

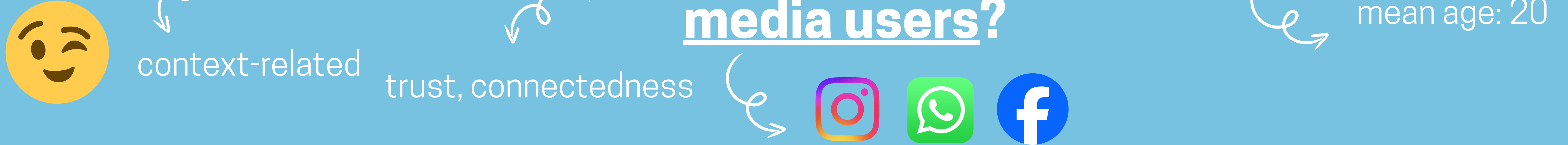


non-verbal cues



Unicode

How does the use of emojis as paralinguistic signals threaten social cohesion among young adult social media users?



Context & Relevance

Since the 1990s emojis have taken over a major role on social media eventually becoming an own language. (Ljubescic & Fiser, 2016)
 They serve as emotional enrichment and enhance social trust and connection. (Veytia-Bucheli et al., 2020)

BUT ALSO:

- **Ambiguity and Misinterpretation**
- **Context Loss**
- **Facilitation of Toxicity/ Ideology**
- **Threat to Social Cohesion** (Ingroup/ Outgroup)

(i.e. Czesłochowska et al., 2022;
 Zhukova & Herring, 2024;
 V. Evans, personal communication, February 11, 2026)



Methods

Survey

(Zhukova & Herring, 2024)



Positive emoji



Negative emoji



Neutral emoji

How can threat perception be amplified or reduced by emoji use?

Purpose: investigate whether education about the use and the potential ambiguous meanings of emojis holds promise for neutralising/reducing the negative valence of messages

- **3 Sentences per condition**
- **Respondents are asked to evaluate the statements' positive-negative impact for different senders before and after receiving an explanation of the emoji**

Results

H1: There is a difference in threat perception for different senders.

