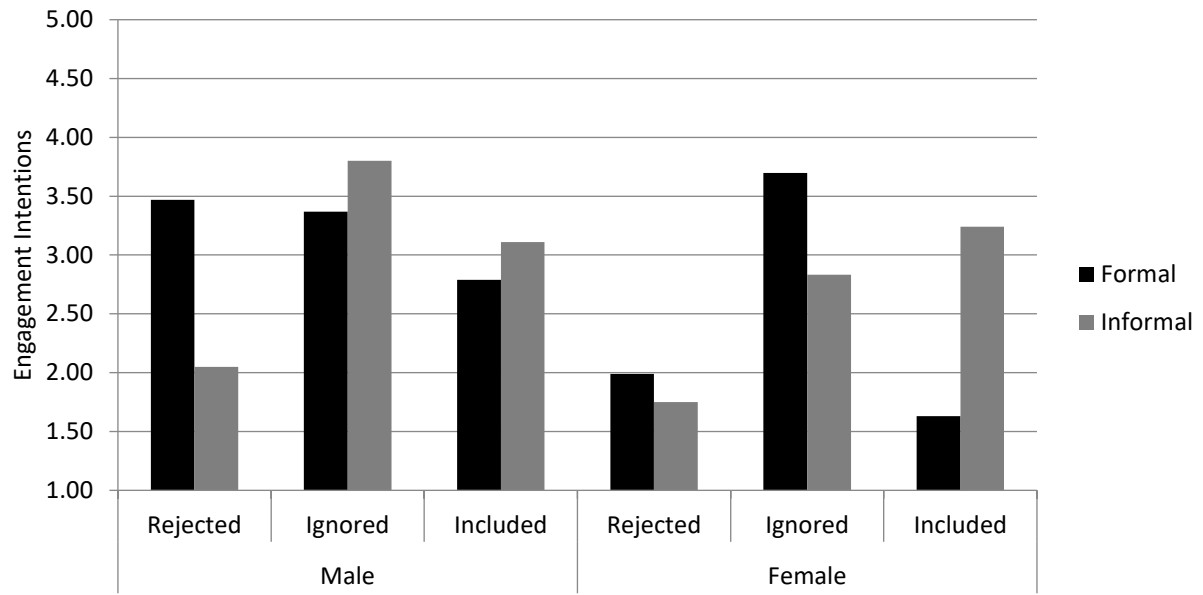
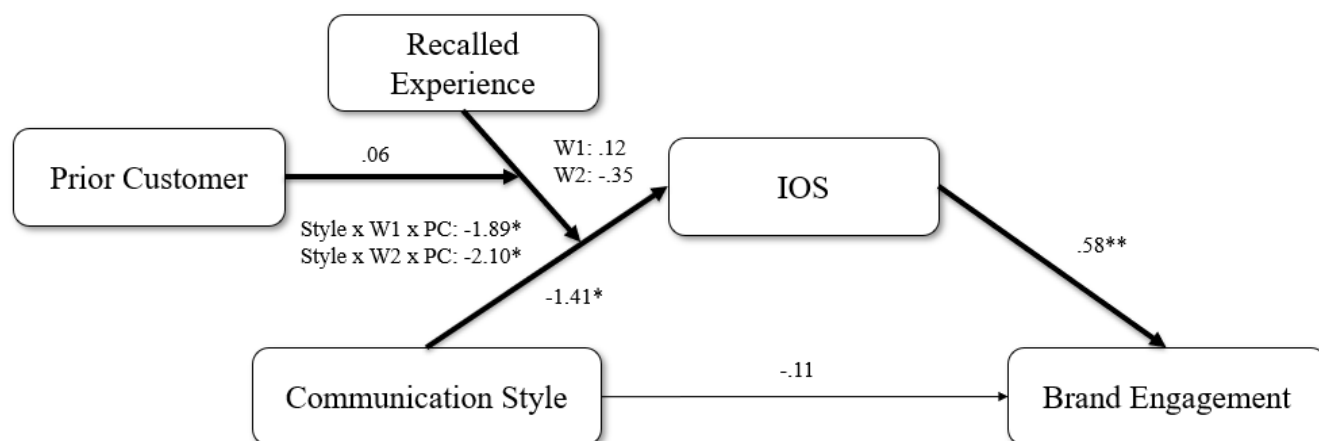


FIGURE 7: Self-Brand Closeness Mediation (Study 2)



