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MEME MARKETING AND CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT IN THE FAST-FOOD BUSINESSES

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I hereby declare that I have compiled the thesis independently
and all works, important standpoints and data by other authors
have been properly referenced and the same paper
has not been previously presented for grading.

The document length is 9817 words from the introduction to the end of the conclusion.

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the current graduation thesis is to find out how meme marketing of fast-food companies affect customer. The study is conducted to find wheather there is a link between customer engagement and marketing campaigns with the focus on fast-food businesses since there is lack of information regarding the topic.

As a reference for the current graduation thesis, potential fast-food customers are measured, using and adopting the Instagram Engagement Score conceptualised by Gong (2014), Elaboration Likelyhood Model by Petty & Cacioppo (1986) as well as the Customer Brand Engagement (CBE) Model by Hollebeek, et al. (2014), as theoretical foundation. In order to achieve the aim of the the current study, the Instagram Engagement score is calculated based on four randomly picked meme marketing campaign by four fast-food companies. Additionally, peripheral and central routs are ranked and their mean values are compared with the mean values of digital customer engagement. Moreover, digital involvement' correlation with cognitive proccessing's, affection's, action's (the CBE elements) is studied using the Spearman's rank correlation. Then, the CBE factors' correlation with self-brand connection's and brand-usage intent's is measured. Finally, the factor analysis was conducted for the CBE Model's (Hollebeek, et al., 2014) elements. Empirical research considers four globally leading fast-food companies. The sample size of the study is 175 respondents.

Based on Instagram Engagement Score, McDonald's and KFC are having the best meme marketing campaigns. The most important characteristics of memes are being "funny" and "visually appealing", i.e. a successful meme marketing campaign should focus on peripheral route of customer involvement. The higher the customers assess meme characteristics related to the peripheral route of involvement, the higher they assess meme characteristics related to the central route of involvement as well the higher is likelihood of liking, commenting and sharing that particular meme. Correlation between involvement and customer engagement is rather low. Correlation between customer engagement and self-brand connection as well customer engagement and brand usage intent are strong.

Based on the findings, fast food businesses should make an effort to make their meme marketing funny and visially appealing to the target audience. They should also increase their engagement intent by concentrating on cognitive, emotional, and behavioral factors so they can achieve greater results and forge stronger connections.

Keywords: Meme marketing, customer engagement, McDonald's, KFC

INTRODUCTION

The importance of digital marketing has become more critical than ever as the global pandemic changes users' habits towards online shopping. According to Vijayanand (2021), marketing activity on digital platforms enabled marketers to connect directly with customers regardless of their physical location and to engage directly with customers in order to minimize misunderstanding. There are enormous advantages of using digital marketing for brands: growth opportunity for smaller brands, customers comfort, less cost, client's personalization, good relationships with consumer, availability of products' information and their instant comparison (Vijayanand, 2021). One of the most key areas of digital marketing is social media.

According to recent studies published by Dean (2021), there was 4,48 billion social media users worldwide and they averagely spent 2 hours 24 minutes on social media, and no doubt it is a great instrument for wide-scale promotion. Social media is a key communication channel for any company, it also serves as a platform for news distribution, product promotion, brand awareness, community building, etc. Moreover, social media is an ideal option for quick feedback about the product or service and further strategy building based on that. Often, for the position of a particular brand in social media, users can cancel brands, thus, online communication channels have a huge driving force.

In today's realities, marketers must adapt to current trends and be able to find a language with their audience and potential consumers to build trust. Many underestimate the power of satirical content, which can go viral and increase brand awareness and help to build relationships with consumer. The usage of actual on-date memes is one way to prove that there is a brand that keeps up with the changing environment and its audience. Besides, humor is a great tool for businesses for calling positive emotions and promote a product among potential customers. However, it often happens that the meme does not fall into the audience, or is considered embarrassing, unfunny, offensive, and off topic. Therefore, it is crucial for brands to approach this tool very carefully and accurately, considering the relevance and their target group.

The motivation for writing this thesis emerges from newest marketing trends linked to enlargement of new communication strategies that are widely spread on divergent social media platforms and properly applied by plenty of brands as satirical content have recently been acknowledged as one of the most effective types of marketing communication, as well as one of the easiest ways to involve target audiences (Malodia *et al.,* 2022). Besides, there is lack of information on meme marketing and engagement as well as on aspects influencing engagement with memes utilized by fast-food brands. The author has been dealing with the topic since 2020, being engaged with companies who are using meme marketing. This experience allows in this paper to incorporate business practices along with theoretical concepts.

Present and prevailing research are primarily focused on meme marketing's brand image, positioning, personality, perception, or purchase decision along with lack of engagement examination. Some studies compare memes with non-memetic imagery to see if using memes in marketing communication affects a brand's personality from the customers' viewpoint (Krasniqi & Palmstadius, 2021). Another research looks at how satire via online memes affects brand image (Kontio *et al.,* 2020). Besides, there is a detailed investigation on how to trigger engagement by creating viral based on industry stakeholders (Malodia *et al*., 2022). The research problem is the lack of information on about the link between meme marketing and customer engagement. The study's aim is to find out how meme marketing of fast-food companies affect customer engagement.

The research questions are the following:

RQ1 – Which fast-food companies have most successful meme marketing campaigns?

RQ2 – What are characteristics of meme marketing campaigns of successful fast-food companies?

RQ3 – What is the link of meme marketing to customer engagement for fast-food companies?

The current graduation thesis is divided into three main chapters. The first chapter covers the theoretical background, first sub-chapter provides an overview on memes and meme marketing as and shows interpretation of consumer engagement. Moreover, the second sub-chapter includes explanation on central and peripheral paths via involvement, the third sub-chapter shows the

customer engagement model for implication, and the fourth sub-chapter presents previous studies about utilization of meme marketing.

The second chapter of the thesis gives a brief overview of global fast-food business and companies and their use of memes in social media in the first sub-chapter as well as research methodology in the second one. The third sub-chapter includes sample description.

The final chapter presents the results of the research in the first sub-charter, discussion of the results in the second one and proposal, recommendations, limitations, and suggestions for the further studies in the third sub-chapter.

1. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

This chapter gives a theoretical framework for the graduation thesis and divided into five separate sub-chapters. The first subchapter covers the definition of memes from various perspectives, how it was firstly utilized and its adaptation to the Internet culture. The second sub-chapter covers customer engagement as well as memes via peripheral and central influencing. The third chapter explains the Instagram Engagement Score as a possible formula for calculating digital customer engagement. The fourth sub-chapter introduces Customer Brand Engagement model as a possible tool for indicating factors influencing engagement as well its consequences. The last sub-chapter covers previous studies on meme marketing and its influence on customer engagement.