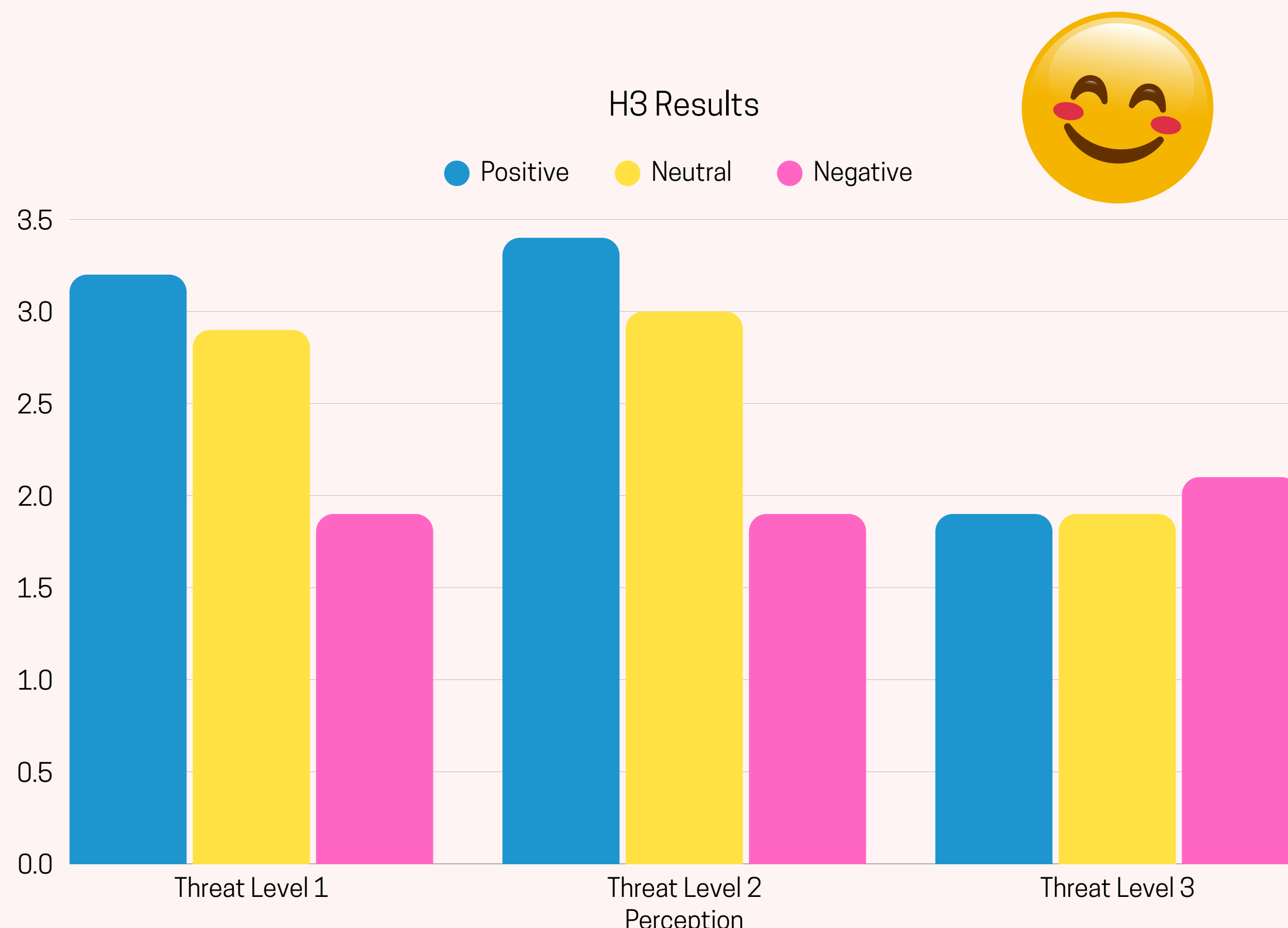
- Sender (only) plays a role when the message has room for interpretation (neutral/positive) and seems ambiguous

H2: For the same message, there is a significant difference in threat perception before and after they are presented with an emoji explanation.

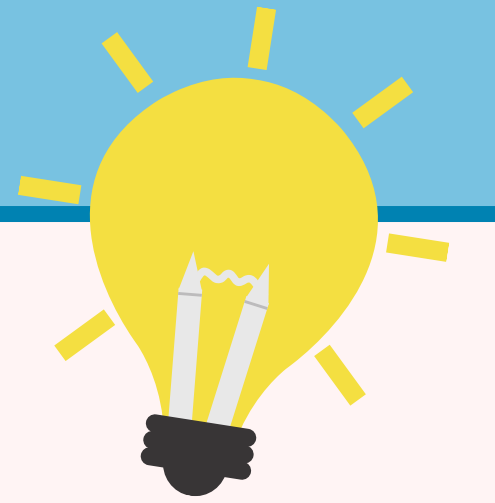
- Participants' threat perception changed after the explanation
- The effect of the explanation did not differ across emoji conditions

H3: The initial threat perception is in line with the connotation of the used emoji.

- Selection of emojis directly influences how scenarios are interpreted



Conclusion & Recommendations



Key findings:

- Emoji-based communication can significantly shape perceived threat in text-based interactions
- Findings emphasize the value of education of the implicit meanings and the use of emojis within digital communication
- Increasing awareness on how emojis could be received
 - reducing misinterpretation and diminish unintended harm (Zhou et al., 2025)
 - more inclusive and social cohesive interactions online (Cantabrana et al., 2015)

Future Directions:

- The role of emoji literacy and communication awareness should be more directly researched
- Studies using real conversational data or interactive designs for more ecologically valid insights
- Expanding samples to include diverse cultural and demographic groups

Limitations:

- Relatively small sample
- Text-prompts in the survey didn't reflect the participants' previous personal behaviour
- No direct examination of differential impacts on minority groups



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