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- The Effects of Emoticons on Perceived Competence and Intention to Act -

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Abstract

The current study explores the effects of emoticon use in organizational communication in a socio-psychological context. More specifically, we examined the effect emoticons have on a) targets' perception of an agent's competence, and b) a target's intention to act based on an agent's request. We investigated the potential moderating effects of organizational roles, gender, and age. Through a pilot study and two experiments, we were able to detect a significant, negative relationship between the use of emoticons (presented as —smiley”) and how targets perceived the competence of an agent. The participants perceived the sender of an e-mail as less competent when emoticons were included in the e-mail relative to when they were not included. The relationship between use of emoticons and intention to act was not significant, nor did we find any significant results when the moderating variables were included. We did, however, detect some surprising observations concerning gender. The results revealed that men discriminate against women, and women discriminate against men, when it comes to perceptions of competence and intention to act, regardless of emoticon use. These observed tendencies contradict previous beliefs that female as well as male evaluators generally tend to discriminate against women.

1. Introduction

The ability to promote an opinion or an idea that is accepted or regarded as valuable by others is important when people communicate. This implies that communication is closely linked with an unintentional or intentional desire to exert influence on and to persuade the people we communicate with. How we communicate will affect how others perceive us, and considering that people can alter the impressions they convey to others (Goffman 1955), this raises questions as to how and with what effect they may do so. The organization is an arena where people constantly communicate and often rely on techniques and tools to influence others, while at the same time attempting to create a favourable impression of themselves through communication.

Within organizations, contemporary workers increasingly use computer-mediated communication, such as e-mail (Byron and Baldrige 2007, 137), and employees in various organizations are likely to prefer e-mail in their communication with coworkers, clients and customers (Byron and Baldrige 2005). Computer-mediated communication refers to synchronous or asynchronous electronic mail and computer conferencing, by which senders encode in text messages that are relayed from the senders' electronic devices to the receivers (Walther 1992, 52). Because organizations rely heavily on computer-mediated communication in their internal (as well as external) communication, questions concerning the effects of using this channel have gained increased attention in research. Focusing on e-mail, as it is the most commonly used form of computer-mediated communication (Walther and D'Addario 2001), researchers and scholars have argued that the increased use is influenced by the advantages e-mail has over other communication channels. More specifically, e-mails can easily be sent to a large number of people and can facilitate collaboration with people separate in time and space (Byron and Baldrige 2007). In line with this, Lee (1994, 151) states that communication through e-mail does not lose richness relative to face-to-face communication. There are however many different opinions concerning the effects and use of e-mail, and its advantages and disadvantages. For instance, some have argued that e-mail may be ill suited for communicating ambiguous or emotional information due to reduced availability of cues (Daft and Lengel 1986).

On the other hand, Walther and Tidwell (1995) have proposed that users of computer-mediated communication actually rely on a variety of cues in their e-mail messages to form perceptions about the sender. These cues are referred to as emoticons, which are defined as “—visual cues formed from ordinary typographical symbols that, when read sideways, represent feelings or emotions” (Rezabek and Cochenour 1998).

Empirical studies of the effects of emoticons suggest that they are similarly interpreted and fulfill similar functions to nonverbal behavior in face-to-face situations (Ganster, Eimler and Krämer 2012). Supporting this, Lo (2008) conclude that emoticons actually do perform nonverbal communication functions, and Byron and Baldrige (2005) found, in their experiment, that nonverbal cues in e-mail carry emotional meaning for e-mail recipients. These emotional symbols have today become an integrated part of computer-mediated communication and as early as 1995, Marvin (1995) stated that these symbols were the paralanguage of the internet. Although very few studies actually examine emoticon use, almost all commentators assume that emoticons have meaningful communicative impact (Walther and D`Addario 2001). However, the relative newness of e-mail means that no universal standard of emotional communication by e-mail exists (Byron 2008), and that there are still many factors related to the use of emoticons in communication that has not yet been explored. Despite the availability of some nonverbal cues, research indicates that their purposeful use remains unexplored (Byron 2008). In line with this, Walther and D`Addario (2001) claim that although individuals are influenced by the use of nonverbal cues in other contexts, it is unknown what impact emoticons have in e-mail. In face-to-face communication it is often easy to interpret and give feedback; we interpret the verbal messages that we receive, but also the non-verbal cues such as posture and facial expressions to make sense of the given message. However, in other communication channels, such as e-mail, these cues are absent and we therefore have to rely on other factors or non-verbal surrogates, such as emoticons, to convey meaning or to interpret a message. Accordingly, if it is possible to manage the impressions we give to others, what could be the effects of using non-verbal cues such as emoticons? Will the inclusion of such symbols have a positive or negative effect on how people evaluate the sender? As employees rely on

techniques and tools to convey their intended meaning of a message, and to create favorable impressions of themselves, it seems important to be aware of the potential effects that inclusion of emoticons may have, and how this influence how one is perceived by others.

An important factor we consider when forming an opinion of others, and especially in an organization, is competence. Perceptions of competence appear to be particularly relevant and important in the realm of e-mail communication. Research has clearly demonstrated that people form impressions and interpret behavior about others based on two basic dimensions, namely competence and warmth (Cuddy, Glick and Beninger 2011). In our thesis, competence is the only dimension assessed because the relative accessibility of the two dimensions is moderated by the context, and Cuddy, Glick and Beninger (2011) argue that judgments concerning competence of strangers in social situations are primary within organizational contexts. This means that competence is the first dimension people use to evaluate others in organizations. When people form impressions of others, competence is argued to be a crucial, basic dimension that is utilized for characterization (Fiske, Cuddy and Glick 2006). Consequently, our thesis explores the effects emoticon use may have on receivers' perception of the competence of senders, which may create new insight into communication and have several practical implications. We believe that by gaining insight into the effects of emoticon use in the workplace, people may be more aware of the use of such symbols, but also be able to use this information to gain more control over the impressions that other people in the organization form when communicating. However, it is not only others perceptions of one's competence that is important in this context. Employees in various organizations exert a lot of effort in getting people to do what they want, but little is known about how the use of emoticons in organizational communication may influence people's intention to act or do as requested. Walther (1995) states that the use of emoticons makes individuals less agreeable, but the current thesis aims to extend this line of research by proposing that the inclusion of emoticons in an e-mail will not only make us less agreeable, it may have an effect on our intention to act based on a request.

Being able to influence and persuade others is also related to power, as people that possess power will often be able to modify the behaviour, thoughts and feelings of other people. An important notion here is that groups give influence to members who possess superior competence and expertise (Anderson and Kilduff 2009, 491). Accordingly, it is interesting to investigate how emoticon use will be perceived when used by organizational members that differ in organizational power (operationalized through organizational position; leader or subordinate), or if the use of such symbols may decrease or increase perceptions of competence regardless of position within a hierarchy. Byron (2008) calls out for research on the use of emoticons that considers organizational level effects. Thus the present study includes organizational roles (leader or subordinate) as a potential moderator, and limits the context to an organizational setting.

Another potential moderator is gender, as researchers have found that men and women exhibit different stylistic features and communication patterns in computer-mediated communication (Lee 2007, 516), and that women use emoticons approximately twice as frequently as men (Walther and D'Addario 2001). Accordingly, Zhang, Erickson and Webb (2010) found that there are differences in how emoticons are used and that women have been found to use a more emotional style in online settings than males. Further, they found support for their hypothesis that females are more likely to have a stronger emotional response towards emotional text compared to males. Thus, it is possible that women and men perceive the use of emoticons in different ways, and to gain knowledge about the possible influence of emoticons one needs to take these differences into account. Accordingly, we believe that it is interesting to explore whether men and women react differently to the use of emoticons in e-mail and how people evaluate the message they receive when the sender is male as compared to female.

The present study aims at exploring the possible effects the use of emoticons may have in communication between a sender and a receiver of an e-mail, which will be referred to as respectively the agent (sender) and the target (receiver) in the following. Moreover, Derks, Bos, and Van Grumbkow (2008) assert that future research should take a closer look at the receiver's perspective in communication

interaction. With this in mind, we will attempt to explore the possible effects emoticon use may have on the target's perception of the agent.

Thus, the question guiding our thesis is: ~~What~~ What effect does emoticons have on a) targets' perceptions of agents' competencies and b) targets' intention to act based on senders' request. In order to investigate our research question, a conceptual model was constructed (see Figure 1). This model proposes that the use of emoticons will have an effect on how a target perceives an agent's competence, and on the target's intention to act based on the agent's request. The model also includes potential moderating factors.

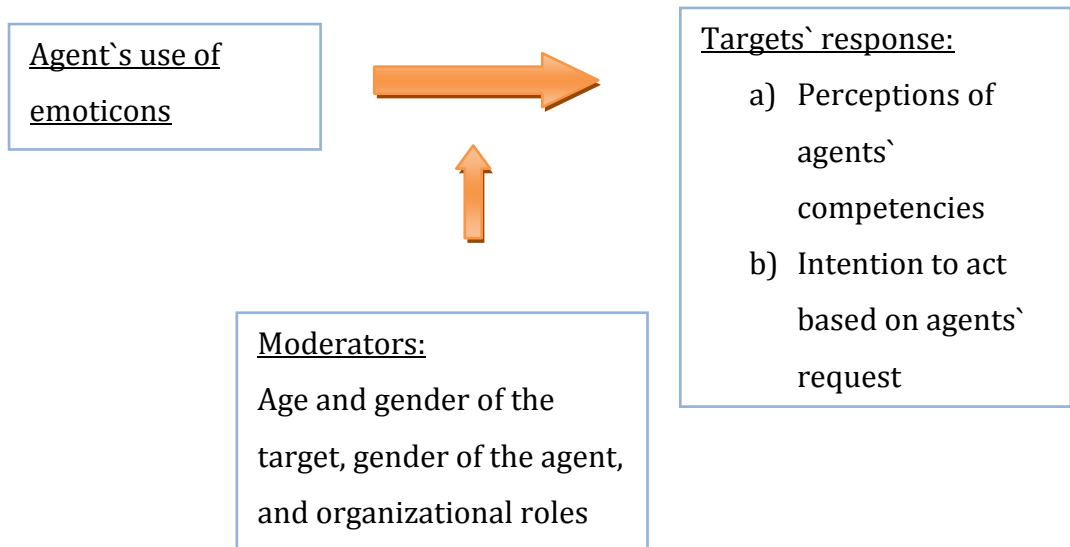


Figure 1: Conceptual model

2. Theoretical Background

2.1 Introduction

Throughout this chapter, theory and research discussing the possible influential effect of emoticons will be presented. By doing so, we aim at creating a solid foundation for our propositions. First, we will take a closer look at computer-mediated communication in more general terms and its relation to emoticons. Secondly, the possible effect of emoticons on perceptions of competence will be

explored, before we assess how intention to act also may be influenced by the use of emoticons in computer-mediated communication. Finally, research findings and theory regarding gender, age and organizational roles in relation to emoticon use will be discussed. The aim of this chapter is to provide a solid foundation for hypotheses that in turn may shed new light on the possible influential effects of the use of emoticons in an organizational setting.

2.2 Computer-mediated communication and emoticon use

The research on emotional messages in computer-mediated communication is relatively new, but there are studies that have investigated the function of emoticons (Lo 2008), their influence on the target (Byron 2008), and the differences between face-to-face communication and computer-mediated communication (e.g. Walther, Anderson and Park 1994; Walther 1992; Walther 1995; Walther 2012; Utz 2003; Tidwell and Walther 2002; Lee 1994; Walther and Burgoon 1992; Peter and Valkenburg 2006; Walther and D'Addario 2001). However, to this date, several aspects that could make us think twice before using emoticons in a professional setting remain unexplored. Early researchers exploring computer-mediated communication agreed that this communication form did not include social functions communicated by nonverbal cues (Walther and D'Addario 2001). More precisely, previous scholars have held that computer-mediated communication lacks nonverbal communication cues (Lo 2008, 595). More recent findings suggest the opposite, however, and posit that the difference between computer-mediated communication and face-to-face communication are not that important (Walther, Anderson and Park 1994), and that computer-mediated communication actually does include nonverbal cues (Utz 2003).

As mentioned above, e-mail is the most commonly used form of computer-mediated communication, and it is becoming one of the most usual forms of communication overall (Walther and D'Addario 2001), something that highlights the importance of more research on the topic. Byron and Baldrige (2005) found that emotions are communicated by e-mail, intentionally or unintentionally, and that users often incorporate emoticons as visual cues to augment the meaning of textual electronic messages (Walther and D'Addario 2001). This is also supported

by other researchers, who argue that we use emoticons to convey an emotional message (Rice and Love 1987). For instance, Ganster, Eimler and Krämer (2012) argue that emoticons can be considered examples of how people have created surrogates for nonverbal cues, and that these generally influence message interpretation and person perception. However, scholars from fields as diverse as psychology, neuroscience and sociolinguistics have scrutinized emoticons as an unnecessary and unwelcome intrusion into a well-crafted text (Garrison et al. 2011). Regarding person perception of emoticon users, the few findings available so far have showed that the presence of emoticons in chat messages resulted in a positive evaluation of the person (Ganster, Eimler and Krämer 2012, 227).

Scholars seem to disagree about the effectiveness of emoticons. Walther and D'Addario (2001) propose that nonverbal cues have impact as great as or greater than verbal messages alone when interpreting emotions in face-to-face communication. Relating this to e-mail, it could indicate that emoticons (being nonverbal cues) may have great impact on interpretations of emotions. On the other hand, Andrews (1994) claims that emoticons are superfluous, and that they serve no purpose in a well-constructed message. Because his statement was given in 1994, we assume that more recent research claiming to see effects and meaning of emoticon use may be more accurate. In addition, new emoticons continue to develop (Wolf 2000), indicating that emoticons do serve an actual purpose. The question is then, what purpose? Byron and Baldrige (2007) argue that emoticons can decrease uncertainty regarding the agent's intent. However, it has also been proposed that the use of emoticons in digital communication may be perceived as unprofessional and that emoticons are often used in a way that disturbs or even destroys the message (Nipen 2012).

Theory and research on the influence of computer-mediated communication and emoticon use are often concerned with describing different characteristics of various communication channels and the positive and negative aspects associated with delivering different types of messages through different media (Byron and Baldrige 2005). Moreover, previous research on the effectiveness of computer-mediated communication has often focused on the advantages and disadvantages of computer-mediated communication relative to face-to-face communication.

However, there seems to be a lack of consensus regarding whether computer-mediated communication can enhance or hinder emotions in communication (e.g. Walther and D'Addario 2001). The use of emoticons to represent emotions or feelings in computer-mediated communication has gained substantial focus, and it has been suggested that these symbols or cues are often used as nonverbal surrogates that may enhance the exchange of emotional information (Derks, Bos, and Von Grumbkow 2008). Although a variety of studies have been conducted to detect the perception of emotions in computer-mediated communication, there seems to be a gap in research concerning the effects that these perceptions may have for the person using e-mail as a communication channel, but also for the use of emoticons to convey feelings or emotions, regardless of whether these are used intentionally or not. People have adapted computer-mediated communication, such as e-mail to communicate messages with an affective content, to create favorable impressions of themselves and to achieve greater intimacy with others (Byron and Baldrige 2005). Regardless of the intent, it could be that the impressions formed through this type of communication depend on the context in which the interaction takes place, and hence be suitable in some settings, but inappropriate in other settings. Accordingly, it is expected that individuals use more emoticons when communicating with friends than with strangers (Derks et al. 2008).