Communication Style: 1 = informal; 0 = formal

Recalled Experience Dummy 1 (W1): 0=included, 0=rejected, 1=ignored

Recalled Experience Dummy 2 (W2): 1=included, 0=rejected, 0=ignored

Prior customer (PC): 1=yes, 0=no

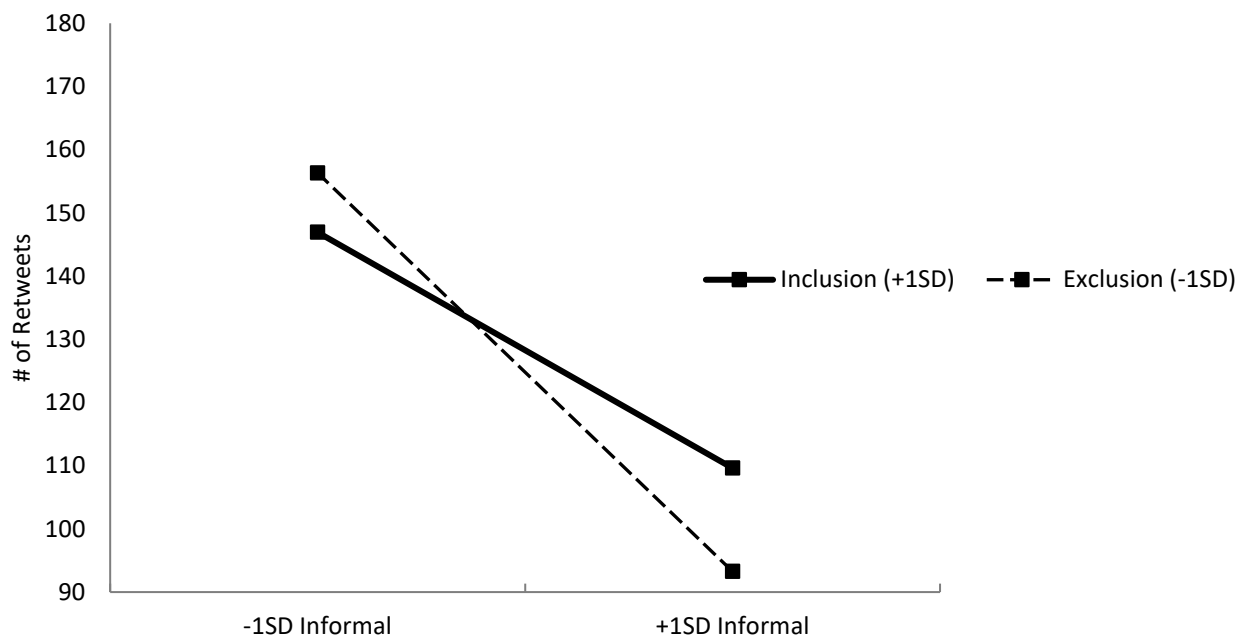
+ $p < .10$

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

FIGURE 8: Follow-Back Ratio x Informal Language Characteristics on Number of Retweets

A. Continuous Follow-Back Ratio



B. Dichotomized Follow-Back Ratio

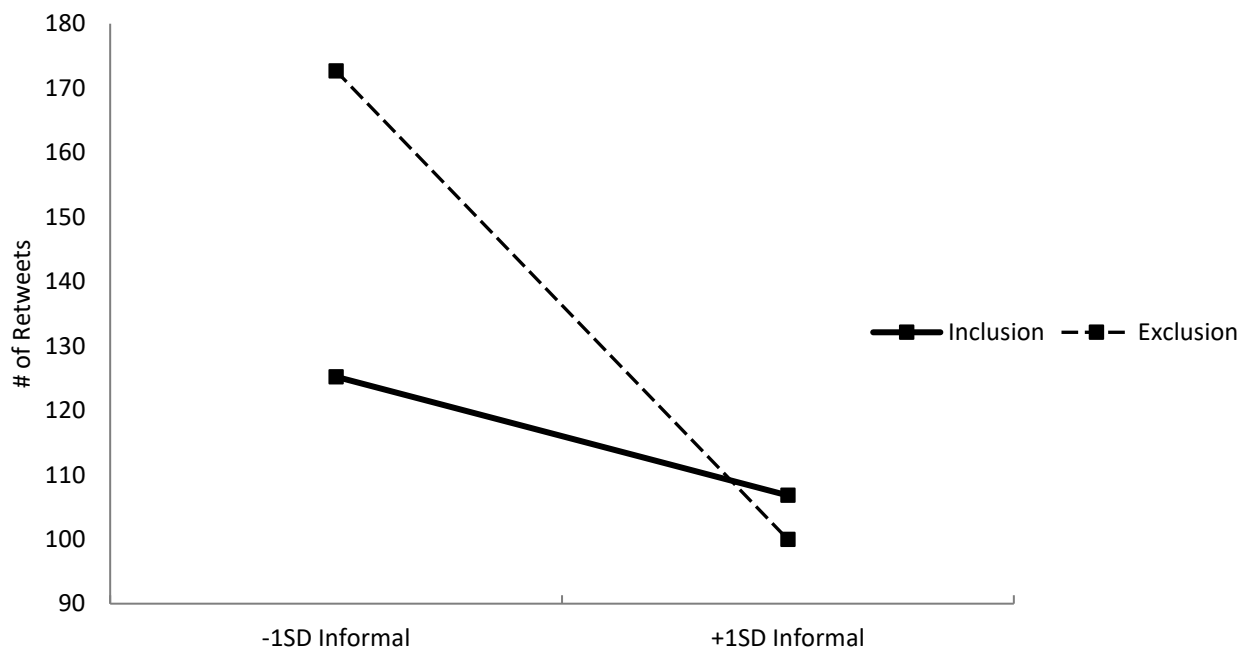
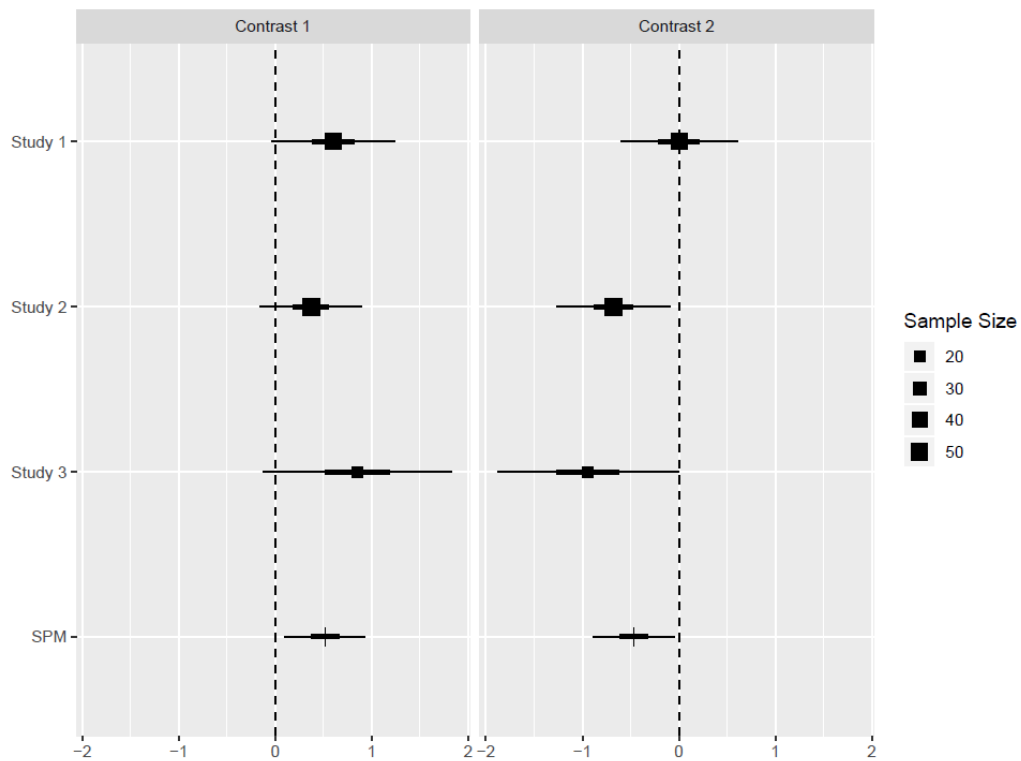