1.1. Memes and meme marketing as a tool for developing customer engagement

Memes are a part of popular Internet culture and are regularly utilized by active network users. However, the word itself was first described and used in 1976 by Richard Dawkins in his book The Selfish Gene (Krasniqi & Palmstadius, 2021). The scientist proposed memes as a cultural equivalent of genes to describe how gossip, catchphrases, tunes, or fashion tendencies spread across a society by jumping from brain to brain via imitation (Bauckhage, 2021). Therefore, meme in its prior definition is considered as an independent and complex unit of culture. In fact, memes reflect the specific society in the historical moment, a fixation of events through the prism of one's cultural background. The idea is supported by Raj & Jayaprakash (2021), they describe memes as ideas, symbols or practices defined by culture, which can be distributed from person to person through different channels such as writing, speech, gestures, rituals.

Schulz & Lavenda (1995) define culture as "sets of learned behavior and ideas that human beings acquire as members of society. Human beings use culture to adapt to and to transform the world in which we live" (as cited in Nicovich & Cornwell, 1998, p.24). Traditional cultural and social boundaries include geographics, skin colour, ethnicity, religion and used as intermediary for recognising one's beliefs, attitudes and behaviour, which is not strongly implied to members of

the internet culture (*Ibid.*). Digital members determine who is a member and who is not and community acceptance by discourse, which is used for expanding a sense of belonging (*Ibid.*).

As a result of Internet growth, digital society becomes more globalised, where meme language is a universal form of spreading and sharing a message in form of humorous visuals. Petrova (2021), states that online culture examines the virtual space and the society in a socio-technological setting, in which digital language raises space-time issues. Memes, forming everyday discourse, are the process of interaction and users' engagement (*Ibid.*). The phrase "Internet meme" is widely used to describe how various sorts of content, such jokes, gossip, films, or websites, travel from one person to another online (Shifman, 2013). Internet memes are described as elements of popular culture that are spread, mimicked, and altered by particular Internet users, resulting in the creation of a shared cultural experience (*Ibid.*). Internet memes should be considered as groupings of content pieces that were developed with awareness of one another and share similar traits rather than as single ideas or formulae that spread effectively (*Ibid.*). Bauckhage (2021) adds that memes spread quickly and are distributed in voluntary, peer to peer fashion.

Understanding the core of the meme, defining mechanisms for stratifying memes in the media field, and the creation of strategies for influencing cultural potential memes are all significant components in the production of new, relevant approaches to consumer communication. Malodia, *et al.* (2022) claim that there is no skepticism that the relevance and popularity of memes are growing in many companies' and brands' promotional and marketing tactics. Additionally, memes have recently been acknowledged as one of the easiest methods of reaching core audience and as one of the most effective forms of marketing communication (*Ibid.*). Moreover, the reasons for memes being so frequently utilized are high cost-effectiveness, audience's relativity to popular memes, organic connection with the public, and easiness for modifying due to meme templates (*Ibid.*).

Malodia, *et al.* (2022) specify that the recent social media behaviour studies have shown that 75% of users aged 13-36 post memes on a regular basis, and 30% of these people share memes every day, moreover, Instagram users exchanged 1 million memes every day in 2020. Paquette (2019) confirms that employing memes in advertising delivers a 30% engagement rate on social media against a 1% click-through rate in the case of Google AdWords (as cited in Malodia, *et al.*, 2022). This suggests that memes are a simple and effective way to communicate and increase user interest in a brand, this leads to engagement and community building.

Apart from social media, it is essential to overview customer engagement. McEwen (2004) states that on the degree to which consumers have developed both rational and emotional attachments with a brand, engagement might be used as a potential measure of how strong a company's customer relationships are (as cited in Bowden, 2009). Van Doorn *et al.* (2010) defines customer engagement as the behavioral manifestation, which is now greater than purchase behavior, that goes from consumer toward a brand (as cited in Bijmolt, *et al.*, 2010). Hollebeek (2011) refers to consumer brand engagement as to the degree to which a customer is motivated to engage with a brand based on their motivational, brand-related, and context-specific state of mind. This state of mind is distinguished by certain degrees of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral activity that occur during direct brand encounters (*Ibid.*).

Bijmolt, *et al.* (2010) state that customer engagement may lead to word-of-mouth referrals, participation in company's activities, suggestion for improving product, sharing opinion and feedback, joining brand communities, or engaging in negative behaviors such as revenge. Higgins & Scholer (2009) acknowledge both potentially negative manifestations of the engagement (such as dissociating from an object) as well as good manifestations of engagement, such as bonding, which occurs as a result of being drawn to the object (as cited Brodie, *et al.*, 2011). Additionally, it can be considered that in a rapidly changing environment customer engagement plays an enormous role in a company's sales growth, competitive advantage, and profitability (Brodie, *et al.*, 2011). Brodie *et al.* (2011) claim that these allegations are based on the idea that engaged customers are a crucial factor in viral marketing because they tend to refer or recommend specific products, services, or brands to other people or vice versa.

It can be rightly noted that the engagement affects the emotional connection between the brand and the end consumer. Moreover, it refers to a wide range of conditions, including awareness, interest, and willingness to purchase, retention, and loyalty (Sashi, 2012). With the development of the Internet and social media, the methods of communication between the brand and the consumer have improved markedly, it became easier to maintain interaction and increase engagement. Online social networking services like brand pages, which are becoming more sophisticated, have made it possible for businesses to go from being passive viewers to becoming active players and collaborators who produce innovative ideas (Jahn & Kunz, 2012, Hollebeek *et al.*, 2016, as cited in Carlson *et al.*, 2018). According to Sashi (2012), social media's interactive features, which enable conversations between people and organizations in communities of sellers

and customers and involve customers in content creation and value creation, have practitioners excited about the possibility of providing better customer service and meeting their needs.

1.2. Consumer involvement via peripheral and central influencing

The Elaboration Likelihood Model can be used to how different routes influence the processing of marketing messages and involvement level. In 1981, Petty & Cacioppo introduced the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) concept. The ELM divides influence processes into central and peripheral pathways based on the type of information processed by a specific individual (Shi *et al.*, 2018). According to Petty & Cacioppo (1986), people who use the central path think critically about issue-related arguments and examine their benefits and purpose before making an opinion about the commercial or product. Individuals must understand the information clearly, assess it, compare it to previously known information, and judge the probability of the assertions stated in the central route (as cited in Shi *et al.,* 2018). On the other hand, individuals who use the peripheral path depend on shortcuts such as the number of reasons and physical attractiveness of endorsers (Lee, 2009).

The ELM specific focus on persuasive effects in both high- and low-involvement situations; audience engagement with the persuasive communication is considered as a significant moderating impact on the nature of the process by which a message exerts its persuasive effects on the audience (Areni & Lutz, 1988). The two unique "routes" to persuasion are connected to the ends of the involvement continuum, with great involvement corresponding to the "central route" and low engagement to the "peripheral route" (*Ibid.*).

