

The influence of negative emotions on brand trust and intention to share cause-related posts: A neuroscientific study

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ABSTRACT

Negative user-generated content provides cues that warn other consumers to avoid using a particular product or service. This study explores whether brand feedback can counteract consumer backlash to a given company's cause-related marketing, with a particular focus on how visual attention can moderate negative emotions. Hypotheses based on the Appraisal-Tendency Framework and commitment-trust theory were tested using neuro-physiological tools (eye tracking and facial coding) and self-reported measures. The findings suggest that emotions with similar valence and arousal levels cause differing trust perceptions and consumer behavioral responses (sharing intentions), based on the presence or absence of brand feedback. Brand feedback diminishes customers' visual attention to negative comments in cause-related marketing posts. Consumers' visual attention to negative comments on a given brand's cause-related posts, reduces brand trust and its influence on sharing intentions. The findings contribute to the literature by describing mechanisms through which brand feedback influences brand outcomes.

1. Introduction

Social media (SM)¹ is a particularly important tool for companies' corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives as online comments can increase consumer awareness of their CSR activities and diminish potential skepticism towards these activities (Bhandari & Rodgers, 2018; Khanal et al., 2021). Some sectors are more prone than others to negative SM-based user-generated content (UGC) due to the controversy they often attract. This is the case with the fast-food industry, which often attracts a negative image because of the obesity problems caused by "junk food" (Joe et al., 2020). Fast food consumption is linked to negative self-image and attitudes towards fast food brands. Consumers of fast food have been shown to experience shame and guilt over their self-image (Aydin et al., 2018). Little research has been undertaken into the negative image that consumers harbor towards the fast-food industry and how this impacts their attitudes towards fast food brands. In general, fast-food brands attract high levels of hate and negative comments from users, which can have a devastating impact on attitudes

towards well-established brands in the sector (Hashim & Kasana, 2019).

Research over the past three decades has found that consumers' emotions significantly affect their judgments and decision-making (Han et al., 2007). For instance, emotions have been found to influence pro-social behaviors (Septianto & Chiew, 2018). Cognitive appraisal theories allow researchers to distinguish the effects of two emotions with similar valences and arousal levels (Roseman, 1991). This study draws on the Appraisal-Tendency Framework (ATF) (Lerner & Keltner, 2010) to analyze emotion-specific influences on consumers' brand judgments and sharing behaviors in the context of SM-based cause-related marketing (CRM) campaigns, thus overcoming the limitations of overall valence approaches.

Emotionality is known to play a substantial role in driving online conversations (Berger, 2011), but surprisingly little is known about the effects of consumers' emotions evoked by company-consumer conversations. When consumers express negative feelings towards brands on SM, this affects other consumers by causing negative brand perceptions and lowering purchase intentions (Bhandari & Rodgers, 2018). Ad

Abbreviations: SM, Social Media; CSR, Corporate Social Responsibility; UGC, User-Generated Content; ATF, Appraisal Tendency Framework; CRM, Cause-Related Marketing; eWOM, Electronic Word-Of-Mouth; AC-TEA, Attention Capture and Transfer by Elements of Advertisements; AOI, Area Of Interest; ANOVA, Analysis Of Variance.

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¹ SM: Social Media; CSR: Corporate Social Responsibility; UGC: User-Generated Content; ATF: Appraisal Tendency Framework; CRM: Cause-Related Marketing; eWOM: electronic word-of-mouth; AC-TEA: Attention Capture and Transfer by Elements of Advertisements; AOI: Area Of Interest; ANOVA: Analysis Of Variance.

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skepticism can be defined as consumers' perceptions that advertising claims made by brands are untruthful and/or implausible (Hibbert et al., 2007). Skeptics react unfavorably to advertising and disbelieve brand claims made on SM. Thus, skepticism challenges the ability of brands to foster trust in the claims they make via CRM posts.

Brands respond to negative UGC on SM to mitigate ad skepticism. Previous research on the effectiveness of brand feedback is inconclusive (Khamitov et al., 2020), and previous studies have not focused specifically on the visual attention paid to consumers' skeptical comments towards CRM campaigns. Clear correlations have been identified between consumers' visual attention to campaigns and their attitudes and behaviors (Orquin & Wedel, 2020). We can gain a more comprehensive understanding of the effects of negative electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) by measuring unconscious responses (visual attention) to a facet under the consumer's control (negative UGC), and a facet under the brand's control (brand feedback).

Three research gaps are evident. First, what type of emotions do consumers experience when they read a brand's CRM post, which is accompanied by negative UGC? Second, do customers who experience similarly valenced emotions (i.e., fear, disgust, anger, contempt and sadness) due to SM content, differ regarding their brand trust perceptions and sharing intentions? Third, does brand feedback create visual attention which mitigates the effects of negative comments made about a given brand's CRM posts?

This research identifies the effects that negative emotions towards CRM Instagram posts which are accompanied by negative UGC, have on consumer trust and behavioral intentions, with a particular focus on the moderating role of visual attention. This study has three specific goals: (1) to identify whether the negative emotions evoked by the subject brand's CRM posts accompanied by negative UGC, vary based on the presence or absence of brand feedback; (2) to assess the effects that negative emotions evoked by CRM posts accompanied by negative UGC have on consumer trust and intention to share brand-generated CRM posts; and (3) to examine the relationship between brand trust and behavioral intentions by identifying the moderating effects of the consumers' visual attention to negative comments about CRM ads.