2.3 Perceived competence

To assess whether emoticon use in an e-mail can effect perceived competence, we must define the term "competence". According to Lai (2004) competence refers to the knowledge, skills, capabilities and attitudes that make it possible to conduct relevant functions and tasks in line with requirements and goals defined. Hence, all of these components could contribute to assess whether a person is perceived as competent or not. The question of interest for this thesis will be whether or not emoticon use can harm the perceived competence of an agent; more specifically, whether a person using such symbols in a professional matter would be perceived as less competent relative to those not using emoticons in their communication.

Competence is valuable to assess because when people form impressions of others, competence is argued to be a crucial, basic dimension that account for how people characterize others (Fiske, Cuddy and Glick (2006). Competence is further argued to reflect traits that are related to perceived ability, including intelligence, skills, creativity and efficacy (Fiske Cuddy, and Glick 2006), which are believed to be of tremendous importance for several organizational outcomes.

Most researchers and practitioners agree that competence is an important term in the organizational context, as the organization and its employees depend on competence to be able to perform adequately. Moreover, it is important that employees trust that their peers and subordinates have the competence necessary to perform their jobs. The behavior and performance of employees will be influenced by their beliefs about the competence of managers, and assumptions about competence can undermine effective decision making (Cuddy, Glick and Beninger 2011). Hence, the assessment of perceived competence in organizations is important in terms of organizational performance (O` Driscoll, Humphries and Larsen 1991. Despite the bundle of research suggesting that perceptions of competence may have an effect on organizational outcomes, researchers have not yet, to the best of our knowledge, investigated how the use of non-verbal cues in e-mail may affect such perceptions. More precisely, as emoticons are used more and more frequently in this type of communication, investigating the usage of these non-verbal cues may create broader insight into organizational communication.

Nipen (2012) proposes that people should be aware that use of emoticons may seem unprofessional. Research by Rice and Love (1987) supports this notion, claiming that emotional expression in computer-mediated communication is often negative and inflammatory. This could be related to the argument that using emoticons in conversations between professionals is unprofessional. Any deviation from this assumption could be regarded as “breaking” the norm of professional conduct, and therefore creates less positive perceptions of the other. In line with this, formal expressions have been argued to be observed more frequent in computer-mediated communication than in face-to-face conversations (Kiesler et al. 1985). Thus, emoticons may be tampering with our expectations of

formality and create biases concerning the professionalism and competence of the conversation partner.

Professor Scott Fahlman, who originally developed the smiley face (a type of emoticon) over thirty years ago, has proposed that the use of smileys in e-mail may have destroyed our written language more than it has enhanced it (Nipen 2012). Accordingly, authors of articles on “~~net~~etiquette”—etiquette related to internet use—advise organizational members to limit the use of emoticons in work-related e-mails, because their use may be perceived as unprofessional (Calem 1995). Consequently, it would seem that the use of emoticons may contribute to the perception of the agent being unprofessional, and as a possible result be perceived as less competent in their job. Accordingly, we assume that including emoticons in professional e-mails could induce targets to perceive the agent as less competent than if emoticons were not included.

Hypothesis 1: The use of emoticons in professional e-mails will have a negative effect on targets' perception of agents' competence.

2.4 Intention to act

Emoticons are mostly used for the expression of emotions, for strengthening the verbal part of a message and for expressing humor, and people use more emoticons in communicating with friends than when communicating with strangers (Derks, Bos, and Von Grumbkow 2008). This supports the proposal that it could be unwise to use emoticons in a professional setting, as this is reserved for friends. Because it is believed that we would judge the competence of an agent as lower when emoticons are present, it is also likely that people would be less compelled to act based on an agents' request when they view the agent as less competent. Gaining a better understanding of how emoticons form the targets' perception of the agent and their intention to act based on this, may be important given the increasing growth in e-mail communication and the increasing recognition of the importance of emotions in professional relationships (Byron 2008). Currently there is a lack of research concerning the effects emoticons may have on peoples' intention to act based on a request communicated by e-mail.

However, people tend to feel a sense of irritation when they see emoticons, and this is a major concern for the sender if he/she has a low level of intimacy with the receiver (Xu, Xu and Yi 2007). Additionally, Byron and Baldrige (2005) posit that nonverbal cues associated with emotions in computer-mediated communication influence the receivers' behavioral responses, making them less likely to respond to an e-mail where non-verbal cues deviates from the formal norm. This may indicate that intentions to act when emoticons are included in a professional e-mail may be lower than if emoticons are not included. Walther (1995) proposes that electronic media make people less agreeable than in face-to-face communication, indicating that the medium alone will cause people to be less inclined to act and agree upon a request. This provides information about the baseline of agreeableness in e-mail communication, meaning that comparing it with face-to-face communication could yield a significant difference in intention to act. As this seems logical, a further question is then what effect emoticons will have on intentions to act? More specifically, will emoticons have an effect on a target's intention to act based on an agent's request?

Hypothesis 2: The use of emoticons in professional e-mails will have a negative effect on targets' intention to act based on agents' request.

2.5 The moderating role of gender

2.5.1 Gender and the use of computer-mediated communication

Wolf (2000) did an experiment that seemed to reinforce the stereotype of the emotional woman and the inexpressive man. Wolf (2000) found that rather than females adopting the offline male standard of less emotional expression, the opposite occurred: Both males and females displayed an increase in emoticon use. Consequently, it could be that women and men do not necessarily react differently to emoticon use.

Although early studies pointed to gender as an influencing factor in the experience of emotion, more recent studies have challenged the central role of gender in understanding the distribution of emotional experience and expression (Lively 2008, 926). Several studies have investigated whether men and women

communicate differently using computer-mediated communication, and have found that such differences can be detected (e.g. Savicki and Kelley 2000). However, research has also found that although there seem to be overall differences between men and women, gender composition of the groups within which the communication took place was a variable with the strongest relationship to communication style (Savicki and Kelley 2000). This could highlight the importance of investigating whether there are any differences in how men and women perceive their communication partner. As mentioned above, it is argued that women are the “emotional sex” and that men are less emotionally expressive (Shields 2002; Zammuner 2002), and research has confirmed a tendency for women to report stronger and longer emotions and to express these more clearly (Thelwall, Wilkinson and Uppal 2009, 192). Although it is claimed that computer-mediated communication neutralizes distinctions of gender, Herring (1994) has argued that women and men value different kinds of online interactions as appropriate and desirable. Ragins and Winkel (2011) proposed in their study on gender, emotion and power in work relationships that gender-role stereotypes influence both the perception and the evaluation of emotional displays in work relationships. They suggest that “gender influence expectations, perceptions and reactions to emotional displays in ways that prevent women from developing and leveraging power in their work relationships” (Ragins and Winkel 2011, 377). Even negative emotions, such as anger have been argued to be a source of influence for men, but lead to negative evaluations of women. Accordingly, it could be argued that the evaluation of a message can be influenced by whether the agent is male or female. That there may exist such differences highlights the importance of considering how people evaluate a message when the agent’s gender is known, and whether this can influence communication in the workplace.

2.5.2 The influence of gender differences

It has been argued that electronic communication creates an environment in which individual differences in status, social class and group membership are less visible, and thus, according to some, insignificant (Postmes, Lea and Spears 2002, 3). According to this “less-filtered-out” model, which dominated early research

on computer-mediated communication, electronic communication has the potential of liberating individuals from normative concerns and social constraints (Lee 2007, 515). Some researchers argue that high-status people do not dominate the discussion in electronic groups as much as they do in face-to-face groups due to the anonymity of computer-mediated communication (Postmes, Spears and Lea 1998, 693). However, more recent studies have documented the persistence of social stereotypes in computer-mediated communication, and how the lack of individuating information (i.e. depersonalization) can amplify social stereotyping and create group-oriented behaviors rather than decrease them (Lee 2007, 516). It is also argued that computer-mediated communication messages more frequently contain attempts to persuade others, suggesting a dominance-seeking pattern (Walther and Burgoon 1992, 61).

People assume that high- versus low-status groups achieve their positions because they are respectively more versus less competent (Fiske, Cuddy and Glick 2006, 81). Hence, the relative status of the sender may affect how receivers perceive emotions in e-mails (Byron 2008, 316). Further, because men tend to hold higher positions than women within most organizations (Eagly 1983), there could be external status differences between men and women, which become internalized as people develop greater expectations for men than for women. Although more women now posit management positions than before, recent studies suggest that gender still functions as a status characteristic (Kray, Galinsky and Thompson 2002). Dalton and Kesner (1993, 6) proposed that women remain subject to a series of unfavorable biases in important organizational outcomes. Women generally have lower status than men and are considered to be less competent than men (Carli 1990, 941). In addition, stereotypical feminine traits tend to be evaluated less favorably than stereotypical masculine traits (Broverman et al. 1972). Accordingly, status cues can lead people to have expectations about each other's behavior, so that people who have characteristics that are usually associated with higher status roles in our society (e.g. maleness), are assumed to be more competent (Wood and Karten 1986, 341). Additionally, Foschi, Lai and Sigerson (1994) suggest that different standards of competence are applied for each gender. Women have to perform a task at a higher level than men to be evaluated as similarly competent. Hence, men are able to be judged as competent

more frequently than women. It is assumed that people more often value the contribution of a man than of a woman, and are more likely to defer to the opinions of men than to those of women (Lee 2007, 519). Accordingly, the gender of the agent could affect how the target of an e-mail perceives the agent's competence. Research also suggests that the gender of the agent could influence whether the target will be more prone to act upon the request received, which is evident from Lassonde and O'Brien's (2013, 389) proposition: "It is quite clear that exposure to gender stereotypes can influence thoughts and behavior".

Expectations and stereotypes are an essential part of everyday communication. However, when expectations are inaccurate it can cause information to be interpreted in a flawed manner, and hence perpetuating the inaccuracy (Epley and Kruger 2005). Hence, if group members form expectations about sex differences in competence, based on their general experience with women and men, they may interact with each other in a way that is consistent with their initial belief. Consequently they act in a manner that confirms the original expectation: That men are more competent than women (Wood and Karten 1986, 346).

Based on the research above, it is notable that there may exist gender differences in the use and evaluation of e-mail communication and emoticons, thus it may be possible that these differences also occur in perceptions of competence and intention to act. Accordingly we hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 3a: The relationship between use of emoticons and (a) perceptions of agents' competence and (b) intention to act will be moderated by the targets' gender

Hypothesis 3b: The relationship between use of emoticons and (a) perceptions of agents' competence and (b) intention to act will be moderated by the agents' gender

2.6 The moderating role of the age of the targets

Another demographic factor worth considering is the age of the target. Because computer-mediated communication is a relatively new phenomenon, it may be more prevalent among adolescents than adults. In line with this, research shows that adolescents are the main users of the internet (Madden and Rainie 2003), and that they have adopted internet communication as a natural part of their social lives (Gross, Juvonen and Gable 2002). Moreover, in their study from 2006, Peter and Valkenburg found that in pre-adolescence and early adolescence, the quality of real-life relationships and face-to-face communication is lower than in late adolescents. Compared to adults, younger people may depend more on internet communication to engage in quality communication (Peter and Valkenburg 2006). Because adolescents may experience computer-mediated communication as an integrated part of their everyday life as compared to adults, emoticons may be perceived as a natural part of this type of communication, thereby making adolescents more prone to ignore the presence of emoticons in an e-mail, as compared to adults. In support of this, Byron (2008) argues that older employees tend to use and perceive e-mail differentially from younger employees and that this difference is manifested through a negative effect of age on emotional expression in e-mail. Thus older employees may be more likely to react negatively to the display of emoticons in e-mail. Xu, Xu and Yi (2007) agree with other researchers when reporting that university students (mostly young people) use more emoticons than any other group of the population. Based on previous research findings, the current thesis aims at exploring possible interaction effects between the use of emoticons, perceptions of competence, intention to act, and age.

Hypothesis 4: The relationship between use of emoticons and (a) perceptions of agents` competence and (b) intention to act will be moderated by the age of targets.

2.7 Organizational roles as a moderator

Byron (2008) encourages future research on the effects of emoticons to explore effects of organizational levels. Consequently, we acknowledge the possible,

moderating effects different organizational roles may have when exploring emoticon use in organizations. Thus, it is important to consider that people tend to have certain expectations related to their interaction partner, because expectations and stereotypes are an essential part of everyday communication (Epley and Kruger 2005). However, these expectations include erroneous first impressions, or negative preconceptions, which can cause information to be interpreted in a manner consistent with stereotypes, thus creating biases when forming impressions about others (Epley and Kruger 2005). Take a leader in an organization; people may expect the leader to be competent because of the relative status of his or her position, but when people then expect the leader to be competent, they may look for evidence to support this claim, and ignore other signs that may deviate from their expectation; hence a confirmatory bias may arise due to organizational roles. When exploring the effects of emoticon use on perceptions of competence and intention to act in an organizational context, it is important to consider and explore biases related to organizational roles, as status may be important in different leader-member exchanges.

The issue of leader-member communication is not new to research. Ashkanasy (2002), for example, has conducted a series of studies to determine the extent to which leader-member relations are affected by subordinates' reading of supervisors' emotional expressions, and if this influences the quality of the leader-member exchange. Early results indicated that subordinates were more influenced by perceptions of non-verbal cues in leader-member interactions than by the content of the message being communicated verbally (Ashkanasy 2002). This could imply that non-verbal cues such as emoticons may influence subordinates to a greater extent when communicating with a leader. Considering the notion that emoticons may express the mood of the leader, and that the mood of the leader is argued to be contagious (Sy, Côté and Saavedra 2005), it may be that organizational roles moderate the proposed relationship between use of emoticons and a) perceived competence and b) intention to act. In support of this proposition, Epley and Kruger (2005, 420) found that when individuals interact over e-mail with someone whom they already have a stereotype about they are more likely to leave the conversation with those stereotypes still intact. This means that if organizational members have stereotypes related to status in

organizations, these perceptions will continue after engaging in communication. The key theme here seems to revolve around status. Wood and Karten (1986) argue that status cues lead people to have expectations about each other's behavior, so that people who have characteristics ordinarily associated with higher status roles in our society are assumed to be more competent. Because being a leader could yield higher perceptions of status within an organization relative to a subordinate, organizational roles may moderate the relationship between use of emoticons and targets' perceptions of agents' competence. Carli (1990) supports this notion, claiming that people with high status are expected to be more competent, which is reinforced by the research of Fiske, Cuddy and Glick (2008), who argue that competence results from judged status. Although gender traditionally has been, and could still be, a major source of evaluations of status, it is believed that organizational roles also could serve as an important influence when it comes to how emoticons affect perceived competence. Additionally, the target will likely be more prone to act when a request from a high-status individual is sent, because of respect and a sense of obligation to the sender. Thus, we propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 5: The relationship between use of emoticons and (a) perceptions of agents' competence and (b) intention to act will be moderated by the organizational roles of the targets and agents.

3. Methods

3.1 Introduction

We designed experiments to investigate the effect of some process or intervention, here the use of emoticons. Our study compared a group that was exposed to the use of emoticons in an e-mail (manipulation group) with a group that was exposed to an e-mail where no emoticons were used (control group). Through a randomized assignment of stimuli it is possible to eliminate other possible variables that could affect the relationship if the sample size is sufficient relative to the heterogeneity in the sample. This meant that it was necessary to have a large sample size to conduct an experiment based on randomization (Lai 2004).