When involvement is great which means that a customer is carefully listening to and paying attention to the communication, the core pathway of elaboration takes place (Bullock, 2014). As a result, the person is very interested in the argument being stated. The typical way that considerable issue-relevant thought takes place in central-route processing is to: "through extensive issue-relevant thinking: careful examination of the information contained in the message, close scrutiny of the message's arguments, consideration of other issue relevant material, and so on" (O'Keefe, 2008, p. 1478 as cited in Bullock, 2014). High cognitive effort processing via the central pathway results in more remembered choices that have the potential to alter an individual's schema. It is

difficult to employ in advertising, though, as it necessitates participation and drawn-out discussions. Central route processing is therefore challenging to implement even if it is effective at leaving a lasting impression (Wagner & Petty, 2011; Petty, Brinol, & Priester, 2009 as cited in Bullock, 2014).

When involvement is minimal, which indicates that the participant is probably not paying much attention to the message, ELM takes the peripheral path (Bullock, 2014). Different peripheral signals are used by peripheral route processing to sway participants in an effort to convince them (Ibid.). The use of celebrities, experts, comedy, the surroundings, repetition, rewards, credibility, and presumed credibility are some examples of peripheral cues, which enable the mind to quickly and in a less sophisticated fashion locate support for the argument *(Ibid.)*. The author (2014) provides an example of vivid fragrance marketing campaigns, where it is impossible to smell the perfume but rather become interested by known celebrity, music, and beautiful surrounding, these persuade customers to buy product.

For the purposes of this study, involvement will refer to interaction with a brand on its social media sites that is motivated by needs, values, or interests, in particular brand familiarity (Huang et al., 2010 as cited in McClure & Seock, 2019).

1.3. Models to evaluate customer engagement

The author will consider two models in the thesis research: First one is the Instagram Engagement Score formulated by Gong (2014) and second one is conceptualized and structured by Hollebeek, et al. (2014).

Promoting a business online requires a serious approach from marketers. Especially when it comes to calculating results or evaluating the profitability of a promotional channel. The activity of the customers needs to be counted, analyzed, and constantly monitored. Gavilanes *et al.* (2018) write that consumer encounters with brands in an online realm are referred to as "digital consumer engagement" (DCE). This deepens customers' commitment to the brand at various levels and stages, resulting in measurable responses like clicks, likes, comments, and shares (as cited in Munaro et al., 2020).

Munaro et al. (2020), claim that liking a message represents a moderate level of engagement since it requires less interactions, it is more intuitive and less cognitive (Labrecque *et al.,* 2020; Swani *et al.,* 2017). Contrariwise, writing a comment demands more effort, time and cognitive resources; since people typically leave comments when the topic is legitimately relevant to them, commenting entails more emotions and sentiments (Sebate *et al.,* 2014; Munaro *et al.,* 2020).

Since memes are part of the Internet, especially social media, it was decided to partially focus on engagement metrics in Instagram. The theoretical basis for calculating customer engagement in Instagram was taken from a scientific work "Strategic Customer Engagement on Instagram" by Xueqi Gong (2014). To quantify Instagram engagement for this case study, a formula based on the number of followers, likes, and comments was provided as follows:

$$\textit{Instagram Engagement Score} = \frac{number\ of\ likes + number\ of\ comments}{number\ of\ followes} \times 1000$$

where
number of likes – sum of likes by unique users in Instagram
number of comments – sum of comments by users in Instagram
number of followers – amount of unique users following the concrete Instagram page

Subscriber engagement is measured by how they directly connect with a piece of visual material, particularly by like and hash-tagging it so that it appears in other followers "explore" feeds (*Ibid.*).

Although social media can grant many possibilities for improving interaction, giving insights, creating useful innovation, understanding the potential and existing buyer, and accordingly increasing engagement, many companies do not know how to use it for catching opportunities (Robers & Piller, 2016, as cited in Carlson *et al.,* 2018). Businesses can tailor their marketing strategies for better reach and influence different types of customers.

For further customer engagement measurement Hollebeek, *et al.* (2014) conceptualized and developed a 10-item scale. There are three key elements related to brand and customer interactions developed in the Consumer Brand engagement scale: cognitive, emotional, and behavioral activity (Hollebeek, et al., 2014). Firstly, 'cognitive processing' is considered as "a consumer's level of brand-related thought processing and elaboration in a particular consumer/brand interaction" (Hollebeek, et al., 2014, p. 154). Secondly, the authors (2014) describe 'affection' (i.e. emotional dimension) as "a consumer's degree of positive brand-related affect in a particular consumer/brand

interaction" (p. 154). Thirdly, 'activation' (i.e. behavioral dimension) is defined as "a consumer's level of energy, effort and time spent on a brand in a particular consumer/brand interaction" (Hollebeek, et al., 2014, p. 154). A suggested concept model by Hollebeek, et al. (2014) incorporates consumer involvement, self-brand connection and brand usage intent.

CBE ANTECEDENT   CBE   CBE CONSEQUENCES

```
                                ┌ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ┐
                                │  ┌──────────┐ │        ┌──────────────┐
                                   │ Cognitive │          │ Self-brand   │
                                │  │ processing│ │        │ connection   │
                                   │ (cognitive)│         └──────────────┘
                                │  └──────────┘ │
        ┌──────────────┐        │              │
        │ Customer     │───────▶│  ┌──────────┐│
        │ involvement  │           │ Affection ││
        └──────────────┘        │  │ (emotional)││       ┌──────────────┐
                                   └──────────┘ │        │ Brand usage  │
                                │              │         │ intent       │
                                   ┌──────────┐          └──────────────┘
                                │  │ Activation││
                                   │ (behavioral)│
                                │  └──────────┘│
                                └ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ┘
```
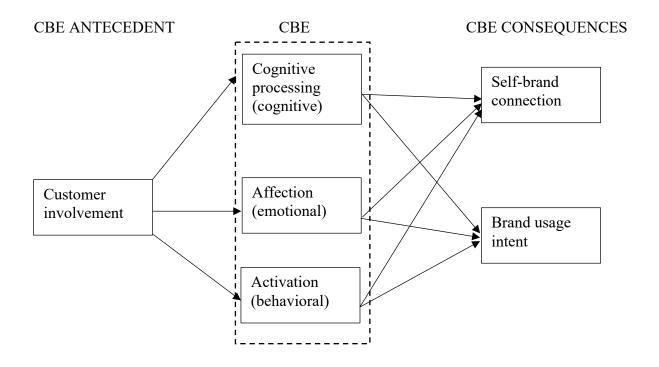
Figure 1.1. Customer Engagement Model
Source: Hollebeek, *et al.* (2014)

Self-brand connections are the connections customers make between a brand and their own identity; the more closely a consumer associates a brand with themselves, the more significant they believe the brand to be (Escalas, 2004 as cited in in Harrigan, *et al.,* 2018). The intent of a consumer for one brand over others that are comparable shows the intrinsic value of branding (Yoo & Donthu, 2001 as cited in Harrigan, *et al.,* 2018).