This study makes three contributions to the literature. First, we extend the ATF and commitment-trust theory by analyzing how contradictory communications issued by brands evokes negative emotions within skeptical consumers, thereby impacting on their trust and behavioral intentions. We propose that generalized, valence-based approaches to examining emotions do not fully explain this impact. Second, we analyze the moderating role of visual attention paid to negative UGC by providing further knowledge of the mechanisms underlying the effects of brand feedback on attention. These effects have been analyzed in the marketing funnel and brand engagement contexts (Colicev et al., 2019), but their effects on visual attention are not yet understood. As Bhandari and Rodgers (2018) emphasized, viewing eWOM more dynamically, and not as a one-way form of communication, but as part of a process whereby brands can address inaccuracies and negative reviews—opens up a whole new area of eWOM-based research. Third, this work explains intention to share brand generated content by combining neurophysiological measures, which refers to visual attention obtained from eye tracking and emotions measured by facial reading, with self-reported measures, namely, trust perceptions. The literature review found few SM-based studies that used both neurophysiological tools and self-reported measures to examine the impact of visual advertising stimuli on consumers' perceptions and behavioral intentions (Muñoz-Leiva et al., 2019).

2. Conceptual framework and hypotheses development

2.1. Appraisal-Tendency framework (ATF)

The affect-judgment literature takes a valence-based approach, testing how positive versus negative feelings affects judgment and

choice; this model concludes that the valence of emotions is the basis for judgments about brands (Elster, 1998; Han et al., 2007). However, this approach does not identify if (and when) emotions with the same valence have differing effects on judgment. Although valence has been shown to be a powerful gauge for predicting emotional effects (Forgas, 2003), it is only one dimension of emotion. Cognitive appraisal theory explains how the customers' evaluation results in cognitive and emotional outcomes. The ATF (Lerner & Keltner, 2010) overcomes the limitations of valence-based approaches and embeds the predictive power of the valence of emotions within a multidimensional theoretical framework (Han et al., 2007).

The ATF proposes that emotional reactions to an event are the result of personal interpretations (appraisals) of the event itself and the situational environment (Roseman, 1991). For example, a consumer presented with a brand's CRM post featuring a negative UGC comment might appraise the event in terms of the unexpectedness of the advice (leading to surprise), a reduction in required information processing effort (leading to relief) or blame towards the company (resulting in anger).

The ATF identifies six cognitive dimensions that define the underlying appraisal patterns of the different emotions (Han et al., 2007; Smith & Ellsworth, 1985): anticipated effort, attentional activity, certainty, situational control, pleasantness and responsibility (all defined in Table 1).

2.2. Emotions as consequences of cognitive appraisals

Drawing on cognitive appraisal theory, emotions have been characterized as a "mental state of readiness that arises from cognitive appraisals of events or thoughts" (Bagozzi et al., 1999, p. 184). The psychoevolutionary theory of emotions (Plutchik, 2001) proposes that emotions are complex elements of human nature, usually linked to biologically important cognitive experiences, which can predict future events based on these same cognitions. The psychology literature categorizes emotions using several approaches. First, the bipolar dimensional approach distinguishes emotions by applying different bipolar dimensions (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). Second, the categorical approach focuses on the classifications and semantic expression of emotions (Izard, 1992). Third, appraisal theory explores people's emotions based on their evaluations of the social environment, which then leads to different behavioral responses (Lazarus, 1991). The present study

Table 1
Cognitive appraisals of emotions.

Dimension	Definition
<i>Anticipated effort</i>	Degree to which physical or mental exertion seems to be needed (high) vs not needed (low)
<i>Responsibility</i>	Extent to which the consumer believes others (the company or something/one else) is responsible for the event that arouses the emotion
<i>Attentional activity</i>	Extent to which events violate or meet expectations and, therefore, draw the consumer's attention (high) vs repels the consumer's attention (low).
<i>Certainty</i>	Degree to which future events seem predictable and comprehensible. Negative emotions, characterised by certainty about what has happened (e.g., anger and contempt), arise when undesirable outcomes are predictable, or have occurred repeatedly in the past
<i>Control</i>	Attributions about the extent to which events seem to be controlled by external circumstances (situational), versus the extent to which they are controlled by the consumer, or by others (e.g., the company)
<i>Pleasantness</i>	Extent to which an event is interpreted as conducive to one's goals (Roseman, 1991). Stimuli are intrinsically pleasant or unpleasant, and our evaluation of them depends on their relevance to the consumer's current purposes.

Source: Own design.

follows the appraisal approach and focuses on five negative emotions: sadness, disgust, fear, anger and contempt.

While all these emotions can have the same valence, they are represented by different patterns of appraisal outcomes. Smith and Ellworth (1985) argued that each cognitive dimension of appraisals is associated with particular emotions. For example, fear, sadness and anger differ in terms of situational control and certainty. Anger arises from appraisals of individual control of negative events, and the consumer blames others, whereas sadness and fear arise from appraisals of situational control (e.g., the belief that fate or circumstances are responsible for negative events). Fear is associated with extreme uncertainty about a situation and with strong attributions of situational control. Thus, when deciding between a high-risk, high-reward option and a low-risk, low-reward option, fearful people may choose an option that reduces risk, whereas sad and angry people may choose an option that maximizes reward.