A pilot study (experiment 1) was conducted during the autumn of 2012. In this experiment we assessed the targets' compliance to act, and their perceptions about the agent's competence. During the spring of 2013, a new set of experiments were carried out. One difference between the pilot study and the further experiments (experiment 2 and 3) was that the latter two did not investigate the effect of emoticons on compliance to act, but rather explored the targets' intention to act based on the agent's request. The difference between compliance to act and intention to act may seem minor, but the term compliance did not seem to grasp the construct we wanted to measure. Consequently it was replaced with a more suitable term (intention to act), which was easier understood. Another difference between the pilot study (experiment 1) and experiment 2 and 3 was that in the two latter we explored our research question in an organizational setting, and provided a more comprehensive account of the possible influence of gender. In the pilot study, the agent was presented as a male dentist and the target was supposed to be a female client. In experiment 2 the agent was presented as a leader. The participants receiving the e-mail were the targets of the experiment, and the case instructed them to perceive themselves as the subordinates. The agent was introduced as female in half of the scenarios and as a man in the remaining scenarios. In contrast, experiment 3 presented the agent as a subordinate, and the targets (participants) were instructed to imagine themselves as the leader. In the third experiment, the gender of the agent was also introduced as female in half of the scenarios, and male in the rest. The manipulation of gender gave us the opportunity to explore different gender compositions and investigate their possible influence. In all three experiments, the age of the targets was assessed as a possible moderating factor, but only in experiment 2 and 3 were organizational roles proposed to have an interaction effect. Throughout all the experiments, fictional cases were developed, and emoticons were represented as an icon resembling a person smiling, a so called smiley face (i.e. ☺) and an icon that resembled a sad person, a so called sad face (i.e. ☹). In the following, the statistical procedures as well as the sample, experimental procedures and measures for each of the experiments will be described.

3.2 Statistical procedure

In order to test the empirical hypotheses, several statistical analyses embedded in the software package SPSS (IBM Statistics SPSS 20) were used. To test hypothesis 1 and 2; whether the use of emoticons in professional e-mails will have a negative effect on targets' perceptions of an agent's competence and intention to act, a one-way ANOVA was conducted, enabling us to compare means. This test was conducted to explore the impact of emoticons on the dependent variables. Further, as only one independent variable in each of the hypotheses was included in the tests, the one-way rather than the two-way test was used. Hypotheses 3a, 3b, 4 and 5 were tested using a univariate linear model (two-way ANOVA), which enabled us to investigate possible interaction effects. We believe it is important to mention that our main response variables (dependent variables) are categorical as we use a 7 point likert scale to measure them, while the statistical test used assumed a continuous response variable. However, by including 7 response categories the problem may have been reduced. Additionally, there were no easily available alternatives.

3.3 Experiment 1 (Pilot study)

3.3.1 Sample

The sample consisted of 60 Norwegian business school students (N=60), of which 32 (53 %) were male and 28 (47 %) were female. Age was grouped into four categories, namely category 1 (age 16- 20), category 2 (age 21- 25), category 3 (age 26- 30), and category 4 (age 31- 35). Most of the participants were in age category 2 (67 %).

3.3.2 Procedures

A fictional case was constructed. The case presented information about a woman who had contacted a male dentist by e-mail with questions regarding a dental problem. The dentist's response to this e-mail was then presented. In this e-mail, the dentist suggested possible solutions to the problem, and advised the woman to come in for a consultation. Half of the participants were randomly assigned to the manipulation group (receiving the case that included smileys), and the remaining

participants were in the control group (receiving the case not including smileys). (Experimental material is enclosed in Appendix A).

3.3.3 Measures

Independent variable: use of emoticons

The two cases presented to the participants were identical, except that one included emoticons and one did not. By looking at the mean difference between the answers from the control group and the manipulation group, we assessed the effect of the presence of emoticons on the dependent variables.

Dependent variables: a) perceptions of competence and b) compliance to act

Responses on both likelihood of compliance to act and perceptions of the dentist's competence were rated using a 7 point likert scale, ranging from; 1 (highly unlikely or highly incompetent), to 7 (highly likely or highly competent).

Participants were asked to read the case and then answer the following questions:

- 1) How likely is it that you would see this dentist?
- 2) Based on the case you have read, how competent do you think the dentist is?

3.4 Experiment 2 and 3

The first experiment (pilot study) outlined a professional-client relationship, the dentist was a male and the client was a female. Further, the participants were about the same age, and in total there were only 60 participants. The second and third experiment addressed a different setting. Because our interest is organizational psychology and leadership, we wanted to explore the effects of emoticon use in an organizational setting. Additionally, we think the psychology related to the expectations associated with different roles in organizations is fascinating, and something that is important to consider when studying the effects of emoticon use in organizations. Consequently, experiment 2 and 3 aimed at exploring organizational roles as a possible moderator in the earlier proposed relationship between emoticon use and response in an organizational setting.

Additionally, the gender of the target was manipulated in experiment 2 and 3. In the following we will describe the sample, procedures and measures of experiment 2 and 3. Both experiments are illustrated below (Figure 2).

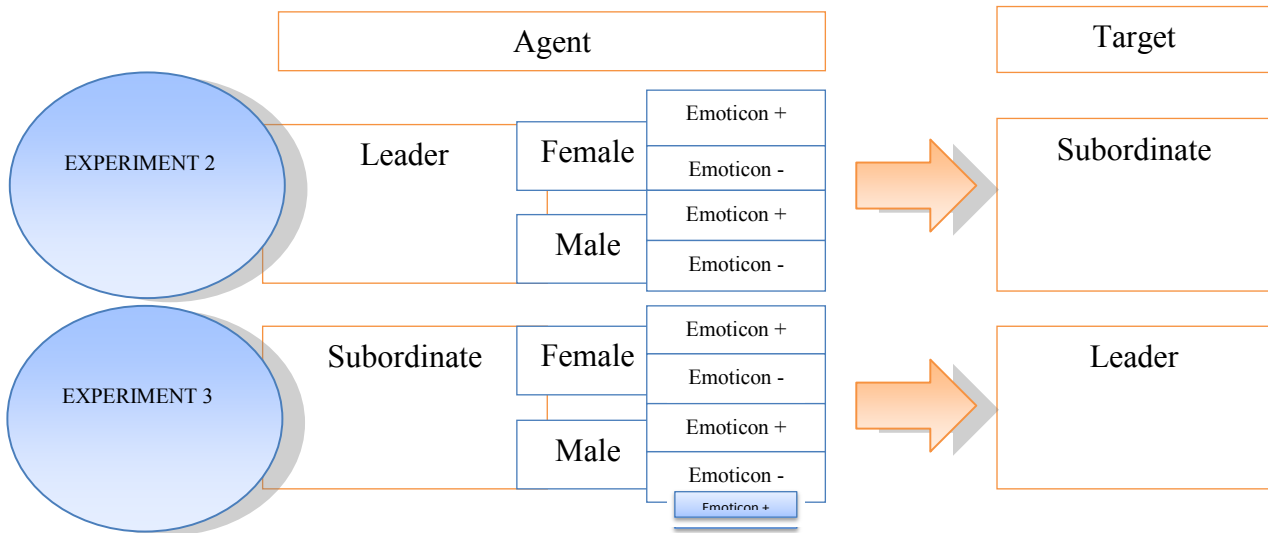


Figure 2: Overview of the experimental design (Experiment 2 and 3).

3.4.1 Sample

In the final two experiments a total of 240 participants were randomly gathered at a shopping mall, on the street, and at a subway station, in which 120 individuals were randomly assigned to experiment 2, and 120 to experiment 3. In each of the experiments half of the participants were introduced to an agent presented as female, and the rest were presented with a male agent. There were 126 women and 114 men participating in total. The age of the participants ranged from 15 to above 75 years.

3.4.2 Procedure

The participants were first asked to attend the experiment and then instructed to read a short text and answer some questions. The participants were then randomly assigned to either the control group or the manipulation group. These experiments differed from the pilot study in that they consisted of four different conditions within both the control and the manipulation groups. The case outlined

communication either from a subordinate (female in one case, male in the other) to a leader or vice versa. Moreover, the participants were told that the experiment was a part of a master thesis. After they had finished the case, some participants wanted to know more about the study, and were told that it was an experiment that explored effects of emoticons. The two experiments contained the same dependent and independent variables as the pilot study, the only difference was that experiment 2 and 3 also considered organizational roles, and had a different approach when it came to gender, as mentioned previously. The procedure used to measure the variables was similar to the one in the pilot study, but gender was assessed by giving the agent either a female name or a male name. Organizational roles were introduced through an introductory text presented in the case.

Experiment 2

The aim of experiment 2 was to explore the possible effects of emoticon use on a) targets' perceptions of an agent's competence, and b) targets' intentions to act based on agent's request, when the agent was presented as a leader and the target as a subordinate. The agent was introduced as female in half of the scenarios and as a man in the remaining. A case was developed, much like the one in the pilot study. However, some important aspects differed. In experiment 2 the case involved an employee receiving an e-mail from his or her leader. The case was constructed in a way that attempted to get the participants to view themselves as the subordinate and evaluate the competence of their leader, and their intention to act based on a request from their leader. The participants were randomly assigned to either the control group or to the manipulation group. The manipulation group received the e-mail including emoticons, and the control group received the same e-mail without emoticons. Experiment 2 consisted of two parts that were randomly assigned to the participants. In the first, the leader was presented as a female and in the second the leader was presented as a male. The aim of doing so was to assess whether the gender composition would moderate the relationship between emoticon use and a) perceptions of competence and b) intention to act based on agent's request, as we also controlled for the gender of the target. Additionally, differences in the age of the targets and its possible influence were assessed. (Experimental material is enclosed in Appendix B).

Experiment 3

Experiment 3 resembled experiment 2, but one important factor differed, namely the organizational roles of the agent and the person receiving the e-mail (target). The main aim of experiment 3 was to explore the effects emoticon use had on a) targets' perceptions of an agent's competence and b) targets' intentions to act based on agent's request, when the agent was a subordinate and the target was a leader. Consequently, we wished to explore the possible difference in the proposed relationship when the roles changed.

A new case was developed that presented a leader receiving an e-mail from a subordinate. The case was constructed in a way that attempted to get the participants to view themselves as the leader and evaluate the competence of the subordinate, and their intention to act based on a request from the subordinate. Similarly to the pilot study and experiment 2, the manipulation group received the e-mail including emoticons, and the control group received the same e-mail without emoticons. This experiment was also conducted as two different parts; one where the subordinate was female, and one where the subordinate was male. The assessment of targets age and gender was also considered in this experiment. (Experimental material is enclosed in Appendix C).

3.4.3 Measures

Independent variable: use of emoticons

To measure the effect of emoticon use, half of the cases included emoticons and the rest did not. By looking at the mean difference between the answers from the control group and the manipulation group, we assessed the effect of emoticon presence on the dependent variables.

Dependent variables: a) perceptions of competence and b) intention to act

Responses on both perceptions of competence and likelihood of intention to act were measured using the same 7 point likert scale as in the pilot study.

Participants were asked to read the case and then answer the following questions:

- 1) How likely is it that you would do what the leader/subordinate recommends?
- 2) Based on the e-mail you have read, how competent do you think the leader/employee is in general?

Moderating variables – gender, age and organizational roles

Gender was measured in two ways. First, the gender of the agent was manipulated such that half of the participants received a case where the agent was male, and the rest received a case where the agent was female. The gender and age of the targets was measured by asking the participants to tick off to either male or female, and in an age box on the answering sheet. Organizational roles were measured by manipulating the role of the agent and the target. Cases that presented the agent as a leader and asked the participant to view him or herself as a subordinate were given to half of the participants, and the rest received cases where the agent was presented as a subordinate and where the participants were asked to consider themselves as the leader. Assessing mean differences and conducting moderator analyses enabled us to detect influential effects of gender, age and organizational roles on the relationship between emoticon use and the two dependent variables.

4. Results

4.1 The pilot study

We found support for our hypotheses that targets` viewed the agent as less competent and were less complied to act when emoticons were included in the e-mail. When it came to likelihood of compliance, there was a significant difference in scores for when smileys were included (Mean (M) = 3.07, Standard Deviation (SD) = 1.52) than when they were not included in the e-mail (M= 5.30, SD= 1.51; $t(58) = -5.69, p = .00$, two- tailed test). The magnitude of the difference in the means was: mean differences= -2.23. Our data supported our first hypothesis; targets receiving an e-mail containing emoticons judged the agent as less competent than the targets that got the e-mail without emoticons.

Regarding participant's compliance to act, we found a statistically significant difference in scores for when smileys were included ($M= 3.47$, $SD=1.30$) than when they were not included ($M= 5.23$, $SD= 1.27$; $t(58) = -5.29$ $p= .00$, two-tailed test). The magnitude of the difference in means was: mean difference= - 1.77. Accordingly, the data from the experiment supported the second hypothesis; participants who received the e-mail containing emoticons reported being less complied to act than the participants that received the e-mail without emoticons.

4.2 Emoticons and perceived competence

The results from experiment 2 and 3 showed that the mean of competence perceptions in the manipulation group ($M=3.35$, $SD=1.40$) was lower than the mean in the control group ($M=3.89$, $SD= 1.50$), and the difference was significant ($p=.004$). The mean difference between the groups is 0.54, and although the difference is quite small, we believe it is important to report because it is a statistical significant difference. In sum, these results suggest that the use of emoticons in a professional e-mail will have a negative effect on targets perception of agent's competence.

4.3 Emoticons and intention to act

In experiment 2 and 3, we used an one-way ANOVA to evaluate hypothesis 2: If use of emoticons in professional e-mails will have a negative effect on targets' intention to act based on agent's requests. This test was done to explore the potential effects of emoticons on intention to act. There was a small difference in mean scores between the manipulation group ($M= 4.02$, $SD= 1.58$) and the control group ($M= 4.13$, $SD= 1.53$), and the difference was not statistically significant. There might be a slight negative effect of using smileys in a professional e-mail when it comes to targets intention to act based on a request, however the hypothesis regarding this relationship was not supported. Hence, hypothesis 2 that the use of emoticons in professional e-mails will have a negative effect on targets' intention to act based on an agent's request was not supported.