Harrigan, *et al.* (2018), proposed that the cognitive dimension of Customer Brand Engagement is a predictor of brand usage intent since consumers are not just clicking on the social media site for no reason, but deliberately engaging with a brand. According to earlier studies, consumer satisfaction affects a brand's intention (Ginting, *et al.,* 2022). The impact of communication on consumers who were the beneficiaries of these stimuli was good (*Ibid.*). Therefore, brand communication had a positive relationship with brand equity if the message pushed consumer

behavior toward the concerned branded product rather than unbranded items (Yoo & Lee, 2012, as cited in Ginting, *et al.,* 2022).

1.4. Previous cases of meme marketing usage to engage consumers

The adoption of memes is not something obviously unfamiliar, companies actively post them to make engaging content, be trendy and reach the audience. For example, Ngo (2021) observes a meme uploaded on Facebook by official McDonald's page, which was called "McDonald's Goes to Mars". The author (2021) describes the meme as a black-and-white image with the company's renowned Szechuan Sauce on an alien surface with the caption "there it is" in Figure1.2.
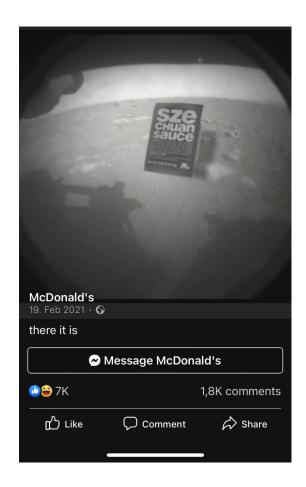

Figure1.2. McDonald's Meme Post
Source: McDonald's (2021)
Retrieved from:
https://www.facebook.com/McDonalds/photos/a.10150319191897014/10158069396327014
Ngo (2021) also adds that McDonald's is took an original picture by NASA and Photoshopped it to grab follower's attention to their renewed sauce. The image illustrates the first photograph

taken on the surface of Mars; it was posted on NASA's Perseverance Mars Rover's Twitter account that can be seen in Figure 1.3.

Figure 3. NASA's Perseverance Mars Rover's Twitter Post
Source: NASA (2021)
Retrieved from: https://twitter.com/NASAPersevere/status/1362507436611956736

Ngo (2021) explains that the image by NASA is not the only meme element for McDonald's Szechuan Sauce. The sauce itself was released as a limited-edition promotion for the Disney movie "Mulan" in 1998 (*Ibid.*). The premiere of the new season of a cartoon TV show named "Rick and Morty" in 2017 with the character's obsession with the sauce, brought it back into the spotlight, causing an explosion in demand on social media, leading McDonald's to respond to the extensive popularity (*Ibid*.). The humorous and popular nature of the meme, combined with its ability to create a sense of emotional bonding with viewers, illustrates the potential power of meme marketing in engaging customers and generating demand for a product. McDonald's expected its meme to go viral, considering the popularity of its product and the cultural attraction boost surrounding the Mars landing (*Ibid.*). The attempt at meme marketing was successful, with the post receiving around 7000 reactions, 1722 shares, and around 1800 comments as of April 2nd, 2023.

Another example of meme marketing and engagement was mentioned by Madolia, *et al.* (2022), the authors explained the Heinz meme marketing campaign that raised the debates about tomato's status, whether to classify it as a vegetable or a fruit, they created a hashtag and asked social media users to participate with their vote. Cole (2018, as cited in Malodia, *et al.,* 2022) writes that the campaign generated over 80,000 engagements (including likes, comments, and shares) with 4 million impressions on Instagram and Facebook.

Nevertheless, it should be considered that meme marketing can cause opposite reaction and lead to consumer engagement but in a negative sense. For instance, there is a user's meme, which is called "Silence, Brand!", seen in Figure 1.4. According to an online source Totempool (2022), it is a joke about how social media users mock the brand's attempt to be funny, relatable, socially engaged, but fail to be authentic. The meme aims to demonstrate to businesses that customers can see through the apparent deception of coolness, friendliness, care for the environment, or social participation (*Ibid.*).

Figure 1.4. the "Silence, brand" meme
Source: Totempol (2022).
Retrieved from: https://totempool.com/blog/silence-brand/

2. RESEARCH OBJECT AND METHODOLOGY

The second chapter includes two sub-chapters. The first one gives a brief overview of global fast-food companies and their use of social media, their overall engagement rate and previous example of meme marketing by McDonald's and KFC. The second sub-chapter provides an overview of the methodology used in the current thesis and sample description.

2.1. Brief overview of global fast-food business and companies and their use of memes in social media

According to Fortune Business Insight (2022), at a projected compound annual growth rate of 6.05% throughout the forecast period, the worldwide fast-food industry is expected to increase from USD 972.74 billion in 2021 to USD 1,467.04 billion by 2028. The age group with the biggest percentage of fast-food customers was those between 20 and 39 years old, with 44.9% of the population (Elad, 2023). Moreover, 21% of millennials make fast food selections based on social media posts or other images (*Ibid.*).

No surprise that every fast-food restaurant considered a big market player has social media accounts where they share latest news, offers and memes as mentioned in the last chapter. In recent years, fast food firms have mostly concentrated on leveraging social media because of its significance in promoting brand interaction and forming brand perception (Hanaysha, 2021). The top four fast food chains should then be listed in ranked of sales volume: McDonald's, KFC, Pizza Hut, and Burger King (Gascón, *et al.,* 2017).

As to the followers count, at the time of writing the thesis, McDonalds has the highest amount of Instagram users compared to other listed fast-food companies. The company leads the list with 4.6 million followers, then there is Burger King with 1.9 millions, then KFC and Pizza Hut with 1.7 million followers (HypeAuditor, 2023). The website HypeAuditor (2023) also shows overall

engagement rate with post statistics of McDonald's (0.73%), Burger King (0.08%), KFC (0.41%) and Pizza Hut (0.11%).

Fast-food companies have long used memes to promote their products. For instance, Fernandez (2018) reports that McDonald's used a popular meme in the chain's seasonal campaign: "Bad Luck Brian's", which real name is Kyle Craven, starred in a commercial video for "Trick. Treat. Win!" advertising. The message was that even with bad luck, anyone can win. Most of the Internet users supported Kyle's monetization of his name, others were disappointed with the ad since they believed it was outdated, because the meme came into people's lives 6 years before the video (*Ibid.*).

Fast-food brands utilize memes in their social media too: KFC increases the virality of it's communication by reacting to trendy memes and deliberating with their consumers and various brands colloquially (Heywood, 2021). KFC can encourage interactions with its target consumer base by becoming involved in popular subjects like events, TV shows, or other companies (*Ibid.*). Moreover, companies like McDonald's switched from influencing marketing to meme marketing as it appeals to shared experience (Ramaprasad, 2021). The company promoted McRib sandwich via meme-driven campaign, which is considered successful based on visible virality and user engagement (*Ibid.*).

2.2. Research methodology

As mentioned before, the paper aims to find out how meme marketing of fast-food companies affect customer engagement. To determine engagement with meme marketing among social media users and characteristics affecting it, three questions were answered:

1) Which fast-food companies have most successful meme marketing campaigns?