2.3. Brand feedback, emotions and brand trust

CRM activities, even if initially linked to expected positive reactions, can also generate negative emotions (García-De los Salmones & Perez, 2018; Zheng et al., 2019). Negative UGC provides cues that warn other consumers to avoid using a particular product (Bhandari & Rodgers, 2018). Because negative cues are more salient than positive cues, we posit that a given brand's CRM posts which feature negative UGC comments will evoke negative emotions in consumers.

Brand feedback is the brand's attempt to reinforce the validity of the brand promise and reinstate the trust lost as a result of negative eWOM (Bhandari & Rodgers, 2018). The literature about the role of brand feedback in mitigating the impact of negative comments is inconclusive (Khamitov et al., 2020). Some studies have indicated that brand feedback may positively influence consumers who have previously read negative eWOM (Bhandari & Rodgers, 2018; Sparks & Bradley, 2017). However, other studies have found that brand feedback reduces purchase intentions (Mauri & Minazzi, 2013), or produces mixed results (Cheng & Loi, 2014). Furthermore, brand feedback has also been shown to diminish negative emotional reactions if it includes reliable information and if the company shows a willingness to enter into a dialogue with its customers (Cheng & Loi, 2014). The effects on customers' emotional reactions based on differences in brand feedback have been little explored. Therefore, we propose H1.

H1. Brand feedback mitigates negative emotions evoked by CRM posts which feature negative UGC

Trust has been defined as one party's expectations about the other party's motives and behaviors (Jarvenpaa et al., 1999). It is generally agreed that three key aspects shape trust in offline and online environments (Flavián et al., 2006): honesty, benevolence and competence. In the context of this study, honesty is defined as the consumer's perception that the fast-food restaurant brand fulfils its promises and commitments. In this scenario, the customer believes that the brand's promises are sincere and will be kept. Benevolence refers to the consumer belief that the brand is concerned about achieving mutual benefits with its users. Competence refers to the consumer's belief that the brand has the experience and resources in its field of activity to do its work well and offer products or services of the promised quality.

Customers use emotions as an information source for evaluating the organization's trustworthiness. Zhigang, Le and Xintao (2020) developed a model which depicts the succession of events that link CSR-related corporate actions and trust: a negative difference between customer expectations and perceived performance suggests to the consumer that the company is hypocritical, which evokes negative emotions and leads to feelings of distrust. Perceptions of extrinsic attributions about CRM actions generate negative feelings due to the company being seen as selfish, and this leads to distrust (García-De los Salmones & Perez, 2018). Previous studies have focused mainly on the positive emotions evoked by CSR activities (Fernández et al., 2022).

Nonetheless, the effect of negative emotions, namely, hypocrisy, skepticism or negative attributions, in response to positive social responsibility actions, are underexplored. Geng and Li (2018) found that positive emotions arising from communication initiatives had a significant effect on brand trust, whereas negative emotions only explained brand affect. Other studies have also highlighted that negative emotions felt towards brand identification fail to explain green customer behaviors, which is not the case with positive emotions (Su et al., 2017).

Several aspects of sustainability-related information about products, such as overload and ambiguity, generate a series of negative emotions that mediate the effects on distrust (Moon et al., 2016). Several studies have suggested that brand feedback may have a positive impact on brand attitudes when it presents compelling arguments (Cheng & Loi, 2014), or when customers' complaints are about aspects that the business cannot easily change or improve (Xie et al., 2014). If consumers feel negative emotions when reading negative UGC, brands can seek to restore the lost trust by expressing that they care about their customers' satisfaction, and that they keep their promises. Perceived benevolence and honesty are key components of trust (Flavián et al., 2006). This study posits that negative emotions evoked by CRM posts featuring negative UGC negatively influence brand trust, but this effect is diminished by brand feedback. Hence, we propose H2:

H2. Brand feedback mitigates the effect of negative emotions evoked by CRM posts featuring negative UGC on brand trust

2.4. Brand trust and sharing intentions

Emotions have been conclusively shown to change consumers' beliefs, attitudes and actions (Bagozzi et al., 1999). Valence-based approaches suggest that negative feelings lead to negative judgments (Elster, 1998; Han et al., 2007). Perceptions of corporate hypocrisy lead to negative responses to CRM, which encompasses behaviors such as negative WOM, complaints and boycotts (Zhigang et al., 2020). Brand feedback can provide information that changes the consumer's views (attribution) of the company-consumer interaction, thus altering the effect of emotions on sharing intentions. Thus, we propose the following hypothesis:

H3. Brand feedback mitigates the effect of negative emotions evoked by CRM posts featuring negative UGC on intention to share CRM-related brand-generated posts

Trust has been defined as the starting point for successful relationships between marketers and customers (Morgan & Hunt, 2018). Trust influences the individual's willingness to exchange information and content with others (Sijoria et al., 2018; Yeh & Choi, 2010). Therefore, trust promotes co-creative behaviors such as readiness to exchange information, recommendations and other content with other consumers (Morgan & Hunt, 2018; Yeh & Choi, 2010), and may evolve over time based on the fluctuations of the customer-company relationship (Ye et al., 2020). In the digital context, brand advocates have a significant amount of confidence in the brand and defend and speak positively about it, due to the strong trust and emotional attachment on which their relationship with the brand is built (Choi et al., 2021). Therefore, we propose:

H4. Consumer trust in CRM brand-generated posts has a positive influence on intention to share brand-generated content on SM

2.5. Moderating effect of visual attention

Negative UGC negatively affects consumer trust in organizations (Sparks & Browning, 2011). If the information that brands dispense is not considered to be reliable, this diminishes the consumer's intention to disseminate it in online settings (de Matos & Rossi, 2008). Kelly, Kerr and Drennan (2010) demonstrate that SM advertising is likely to be disregarded if the user is skeptical about the ad. In terms of companies' SM profiles, negative UGC harms stakeholder trust, worsens consumers' perceptions of companies' corporate social responsibility (CSR)

activities and has a detrimental effect on corporate reputation (Haigh & Wigley, 2015), which can void the positive effects of CRM communications (Dunn & Harness, 2019).

When consumers are exposed to negative UGC they might use it as a heuristic cue for decision-making. Most previous research has assumed that consumers read all the information in posts. This is not always the case. As Pieters and Wedel (2004) proposed in their Attention Capture and Transfer by Elements of Advertisements (AC-TEA) model in which they observed print ads, consumers pay attention in different ways to cues; that is, they may take a bottom-up or top-down approach. Some studies have indicated that brand feedback may positively influence consumers who have previously read negative eWOM (Bhandari & Rodgers, 2018; Sparks & Bradley 2017). Furthermore, as two-sided content (negative UGC and positive brand feedback) forces consumers to expend greater cognitive effort to process the opposed arguments, CRM posts with brand feedback will attract greater attention. Thus, we propose:

H5. The visual attention paid to brand feedback is greater than the visual attention paid to other textual cues in CRM-related posts.

Negative UGC in CRM posts requires further research into its effects because the societal nature of CRM may make it more sensitive than communications about products (Babakhani et al., 2020). Daugherty and Hoffman (2014) showed, through fixation duration, that negative eWOM attracts more visual attention. Furthermore, eWOM has an impact on consumers trust (Wang et al., 2014). When consumers search for UGC, negative feedback to brand-generated comments launches a disconfirmation process, based on prior assumptions about the performance of the company, that ultimately might lead to distrust or loss of credibility of the elements of the brand-generated comment—communicator, content or context (Verma & Dewani, 2020). The distrust may be caused by skepticism (Nam et al., 2020). When skepticism and distrust emerge, fixation durations will be higher because the consumer might want to be sure of the content before sharing the negative comment. Based on these arguments, we propose that brands' CRM posts which are accompanied by negative comments can diminish the positive effect of trust on sharing intentions:

H6. The more visual attention that readers pay to negative UGC in a CRM post, the lower will be the influence of trust on intention to share the post.

Fig. 1 depicts the conceptual framework of this research.

3. Method

3.1. Experimental design and procedures

The study uses one factor (brand feedback vs non-brand feedback) between subjects' experimental design, where participants viewed a CRM-based Instagram post, accompanied by a negative user comment, published by a fictitious restaurant company. The experiment was carried out at the DIGIMK.COM laboratory at the University of Valencia, Spain. The participants were told they were taking part in a study into perceptions of advertising on SM.² The participants were shown a TV screen with an Instagram post issued by a fictitious fast food restaurant company. The post gave information about the company's CRM initiative and included a piece of negative UGC. The participants were given the freedom to view each of the stimuli for 45 s for all scenarios and treatments. This allowed us to obtain standardized data, make comparisons and exercise greater control.

A pre-test with five people was carried out to ensure the instructions were clear; this data was not considered for the study. The exposure time for the main experiment was calculated based on experience gained during the pre-test; this ensured the participants had enough time to

view the stimuli. The online survey was completed by the participants during the experiment, immediately after exposure to the stimuli.

3.2. Stimuli

A fast food (hamburger) restaurant was chosen as the study context. The data for the study was obtained through an experimental design. The stimuli were the brand's CRM Instagram posts based on the platform's desktop version. Instagram was chosen as the study context because it is the leading photo-sharing social network—it is expected to have 1.2 billion users worldwide by the end of 2023 (Statista, 2022). We opted for the desktop rather than the mobile interface for two reasons: first, to avoid the problems sometimes caused by head-mounted eye tracking devices and, second, problems caused by tapping the mobile screen. Recent studies have shown that users do not change their intention to read information and share posts based on whether they are using desktop vs mobile versions of SM (Keib et al., 2021). The posts were about a CSR initiative carried out by a restaurant company. The manipulation of the post involved changes to the text: in the feedback scenario, the company responded to the skeptical UGC by arguing why the CRM initiative was valid and giving a link to allow the reader to obtain more information about the company's actions. In the no-feedback scenario, there was no company-user interaction after the negative UGC. The same negative UGC was used for both scenarios. Each stimulus featured an image on its left-hand side, and a caption explaining the CRM initiative on the right-hand side. These were followed by an anonymous user's negative UGC and, in the brand feedback scenarios, a reply by the company. Fictitious brand names and logos were used to avoid brand familiarity bias (Zhou & Xue, 2021). A stimulus, and its corresponding heatmap, are depicted in Fig. 2. Five areas of interest (AOIs) were specified, reflecting the key elements of the post: picture, brand logo, company text, the consumer's negative eWOM and the brand feedback.