FIGURE 9: Single Paper Meta-Analysis of Pilot Study and Studies 1-2 (Engagement Intentions)

A. SPM of Pilot Study and Studies 1-2 (Rejection and Inclusion Conditions Only)

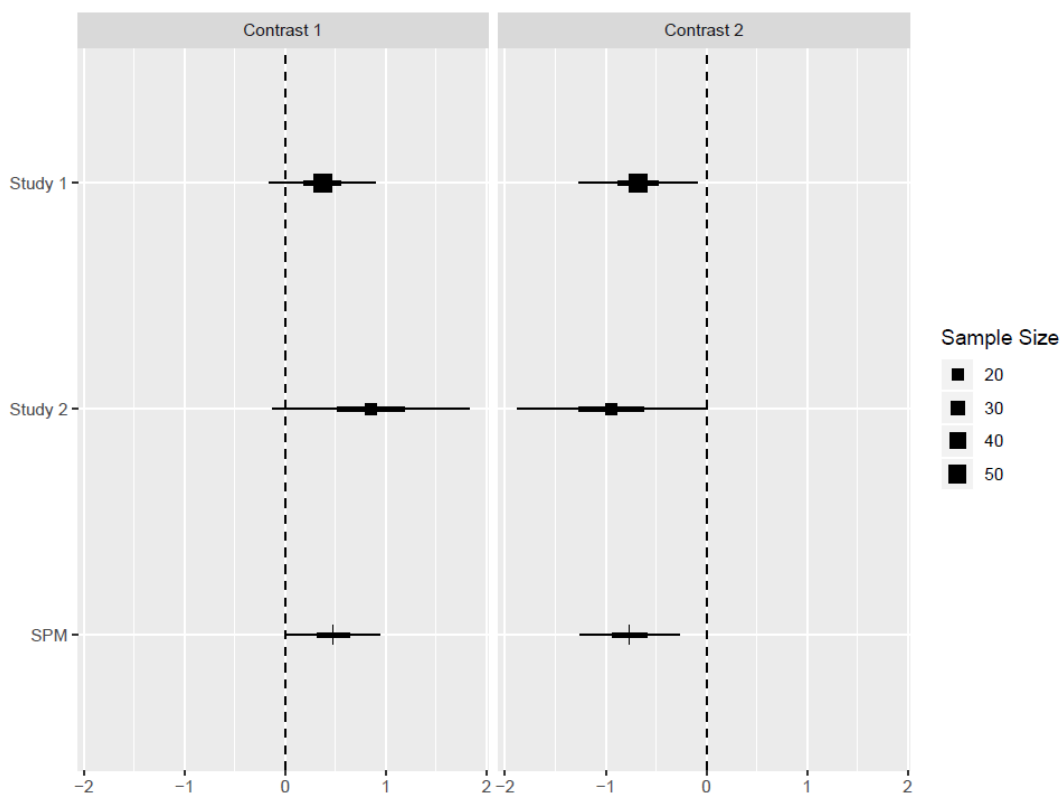


Contrast 1 = informal vs. formal when included

Contrast 2 = informal vs. formal when rejected*

*Results of Study 1 are based on the exclusion condition, as it did not parse out exclusion type