2) What are characteristics of meme marketing campaigns of successful fast-food companies?

3) What is the link of meme marketing to customer engagement for fast-food companies?

To answer these researcher questions, the author used 2-step quantitative research for collecting and analyzing data. The author is striving to find virtual and real-life results for a more adequate and relevant picture. Quantitative research was chosen to "better understand phenomena in a specific group being studied" (Hulton & Burnett, 2005, p.30).

The author used the Instagram Engagement Rate (IER) to find the most successful companies' meme and narrow the research object. To calculate the IER with meme marketing among followers of fast-food chains, the author selected four biggest companies by sales volumes, including McDonalds', Burger King, KFC, and Pizza Hut. It was decided to randomly choose 16 meme marketing examples from the years 2020-2023 from the companies' official Instagram accounts. All the meme examples used by the author can be seen in Appendix 1. The author used the previously mentioned formulae to compute the IER for each post and calculated the average of 4 posts for each company based on likes, comments, and the companies' follower's amount.

According to Statista (2023), in 2022 the number of Instagram users worldwide was 1.28 billion, therefore, it should be considered that many users might use other social media than Instagram. To find real-life data from diverse, it was decided to conduct a survey based on Consumer Brand Engagement by Hollebeek, et al. (2014) and Elaboration Likehood Model by Petty & Cacioppo (1981) both. The author selected survey as prior quantitative method as it has multiple advantages, like low development time, cost-effectiveness, easy data collection, its opportunity to reach greater audience, and high representativeness (Queirós, *et al.,* 2017).

It was decided to spread the survey online through the author's personal and friends' social media accounts like Instagram, Facebook and Telegram, the author was striving to get as many answers as possible and get the right target group. For sampling it was decided to use the snowball method. The author wanted to reach active Internet users, who are aware of memes and can potentially be fast-food buyers like the author herself. The questionnaire was created by using Google Forms and was conducted anonymously. The author divided possible pool into two groups. Since McDonald's and KFC had better results in prior calculation of the IES that others, the author picked these businesses for further investigation and comparison. The McDonalds' survey was distributed mostly among respondents that live in different countries apart from Russia as the company has left the market. Nevertheless, the KFC survey was distributed among different respondents as the company is still operating in Russia. The questionnaire was distributed on the 22th of April 2023 and run until the 9th of May 2023.

The questionary was divided into 6 sections for McDonalds' seen in Appendix 2 and for KFC seen in Appendix 3. The total number of questions in the survey was 36. Each survey included 3 most successful memes by the companies that were evaluated in the IES calculations.

The first section of the survey introduced the survey aim, definition of the meme by Shifman (2013), and remark that the survey was anonymous, and data would be used for thesis purpose only and be deleted afterwards. The second section introduced all memes by company that would be used for further questions, respondents were able to get an insight beforehand, they could skip this question.

The third part was divided in three parts, each meme was linked to questions regarding digital customer engagement and peripheral and central cues. The aim of the question was to find the respondent's intent to like, comment and share the meme, they could choose from 1 to 5, 1 stood for "Very unlikely", 2 for Unlikely", 3 for "Neither likely nor unlikely", 4 for "Likely", 5 for "Very likely", they also could pick "I do not know" option, which will be considered as missing value. Besides, the author wanted to get assessment of the meme from the perspective of peripheral and central cues, the assessment criteria included funny and visually appealing as the peripheral cues and beliefs and values and important message as central cues. The respondents were asked to assess the meme using the same 5-Likert scale.

The fourth part included factors of central and peripheral cues, the author asked respondents to rank them, thus it could be seen what the customers' expectations from meme marketing campaign by fast-food companies are. There was a possibility to rank each factor from 1st to 4th place.

The fifth part included questions regarding involvement that was not based on the Hollebeek, et al. model (2014) as the author of the thesis decided that it is not applicable in terms of memes as the model is focused on brand engagement. Therefore, the author adjusted questions herself.

The sixth part included questions based on the Hollebeek, et al. model of CBE (2014), the author adjusted questions from the original list to meme marketing. The respondents were asked to assess the sentences with a 5-Likert scale, were 1 stood for "Strongly disagree", 2 for "Disagree", 3 for "Neither agree nor disagree", 4 for "Agree" and 5 for "Strongly agree" and option "I do not know"

(missing value). The final section included demographical question including gender, age, nationality, and monthly spending on fast-food.

To answer the second research question, it was decided to rank factors analyzed by peripheral and central routes, the prior ranking was made by the respondents for companies' meme examples. The author gave 5 points for the 1st place, 3 points for 2nd place, and 2 and 1 points for 3rd and 4th places respectively. Subsequently, the author calculated average of 4 factors for 3 memes separately as well as average like, share and comment intent and compare them. Additionally, the author compared the numbers for each meme to see whether they were successful or not in terms of digital customer engagement and their relationship with respondent's evaluation of peripheral and central factors.

To analyze the results of the survey and find answers to the third research question the author used mean values, correlation analysis and factor analysis. Spearman's correlation analysis was used for the Hollebeek, et al. (2014) CBE model and involvement in context of meme marketing. Beforehand, the author calculated sum of every factor used in the model for each respondent. The author tested correlation between CBE antecedent (involvement) of sector or company orientated questions and CBE components (cognitive processing, affection and activation), and between CBE components and CBE consequences (self-brand connection and brand usage intent). To check the correlation, the author used the SPSS statistics software. For interpreting the size of a correlation coefficient in social sciences, the author used table by Akoglu (2018) and focuded on Dancey & Reidy (2007) correlation interpretation.

Table 2.1. Interpretation of the Pearson's and Spearman's correlation coefficients.

Correlation Coefficient		Dancey & Reidy (Psychology)	Quinnipiac University (Politics)	Chan YH (Medicine)
+1	−1	Perfect	Perfect	Perfect
+0.9	−0.9	Strong	Very Strong	Very Strong
+0.8	−0.8	Strong	Very Strong	Very Strong
+0.7	−0.7	Strong	Very Strong	Moderate
+0.6	−0.6	Moderate	Strong	Moderate
+0.5	−0.5	Moderate	Strong	Fair
+0.4	−0.4	Moderate	Strong	Fair
+0.3	−0.3	Weak	Moderate	Fair
+0.2	−0.2	Weak	Weak	Poor
+0.1	−0.1	Weak	Negligible	Poor
0	0	Zero	None	None

Note: The naming on the 1) Left: Dancey & Reidy., 2) Middle: The Political Science Department at Quinnipiac University, 3) Right: Chan et al.
Source: Akoglu, 2018.

For further calculation for involvement, the author divided survey questions and results into two sub-groups: questions 3.1, 3.3. and 3.5. represented the overall involvement with fast-food segment in social media, however, questions 3.2., 3.4 and 3.5 represented the involvement with the specific company. The author calculated the sum of answers and ranked involvement as 1, 2 and 3. Specifically, 1 stood for "low", 2 for "neutral" and 3 for "high".