3.3. Data collection and measurement of the variables

The participants' visual behaviors were recorded with a 23-inch, 1920 × 1080-pixel resolution PC monitor (that also displayed the experimental instructions and stimuli). The data was collected by using a Tobii X2-30 Compact Eye Tracker. The software used was iMotions 8.1. Visual attention was measured through fixation duration; that is, the amount of time the eye stops and focuses on a particular visual cue. This metric is based on the eye-mind assumption, which proposes there is a direct connection between visual attention and cognitive processes (Just & Carpenter, 1980). A greater fixation duration indicates the viewer is paying more attention to a specific cue. Facial gestures were captured by a C920 HD PRO Webcam FullHD 1080p installed in the monitor, and processed through AFFDEX, software integrated into the iMotions ET equipment. Data for trust and intention to share were obtained through a questionnaire; (the items measured are at Table 2).

3.4. Participants

The initial sample consisted of 128 participants from a Spanish town. The data for 123 participants were finally considered valid for the analysis; the other five participants were excluded either because: (1) the eye-tracking data did not reach a minimum threshold of 90 % validity based on the software measurements; or (2) the questionnaire data was incomplete. The missing data caused no problems for reliability and validity, given the relatively large sample size and the fact that the number of participants in the scenarios was balanced. Data was collected in February 2020.

A mixed sampling method was used to recruit the sample: 100 participants were recruited by a marketing research company, and another 28 through snowballing (to obtain a larger sample). The marketing agency used to recruit the sample was instructed to provide candidates

² All participants read and signed an informed consent approved by the ethical committee of the University of Valencia.

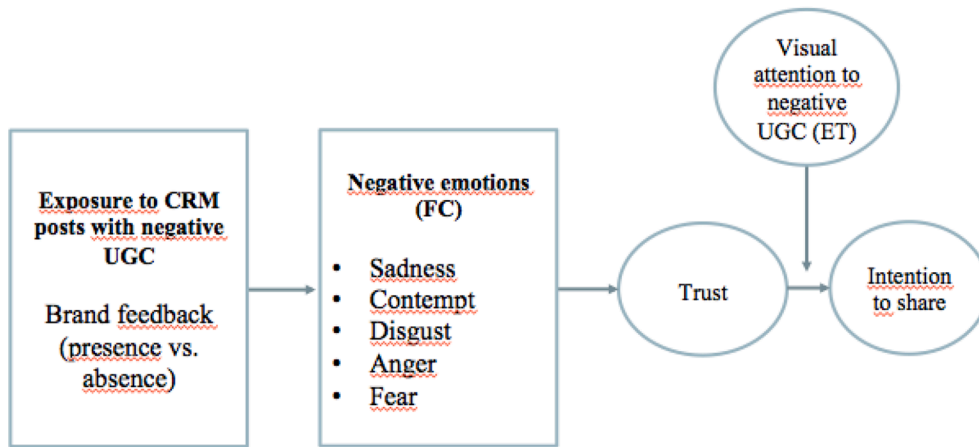


Fig. 1. Conceptual framework.



AOI Text: “For us #HamburgueseriaGrill it is crucial to offer high-quality products. To demonstrate this commitment, we use only Spanish beef, choosing those suppliers that share our high quality, animal care and food security principles. Our motto is, “Fresh, never frozen meat”: it contains no colourinas or preservatives”.

AOI UGC: “I don’t believe that you manage to run all your restaurants in the country without using frozen meat #dontbuyit”

AOI Feedback: “@anaaarcia as our beef comes from various regions in the country we are able to move the fresh meat to our restaurants using refrigerated trucks. You can find more info in the following link.”

Fig. 2. Experimental stimulus.

Table 2
Measurement scales.

Construct	Authors	Items
Trust	Flavián et al. (2006)	The information offered by X is sincere and honest X is concerned with the present and future interests of its customers X has the necessary resources to successfully carry out its activities
Intention to share	Lee & Ma (2012)	I intend to share X posts in social media in the future I expect to share posts contributed by other users I plan to regularly share X posts in social media

X = Hamburger grill.

based on age, gender, SM usage and a quota-based sampling method; the agency was instructed to ensure that age and gender quotas were representative of the town where the study took place. The sample is representative of the town, which has approximately 700,000 inhabitants. The characteristics of the sample are shown in Table 3. An analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to check for variability in the results between both groups (i.e., the participants recruited by the

agency and participants recruited through the snowballing method), but no significant differences were detected for any of the study variables.

4. Results

The duration of expressed emotions was measured through facial reading and recorded as percentages. The results (see Table 4) show that of the negative emotions, disgust and sadness are expressed for the longest duration, followed by anger, contempt and fear. Average rates of anger, disgust and fear were also smaller in the feedback scenario, whereas contempt and sadness had slightly higher averages in the no-feedback scenario. The differences in negative emotions based on the presence or absence of feedback in CRM posts were non-significant; therefore, H1 is rejected.