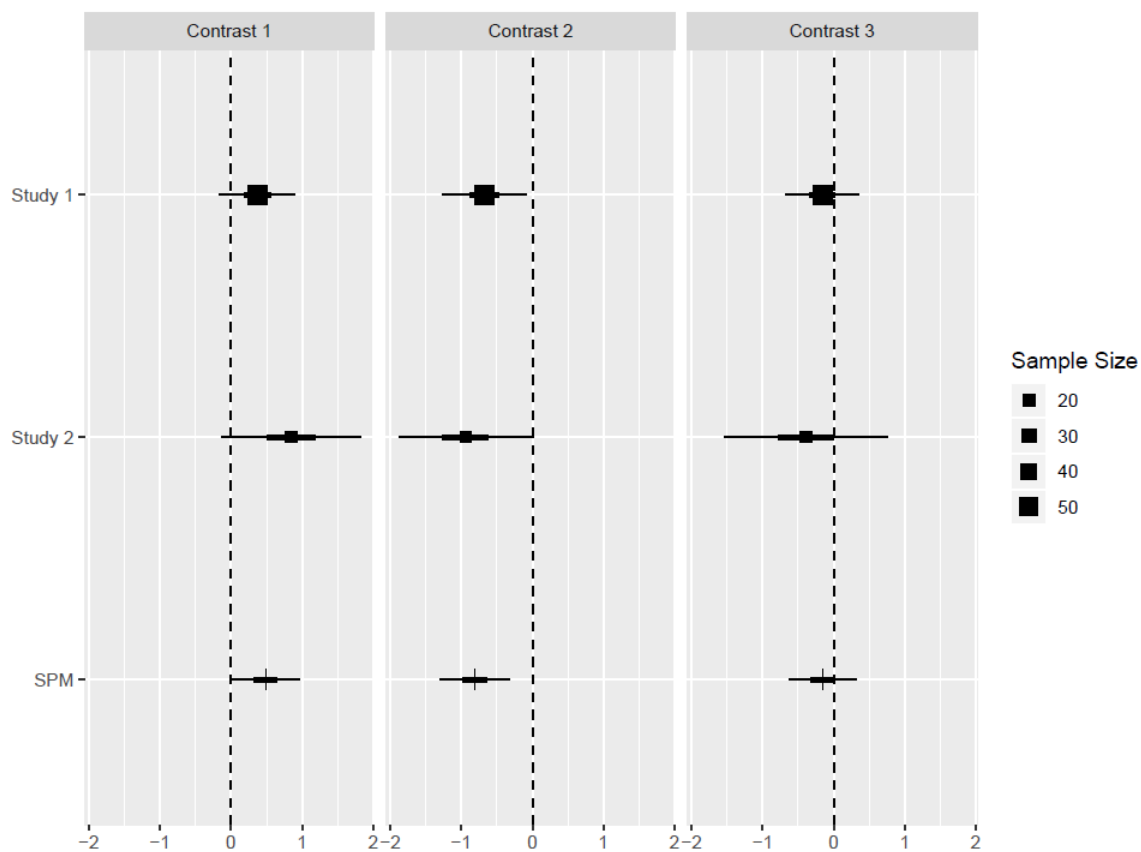
B. SPM of Studies 1-2 (Rejection and Inclusion Conditions Only)