The Spearman's rank correlation was tested on segment-related involvement along with McDonald's-related involvement and CBE elements seen in Appendix 4, segment- and KFC-related involvement and CBE elements seen in Appendix 5. To check the results reliance the author computed mean for each variable seen in Appendix 6. The author also made correlation analysis between CBE and CBE consequences, for McDonald's seen in Appendix 4, for KFC seen in Appendix 5.

In addition, the author wanted to check correlation between positive, neutral, and negative engagement and the customer engagement consequences. To create subgroups for different types of engagement, the author took the respondents replies to questions 4.4.-4.9. only since cognitive processing was not sensible to apply in terms of negative nor positive interaction, then calculated sum of answers for each respondent and assigned different classifications. Thereafter, the correlation analysis was conducted to see is there is a strong connection. The author made analysis separately for McDonalds seen in Appendix 7 and for KFC seen in Appendix 8. It was also decided to check negative, neutral, and positive engagement and their mean CBE consequences seen in Appendix 8 both for McDonald's and KFC.

The author also used factor analysis for the CBE and CBE consequences based on the Hollebeek (2014) model to meet the following objectives: "to determine the number of common factors influencing the set of measures and the strength of the relationship between each factor and each observed measure" (DeCoster, 1998, p.2). The number of components that contributed significantly to the variance in the data was initially determined using an exploratory factor analysis using the eigenvalue larger than 1 criteria. Principal component analysis along with varimax rotation was the technique employed for factor extraction. The size and distribution of factor loadings were used to interpret the generated factors.

2.3. Sample of the research

For the thesis, snowball sampling was conducted for easier recruiting research participants when seeking access to population that generally hard to reach (Parker, et al., 2019). Some populations may not reach their potential due to being small, dispersed, private, feeling stigmatized, sensitive or vulnerable, and requiring trust to participate (Ibid.).

Table 2.3.1. McDonald's Demographical Results

		Count	Proportion
	18-25	77	85.56%
	25-35	12	13.33%
Age of respondents	36-46	1	1.11%

	Female	53	58.89%
	Male	35	38.89%
Gender	Others	2	2.22%

	American	1	1.11%
	Arabian	1	1.11%
	Armenian	1	1.11%
	Azerbaijani	1	1.11%
	Belarusian	9	10.00%
	Estonian	24	26.67%
	Kazakh	1	1.11%
	Kurdish	1	1.11%
	Latvian	1	1.11%
	Lithuanian	1	1.11%
	Portuguese	1	1.11%
	Russian	16	17.78%
	Spanish	1	1.11%
	Turkish	1	1.11%
Nationality	Ukrainian	30	33.33%

	0€	1	1,11%
	1-5 €	2	2,22%
	6-10 €	9	10,00%
	11-20 €	16	17,78%
	21-30 €	23	25,56%
	31-40 €	22	24,44%
	41-50 €	10	11,11%
	51-60 €	1	1,11%
	61-70 €	2	2,22%
Spendings	more than 70 €	4	4,44%

Source: table created by the author based on self-made calculations.

The last part of the survey, which included data on the respondents' demographics, served as the foundation for the sample in the research, as shown in Table 2.3.1. Based on the data collected in the McDonald's' survey, the majority was female respondents and in the 18-25 age group, three high distributed nationalities were Ukrainians, Estonians and Russians.

Table 2.3.2. KFC Demographical Results

		Count	Proportion
	17-25	63	74,12%
	25-35	20	23,53%
Age of respondents	36-46	2	2,35%
	Female	45	52,94%
	Male	39	45,88%
Gender	Others	1	1,18%
	Azerbaijani	5	6%
	Belarusian	6	7,06%
	Canadian	1	1,18%
	Estonian	12	14,12%
	Latvian	1	1,18%
	Mexican	1	1,18%
	Peruvian	1	1,18%
	Russian	41	48,24%
	Spanish	1	1,18%
	Turkish	1	1,18%
	Ukrainian	14	16,47%
Nationality	United Kingdom	1	1,18%
	0€	3	3,53%
	1-5 €	4	4,71%
	6-10 €	7	8,24%
	11-20 €	24	28,24%
	21-30 €	18	21,18%
	31-40 €	13	15,29%
	41-50 €	11	12,94%
	51-60 €	3	3,53%
	61-70 €	0	0,00%
Spendings	more than 70 €	2	2,35%

Source: table created by the author based on self-made calculations.

The same is shown in Table 2.3.2. but regarding the KFC's survey. Based on the data collected, the majority was female respondents too and in the 17-25 age group, three high distributed nationalities were Russians, Ukrainians and Estonians.

3. STUDY ABOUR CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT AND MEME MARKETING – CASES OF MCDONALD'S, BURGER KING, KFC AND PIZZA HUT

The third chapter of the study includes four sub-chapter. In the first sub-chapter the author presents the study results including the results of Instagram Engagement Score of fast-food companies' meme marketing and the results of the survey. The second sub-chapter contains discussion of results. The third sub-chapter covers proposal and recommendation. The last sub-chapter introduces limitation of the study as well as suggestions for further studies.

3.1. Study results

3.3.1. Instagram Engagement Scores of fast-food companies' meme marketing campaigns

For the current thesis the author randomly picked 4 posts from 4 companies official Instagram accounts for calculating the Instagram Engagement Score. It was decided to bring to one average number, thus, it is easier to compare indicators.

Table 3.1. shows the IES of randomly selected memes on the official Instagram page of the company. The table demonstrates the number of likes per post as well as number of comments, Besides, it displaces the number of followers as to the 30th of March 2023. Memes examples have divergent IES, there is no absolute or duplicate number. The average IES for four McDonald's' memes is 12.85, which is the highest index among the companies presented in the research.

Table 3.1. The IES results of McDonald's meme marketing

McDonald's	№ of likes	№ of comments	№ of followers	IES	Average IES
Meme example №1	25066	477		5.56	
Meme example №2	98114	1845		21.73	
Meme example №3	47418	1195	4600000	10.57	12.85
Meme example №4	61643	638		13.54	

Source: table created by the author while calculating the IES of McDonald's memes.

Table 3.2 shows the IES for four randomly picked memes examples made by KFC and posted on their official Instagram page. It also presents the number of likes and comments per post and number of followers as to the 30th of March 2023. The average IES for chosen posts is approximately 9.60. KFC has the second highest IES among the fast-food companies.

Table 3.2. The IES results of KFC meme marketing

KFC	№ of likes	№ of comments	№ of followers	IES	Average IES
Meme example № 1	14632	269		8.77	
Meme example № 2	20769	194	1700000	12.33	9.60
Meme example № 3	18285	306		10.94	
Meme example № 4	10646	164		6.36	

Source: table created by the author while calculating the IES of KFC's memes.