To address H2, regressions examining the effects of negative emotions on trust were performed separately for the two scenarios (see Table 5). Fear ($\beta = -0.076, p < 0.05$) was shown to be negatively related to trust in the no-feedback scenario (H2 partially accepted). Negative emotions did not display significant effects on trust in the feedback scenario. To test H3, regressions examining the effects of negative emotions on intention to share were also carried out for the two scenarios (see Table 6); the negative emotions of disgust and fear showed

Table 3
Sample characterisation.

			Male	Female	TOTAL
Gender			60	63	123
Age			18–24	25–34	35–50
Education	Primary education	Secondary/High school education	40	26	123
	1	15	Vocational training	Undergraduate studies	Postgraduate studies
	<15,000€	15,000–29,999€	35	43	29
Income level (year)	63	36	30,000–44,999€	45,000–59,999€	60,000€ or more
Occupation		Student	4	0	123
		33	Self-employed	Employed	Unemployed
Instagram user		110	14	69	7
		Every day	13	Yes	No
Instagram frequency of use		87	14	123	3
			2–3 times a week	Once a week	Less than once a week
			6		110

Table 4
Descriptive statistics: Facial expressions (emotions).

		Global N = 123	Feedback N = 62	No feedback N = 61
Anger time (%)	Mean	0.59	0.28	0.90
	St. Dev.	3.31	1.30	4.52
	Mean	1.64	1.82	1.47
Sadness time (%)	St. Dev.	6.35	6.88	5.84
	Mean	0.51	0.09	0.95
	St. Dev.	3.78	0.39	5.34
Disgust time (%)	Mean	0.91	0.60	1.24
	St. Dev.	3.59	2.68	4.32
	Mean	0.41	0.62	0.20
Fear time (%)	St. Dev.	3.16	4.41	0.65
	Mean	0.41	0.62	0.20
	St. Dev.	3.16	4.41	0.65

Table 5
Regressions (emotions to trust).

	Relationships	Standardised β	t-statistic	Sig.
Feedback	Anger -> Trust	-0.102	-0.921	0.361
	Sadness -> Trust	0.016	0.809	0.422
	Disgust -> Trust	-0.485	-1.226	0.225
	Fear -> Trust	-0.023	-0.446	0.657
	Contempt -> Trust	-0.041	-1.211	0.231
No feedback	Anger -> Trust	-0.124	-0.980	0.331
	Sadness -> Trust	0.000	0.008	0.994
	Disgust -> Trust	0.141	1.332	0.188
	Fear -> Trust	-0.076	-2.586	0.012*
	Contempt -> Trust	0.109	0.509	0.613

* p < 0.05.

significant effects on intention to share at a 0.10 level in the feedback scenario (H3 partially accepted).

H4 was tested using regression analysis (see Table 7). Consumer trust was positively related to intention to share ($\beta = 0.446, p < 0.001$), supporting H4. To test H5, a Mann–Whitney U test was used to compare the distributions of the presence and absence of brand feedback (Table 8). We found significant differences in the fixation duration for text (5.430, $p < 0.001$) and skeptical UGC (2.820, $p < 0.01$), which were significantly smaller in the brand feedback scenarios ($M = 44.69$ vs $M = 79.60$; $M = 53.01$ vs $M = 71.14$); the picture and the brand name were unaffected by brand feedback; thus, H5 is supported.

Table 6
Regressions (emotions to intention to share).

	Relationships	Standardised β	t-statistic	Sig.
Feedback	Anger -> Intention to Share	0.196	1.057	0.295
	Sadness -> Intention to Share	0.036	1.079	0.285
	Disgust -> Intention to Share	-1.293	-1.958	0.055
	Fear -> Intention to Share	-0.171	-1.980	0.053
	Contempt -> Intention to Share	-0.020	-0.354	0.724
No feedback	Anger -> Intention to Share	-0.020	-0.089	0.930
	Sadness -> Intention to Share	-0.043	-1.158	0.252
	Disgust -> Intention to Share	0.069	0.360	0.720
	Fear -> Intention to Share	-0.059	-1.112	0.271
	Contempt -> Intention to Share	0.170	0.439	0.662

* p < 0.1.

Table 7
Regressions (trust to intention to share).

Relationships	Standardised β	t-statistic	Sig.
Trust -> Intention to Share	0.446	4.806	0.000***

*** p < 0.001.

Table 8
Mann-Whitney U test by AOIs (brand feedback vs no feedback).

AOI	Mann-Whitney U	Test statistic	Standard error	Standardised test statistic	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)
AOI _{PICTURE}	1914.500	1914.500	197.688	0.119	0.905
AOI _{BRAND}	2014.500	2014.500	197.684	0.625	0.532
AOI _{TEXT}	2964.500	2964.500	197.688	5.43	0.000***
AOI _{UGC}	2448.500	2448.500	197.688	2.82	0.005**

*** p < 0.001.

** p < 0.01.

Finally, we tested H6; that is, the extent to which differing levels of attention to the negative UGC comment affect the relationship between consumer trust and intention to share the post (see Table 9). The results

Table 9
Moderation hypotheses testing (attention paid to negative UGC).