Contrast 1 = informal vs. formal when included

Contrast 2 = informal vs. formal when rejected

C. SPM of Studies 1-2 (All 3 Exclusion Conditions)

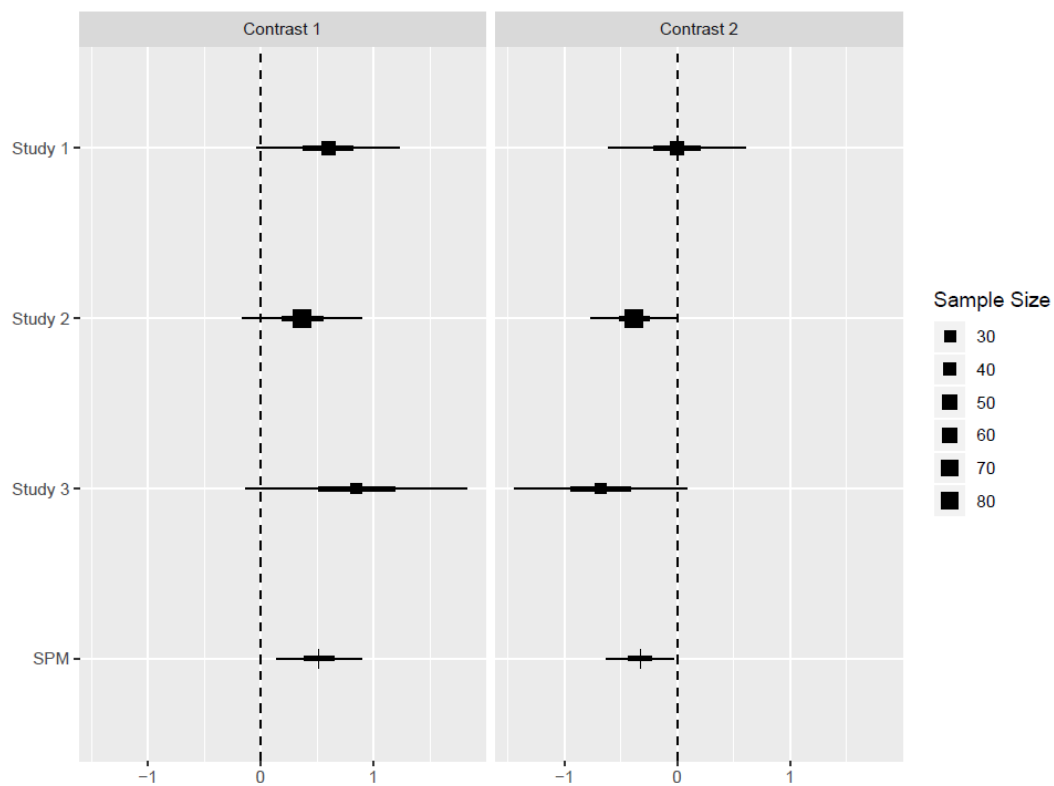


Contrast 1 = informal vs. formal when included

Contrast 2 = informal vs. formal when rejected

Contrast 3 = informal vs. formal when ignored

D. SPM of Studies 1-3 (Rejected and Ignored Conditions Combined in Studies 2-3)



Contrast 1 = informal vs. formal when included

Contrast 2 = informal vs. formal when excluded

TABLES

TABLE 1: Operationalizations of Formal and Informal Language Style

Operationalizations of Informality ^a	Dependent Variables				Citations
	Social Connection*	Intensity	Warmth	Competence	
Word Choice					
Personal (vs. impersonal) language* (pronouns, greetings, closings)	F < I			F > I	Heylighen and Dewaele 1999; Levin, Giles, and Garrett 1994; Morand 2000
Use of shorter (vs. longer) words*				F > I	Levin et al. 1994
Fewer (vs. more) verbal hedges	F < I				Brown and Levinson 1978; Morand 2000
Verbal omission or abbreviation* (e.g., “Mind if I ask a question?”, “What’s up?”)	F < I				Brown and Levinson 1978; Crystal 2001; Morand 2000
Grammar^b					
Improper (vs. proper) grammatical structure*				F > I	Levin et al. 1994
Minus features (e.g. not capitalizing the first letter of a sentence or any formal nouns)	F < I				Carey 1980; Crystal 2001; Harris and Paradice 2007
Capitalize an entire word (e.g., “LOVE”)		F < I			Carey 1980; Schandorf 2013
Added vowels (e.g., “wooo”) or added letters to the end of a word (e.g., “amazinggg”)		F < I			Kalman and Gergle 2014
Repeated exclamation points* (i.e., “!!!”)		F < I	F < I		Vandergriff 2013; Waseleski 2006; Yin et al. 2017
Dashes* (i.e. “—“)	F < I				Bloch 1996; Krahn 2014
Emoticons/emojis* (e.g., “:D”, 😊)	F < I				Derks, Bos, and von Grumbkow 2008; Huang, Yen, and Zhang 2008

Note: empty boxes reflect that no prior research has measured the particular effect.

^aInformal language characteristics are displayed first; formal language characteristics are in parentheses.

^bAll operationalizations of grammar are informal characteristics, as formal grammatical characteristics simply adhere to textbook grammatical norms (Labov 1972).

*Indicates what is measured or used in manipulations for empirical portion of dissertation.

TABLE 2: Summary of Results of Engagement Intentions (Pilot Study and Studies 1-2)

Study	Prior Customer	Experience	Formal	Informal	<i>F</i> -values
Pilot	No	Excluded	4.39	4.39	.00
		Included	4.00	4.60	3.72 ⁺
1	No	Rejected	4.39	3.71	5.60*
		Ignored	4.38	4.22	.35
		Included	4.18	4.55	1.82
2	Yes	Rejected	4.13	4.55	1.99
		Ignored	4.62	4.50	.19
		Included	4.33	4.13	.47
	No	Rejected	2.88	1.94	3.03 ⁺
		Ignored	3.57	3.18	.47
		Included	2.32	3.17	3.02 ⁺

⁺ $p < .10$

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

TABLE 3: Summary of Results of Perceptions of Self-Brand Closeness (Studies 1-2)

Study	Prior Customer	Experience	Formal	Informal	<i>F</i> -values
1	No	Rejected	2.77	2.00	7.67**
		Ignored	2.42	2.52	.13
		Included	2.60	2.92	1.46
2	Yes	Rejected	2.66	3.35	4.51*
		Ignored	3.24	3.15	.08
		Included	3.09	3.02	.05
	No	Rejected	2.60	1.19	5.93*
		Ignored	2.72	2.43	.23
		Included	2.25	2.17	.02

⁺ $p < .10$

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

TABLE 4: Index of Informal Language Characteristics Used in Brand Tweets

Company	# Tweets/Brand^a	Informal Language^b	Informal Punctuation^{bc}	Emojis^d
Coca-Cola	289	3.01	11.23	39.2
Ford	251	2.82	6.87	2.4
Walmart	264	2.20	10.85	64.3
Tesco	98	5.35	5.3	11.6
McDonald's	203	2.41	13.38	43.8
Amazon	363	2.49	15.65	69.3
Disney Parks	492	5.37	6.11	.2
Nike	121	4.85	3.14	3.0
Aflac	467	4.56	3.8	5.0
Cheerios	275	4.19	12.72	48.8
Cheetos	406	4.09	7.55	35.9
Energizer	108	4.00	2.86	2.0
Forest Service	152	4.79	1.78	0.0
Fritolay	126	3.98	14.57	.6
Geico	173	4.03	4.55	1.3
Kellogg's	411	5.66	5.11	2.0
Progressive	272	3.00	11.19	18.1
Starbucks	294	3.14	19.56	36.9
Tootsie Roll	304	8.18	12.11	5.3
Denny's Diner	439	3.26	6.46	15.0