4.4 The moderating effect of gender

4.4.1. Targets` gender

Both hypotheses 3a and 3b were assessed using a univariate linear model (two-way ANOVA). This enabled us to investigate possible interaction effects. First hypothesis 3a, concerning the gender of the target, was analyzed. The aim was to explore if gender of the target had an influence on the effect smileys had on perceived competence and intention to act. The results revealed that gender of the target did not have a significant interaction effect on the relationship between the use of smileys and a) perceived competence or b) targets` intention to act. (See Figures 3 and 4)

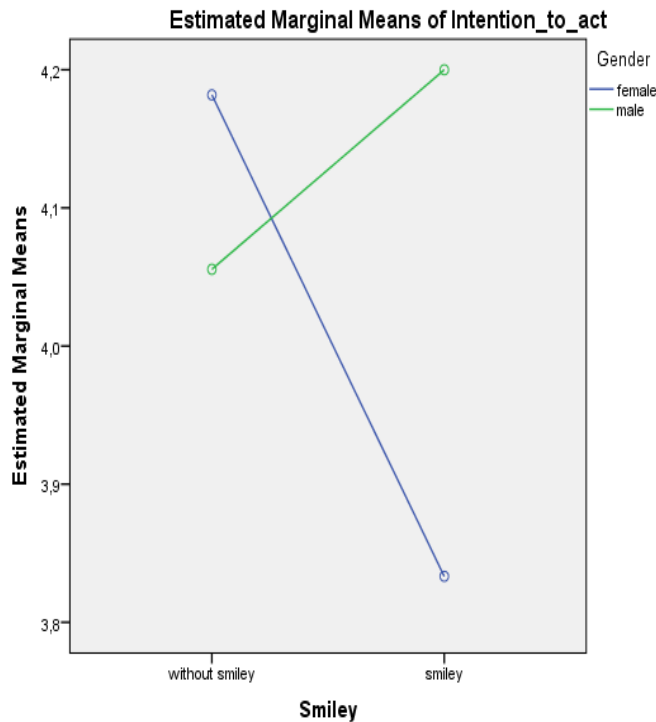


Figure 3: Estimated marginal means of intention to act with gender of target.

From the plot in Figure 3 we note that women ($M=4.18$, $SD=1.59$) seem to have more intention to act than men ($M=4.06$, $SD=1.46$) when smileys are not included in an e-mail, but that the female targets ($M=3.83$, $SD=1.62$) in our data have less intention to act than men ($M=4.20$, $SD=1.54$) when smileys are included. Men, on the other hand, seem to have a stronger intention to act when smileys are included than when they are not. We actually see an increase in their intention to

act when smileys are introduced. To sum up, it would seem that the male part of our sample reacts more positive to the inclusion of smileys when it comes to intention to act than the female part of our sample, although this is not statistically significant.

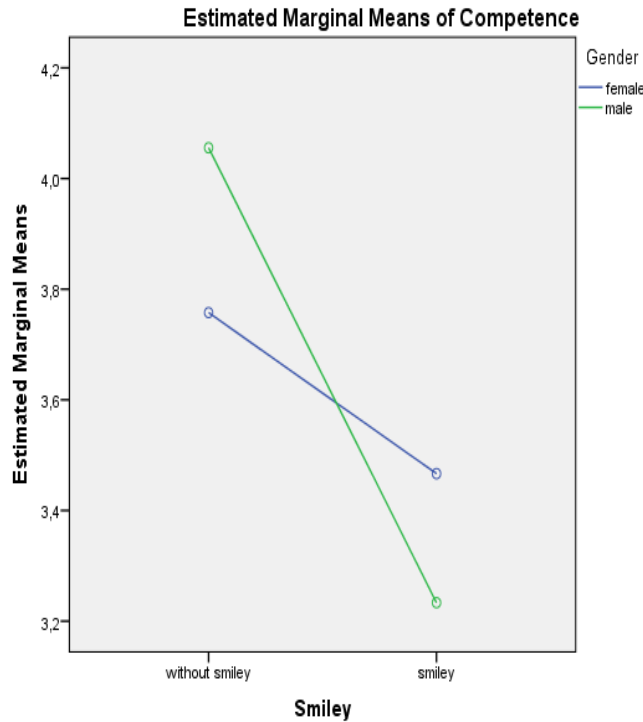


Figure 4: Estimated Marginal Means of Competence and gender of targets.

Figure 4 shows that the female targets ($M= 3.76$, $SD= 3.76$) perceive the agent as less competent than the male targets ($M=4.06$, $SD= 1.36$) when smileys are not included in an e-mail. Both gender show a decline in perceptions of the agent's competence when smileys are introduced, but the male part ($M= 3.23$, $SD= 1.35$) of our sample seems to be influenced more negatively than the female part ($M= 3.47$, $SD= 1.44$) when smileys are introduced. The plot tells us that our male participants rated the agent as less competent than the female participants when smileys were included in the e-mail. It would seem that our male participants are negatively influenced by emoticons when it comes to competence and positively influenced by them when it comes to intention to act. The female participants seem to be negatively influenced by the presence of smileys both in relation to their intention to act and in relation to perceptions of the agents' competence. However, as previously mentioned, we did not find a statistical significant

interaction effect between targets gender and the dependent and independent variables.

4.4.2 Agents`gender

Further, hypothesis 3b regarding agents gender was investigated. Analyses revealed that the gender of the agent did not significantly influence the relationship between use of smileys and a) perceptions of competence or b) intention to act.

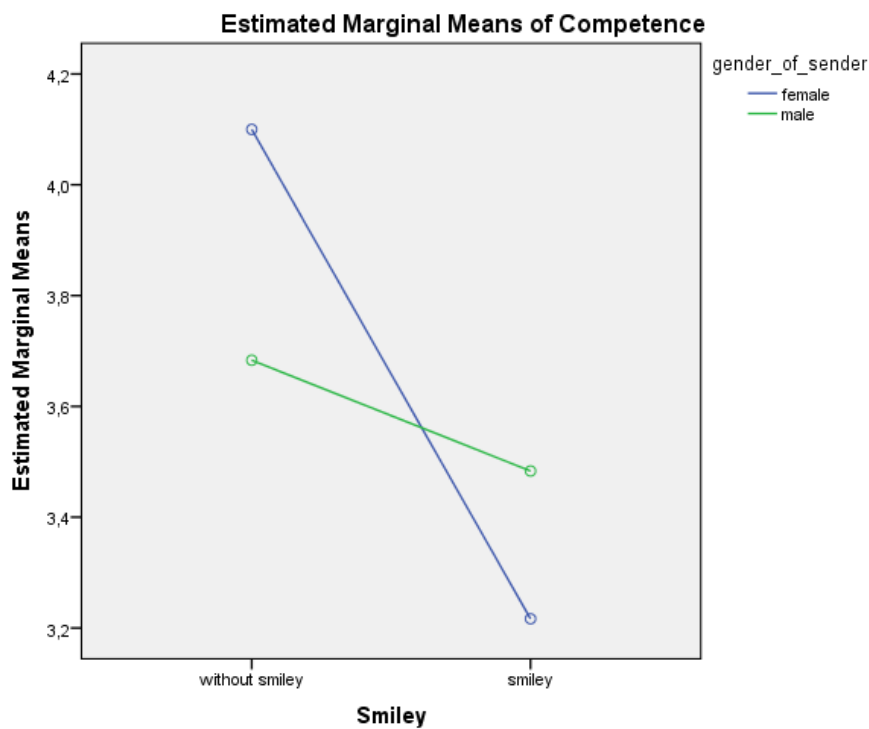


Figure 5: Estimated Marginal Means of Competence and gender of agent.

Figure 5 illustrates the relationship between use of smileys and competence when gender of sender is accounted for (independent of the target`s gender). It is notable that women ($M=4.10$, $SD=1.42$) seem to be perceived as more competent than men ($M=3.68$, $SD=1.54$) when smileys are not included. The opposite occurs when smileys are included; women ($M=3.22$, $SD=1.42$) are perceived to be less competent than men ($M=3.48$, $SD=1.372$). Although the gender of the sender was not found to be a statistically significant moderator of the relationship

at a confidence level of 95%, it was significant had we included results with a 90% confidence interval ($p=0,068$). On the other hand, the results clearly demonstrate the finding related to hypothesis 1: Perceptions of competence are higher for both genders when smileys are not included in an e-mail versus when they are included.

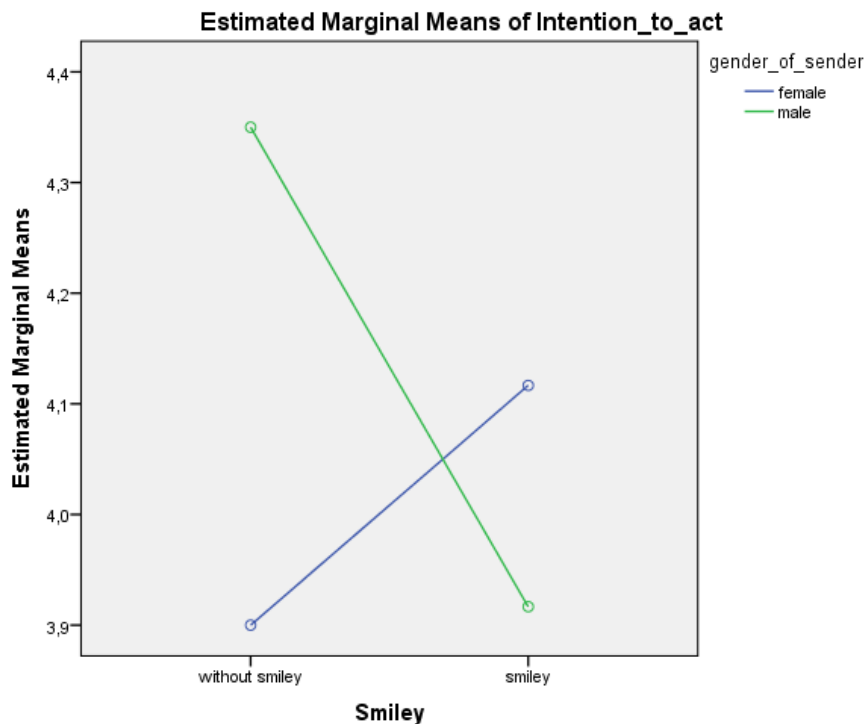


Figure 6: Estimated Marginal Means of Intention to act and gender of agent.

The plot in figure 6 tells us that targets, regardless of gender, have less intention to act when the agent is female ($M=3.90$, $SD=1.34$) than when the agent is male ($M=4.35$, $SD=1.67$) in the case where smileys are not included. Interestingly, the opposite is evident when smileys are included: targets have less intention to act when the agent is male ($M=3.92$, $SD=1.72$) than when the agent is female ($M=4.12$, $SD=1.43$). However, the gender of the agent did not significantly moderate the relationship between use of “smileys” and intention to act with a 95% confidence interval. Overall, there is a decline in intention to act for both genders when smileys are introduced, but the results from hypothesis 2 clearly demonstrate that this difference was not significant.

4.5 Extended results - gender

In sum, hypothesis 3a and 3b were not supported: The relationship between the use of emoticons and a) perceptions of agent’s competence and b) intention to act was not found to be moderated by gender of the agent nor the target. However, we observed patterns that indicated differences in how the targets perceived a female agent relative to a male agent, and that this depended on whether the target was a woman or a man. Accordingly, our data material may suggest that there exists prejudice regarding the “opposite gender”, and implies discrimination from both genders.

4.5.1 Gender composition and intention to act

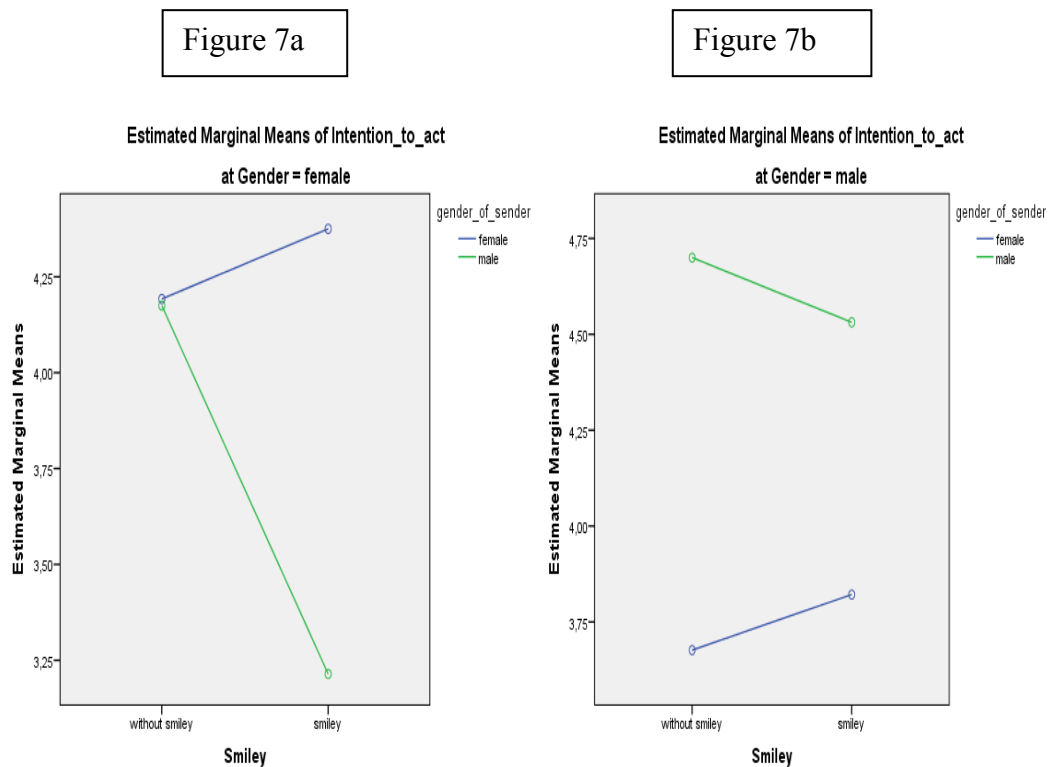


Figure 7a and 7b: The interaction between targets` and agents` gender and intention to act.

The plots in figure 7 are interesting in several ways. First, looking at figure 7a, we observe that female targets have more or less the same intent to act when the agent is female (M= 4.19, SD= 1.29) or male (M= 4.18, SD= 1.78) in the without-

smiley condition. A quite substantial change was observed when smileys were included in the e-mail. Here we see that female targets have less intention to act when the agent is male ($M= 3.21, SD= 1.39$), than when the agent is a woman ($M= 4.38, SD=1.62$). Hence, female targets seem to have a greater intention to act when the agent is female than when the agent is male in the presence of smileys. Second, observing figure 7b, we note a different tendency when targets are men. Here we can see that male targets have less intention to act when the agent is female ($M= 3.68, SD= 1.36$) than when the agent is male ($M= 4.70, SD= 1.42$) in the condition where smileys are not included. The same tendency goes for the condition where smileys are included in the e-mail; male targets have less intention to act presented with a female agent ($M= 3.82, SD= 1.16$) than with a male agent ($M=4.53, SD= 1.76$). It is important to emphasize that the gender of the target and the agent were not found to be a significant moderator of the relationship between use of smileys and intention to act. Nevertheless these plots reveal interesting patterns for future research.