Research Questions	Path Coefficient		Confidence interval (95 %)		Path coefficients difference (HIGH - LOW)	p-value difference (Henseler's MGA)	Status
	HIGH	LOW	HIGH	LOW			
Trust -> Intention to Share (time spent)	0.281	0.593	(-0.432 0.501)	(0.396 0.708)	-0.312	0.090	Accepted

of the moderation showed, at a 0.10 significance level, that the higher the visual attention paid to the negative UGC comment, the weaker is the relationship between trust and intention to share (diff HIGH - LOW = -0.312, $p < 0.10$; H6 supported).

5. Discussion and conclusions

5.1. General discussion

The first goal of this study was to identify whether the negative emotions evoked by brand-generated CRM posts accompanied by negative UGC, varied based on the presence or absence of brand feedback. The results showed that negative emotions were stronger than positive, and that all emotions, except contempt and sadness, were stronger in the no-brand feedback scenarios. This result is aligned with other works that studied the negative emotions evoked by negative UGC (Cheng & Loi, 2014; Wu & Chang, 2020), and provides further understanding by comparing the results of two types of CRM initiatives—with and without brand feedback—to negative UGC.

In the brand feedback scenario, consumers may feel sadness and contempt in response to negative UGC due to their perceptions that the company is self-interested and is greenwashing. Fast food restaurants have been stigmatized and have controversial reputations; if consumers feel contempt for the fast-food industry, brand feedback might reduce anger appraisals but will not reduce long-term feelings of contempt. Consumers think they can change companies' actions if they are merely angry, whereas they will abandon this belief if they hold them in contempt (Fischer, 2011). Moreover, if consumers perceive CRM information in posts to be mere greenwashing, brand feedback will not be enough to mitigate appraisals linked to sadness, as consumers will feel that nothing can be done to resolve the unpleasant situation (the restaurant's attempt at greenwashing). On the contrary, customers who experience anger and disgust perceive the offender (the restaurant) as simply responsible for the bad outcome, without necessarily being regarded as morally base. Anger and disgust did not carry over into future judgments when the emotion-eliciting situation was resolved (e. g., while angry consumers might blame the fast-food restaurant for not using natural ingredients, brand feedback can reduce anger appraisals). In the no-feedback scenario, the negative emotion evoked, that is, fear, seems to be related to the uncertainty the consumer feels about whether the beef is fresh or frozen.

Our second goal was to explore the effects of negative emotions on brand trust and sharing intentions, and to assess whether brand feedback diminishes these effects. Fear is the only emotion that explains the lower brand trust evoked in the no-brand feedback scenario. Fear appraisals are strongly associated with perceptions of risk (Bauer, 1960), and a negative relationship exists between perceived risk and trust (Aldás et al., 2009). Therefore, fearful consumers who have read CRM posts featuring negative comments associate the decision to visit a fast-food restaurant with two outcomes: a lack of knowledge about what might happen (uncertainty about the quality of the meat) and possible negative consequences (buying a frozen burger). The higher the consumer's perceptions of risk, the less they will trust the restaurant. Fear has also been related to the perception that companies are being opportunistic, which has a very negative impact on perceived benevolence and, therefore, on trust (Martin & Camarero, 2016). In the brand feedback scenario, the negative emotions did not have a negative effect

on trust. This is due to the counteracting effect of brand feedback, which has been shown to diminish negative emotional reactions if it contains reliable information and shows willingness on the company's part to enter into dialogue with its customers (Cheng & Loi, 2014).

In contrast, brand feedback may accomplish the opposite in situations where consumers feel disgust and fear, explain the decrease in intention to share a post. Brand feedback raises consumers' suspicions that brands only offer explanations (true or false) to attain their goals (increase sales); therefore, they may perceive that sharing this information with others may misinform them (Sijoria et al., 2018). This result complements Bhandari and Rodgers' (2018) findings that brand feedback has a negative effect on purchase intentions; if consumers are suspicious, or skeptical, about brand feedback, fear and disgust will trigger them to avoid the event (i.e., not share the posts). Consumer trust was shown to have a positive relationship with intention to share, consistent with previous studies that linked trust with eWOM (Dutta et al., 2021).

Our third goal was to analyze how visual attention paid to the negative UGC affects or moderates the relationship between trust and intention to share. First, the results showed that less attention is paid to negative UGC in the brand feedback scenario. Brand feedback is a key informational element, which attracts attention at the expense of other parts of the post, including negative UGC. This finding is consistent with the AC-TEA model (Pieters & Wedel, 2004) that proposes that attention to text increases with text surface size. Finally, we found that the level of attention paid to negative UGC affected the relationship between trust and intention to share; that is, the relationship is weaker when the visual attention paid to negative UGC increases. Attention reflects what previous studies have established about the effects of negative reviews on trust and brand advocacy, as negative comments have more effect than positive; that is, they have a stronger impact on the advocacy intentions that include sharing a brand's positive CRM information (Dunn & Harness, 2019).