^aTweets scraped between February 23, 2016 – April 30, 2019

^bAverage percentage within tweet by brand

^cIncludes punctuation marks, dashes, and apostrophes

^dPercentage of occurrence by brand

TABLE 5

A. Correlation Matrix between Style Operationalizations

	Informal Language	Informal Punctuation	Presence of Emojis
Informal Language		-.05**	.01
Informal Punctuation	-.05**		.05**
Presence of Emojis	.01	.05**	
Mean	5.12	5.28	.07
SD	3.61	6.37	.25
N	29,161		

+ $p < .10$ * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

B. Regression Results for Retweets (Continuous Follow-Back Ratio)

Independent Variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Informal Language (Style 1)	-10.90**			-8.73**		
Informal Punctuation (Style 2)		-2.79**			-3.03**	
Presence of Emojis (Style 3)			27.18			-4.84
Social Inclusion Index	-.04	.06	-.002	-.08	.06	.003
Style * Social Inclusion	.01	-.02	-.05	.02	-.02	-.09
Brand	-	-	-	27.17**	27.67**	27.66**
Tweet Type	-	-	-	14.40	24.27*	22.27+
Intercept	180.74**	139.67**	123.11**	-110.64**	-146.97**	-162.04**
N	29,104					

+ $p < .10$ * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

C. Regression Results for Retweets (Dichotomized Follow-Back Ratio)

Independent Variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Informal Language (Style 1)	-12.81**			-11.07**		
Informal Punctuation (Style 2)		-3.40**			-3.68**	
Presence of Emojis (Style 3)			19.68			-18.52
Social Inclusion Index	-56.66**	-34.06*	-27.46*	-58.81**	-29.43 ⁺	-22.94 ⁺
Style * Social Inclusion	5.95 ⁺	1.75	24.36	7.52*	1.85	40.42
Brand	-	-	-	27.16**	27.61**	27.61**
Tweet Type	-	-	-	16.92	25.77*	23.60 ⁺
Intercept	198.64**	150.28**	131.45**	-92.75**	-137.47**	-154.85**
N	29,104					

⁺ $p < .10$

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

APPENDIX A

Communication Style Stimuli (Pilot Study and Study 1)

A. Informal

Hey X-----!

So glad you've decided to join us at École de Chimie!
You'll be the first to know about the best products, latest trends, skin and hair care tips, exclusive promos, giveaways and more!

We're so excited for you to start your skin and hair care routine! Please feel free to reach out to us if you have any questions! :)

Cheers,
The EDC Team

- Personal Language
- Verbal Omission or Abbreviation
- Exclamation Marks
- Emoticons/Emojis

B. Formal

Dear Mr./Ms. X-----,

Thank you and welcome to École de Chimie.
By joining this listserv, you will gain early knowledge of the best products, recent trends, skin and hair advice, exclusive promotions, giveaways and additional information.

We are excited for you to begin your skin and hair care regimen. Do not hesitate to send us an email with any questions.

Regards,
The École de Chimie Team

- Impersonal Language
- Lack of Verbal Omission or Abbreviation

APPENDIX B

Description of Manipulations (Study 2)

A. Brand Recall

In this next study, you will be asked to imagine that you subscribed to a company's email listserv. You will later be asked questions about this scenario.

Think about a clothing company and write the company's name below.

B. Informal Communication Style

Hey X-----!

So glad you've decided to join us at [RECALLED BRAND NAME]!
You'll be the first to know about new arrivals, this season's trends, in-store events, exclusive promos, giveaways and more!

We're so excited for you to explore what we've curated! Please feel free to reach out to us if you have any questions! :)

Cheers,

The [RECALLED BRAND NAME] Team

- Personal Language
- Verbal Omission or Abbreviation
- Exclamation Marks
- Emoticons/Emojis

C. Formal Communication Style

Dear Mr./Ms. X-----,

Thank you and welcome to [RECALLED BRAND NAME]. By joining this listserv, you will gain early knowledge of new arrivals, the trends from this season, in-store events, exclusive promotions, giveaways and additional information.

We are excited for you to explore our curations. Do not hesitate to send us an email with any questions.

Regards,

[RECALLED BRAND NAME]

- Impersonal Language
- Lack of Verbal Omission or Abbreviation

APPENDIX C

Description of Measures

Dependent Variable: Engagement Intentions

Pilot Study and Study 1

- How would you rate your intentions to buy a skin or hair care product from École de Chimie?
- How would you rate your intentions to visit the École de Chimie website?
- How would you rate your intentions to send École de Chimie an email with a question?

Study 2

- How would you rate your intentions to buy a skin or hair care product from [participant-recalled brand]?
- How would you rate your intentions to visit the [participant-recalled brand] website?
- How would you rate your intentions to send [participant-recalled brand] an email with a question?
- How would you rate your intentions to recommend [participant-recalled brand] to a friend?