4.5.2 Gender composition and perceptions of competence

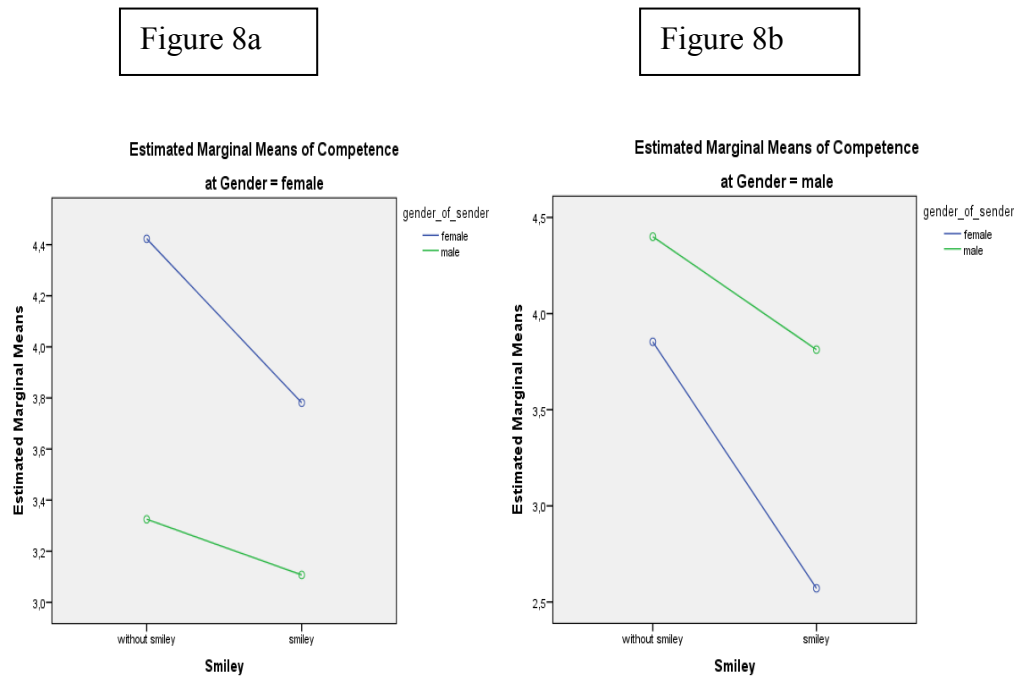


Figure 8: The interaction between targets` and agents` gender and competence.

The plots exhibited in Figure 8 display the interaction between use of smileys and perceptions of competence taking gender of agent and gender of target into account. By examining Figure 8a, we note that female targets perceive female agents ($M= 4.42$, $SD= 1.50$) as more competent than male agents ($M= 3.33$, $SD=1.51$) when smileys are not included in the e-mail. In line with the finding that targets perceive the agent to be less competent when smileys are included, we see that female targets evaluate both female and male agents as less competent in the smiley condition than in the without-smiley condition. However, in the presence of smileys, female targets still perceive the female agent ($M= 3.78$, $SD=1.50$) as more competent than the male agent ($M= 3.11$, $SD= 1.32$). It would seem that female targets favor female agents over male agents. The same tendency is observable for male targets. By examining Figure 8b, we discover that male targets perceive male agents ($M=4.40$, $SD= 1.39$) to be more competent than female agents ($M=3.85$, $SD= 1.33$) when smileys are not included in the e-mail. The same applies when smileys are present in the e-mail; male targets still perceive male agents ($M= 3.81$, $SD= 1.36$) as more competent than female agents ($M= 2.57$, $SD= 1.03$). In sum, our data indicate that men discriminate against women, and women discriminate against men, regardless of emoticon use. Consequently, it seems to exist an interaction between gender of target and gender of sender, regardless of emoticon use. Although neither gender of the target nor gender of the agent was found to significantly moderate the relationship between use of emoticons and competence nor intention to act, we would like to stress that the tendencies relating to an interaction between gender of target and gender of agent (regardless of emoticon use), should be viewed as an important observation that should be addressed by research to come.

4.6 The moderating effect of age

Hypothesis 4 was also tested using a univariate linear model. The results showed that age does not moderate the relationship between use of emoticons and intention to act, because the significance level was not satisfactory. Regarding the relationship between use of emoticons and perceptions of competence, there was not discovered any significant moderating effect of age. Thus, the hypothesis stating that the relationships between use of emoticons and a) perceptions of

agents' competence and b) intention to act will be moderated by targets age was not supported by our data.

4.7 The moderating effect of organizational roles

Finally, hypothesis 5 regarding the moderating effect of organizational roles was tested using a univariate linear model. No support for the hypothesis was found, as organizational roles (plotted as direction) did not significantly moderate the relationship between use of emoticons and perceptions of competence, nor did it significantly moderate the relationship between use of emoticons and intention to act. Hence, hypothesis 5, that the relationship between the use of emoticons and a) perceptions of agents competence, and b) intention to act, will be moderated by organizational roles, was not supported.

To sum up, our data revealed that the use of emoticons have a negative effect on targets' perceptions of agents' competence. However, we found no support for the proposal that emoticon use would have an effect on targets' intention to act based on agents' request. The hypotheses concerning the moderating effect of organizational roles and gender did not gain support; neither did the hypothesis concerning age. However, we did find an interesting pattern regarding gender. More specifically, our data suggested that females perceive males as less competent than other females, and that they are less likely to act upon a request from a male relative to a request from a female, regardless of the use of emoticons. The opposite was apparent when it came to men; they perceived women to be less competent than other men, and had less intention to act on a request from a female agent than from a male agent. Hence, both genders seem to discriminate against each other. We believe these observations deserve further attention.

5 Discussion

Drawing on research and literature regarding the effects of emoticons, competence, gender, organizational roles, and social psychology, we conducted three experiments to explore the effects of using emoticons in computer-mediated

communication. Although the use of emoticons influenced perceived competence and compliance to act in the pilot study, we did not investigate any moderating variables other than the gender of the target. The lack of moderating variables was a limitation that we wanted to address with further experiments. As a result, we formulated several hypotheses intended to explore the effects of emoticons on perceived competence and intention to act, with gender, age and organizational roles as moderators. The results demonstrated that there was a significant, negative effect of emoticon use on targets' perceptions of agents' competence, but no significant relationship was found between the use of emoticons and intention to act, with or without any of the moderating variables. Huang, Yen and Zhang (2008) showed that emoticons may increase information richness, which in turn improves communication efficiency and effectiveness. However, the findings in our thesis yielded negative effects from the inclusion of emoticons. More specifically, our results clearly demonstrated a negative effect on targets' perception of agent's competence when emoticons were included in an e-mail. However, the same negative effect was not found for intention to act. A possible basis for explaining these findings may be found in a psychological theory postulated by Amos Tversky and Daniel Kahneman in 1974. Tversky and Kahneman (1974) suggested two different systems of thinking for making decisions and judgments under uncertainty. System 1 is the cognitive schema we use for making simple decisions, while system 2 is the only one that can follow rules, compare objects on several attributes, and make deliberate choices between options (Kahneman 2011, 36). As the participants in our experiments were asked to evaluate the competence of the agent in an e-mail, and the likelihood to act based on a request from the agent, it might be possible that different systems of thinking occurred for each of the questions the participants were asked to assess. First, because system 1 of thinking works within the familiar realm, the first question concerning competence may have triggered system 1 making it a fast process for the participants to determine the agents' competence. This may be due to biases; that we earlier have experienced judging the competence of a leader or a subordinate, and the participants may therefore have used this experience to form an impression and express a judgment about the agent. The presence of emoticons was perhaps something the participants did not notice directly when assessing this question, but it may have influenced them subconsciously. On the other hand, in

the second question concerning the target's intention to act, participants had to think of several factors related to the action, and make a deliberate choice between wanting to do something or not. This question may have triggered system-2 thinking. However, system-1 thinking may have occurred in the second question as well, but system 2 has the ability to resist suggestions from system 1, slow things down, and impose logical analysis (Kahneman 2011, 103). This may be the case in our experiment, as we noticed the participants used more time answering the second question than the first. However, the pilot study attained different results than the following experiments. In the pilot study we found support for the hypothesis concerning intention to act. So why was this not supported in the second and third experiments? First, the pilot study presented a professional-client relationship, while the remaining experiments focused on a leader-subordinate relationship. It might be that the incentive to act is larger when the request is from someone in your organization, compared to when a professional recommend you to do something, and you consider yourself a client. Maybe intention to act is influenced more by the sense of duty to follow a request from someone you work with than by emoticons. Such an interpretation deserves further investigation. Additionally, the pilot study revolved around a first-time interaction, while in the later experiments, participants were asked to imagine themselves being in the role of either the leader or the subordinate, making it prevalent that the two interaction partners had communicated earlier. The aspect of time as a possible moderator is in line with research by Hancock and Dunham (2001) and Walther (1995) who state that initial impressions in computer-mediated communication become more developed and comprehensive over time. However, Postmes, Lea and Spears (2002) noted that there were no major developments of relations and attitudes as a result of prolonged interaction in their longitudinal study concerning computer-mediated communication. Cuddy, Glick and Beninger (2011) note that impressions often take hold in the first moments of an interaction. Although our results may have differed if the experiment had a more longitudinal design, future research should address this concern more adequately.

When it came to organizational roles as a possible moderator of the relationships between use of emoticons and a) perceived competence and b) intention to act, we

did not find any moderating effects. A reason may be that organizations are continuously becoming less hierarchical structured, making the difference between leaders and subordinate less clear. Consequently, future research on the effects of emoticons could benefit from taking various organizational structures into account.

Moreover, as previously mentioned, the data revealed that gender did not have a significant moderating effect in the relationship between the use of emoticons and the dependent variables: perceived competence and intention to act. However, some interesting and surprising differences between genders were detected.

In previous research (e.g. Kray, Galinsky and Thompson 2002), it was argued that gender still operates as a status characteristic in negotiations, and that women generally have lower status than men and are considered to be less competent (Carli 1990). However, what is interesting to highlight from our results is that although theory and research often argue that women are still subject to unfavorable biases and prejudice (Dalton and Kesner 1993), we found that different-sex biases occurred. Women favored women and men favored men in the evaluation of competence and willingness to act upon the agent's request. Accordingly it may be appropriate to suggest that although gender biases and negative stereotyping of out groups (groups you don't consider yourself to be a part of, as a result of demographic variables such as gender) do exist. The results from our study appear to contradict traditional gender stereotypes. Men do not only discriminate against women, the results also demonstrate that women discriminate against men. Although these results indicate a sense of equality, it is not all positive, but rather something that challenges or questions the dominant view in which both men and women are thought to perceive men as the higher-status gender.

The relative anonymity of computer-mediated communication has contributed to reduced intergroup differentiation and increased equality (Postmes, Spears and Lea 1998) so that communication is often seen as depersonalized or less individualized. Accordingly, it is argued that such depersonalization offers the liberty to ignore social pressures and unwanted influence (Postmes, Lea and

Spears 2002). However, the social identity model of deindividuation effects (SIDE) suggests a more nuanced picture, in which people are more sensitive to group membership if individuating information is scarce (Postmes, Spears and Lea 2002, 4). Hence, people may be more likely to be seen as representatives of a social category that may be salient in an interaction, which could have consequences for how people perceive in-group members, out-group members and themselves. This is also highlighted by Utz (2003) who argued that the anonymity in computer-mediated communication does not necessarily hinder social identification, but that it may even enhance it. Accordingly, depersonalized computer-mediated communication could create an inter-group focus on “us” vs. “them” rather than defining the situation in interpersonal terms (“me” vs. “you”), where group members cognitively maximize intergroup differences, assimilate themselves to an in-group prototype, and develop favorable attitudes toward this in-group (Postmes, Lea and Spears 2002). Out-group members are, on the other hand, liked less and are therefore less influential in decision making (Wang, Walther and Hancock 2009, 61). Thus, the depersonalized interaction in computer-mediated communication stimulates our natural tendency to differentiate between social categories (Postmes, Lea and Spears 2002, 4), and enhance intergroup differentiation rather than reduce it. What this implies is that people use the information available to them to categorize people according to their in- or out-group. This is related to social-identity theory, which proposes that people classify themselves and others in categories based on some salient characteristics, such as gender, race or ethnicity, and where people identify more with members who are similar to their in-group or their category than with dissimilar out-group members (Chow and Crawford 2004, 22). This is evident from our findings, which reveal that men discriminate against women, and women discriminate against men. Since women have more personal experience with sex discrimination, and hence feel more identification with others who have experienced the effects of prejudice, these factors should lead women to support other women's demands rather than the demands of men (Swim et al. 1995, 201). Although these findings only apply to women, it supports the notion that same-sex favoritism can occur due to in-group identification, which has become apparent in our experiments.

5.1 Limitations

The findings from our experiments should be viewed in light of several limitations. The first limitation concerns participants' familiarity with emoticons in general. In our experiments, the participants' familiarity with different types of emoticons and whether they had consensus on the meaning of emoticons were not assessed. Consequently, the participants could have been unaware of the meaning of emoticons, could have different experiences with them, and could have given them different meaning, which in turn could have influenced the results. However, the experiments only contained the most well-known types of emoticons, the smiley face ☺, and the sad face ☹, perhaps contributing to a greater consensus regarding the meaning, and a greater likelihood that the participants were familiar with these symbols. In line with this, no manipulation check was conducted to see whether participants noticed the specific emoticon presented, as this would have drawn artificially increased attention to the manipulation (Walther and D'Addario 2001). This could have been addressed by asking the participants if they noticed the emoticons, after the experiments were finished.

A second limitation concerns the types of emoticons used in our experiments. As we only used a smiley face and a sad face, the question of whether the observed effect resulted from the visual characteristics of the specific smiley used, or whether all kinds of smileys would yield the same pattern of results should be addressed by future studies (Ganster, Eimler and Krämer 2012, 229).

A third limitation is that we only included competence as a dimension of evaluating others. Fiske, Cuddy and Glick (2006) have shown that there are in fact two basic dimensions people evaluate others by: Competence and warmth. We note that the results could have gained an interesting new dimension by including targets' perceptions of agents' warmth. However, as Cuddy, Glick and Beninger (2011) argue; perceptions concerning competence of strangers in social situations take primary within organizational contexts; hence we only included this dimension in our study.

Fourth, our thesis focuses on e-mail and neglects other forms of computer-mediated communication. As Walther (2012, 31) says: —We need to be aware that

each type of computer-mediated communication has its own conditions and therefore, each needs to be analyzed in its own right". However, e-mail is the most dominant form of electronic communication in the workplace (Byron 2008), and many of the theoretical arguments we present may also apply for other types of computer-mediated communication used in organizations, such as instant messaging, which also reduce available cues.

Emoticon use in a socio-emotional context may be differently evaluated than in a task-oriented context due to context-specific behavioural expectations regarding the display of emotions (Ganster, Eimler and Krämer 2012, 229). Thus, a fifth limitation is related to the context in which emoticons are used. The present experiments were limited to an organizational context, making inferences about the proposed relationship generalizable to other settings difficult. If the same experiments were conducted in other contexts, different outcomes may have occurred.

Further, our results need to be verified through longitudinal studies, as the current experiments did not account for length of interaction. Computer-mediated communication in general is proposed to be better suited for longitudinal interaction than short-term meetings (Walther 1995). If a relational bond is built through series of interactions, the effects of emoticon use may differ from the ones found in the present paper. Related to the length of the relationship between interaction partners, it could be interesting to see how the current findings might apply to on-going relationships in computer-mediated communication. As suggested by Walther (1996) a one-time computer-mediated communication interaction could affect participants' motivation to relate to their partners. It is possible that people might try to reduce uncertainty by asking personally relevant questions (Tidwell and Walther 2002), rather than rely solely on the subtle language cues and draw stereotype-based inferences (Lee 2007, 530). Hence, it could be an aim for future research to investigate the effects of using emoticons in relationships of longer duration than those presented in this thesis.