5.2. Theoretical and managerial implications

Unlike previous studies into emotions that took a valence-based approach, the present research proposes that emotions are not merely a product of cognition; rather, we explore the cognitive aspects of emotion and the effects of emotions on judgments and behavioral intentions which contributes to the recent literature on emotional reactions and online customer experience (Sykora et al., 2022). In line with ATF theorists (Lerner & Keltner, 2010), we believe that the experience of emotions is closely linked to the consumer's appraisal of their environment along several cognitive dimensions. We examined the effects of brand feedback on negative UGC on consumer's emotions, brand trust and sharing intentions. The lower levels of anger, disgust and fear in the brand feedback scenario can be explained by the goal-attainment hypothesis; that is, that appraisals can be mitigated when emotion-eliciting problems are solved (Frijda, 1988). Anger, disgust and fear are negative, high-arousal emotions; nevertheless, due to their different perceived risk assessments, we expected and observed that they would influence perceptions of trust in distinct ways. One explanation is that the appraisals of control and certainty associated with these emotions have a stronger link to fear than to other negative emotions (Smith & Ellsworth, 1985).

It is also interesting that the effects of emotions are not limited to

judgment outcomes (trust), as the appraisals linked to fear and disgust also influence sharing intentions (Lerner & Keltner, 2010). Finally, this work has demonstrated that brand feedback significantly decreases the visual attention paid to other textual cues, further supporting the AC-TEA model (Peters & Wedel, 2004) in the context of visuals-based social media. The study also provides methodological insights by using a multimethod approach combining objective (face reading and eye tracking) and self-reported measures (questionnaires). The results provide a further understanding of the importance of negative UGC responses posted on CRM posts in three respects: (1) negative UGC evokes negative emotions which, in turn, reduce trust and sharing intentions; (2) brand feedback mitigates the effect of negative emotions on brand trust; and (3) greater visual attention paid to negative UGC weakens the positive relationship between trust and sharing intentions.

The study results can be leveraged by restaurant managers and restaurant brands' SM community managers. For example, CRM posts that included negative UGC were prone to generating negative emotional reactions, even if the remainder of the posts included positive facts about the CRM initiative. Therefore, the UGC posted in brand-owned SM channels must be carefully monitored. Given that most negative emotions are positively affected by brand feedback, companies should, where appropriate, provide feedback to address negative comments. As contempt and sadness are not significantly affected by brand feedback, brands should be fulsome in their explanations; for example, if the fast-food company has received awards for the quality of its meat, this should be emphasized. As boundary-spanning agents, community managers should clearly address all relevant points in the UGC. It is important to provide adequate content, that consumers perceive as honest, to generate a positive image about the company, and quickly and efficiently respond to negative reviews.

Consumers may feel contempt for the fast-food industry, which they transfer to individual companies. We recommend that fast food companies differentiate themselves from the generality of the processed food industry by providing evidence of their commitment to providing fresh, healthy products. Furthermore, a firm's credibility can be reinforced by reporting full details of its CRM actions to build confidence in its commitment to the principles and values that define a brand's personality; as the focus is fast food restaurants, thorough details should be provided about ingredients and manufacturing processes to minimize the impact of fear on attitudes and behavioral intentions towards a brand. Negative emotions affected trust and intention to share SM content, both in the feedback and no-brand feedback scenarios. Companies should consider taking specific measures to address negative emotions; for example, by inviting relevant consumer groups to visit their facilities to witness the full production process.

The main negative effect can be observed when visual attention paid to the negative UGC is high, and sharing intentions are reduced even among customers that, a priori, trust the brand. From a communications viewpoint, it is also important to include cues such as colors, hashtags, highlighted content, disclosure statements, brand names and tags that focus attention on the elements that are directly controlled by the company. Fear is the only emotion that significantly influences trust. Managers should include content in the CRM posts (e.g., natural ingredients, information about the manufacturing process) to minimize feelings of fear.

This study has limitations that affect generalization of the results. We assessed behavioral intentions in terms of the sharing of CRM posts. Future studies could analyze actual purchase behaviors in appropriate experimental settings. While we examined discrete negative emotions and their effects on customer attitudes and behaviors, it is possible that customers possess pre-existing negative attitudes towards the industry that are not influenced by the negative UGC or the cues in the CRM posts. Our study is static; that is, it does not provide any insight into the dynamics of the effects of negative comments over time, or their potential mitigation through brand feedback. Participants might change their behavior during an experiment when they are observed, as

suggested by the Hawthorne effect. However, a recent study by Kee, Knuth, Lahey and Palma (2021) showed eye tracking equipment used in experiments did not influence individuals' behaviors.

Future research could further examine the impact of negative UGC on customer attitudes and could consider different types of review characteristics. Quantitative factors, such as number of reviews of the post, or ratings—measured by the number of likes given to the comment—could usefully be analyzed, as could qualitative attributes, such as review style (e.g., normal, comparative, suggestive). We focused on a utilitarian product (hamburger), where CRM has an important role as a corporate reputation builder. Other sectors which attract CRM initiatives, such as sports events, could replicate the research model to compare results with hedonic products and, thus, obtain valuable insights. Another research focus which could be of interest is an analysis of the effects of sociodemographic variables on consumer trust towards brands' CRM posts which are accompanied by negative comments, in particular how older customers relate to ethical and green consumption. An examination of the moderating role of attitude towards product type on the relationship between the visual attention paid to the negative UGC and brand trust could also provide new insights.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Enrique Bigné: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Supervision, Resources, Methodology, Funding acquisition, Conceptualization. **Carla Ruiz-Mafé:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Funding acquisition, Conceptualization. **Alberto Badenes-Rocha:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Software, Methodology, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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