

Emojis for Good: How Emoji Symbolism in Brand Communication Affects Consumer Active Engagement with Sustainable Development Goals

Kedma Hamelberg
University of Amsterdam

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Abstract

Despite the popularity of emojis in digital communication, their role in enhancing socially responsible messages, such as the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), remains unclear. This study examines how emoji symbolism—icon emojis (e.g., 🌴 for palm tree) versus symbol emojis (e.g., 🏳️ for pride)—affects consumer engagement with SDG-related social media posts. Analyzing 13,698 brand posts with AI models, the results reveal that icon emojis significantly outperform symbol emojis in driving active engagement (i.e., replies), indicating that excessive media richness from symbols may hinder message clarity. Furthermore, emojis placed at the beginning of posts and the combined use of stand-alone and sequential emojis amplify engagement. These findings extend Media Richness Theory by identifying boundaries to its effectiveness in digital communication, offering guidance for brands to strategically use emojis to enhance consumer engagement with socially responsible content.

Keywords: Emojis, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Media Richness Theory

Track: Digital Marketing & Social Media