Moreover, the cases presented in our experiments were fictional ones, which could have limited the generalizability. More specifically, the results cannot be

generalized to actual behaviour, as the participants were asked to imagine the given situation, which is not the same as a natural e-mail correspondence. Accordingly, future studies could benefit from conducting a similar experiment within an organization, thus creating better means of generalizability and validity. In line with Wang, Walther and Hancock (2009, 78) we argue that future research should also explore whether moving from mere descriptions to actual interactions causes people to focus more on the actual behaviour of their communicative partners rather than their group membership.

Finally, our study could have included measures of personality features, as it has been demonstrated that some characteristics make people initially more positive and responsive to computer-mediated communication, which again could have influenced the results of this thesis (Xu, Xu and Yi 2007). As Xu, Xu and Yi (2007) argue, in the context of emoticon use people with different personality traits would have different attitudes and reactions towards these symbols. More specifically, people who are outgoing and open to experience would be more in favour of using and receiving emoticons than those who are withdrawn, conservative and cautious (Xu, Xu and Yi 2007). However, the relatively slow rate of social information exchanged in computer-mediated communication interactions will tend to reduce the number of person characteristics that participants are willing to evaluate after a one-time interaction (Walther 1993).

6. Conclusion and practical implications

The findings from our experiments highlight important aspects of communication in organizations, and raise implications for practitioners. Our results do not provide any absolute answers regarding whether to use or not use emoticons in e-mail, it rather contributes to knowledge about the effects, making us more informed of the consequences the use of emoticons has in computer-mediated communication. Our study demonstrate that the use of emotional symbols in communication between professionals may have detrimental effects concerning perceptions of competence, and holds that both employees and managers should be careful before using such cues in their daily, digital communication. Further,

although there are no written rules that regulate the use of emotional cues in computer-mediated communication, it may be beneficial to create awareness of the effects that the use of these symbols may have in various organizations. Accordingly, to highlight the consequences that emoticon use may have for perceived competence, one could potentially protect the organizations reputation, and also hinder negative evaluations internally. Additionally, and surprisingly, the current study provides information about gender equality, making us aware that both men and women could possibly discriminate one another in an organization, something that challenges the traditional view concerning prejudice and stereotypes, where women have been subject to unfavourable biases. As such, HR and top management should facilitate to decrease boundaries between in-groups and out-groups related to gender across the organization with the aim of creating less prejudice. Epley and Kruger (2005) have earlier argued that e-mail interaction may enhance stereotypes. This effect on impressions is also likely to be contagious, and can spread to colleagues who do not have first-hand experience with the agent (Epley and Kruger 2005). The notion of contagious stereotypes in relation to the finding that perceived competence is lower when smileys are introduced could serve as an argument to not use emoticons in communication within the organization.

Moreover, O'Driscoll, Humphries and Larsen (1991, 316) have argued that behaviour and performance of employees in an organization are influenced by their beliefs about the competence of their managers. This implies that if the manager use emoticons in e-mail communication, which was found to have a negative effect on perceptions of competence, this could influence the actual behaviour and performance of the employees. Consequently departments and entire organizations could suffer in terms of reduced performance as a result of perceived lack of competence due to emoticon use. On the other hand, emoticons are argued to speed up communication and make the communication easier, more interactive and more fun (Huang, Yen, Zhang 2008). Hence, there may be positive aspects of using emoticons in an organizational context as well.

From a practical standpoint, the results of our experiments highlight the importance of understanding how emoticons are conveyed and perceived in

computer-mediated communication. E-mail communication is proposed to continue to replace other forms of communication, and it can be expected that misunderstandings and uncertainty regarding the emotional content of e-mail messages can take a toll on workplace relationships and organizational effectiveness (Byron and Baldrige 2005, 6). Due to this, as also proposed by Byron and Baldrige (2005), it is important that managers understand how emotions are perceived in e-mail messages, to help assure them that the use of e-mail facilitates organizational communication and in turn effectiveness.

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Appendix A: Pilot Study

A1: Pilot Study without emoticons

Lise er en 28 år gammel selger, som har vært plaget av stram kjevemuskulatur de siste månedene. Den siste uken har hun undersøkt litt rundt tannleger i nærheten og sendt henvendelse til flere med forespørsel om behandling og informasjon. Under kan du se en av svarene hun fikk på e-post.

Hei Lise,

Takk for din henvendelse. Du sier at du har stram kjevemuskulatur og sliter med plager rundt dette. Jeg vil anta at en bittskinne er en mulighet vi kan se nærmere på. Denne brukes på natten og forhindrer at man strammer kjevemusklene slik at de blir stive og vonde! I tillegg kan dette også hjelpe på skjæring av tenner (bruxisme), dersom dette også er en plage.

Videre er en konsultasjon nødvendig for å kunne si mer om dette, og eventuelt for å kunne vurdere andre behandlingsmetoder. Kunne mandag 22/10, kl 09.00 passet?

Mvh

Tannlege Thormod Jensen

1. Hvor sannsynlig er det at du ville gått til denne tannlegen? Kryss av på skalaen, der 1 er svært usannsynlig og 7 er svært sannsynlig.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
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2. På bakgrunn av mailen over, hvor kompetent tror du tannlegen er, generelt sett? Kryss av på skalaen, der 1 er svært lite kompetent og 7 er svært kompetent.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

3. Ditt kjønn:

Kvinne	Mann
--------	------

4. Din alder:

16-20
21-25
26-30
31-35

A2: Pilot Study with emoticons

Lise er en 28 år gammel selger, som har vært plaget av stram kjevemuskulatur de siste månedene. Den siste uken har hun undersøkt litt rundt tannleger i nærheten og sendt henvendelse til flere med forespørsel om behandling og informasjon. Under kan du se en av svarene hun fikk på e-post.

Hei Lise☺

Takk for din henvendelse☺ Du sier at du har stram kjevemuskulatur og sliter med plager rundt dette ☹ Jeg vil anta at en bittskinne er en mulighet vi kan se nærmere på ☺ Denne brukes på natten og forhindrer at man strammer kjevemusklene slik at de blir stive og vonde! I tillegg kan dette også hjelpe på skjæring av tenner (bruxisme), dersom dette også er en plage☺

Videre er en konsultasjon nødvendig for å kunne si mer om dette, og eventuelt for å kunne vurdere andre behandlingsmetoder☺ Kunne mandag 22/10, kl 09.00 passet? ☺☺

Mvh

Tannlege Thormod Jensen

1. Hvor sannsynlig er det at du ville gått til denne tannlegen? Kryss av på skalaen, der 1 er svært usannsynlig og 7 er svært sannsynlig.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
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2. På bakgrunn av mailen over, hvor kompetent tror du tannlegen er, generelt sett? Kryss av på skalaen, der 1 er svært lite kompetent og 7 er svært kompetent.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
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3. Ditt kjønn:

Kvinne	Mann
--------	------

4. Din alder:

16-20
21-25
26-30
31-35

Appendix B: Experiment 2

B1: From leader to subordinate, male agent, without emoticons

Tenk deg at du er ansatt i et stort it-firma i Oslo. Du har det siste halve året hatt ansvaret for et større prosjekt, men har den siste tiden opplevd en konflikt med en kunde som du ikke vet hvordan du skal takle. Du har nå tatt kontakt med sjefen for din avdeling for veiledning. Dette er svaret du får av han på e-post.

Hei

Jeg tror jeg vet om en løsning som kan lette situasjonen noe i tiden frem til prosjektet er over. I og med at prosjektet krever at du opprettholder gode relasjoner med alle klienter, da disse er viktige for bedriften også etter prosjektet er avsluttet foreslår jeg at du lar Jakobsen ta over hovedansvaret for akkurat denne kunden, så du får mulighet til å fokusere på de andre. Gi meg tilbakemelding på om du synes dette høres fornuftig ut.

Mvh

Geir Andersen

1. På bakgrunn av informasjonen over, hvor sannsynlig er det at du ville gjort det du ble anbefalt? Kryss av på skalaen, der 1 er svært usannsynlig og 7 er svært sannsynlig.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
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2. På bakgrunn av mailen over, hvor kompetent tror du sjefen er, generelt sett? Kryss av på skalaen, der 1 er svært lite kompetent og 7 er svært kompetent.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

Ditt kjønn:

Kvinne	Mann
--------	------

Din alder:

15-25
26-35
36-45
46-55
56-65
66-75
75+

B2: From leader to subordinate, male agent, with emoticons

Tenk deg at du er ansatt i et stort it-firma i Oslo. Du har det siste halve året hatt ansvaret for et større prosjekt, men har den siste tiden opplevd en konflikt med en kunde som du ikke vet hvordan du skal takle. Du har nå tatt kontakt med sjefen for din avdeling for veiledning. Dette er svaret du får av henne på e-post.

Hei ☺

Jeg tror jeg vet om en løsning som kan lette situasjonen noe i tiden frem til prosjektet er over☺ I og med at prosjektet krever at du opprettholder gode relasjoner med alle klienter, da disse er viktige for bedriften også etter prosjektet er avsluttet foreslår jeg at du lar Jakobsen ta over hovedansvaret for akkurat denne kunden☺, så du får mulighet til å fokusere på de andre☺ Gi meg tilbakemelding på om du synes dette høres fornuftig ut ☺

Mvh

Geir Andersen☺

1. På bakgrunn av informasjonen over, hvor sannsynlig er det at du ville gjort det du ble anbefalt? Kryss av på skalaen, der 1 er svært usannsynlig og 7 er svært sannsynlig.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
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2. På bakgrunn av mailen over, hvor kompetent tror du sjefen er, generelt sett? Kryss av på skalaen, der 1 er svært lite kompetent og 7 er svært kompetent.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

Ditt kjønn:

Kvinne	Mann
--------	------

Din alder:

15-25
26-35
36-45
46-55
56-65
66-75
75+

B3: From leader to subordinate, female agent, without emoticons

Tenk deg at du er ansatt i et stort it-firma i Oslo. Du har det siste halve året hatt ansvaret for et større prosjekt, men har den siste tiden opplevd en konflikt med en kunde som du ikke vet hvordan du skal takle. Du har nå tatt kontakt med sjefen for din avdeling for veiledning. Dette er svaret du får av henne på e-post.

Hei

Jeg tror jeg vet om en løsning som kan lette situasjonen noe i tiden frem til prosjektet er over. I og med at prosjektet krever at du opprettholder gode relasjoner med alle klienter, da disse er viktige for bedriften også etter prosjektet er avsluttet foreslår jeg at du lar Jakobsen ta over hovedansvaret for akkurat denne kunden, så du får mulighet til å fokusere på de andre. Gi meg tilbakemelding på om du synes dette høres fornuftig ut.

Mvh

Tove Andersen

1. På bakgrunn av informasjonen over, hvor sannsynlig er det at du ville gjort det du ble anbefalt? Kryss av på skalaen, der 1 er svært usannsynlig og 7 er svært sannsynlig.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
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2. På bakgrunn av mailen over, hvor kompetent tror du sjefen er, generelt sett? Kryss av på skalaen, der 1 er svært lite kompetent og 7 er svært kompetent.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

Ditt kjønn:

Kvinne	Mann
--------	------

Din alder:

15-25
26-35
36-45
46-55
56-65
66-75
75+

B4: From leader to subordinate, female agent, with emoticons

Tenk deg at du er ansatt i et stort it-firma i Oslo. Du har det siste halve året hatt ansvaret for et større prosjekt, men har den siste tiden opplevd en konflikt med en kunde som du ikke vet hvordan du skal takle. Du har nå tatt kontakt med sjefen for din avdeling for veiledning. Dette er svaret du får av henne på e-post.

Hei ☺

Jeg tror jeg vet om en løsning som kan lette situasjonen noe i tiden frem til prosjektet er over☺ I og med at prosjektet krever at du opprettholder gode relasjoner med alle klienter, da disse er viktige for bedriften også etter prosjektet er avsluttet foreslår jeg at du lar Jakobsen ta over hovedansvaret for akkurat denne kunden☺, så du får mulighet til å fokusere på de andre☺ Gi meg tilbakemelding på om du synes dette høres fornuftig ut ☺

Mvh

Tove Andersen☺

1. På bakgrunn av informasjonen over, hvor sannsynlig er det at du ville gjort det du ble anbefalt? Kryss av på skalaen, der 1 er svært usannsynlig og 7 er svært sannsynlig.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

2. På bakgrunn av mailen over, hvor kompetent tror du sjefen er, generelt sett? Kryss av på skalaen, der 1 er svært lite kompetent og 7 er svært kompetent.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

Ditt kjønn:

Kvinne	Mann
--------	------

Din alder:

15-25
26-35
36-45
46-55
56-65
66-75
75+

Appendix C: Experiment 3

C1: From subordinate to leader, male agent, without emoticons.

Tenk deg at du er avdelingssjef i en stor norsk it-bedrift. En dag får du en e-post fra en ansatt som ønsker veiledning i et prosjekt han nå har ansvaret for. Under er e-posten du mottar gjengitt.

Hei

Jeg er som du vet i siste fase av Emriconprosjektet, og har den siste tiden opplevd noen uforutsette hindringer med en kunde, som har ført til konflikt mellom han og meg. Ettersom det er nødvendig å opprettholde gode relasjoner med alle kundene, da disse er viktige for bedriften også utenom prosjektet, lurer jeg på om det er en mulighet for at Jakobsen nå kan ta over hovedansvaret for denne kunden til prosjektet er avsluttet?

Mvh

Geir Andersen

1. På bakgrunn av informasjonen over, hvor sannsynlig er det at du ville gjort det du blir forespurt? Kryss av på skalaen, der 1 er svært usannsynlig og 7 er svært sannsynlig.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

2. På bakgrunn av mailen over, hvor kompetent tror du den ansatte er, generelt sett? Kryss av på skalaen, der 1 er svært lite kompetent og 7 er svært kompetent.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

3. Ditt kjønn:

Kvinne	Mann
--------	------

4. Din alder:

15-25
26-35
36-45
46-55
56-65
66-75
75+

C2: From subordinate to leader, male agent, with emoticons

Tenk deg at du er avdelingssjef i en stor norsk it-bedrift. En dag får du en e-post fra en ansatt som ønsker veiledning i et prosjekt hun nå har ansvaret for. Under er e-posten du mottar gjengitt.

Hei😊

Jeg er som du vet i siste fase av Emriconprosjektet, og har den siste tiden opplevd noen uforutsette hindringer med en kunde, som har ført til konflikt mellom han og meg😊 Ettersom det er nødvendig å opprettholde gode relasjoner med alle kundene, da disse er viktige for bedriften også utenom prosjektet😊, lurer jeg på om det er en mulighet for at Jakobsen nå kan ta over hovedansvaret for denne kunden til prosjektet er avsluttet? 😊

Mvh

Geir Andersen😊

1. På bakgrunn av informasjonen over, hvor sannsynlig er det at du ville gjort det du blir forespurt? Kryss av på skalaen, der 1 er svært usannsynlig og 7 er svært sannsynlig.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

2. På bakgrunn av mailen over, hvor kompetent tror du den ansatte er, generelt sett? Kryss av på skalaen, der 1 er svært lite kompetent og 7 er svært kompetent.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

3. Ditt kjønn:

Kvinne	Mann
--------	------

4. Din alder:

15-25
26-35
36-45
46-55
56-65
66-75
75+

C3: From subordinate to leader, female agent, without emoticons.

Tenk deg at du er avdelingssjef i en stor norsk it-bedrift. En dag får du en e-post fra en ansatt som ønsker veiledning i et prosjekt hun nå har ansvaret for. Under er e-posten du mottar gjengitt.