Manipulation Check: Formality

Pilot Study and Study 1

- Using the scales below, how would you describe the language used in the École de Chimie email? (1 = very casual/very informal; 7 = not casual at all/very formal)

Study 2

- Using the scales below, how would you describe the language used in the [participant-recalled brand] email? (1 = very casual/very informal; 7 = not casual at all/very formal)

Manipulation Check: Recalled Exclusion Experience

Pilot Study

- At the beginning of the study, to what extent did you write about an experience where you were...
 - Included by others
 - Excluded by others
 (1 = not at all; 7 = very much)

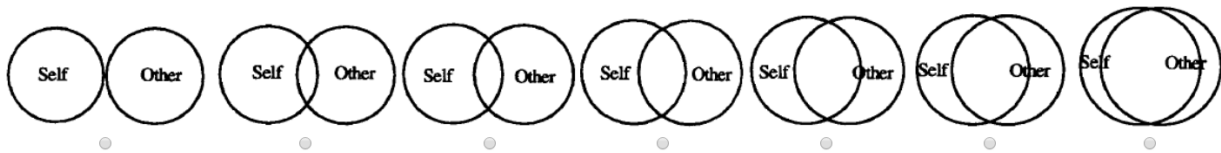
Studies 1-2

- At the beginning of the study, to what extent did you write about an experience where you were...
 - Included by others
 - Rejected by others
 - Ignored by others
 (1 = not at all; 7 = very much)

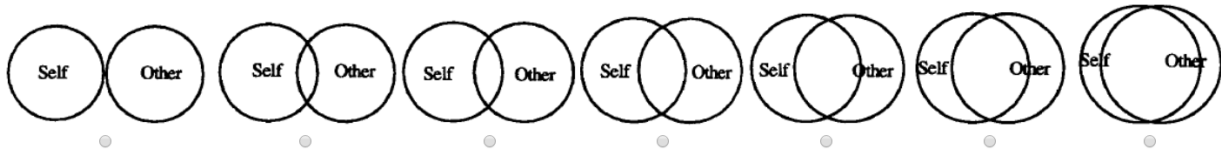
Mediator: Self-Brand Closeness

Study 1

- Please select the picture below which best represents how much you currently identify with the École de Chimie brand, where "Self" represents you and "Other" represents École de Chimie.

*Study 2*

- Please select the picture below which best represents how much you currently identify with the [participant-recalled brand] brand, where "Self" represents you and "Other" represents [participant-recalled brand].



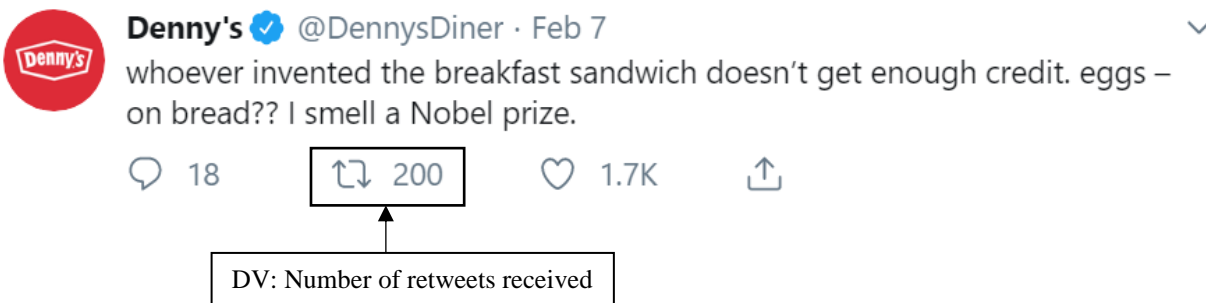
Prior Customer Measure

Study 2

- Have you purchased clothing from [participant-recalled brand] before?
 - (Yes/No)

APPENDIX D

1. Example of User Engagement



2. Examples of Social Exclusion Proxy

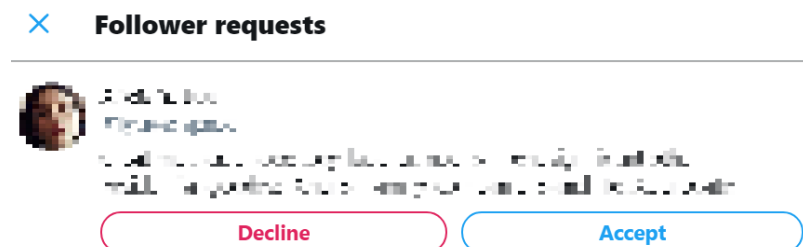
2A. User with low follow-back ratio (under 1; relatively socially excluded)