Additionally, Table 3.3. shows the results of IES for Burger King memes engagement score on Instagram. The author considered four memes and calculated the IES for each as well as the average number of all the examples together, which was 4.78. The table includes the amount of likes, comments, and followers as to the 30th of March 2023.

Table 3.3. The IES results of KFC meme marketing

Burger King	№ of likes	№ of comments	№ of followers	IES	Average IES
Meme example №1	5889	101		3.15	
Meme example №2	17321	333	1900000	9.29	4.78
Meme example №3	5999	147		3.23	
Meme example №4	6380	148		3.44	

Source: table created by the author while calculating the IES of Burger King's memes.

Table 3.4. shows the number of followers of Pizza Hut's Instagram account as well as the number of likes and comments per meme post example. The company's IES is the lowest among other companies that were picked by the author, which was roughly equal to 4.60.

Table 3.4.

Pizza Hut	№ of likes	№ of comments	№ of followers	IES	Average IES
Meme example № 1	8878	241		5.36	
Meme example № 2	8212	216	1700000	4.96	4.58
Meme example № 3	7394	190		4.46	
Meme example № 4	5882	140		3.54	

Source: table created by the author while calculating the IES of Pizza Hut's memes.

Based on the results of calculation the IES of four fast-food companies' marketing campaign, it was decided to choose two most successful companies for further survey.

3.1.2. McDonald's and KFC' central and peripheral factors

The results of the survey were studies based on McDonald's and KFC's questionnaires responses regarding their meme marketing campaigns.

Table 3.5. The peripheral and central cues ranking by the survey's respondents.

	McDonald's	KFC
Funny	380	365
Visually appealing	247	225
Convey important message	168	157
Correspond to consumer's beliefs and values	195	188

Source: table created by the author based on calculations from the results in Appendix 10

Table 3.5. shows the results of calculation of weighted rank score of user's anticipation of meme marketing campaigns by companies. Answering the question 2 with McDonald's meme marketing example, where the respondents were asked to rank the most important factors they expect the company's memes to be, they put "funny" on the first place, "visually appealing" on the second, "convey important message" on the third and "correspond to consumers' beliefs and values" on the fourth. The same hierarchy was spotted in the KFC's survey.

Table 3.6. Mean values of peripheral and central routs and digital customer engagement of 3 memes examples by McDonalds'

Peripheral and central routs assesement (McDonald's)			
	meme example № 1	meme example № 2	meme example № 3
Funny	3.79	3.90	3.11
Visually appealing	3.38	3.59	3.16
Convey important message	3.38	3.08	2.36
Correspond to consumer's beliefs and values	2.86	3.58	2.77
Digital customer gngagement			
Like	3.48	3.80	2.89
Share	2.43	2.81	2.09
Comment	1.96	2.30	1.85

Source: table created by the author based on calculations from the results of Appemdix 11

Table 3.6. shows the mean values of the respondents' answers to questions related to assessment of meme marketing examples by McDonalds' through peripheral and central routs and their intent to digitally engage with a particular meme (liking, sharing and commenting)

Table 3.7. Mean values of peripheral and central routs and digital customer engagement of 3 memes examples by KFC

Peripheral and central routs assesement (KFC)			
	meme example № 1	meme example № 2	meme example № 3
Funny	3.22	3.53	2.71
Visually appealing	2.81	3.32	3.26
Convey important message	3.00	3.08	2.78
Correspond to consumer's beliefs and values	2.24	2.46	2.24
Digital customer gngagement			
Like	2.88	3.35	2.61
Share	1.94	2.13	1.81
Comment	1.61	1.87	1.61

Source: table created by the author based on calculations from the results of Appendix 12

The Table 3.7. displays the mean responses from respondents to questions on how they assess the KFC memes through the peripheral and central cues, as well as how likely they were to interact with a specific meme online (by liking, sharing, and commenting).

3.1.2. McDonald's and KFC's meme marketing link to customer engagement

To investigate the connections between factors based on the Hollebeek (2014) CBE Model and digital involvement, Spearman correlation analysis was used. For the purpose of identifying the presence of statistically significant correlations, the significance threshold was set at 95% (p 0.05). The results marked with letter A in the following figures displays correlation between respondents' digital involvement with the fast-food sector and the CBE elements in relation to meme marketing. In contrast, letter B represents correlation between respondents' involvement with a company and the CBE elements.
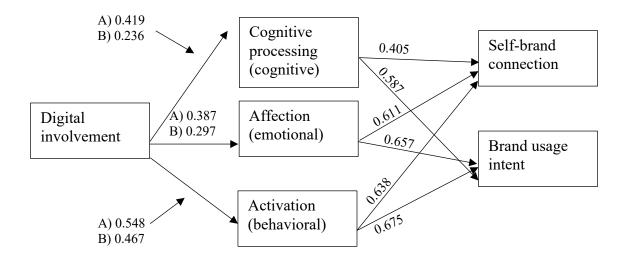
Figure. 3.1. Results of the survey based on the CBE Model (CBE and CBE consequences) and digital involvement with meme marketing by McDonalds
Source: Author's calculation partially based on the Model by Hollebeek, et al. (2014).

The results in Figure 3.1. revealed low positive correlation between respondents' digital involvement (both with the sector and the company) and CBE variables, indicating that level on involvement was not associated with cognitive processing, affection, and activation. Moreover, it can be concluded that there is weak correlation between cognitive processing and self-brand connection. Nevertheless, the rest elements of the CBE had moderately strong positive correlation with the CBE consequences, especially activation with brand usage intent.
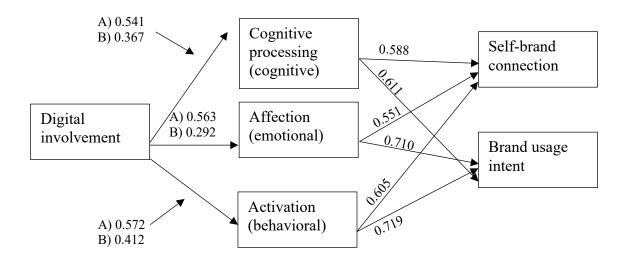
Figure 3.2. Results of survey based on the CBE Model (CBE and CBE consequences) and digital involvement with meme marketing by KFC.
Source: Author's calculation partially based on the Model by Hollebeek, et al. (2014).

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The results in Figure 3.2. showed that digital involvement with fast-food sector and the CBE elements in terms of KFC's meme marketing survey had stronger correlation compared to McDonalds, demonstrating that higher level of involvement was associated with increased the CBE variables and vice versa. Nevertheless, digital involvement with KFC in social media was not strongly linked to the CBE. Besides, cognitive processing, affection and activation were correlated to the CBE consequences, showing moderately strong connection.