Hei

Jeg er som du vet i siste fase av Emriconprosjektet, og har den siste tiden opplevd noen uforutsette hindringer med en kunde, som har ført til konflikt mellom han og meg. Ettersom det er nødvendig å opprettholde gode relasjoner med alle kundene, da disse er viktige for bedriften også utenom prosjektet, lurer jeg på om det er en mulighet for at Jakobsen nå kan ta over hovedansvaret for denne kunden til prosjektet er avsluttet?

Mvh

Tove Andersen

1. På bakgrunn av informasjonen over, hvor sannsynlig er det at du ville gjort det du blir forespurt? Kryss av på skalaen, der 1 er svært usannsynlig og 7 er svært sannsynlig.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
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2. På bakgrunn av mailen over, hvor kompetent tror du den ansatte er, generelt sett? Kryss av på skalaen, der 1 er svært lite kompetent og 7 er svært kompetent.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

3. Ditt kjønn:

Kvinne	Mann
--------	------

4. Din alder:

15-25
26-35
36-45
46-55
56-65
66-75
75+

C4: From subordinate to leader, female agent, with emoticons

Tenk deg at du er avdelingssjef i en stor norsk it-bedrift. En dag får du en e-post fra en ansatt som ønsker veiledning i et prosjekt hun nå har ansvaret for. Under er e-posten du mottar gjengitt.

Hei😊

Jeg er som du vet i siste fase av Emriconprosjektet, og har den siste tiden opplevd noen uforutsette hindringer med en kunde, som har ført til konflikt mellom han og meg😊 Ettersom det er nødvendig å opprettholde gode relasjoner med alle kundene, da disse er viktige for bedriften også utenom prosjektet😊, lurer jeg på om det er en mulighet for at Jakobsen nå kan ta over hovedansvaret for denne kunden til prosjektet er avsluttet? 😊

Mvh

Tove Andersen😊

1. På bakgrunn av informasjonen over, hvor sannsynlig er det at du ville gjort det du blir forespurt? Kryss av på skalaen, der 1 er svært usannsynlig og 7 er svært sannsynlig.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
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2. På bakgrunn av mailen over, hvor kompetent tror du den ansatte er, generelt sett? Kryss av på skalaen, der 1 er svært lite kompetent og 7 er svært kompetent.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

3. Ditt kjønn:

Kvinne	Mann
--------	------

4. Din alder:

15-25
26-35
36-45
46-55
56-65
66-75
75+

Appendix D: Preliminary Thesis Report

Helene Margrethe Andersen
Thea Helene Thoresen

BI Norwegian Business School – Preliminary Thesis Report‘

-The Impact of Emoticons on Judgments of Competence and Intention to Act -

Study programme:
Leadership and Organizational Psychology

Date of submission
15.01.2013

Supervisor:
Professor Linda Lai, Professor

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Summary

In this preliminary thesis report, the focus, aim and procedure of our master thesis will be described. Through theory and research, it is argued that there is a lack of research concerning the effects of emoticon use in computer-based-communication at the current time. By focusing on e-mail communication within organizations, we aim at exploring the possible effects these emotional symbols have on a) targets` (receivers`) judgments about agents` (senders`) competence and b) targets` intention to act based on agents` request. One experiment has already taken place (pilot study) and the findings are presented. In the final thesis, two more experiments will be conducted, where the aim is to extend the scope; to include moderating variables such as organizational roles and gender.

1. Introduction

Communication can be seen as a process of transmitting a message through a specific channel towards a receiver that will decode this message (Hulea 2010). Organizations use different channels when communicating with their employees, their customers or their clients, and accordingly they make a choice of whether to use a formal or more informal approach when communicating. Contemporary workers increasingly use computer-mediated communication (CMC), such as e-mail, to communicate, (Fallows 2002; OfficeTeam 2006, cited in Byron and Baldrige 2007, 137) and according to Byron and Baldrige (2007) this increase is influenced by the advantages e-mail has over other communication channels. More specifically, e-mails can be sent to a large number of people easily and can facilitate collaboration with people separate in time and space. There are however many different opinions on the effectiveness and use of e-mails, and their advantages and disadvantages. Some have for instance argued that e-mails may be ill suited for communicating ambiguous or emotional information due to reduced availability of cues (Daft and Lengel 1986). On the other hand, some researchers have argued that users of CMC actually rely on a variety of cues in e-mail messages to form judgments about the sender (Nowak 2003; Sherblom 1988; Sherman 2003; Walther and Tidwell 1995, cited in Byron and Baldrige 2007, 138) For instance Ganster, Eimler and Krämer (2012) argue that emoticons can be considered as examples to how people have created surrogates for nonverbal cues, and that these generally influence message interpretation and person perception. Asteroff (1987, cited in Walther and D'Addario 2001, 326) referred to emoticons as “relational icons”, whereas Rezabek and Cochenour (1998, cited in Walther and D'Addario 2001, 326) defined emoticons as “visual cues formed from ordinary typographical symbols that when read sideways represent feelings or emotions”. These emotional symbols have today become an integrated part of CMC and as early as 1995, Marvin (1995, cited in Walther and D'Addario 2001, 326) stated that these symbols are the paralanguage of the internet. Additionally, Huang, Yen and Zhang (2008) argue that emoticons are not just enjoyable to use, but are also a valuable addition to communication methods. Moreover, when it comes to biology, research has found, by looking at participant's brain activity

while reading emoticon enriched sentences, that the right and left frontal gyri was activated. Activation of the right frontal gyri indicates that emoticons serve as emotional indicators similarly to other non-verbal means (Yuasa, Saito, and Mukawa 2011). These findings propose that brain sites dealing with both verbal and nonverbal information are activated more strongly when emoticons are added to sentences, than in the case of plain text (Yuasa, Saito, and Mukawa 2011). However, there are still many factors related to the use of emoticons in communication that has not yet been explored.

2. Research question and objective

Despite the availability of some nonverbal cues, research indicates that their purposeful use remains unexplored (Byron 2008). In line with this, Walther and D'Addario (2001) claims that although individuals are influenced by the use of nonverbal cues in other contexts, it is unknown what impact emoticons have in e-mail. Consequently, this study aims at explaining parts of this unexplored area which may enhance our understanding of the phenomenon of emoticons, and also increase practitioner's awareness about the potential, influential impact that derive from the emoticon use. More precisely, we want to explore the possible effects emoticon use has on communication between a sender and a receiver of an e-mail, which will be referred to as the agent (sender) and the target (receiver). Finally, Walther and D'Addario (2001) argue; the utility of emoticons seems fairly widespread, however, less is known about their actual use and impact. Consequently, our thesis will aim at answering the following research question:

“What effect does emoticon use in professional e-mails have on targets` judgments about agents` competence, and their intention to act based on agents` request?”

3. Background

The research on emotional messages in CMC is relatively new, but there are studies that have investigated the function of emoticons (Lo 2008), and their influence on the target (Byron 2008). However, to this date, several aspects that could make us think twice before using emoticons in a professional setting remain unexplored.

Face-to-face communication makes it easy to interpret and give feedback; we interpret the verbal communication as well as the non-verbal cues such as posture, mimic etc. to make sense of a given message, and scholars believe that the goal of nonverbal cues is to convey emotional messages (Lo 2008). As mentioned above, e-mail is the most commonly used form of CMC, and for many it is becoming one of the most usual forms of communication overall (Walther and D`Addario 2001). Employees in different organizations are likely to use, and prefer, e-mail in their communication with coworkers, clients, colleagues and customers (Byron and Baldrige 2005). Further, e-mail has enhanced communication within organizations, and introduced new challenges not associated with other forms of communication. Byron and Baldrige (2005) found that emotions are communicated by e-mail, intentionally or unintentionally, and that users often incorporate emoticons as visual cues to augment the meaning of textual electronic messages (Walther and D`Addario 2001). Other researchers also support the notion that we use emoticons to convey an emotional message (Rice and Love 1987).

3.1 Perceived competence – professional or not?

According to Showry and Manasa (2012), a part of being an effective communicator regards the appropriate use of facial expressions. Facial expressions convey the degree of intensity of emotions like pleasantness or unpleasantness of the speaker. To convey high intensity emotions, the speaker can use both face and entire body cues. However, the ability to use such communication techniques in e-mail is limited, and thus, emoticons may serve as helpful cues to create a more effective communication. To assess whether emoticon use in an e-mail can effect perceived competence it is beneficial to first

define what this term contains. According to Lai (2004) competence refers to the knowledge, skills, capabilities and attitudes that makes it possible to conduct relevant functions and tasks in line with requirements and goals defined. Hence, all of these components could contribute to assess whether a person is perceived as competent or not. The question of interest for this paper will be to investigate if emoticon use can harm the perceived competence of an agent, accordingly whether a person that uses such symbols in a professional matter would be perceived as less competent than those who are not using emoticons in their communication. Moreover, competence is an important term in the professional, organizational context that we wish to investigate, as the organization and its employees depend on sufficient competence to be able to perform as wanted, and since it is important that employees trust that their peers, subordinates and leaders have the competence necessary. In addition, CMC is becoming one of the most common forms of communication and as proposed by Byron and Baldrige (2005) organizations are likely to use, and prefer, e-mail in their communication. However, as the use of emoticons in this widespread form of CMC is increasing, it has not yet, to our knowledge, been investigated the effects that emoticon use in e-mails have on perceived competence.

Researchers seem to disagree about the effectiveness of emoticons. Walther and D'Addario (2001) propose that nonverbal cues have impacts as great as, or greater than verbal messages alone when interpreting emotions in face to face communication. Relating this to CMC, it could indicate that emoticons (being nonverbal cues) may have great impact on interpretations of emotions. On the other hand, Andrews (1994, cited in Wolf 2000, 828) claims that emoticons have inconsistent definitions and are superfluous, and that a well-constructed sentence needs no clarification; emoticons serve no purpose. Because his statement is from 1994, it is assumed that more recent research claiming to see effects and purpose of emoticon use may be more accurate. In addition, new emoticons continue to develop (Wolf 2000), indicating that emoticons do serve an actual purpose. The question is then, what purpose? Byron and Baldrige (2007) argue that emoticons can decrease uncertainty regarding the agent's intent. However, in Aftenposten's article, 14th of October this year, it was argued that the use of emoticons in digital communication may be perceived as unprofessional. Cecilie Staude at BI Norwegian Business School also propose that the increased use of social media has

resulted in more diffuse lines between oral and written communication, and argues that emoticons are often used in a way that disturbs or even destroys the message (Nipen 2012). She proposes that people should be aware when using emoticons as it may seem unprofessional. Professor Scott Fahlman, the man that originally developed the smiley face (a type of emoticon) over thirty years ago, to clear up misunderstandings in dialogue between students, agrees with several of the statements outlined in the article. He states that the use of smileys in e-mail may have destroyed our written language to some extent more than it has enhanced it (Nipen 2012). In line with this, authors of articles on “netiquette”—etiquette related to internet use—advise employees to use sparingly, or not at all, cues such as emoticons in work-related e-mails because their use may appear too casual and unprofessional (Calem 1995, cited in Byron 2008, 312). It would seem that the use of emoticons may contribute to the perception of the agent being unprofessional. Competence may be viewed as related to the idea of professionalism. Thus, in this study it is proposed that including emoticons in a professional e-mail could contribute to the target judging the agent as less competent than if emoticons were not included.

Hypothesis 1: The use of emoticons in professional e-mails will have a negative effect on targets` perceptions of agents` competence.

3.2 Intention to act

Derks, Bos, and Von Grumbkow (2008) found that emoticons are mostly used for the expression of emotions, for strengthening the verbal part of a message, and for expressing humor, and that people use more emoticons in communicating with friends than in communicating with strangers. This supports the proposal that when in a professional setting it could be unwise to use emoticons, as this is reserved for friends. Because it is believed that we would judge the competence of an agent as lower when emoticons are present, it is also likely to believe that people would be less compelled to act based on an agents` message when they view the agent as less competent. Gaining a better understanding of how emotions are perceived by the target and their compliance to act based on this, may be extremely important given the increasing growth in e-mail communication and the increasing recognition of the importance of emotions in professional relationships

(Byron 2008). Currently there is a lack of research supporting this notion; hence the present study seeks to explore this.

Hypothesis 2: The use of emoticons in professional e-mails will have a negative effect on targets` intentions to act based on agents` request.

3.3 Emoticons and targets` gender

Research has also showed that women use emoticons approximately twice as frequently as men (Walther and D`Addario 2001). Accordingly, Zhang, Erickson and Webb (2010) found that there are differences in how emoticons are used and that women have been found to use a more emotional style in online settings than males. Further, they found support for their hypothesis that females are more likely to have a stronger emotional response towards emotional text compared to males. Thus, it could be possible that women and men have a different perception of emoticons. Moreover, Wolf (2000) did an experiment that seemed to reinforce the stereotype of the emotional woman and the inexpressive man. However, in a mixed group of men and women, there was not a statistical significant difference in frequency of emoticon use. Wolf (2000) found that rather than the females adopting the offline male standard of less emotional expression, the opposite occurred: both males and females displayed an increase in emoticon use. Consequently, it seems reasonable to believe that there may not be differences in how they react to the use of emoticons neither.

Hypothesis 3: The relationship between use of emoticons and (a) judgments of agent competence and (b) intention to act will not be moderated by targets` gender.

3.4 Emoticons and agents` gender

Although early studies pointed to gender as an influencing factor in the experience of emotion, more recent studies have challenged the central role of gender in understanding the distribution of emotional experience and expression (Lively 2008, 926). Moreover, several studies have investigated whether men and women communicate differently using CMC, and found that such differences can be detected (e.g. Savicki and Kelley 2000). However, research has also found that

although there seem to be overall differences between men and women, gender composition of the groups within which the communication took place was a variable with the strongest relationship to communication style (Savicki and Kelley 2000). This could also imply the importance of investigating whether there are any differences in how men and women communicate according to whom they are communicating with. It is argued that women are the “emotional sex” and that men are rather emotional inexpressive (Shields 2002; Zammuner 2000, cited in Thelwall, Wilkinson and Uppal 2009, 192) and research has confirmed a tendency for women to report feeling stronger and longer emotions and to express these more clearly (Thelwall, Wilkinson and Uppal 2009, 192). Further, it is proposed that women seem to be more willing to share emotions in public than men. Although it is claimed that CMC neutralizes distinctions of gender, Herring (1994) propose that women and men value different kinds of online interactions as appropriate and desirable (Herring 1994, cited in Wolf 2000, 828). Moreover, studies have found that men and women are expected to show different emotions in their social interactions in order to be seen as gender appropriate (e.g Brescoll & Uhlmann 2008 in Ragins and Winkel 2011, 381). According to this Ragins and Winkel (2011) proposed in their study on gender, emotion and power in work relationships that gender-role stereotypes influence both the perception and the evaluation of emotional displays in work relationships. They argue that “gender influence expectations, perceptions and reactions to emotional displays in ways that prevent women from developing and leveraging power in their work relationships” (Fischer 2000; Johnson and Shulman 1988; Shields 2000, cited in Ragins and Winkel 2011, 377) Even negative emotions, such as anger have been argued to be a source of influence for men, but lead to negative evaluations of women. Accordingly, it could be argued that the evaluation of a message can be influenced by whether the agent is male or female. That there exist such differences highlights the importance of considering how people evaluate a message where the agents` gender is known and how this can influence how communication is perceived at the workplace as well. Moreover, we believe that there will be differences between agents` gender; that a female agent will be evaluated as less competent and receive less intentions to act among the targets, than a male agent will.