416 Following **93** Followers

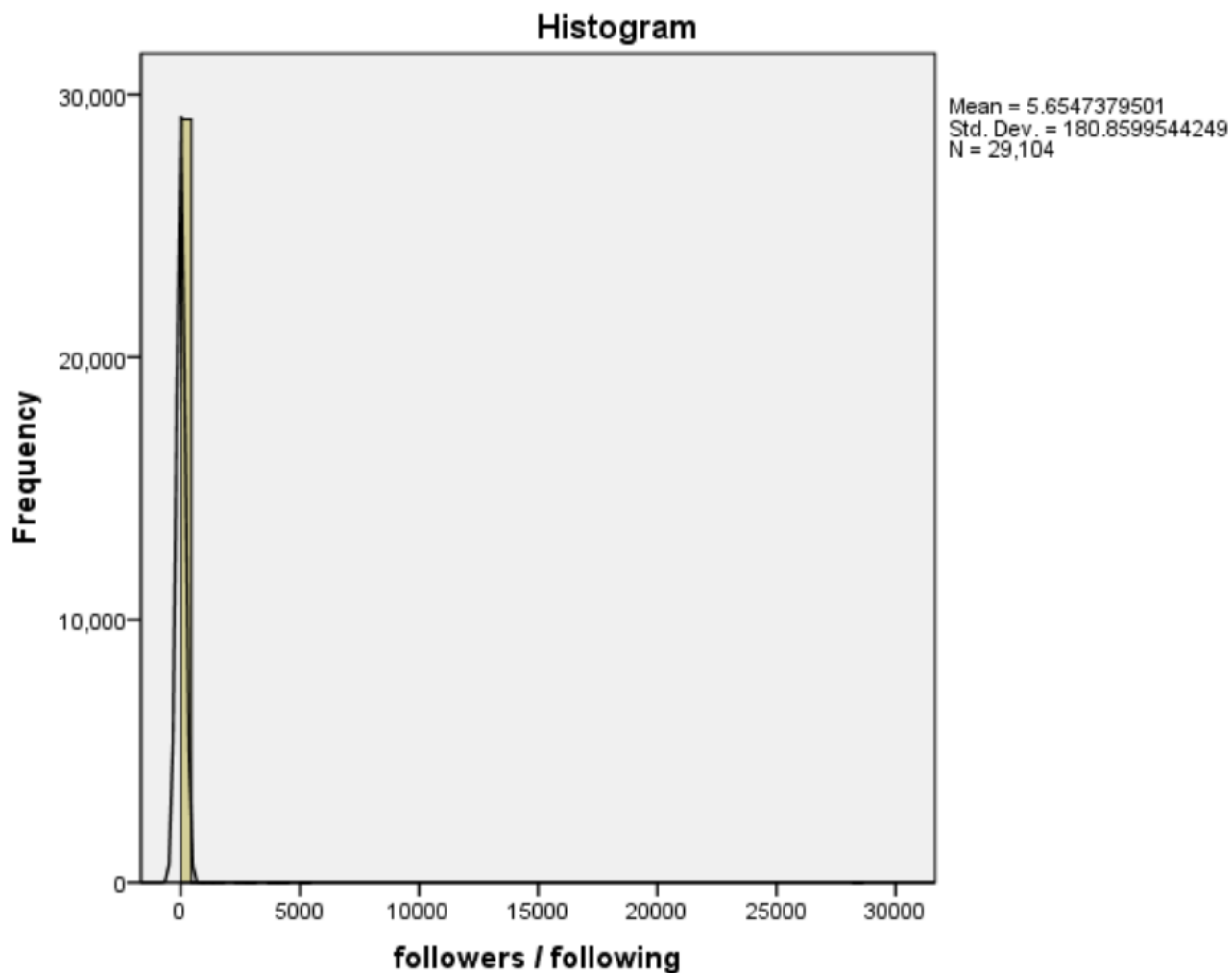
2B. User with high follow-back ratio (over 1; socially included)

1,952 Following **3,612** Followers

2C. Prompt to respond to follower requests



2D. Distribution of Follow-Back Ratio



3. Operationalizations of Informal Style

3A. Informal Language (adapted from LIWC 2015 Dictionary)

Category	Examples	Words in Category	Internal Consistency (α)
Informal Language	Swear words (e.g., fuck, damn, shit) Netspeak (e.g., btw, lol, thx) Assent (e.g., agree, OK, yes) Nonfluencies (e.g., er, hm, umm) Fillers (e.g., I mean, you know)	380	.84

3B. Informal Punctuation (adapted from LIWC 2015 Dictionary)

The following are the punctuation categories included in the LIWC dictionary: periods, commas, colons, semicolons, question marks, **exclamation marks**, **dashes**, quotation marks, **apostrophes**, parentheses, other punctuation. The bolded categories may reflect informal style and were selected for analysis (see Table 1 for summary of punctuation reflecting informal style).

3C. Presence of Emojis

Emojis are defined as any of the 2823 Unicode Standard characters. LIWC currently does not have the capacity to count Unicode characters. However, the tweet contents were exported with UTF-8 encoding. Each brand tweet was independently coded by two judges for presence or absence of emojis.

Below is a sample of exported tweets with emojis.

@kynleigh_kay come get some denny's 🤔

@flamincactus ❤️

@uhhriley ❤️

@LaineNorth 🤔

@pollykeston we'll save you a seat 🤔

@SOCKNOGGIN we're not sure 😞

@Camtay9 thank you ❤️

@ItsCovarr 😞 oh Andrew

@LowLifeOlivia ❤️

@Complex 🏆 we agree 🏆 with this 🏆 list

@My_PerfectCrime ❤️

@elizabethkmua 😊

@CadenMcGovern ❤️

@GangDenny ❤️

@chelliebeach954 😊

@CALLme_MARS come get pancakes 🤔