Hypothesis 4: The relationship between use of emoticons and (a) judgments of agent competence and (b) intention to act will be moderated by agents' gender.

3.5 Emoticons and targets' age

Another demographic factor worth considering is age. Because CMC is a relatively new phenomenon, it may be more prevalent among adolescents than adults. In line with this, research shows that adolescents are the defining users of the internet (Madden and Rainie 2003, cited in Peter and Valkenburg 2006, 215), and that they strongly integrate internet communication into their social lives (Gross et al. 2002, cited in Peter and Valkenburg 2006, 215). Moreover, in their study from 2006, Peter and Valkenburg found that in pre-adolescence and early adolescence, the quality of real-life relationships and face-to-face communication is lower than in late adolescents. Compared to adults, younger people may depend more on internet communication to engage in quality communication (Peter and Valkenburg 2006). Because adolescents may experience CMC as an integrated part of their everyday-life compared to adults, emoticons may be perceived as a natural part of this type of communication and, thus, making adolescents more prone to ignore the presence of emoticons in an e-mail, compared to adults.

Hypothesis 5: The relationship between use of emoticons and (a) judgments of agent competence and (b) intention to act will be moderated by targets' age.

3.6 Emoticons and organizational roles

Because the focus in our thesis will be a professional setting, it may be important to consider the organizational roles of the communication partners within an organization when exploring the effects of emoticon use. Ashkanasy (2002) has conducted series of studies to determine the extent to which leader-member relations are affected by subordinates' reading of supervisors' emotional expression, and if this influences the quality of leader-member exchange. Early results indicated that subordinates were more influenced by perceptions of non-verbal cues in leader-member interactions than by the content of the message being communicated verbally (Ashkanasy 2002). This could imply that non-verbal cues such as emoticons may influence subordinates to a great extent when communicating with a leader. Considering the notion that emoticons may express

the mood of the leader, and that the mood of the leader is proved to be contagious (Sy, Côté and Saavedra 2005), it may be possible that the role of the agent may moderate the earlier proposed relationship. Accordingly, we propose that;

Hypothesis 6: The relationship between use of emoticons and (a) judgments of agent competence and (b) intention to act will be moderated by targets' and agents' organizational role.

3.7 Emoticons and relationship length

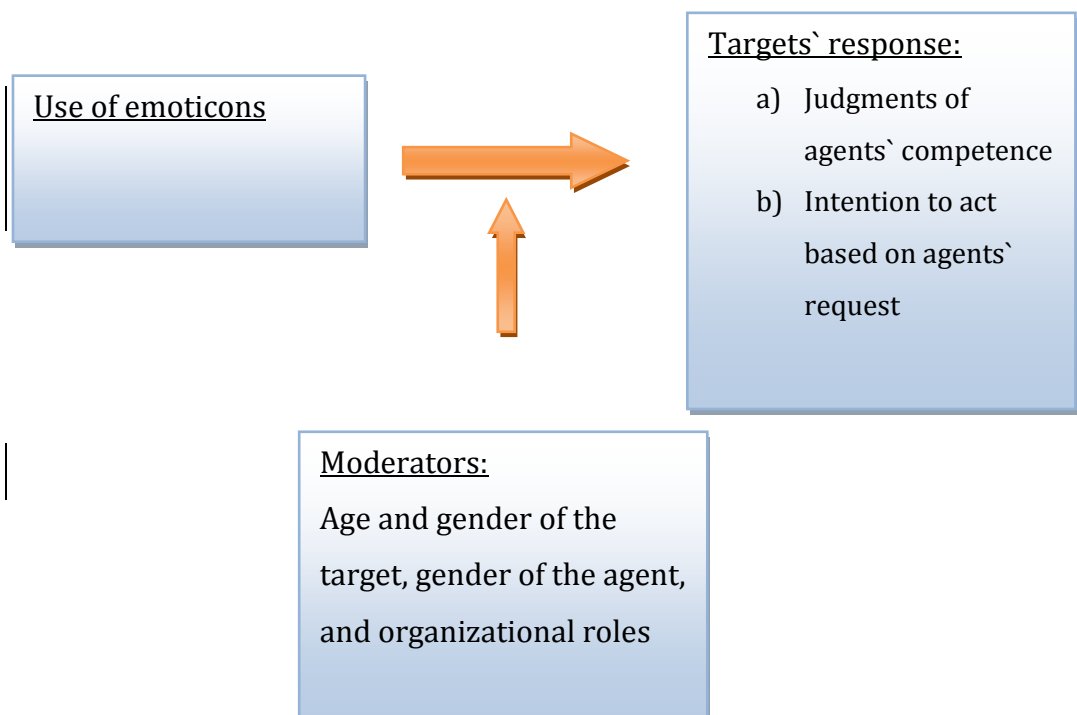
It may not just be the roles between two individuals that may moderate the relationships proposed in this study. Previous research indicates that the length of the relationship between people may be an important factor to consider when exploring the effects of emoticon use. Derks, Bos and Grumbkow (2008) state that one's relation with an interaction partner affect the amount of emotional expression. This means that when you communicate with someone for the first time, you will use less emotional expressions than when interacting with someone you have established a relationship with through series of interactions. Thus, the length of a relationship, meaning the amount of interaction between two people, may be important when considering emoticons as they can be viewed as written emotions. Because we use more emoticons in communicating with friends than with strangers (Derks, Bos and Grumbkow 2008), this could make the presence of emoticons in an early interaction phase subject to negative evaluations as it does not fit with targets' expectations. Moreover, the absence of emoticons in a well-established relationship could make targets question the mood or meaning underlying the communication, because the usage is expected in this interaction phase. Accordingly, we hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 7: The relationship between use of emoticons and (a) judgments of agent competence and (b) intention to act will be moderated by relationship length.

4. Method

4.1 Experimental design

In order to investigate our hypotheses and be able to study the effects of emoticon use, we wish to use experimental design. Experimental studies give us the opportunity to investigate the effect of some process or intervention (here the use of emoticons), and to compare the group that is exposed to a stimuli (the manipulation group) with other groups that are not (control groups). Accordingly, our study will aim at comparing a group that is exposed to the use of emoticons in an e-mail (manipulation group) with a group that is exposed to an e-mail where no emoticons are used (control group). One of the great contributions with experimental design is that through a randomized assignment of stimuli, it makes it possible to eliminate other possible variables that could affect the relationship, if the sample size is sufficient relative to the heterogeneity in the sample. This means that it is necessary to have a large sample size to conduct an experiment based on randomization (Lai 2004).



(Model 1: Conceptual model)

4.2 The conceptual model

To investigate our research question, a conceptual model was constructed (see model 1, above). This model proposes that emoticon use will affect the targets response to judgments of agent competence, and intentions to act based on agents request. To a great extent, the research that has been conducted on the influence of emoticons has used messages that were manipulated to be positive or negative in the first place (Walther and D`Addario 2001). Thus, to the best of our knowledge, research has not assessed the influence of emoticons on target`s judgment about competence, in combination with an affectively neutral message. This study aims at doing so by creating an emotional neutral message, where emoticons serve as the only manipulation, to enhance our understanding of the phenomenon.

4.3 Experiment 1- Pilot study

A pilot study was conducted during the autumn of 2012. In this study, an experiment was conducted to assess targets` intention to act and their judgments about the agents` competence based on a neutral case (no other manipulation than emoticons). Emoticons were here represented as an icon resembling a person smiling, a so called smiley face (i.e., ☺) and an icon that resembled a sad person, a so called sad face (i.e ☹). It was further decided to use students from a Norwegian business school as participants in the pilot study. Responses from 60 participants (N=60) were gathered of which 32 (53 %) were male and 28 (47 %) were female. Age was grouped into four categories, namely category 1 (age 16- 20), category 2 (age 21- 25), category 3 (age 26- 30), and category 4 (age 31- 35). Most of the participants were in age category two (67 %)

A fictional case was constructed, consisting of some information followed by an e-mail. The case presented information about a woman who had contacted a dentist, via e-mail, with some questions regarding a dental problem. The dentist`s response to this e-mail was further presented. In this e-mail, the dentist suggests possible solutions to the problem, and further advises her to come in for a consultation. Half of the participants were randomly assigned to the manipulation group (receiving the case that included smileys), and the other part of participants were in the control group (receiving the case not including smileys).

4.3.1 Measures

- *Independent variable: use of emoticons*

Two types of cases were distributed among participants. They were identical, except that one included emoticons and one did not. By looking at the mean difference between the answers from the control group and the manipulation group, we assessed the effect of emoticon-presence on the dependent variables.

- *Dependent variables: a) judgments of competence and b) intention to act*

Responses on both likelihood of intention to act, and judgments of the dentist’s competence were rated using a 7 point likert scale, ranging from; 1 (highly unlikely or highly incompetent), to 7 (highly likely or highly competent).

Informants were asked to read the case and then answer the following questions:

- 1) How likely is it that you would see this dentist?
- 2) Based on the case you have read, how competent do you think the dentist is?

4.3.2 Results and discussion

In the pilot study, we found support for our hypothesis; that in a professional setting, target`s viewed the agent as less competent, and they had less intention to act when they were presented with a case that included emoticons than one that did not. We also found support for the hypothesis; that the gender of the participants would not have a significant influence on the results.

Although it was found that the use of emoticons would influence perceived competence and intention to act in the pilot study, we did not control for any moderating variables in the relationship between the dependent and the independent variables. The lack of such moderating variables was here regarded as a limitation that we wanted to address in the future.

4.4 Experiment 2 and 3

Based on the theoretical background and the findings from experiment 1 (pilot study), we plan to conduct two additional experiments as part of our master thesis. The results of the pilot study yield large, significant differences in competence-judgments and intentions to act based on emoticon use in an e-mail. The question is then why? How can we explain this? And, are there factors that need to be

controlled for or included to get a more precise picture? As Byron (2008) proposes; individuals and groups vary in both their perceptions and use of e-mail at work. These variations likely persist because the rapid adoption of e-mail allows few established norms and rules in its use. Accordingly, these variations in terms of users (i.e. targets and agents of e-mails) and their social context (i.e., their workgroup or organization) likely influence how targets perceive emotions in e-mail communication (Byron 2008). In turn, e-mail targets likely rely on knowledge about the agent, such as his or her gender, in perceiving emotion in e-mails from that agent. In little research has scholars directly considered these factors, perhaps because of the belief that the relative lack of cues about the agents’ identity in electronic media eliminates biases (Byron 2008).

The first experiment (pilot study) outlined a professional-client relationship, the dentist was a male and the client was a female. Further, the participants were about the same age, and in total there were only 60 participants. Accordingly, it will be an aim to address a different setting and other roles in our final thesis. Because our field of study (and interest) is organizational psychology and leadership, we want to explore the effects of emoticon use in an organizational setting. Additionally, the psychology related to expectations from different roles in organizations is fascinating, and something that could be an important factor to consider when studying the effects of emoticon in organizations. Consequently, we want to explore whether some demographic factors and organizational roles may moderate the earlier proposed relationship between emoticon use and response in an organizational setting.

4.4.1 Procedure – Experiment 2

The main aim of experiment 2 was to explore the effects emoticon use has on a) targets’ perceptions of agents’ competence, and b) targets’ intentions to act based on agents’ request when the agent is a leader and the target is a subordinate.

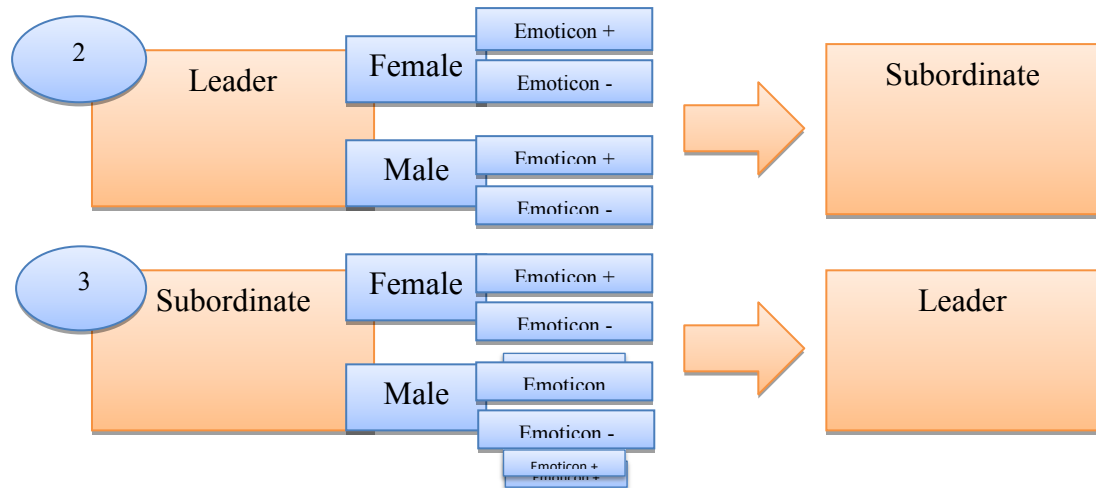
A case will be developed, much like the one in experiment 1. However, some important aspects will differ. In experiment 2 the case will involve an employee receiving an e-mail from his or her leader. The case will be constructed in a way that attempts to get the participants to view themselves as the subordinate and

evaluate the leader`s competence, and their intention to act based on a request from their leader. The manipulation group will receive the e-mail including emoticons, and the control group will receive the same e-mail without emoticons. Experiment 2 will be conducted in two rounds. In the first round, the leader will be presented as a female and in the second round; the leader will be presented as a male. The aim of doing so is to assess whether the gender of the leader will moderate the relationship between emoticon use and a) judgments of competence and b) intention to act based on agents` request. Additionally, we aim at gathering a large population, versatile in age, enabling us to assess differences in targets` age as well.

4.4.2 Procedure – Experiment 3

This experiment will resemble experiment 2, but one important factor will differ; the organizational roles of the agent and the subordinate. The main aim of experiment 3 is to explore the effects emoticon use has on a) targets` perceptions of agents` competence and b) targets` intentions to act based on agents` request when the agent is a subordinate and the target is a leader. Consequently, we wish to explore the possible difference in the proposed relationship when the roles changes.

A new case will be developed that present a leader receiving an e-mail from a subordinate. The case will be constructed in a way that attempts to get the participants to view themselves as the leader and evaluate the subordinates` competence, and their intention to act based on a request from the subordinate. Similarly to experiment one and two, the manipulation group will receive the e-mail including emoticons, and the control group will receive the same e-mail without emoticons. This experiment will also contain two rounds, one where the subordinate is a female, and one where the subordinate is a male. The assessment of age will hopefully also be possible through this experiment. Experiment 2 and 3 are illustrated below:



5. Intended Contribution

Hopefully, the two additional experiments will provide information about the moderating effects organizational roles and gender will have on the proposed relationship between emoticon use and a) judgments about agents` competence, and b) targets` intention to act based on agents` request. Hopefully, this could create a newfound insight to the effects of emoticon use in organization, raise awareness about the possible effects of emoticon use for practitioner`s, add to the body of research within this field, and serve as a starting point for future research on the topic.

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