The descriptive data provided intriguing insights into the levels of engagement, components of CBE, and the resulting effects of McDonald's and KFC's meme marketing that can be seen in Appendix 6. The average mean value for involvement with McDonalds 'was 2.54 and with KFC – 2.2, suggesting low involvement among respondents. However, while examining the CBE elements, both McDonalds' and KFC have the relatively high average mean score, with 3.58 and 3.28 respectfully. Moreover, average mean score for the CBE consequences was 3.30 for McDonald's and 2.93 for KFC. The numbers show that despite relatively low involvement level, the CBE and the CBE consequences' mean values were high.

According to the study's findings, respondents with neutral and positive degrees of engagement received mean ratings for self-brand connection and brand usage intent. Negative involvement was demonstrated by a small number of respondents; hence this group was left out of the study. The mean score for self-brand connection among respondents who had positive engagement with McDonald's meme marketing was 11.03. The average score for brand usage intent was 12.67. Respondents with neutral engagement, on the other hand, had lower degrees of self-brand connection, where mean score was 8.17 and lower brand usage intent with the mean score of 9.73.

The mean scores for self-brand connection and brand usage intent for respondents who had positive engagement with KFC meme marketing were 9.82 and 11.91, respectively. Even lower mean values were seen among participants who had neutral engagement, with a mean score of 7.55 for self-brand connection and 10.00 for brand usage intent.

These results show how varying degrees of engagement have an influence on self-brand connection and brand usage intention in the context of meme marketing for McDonald's and KFC. Positive engagement was shown to have higher mean ratings than neutral engagement, which suggests a greater connection to and intention to utilize the brand. Respondents who had indifferent engagement on the other hand showed less self-brand connection and brand usage intention.

Two components with eigenvalues larger than one emerged from the McDonald's factor analysis. The analysis can be seen in Appendix 13. The first component's inclusion of variables like AF2, AC2, AC3, SBC1, SBC2, SBC3, BUI1, BUI2, and BUI3 in the rotated component matrix suggests that these variables are connected and may stand for a construct related to self-brand connection and brand usage intent. The presence of variables like CP1, CP2, CP3, AF1, AF3, and AC1 in the second component suggests that these variables may each refer to a distinct construct associated with the cognitive processing of advertising messages.

The findings of the factor analysis for the meme marketing by KFC showed a two-component structure too. The analysis can be seen in Appendix 14. There was a significant correlation between the first component's measures evaluating cognitive processing (CP1, CP2, CP3), emotional aspects (AF1, AF2, AF3), as well as behavioral (AC1, AC2, AC3), and brand usage intent (BUI1, BUI2, BUI3). The relevance of consumers' perceptions of personal connections to the KFC brand through meme interaction was highlighted by the second component, which stood for self-brand connection (SBC1, SBC2, SBC3).

3.2. Discussion of results

The result of the research showed that there is a significant difference in the fast-food companies' IES when comparing usage of memes in social media. McDonald's had the highest result among the rest of businesses, which was 12.85, KFC had a score of 9.6, while Burger King and Pizza Hut had the lowest score around 4.6.

One possible explanation for the higher score in McDonald's case could be related to their sense of humor, or pop culture references that are relatable to social media users. On the other hand, the lowest IES for Burger King and Pizza Hut might indicate that their meme marketing and overall memes utilization are not as effective as McDonald's or KFC. It can be presumably considered that these companies do not use the full potential of memes to engage with customers.

The study's conclusions validate the Elaboration Likelihood Model's (ELM) peripheral route. Respondents found the McDonald's and KFC's meme marketing to be amusing and visually appealing, demonstrating the considerable influence that humor and attractive visuals have on digital customer engagement as seen by their like, sharing, and commenting activity. These

findings imply that people frequently engage with memes without giving much attention to the message's content or how well it aligns with their values and beliefs.

The study also shows that respondents' involvement is minimal when they participate in meme marketing using peripheral way. This is consistent with the theoretical idea that peripheral stimuli result in decreased cognitive participation because people are less inclined to examine arguments critically. The study demonstrates that other components of the CBE model, such as cognitive, emotional, and behavioral engagement, still have positive mean values despite low digital involvement. This shows that people engage with the meme marketing even if they have a low level of interaction with the brand or fast-food sector on social media.

The descriptive data offered provided overview into the CBE components, degrees of engagement, and outcomes of McDonald's and KFC's meme marketing. Despite the respondents' generally modest involvement, the CBE components' average mean ratings were high, demonstrating engagement in a variety of meme marketing campaign parts. Additionally, the CBE consequences had average mean ratings that were rather high, indicating that users' interaction with the memes led to successful results.

The findings from the correlation analysis between digital involvement and the CBE Model elements indicate a low positive correlation between respondents' digital involvement and the CBE variables, suggesting that the level of involvement does not strongly influence cognitive processing, affection, and activation in the context of meme marketing. Additionally, a weak correlation between cognitive processing and self-brand connection was observed. However, the other components of the CBE model exhibited a moderately strong positive correlation with the CBE consequences, particularly activation with brand usage intent. This suggests that despite the limited digital involvement, users still exhibit positive behavioral responses and intentions to engage with the brand.

Furthermore, the study finds that when comparing McDonald's and KFC's meme marketing, there was a stronger correlation between digital involvement in the fast-food industry and the CBE components. It should be emphasized, though, that social media activity related to KFC did not appear to have much of an impact on the CBE. The moderately high correlations between cognitive processing, affection, and activation and the CBE outcomes point to their potential significance in influencing users' brand-related actions.

Additionally, higher mean ratings for self-brand connection and brand usage intent were linked to positive engagement, indicating a deeper bond and desire to utilize the brands. Conversely, neutral engagement led to lower mean values for brand usage intent and self-brand connection.

Both McDonald's and KFC meme marketing factor analyses showed the creation of two separate components, each of which represented distinct aspects of customer involvement and cognitive processing. In the case of McDonald's, one component included elements related to the emotional and behavioral aspects, brand usage intent, and self-brand connection. With a small group of variables representing emotional and behavioural components, the second component predominantly represented cognitive processes. Similar to this, for KFC, one component particularly indicated self-brand connection, while the other component included cognitive processing, emotional and behavioral components, and brand usage intent. In previous research made Harrigan, et al. (2017), the authors checked factors for cognitive process, affection and action in terms of tourism sites, and only 2 factors had eigenvalue that was greater than 1.

3.3. Proposals, recommendations, limitations, and suggestions for further studies

Businesses should prioritize humor and visually appealing elements in their meme marketing campaigns to effectively engage customers in the digital sphere. According to the study's findings, respondents had a high preference for humorous and appealing content, which is shown by their likes, shares, and comments intent. Respondents exhibited a propensity to interact with memes without analyzing the critical arguments. Therefore, companies should concentrate on producing relevant and simple memes that need little cognitive effort. Brands may boost engagement and promote viral sharing by catering to customers' demand for short and interesting content.

The study also emphasizes the importance of the Hollebeek, et al. (2014) Customer Brand Engagement model's cognitive, emotional, and behavioral engagement components, especially in the setting of low digital involvement. Through their meme marketing initiatives, businesses should work to promote these elements because they are essential to essential outcomes. Brands may increase consumers' self-brand connections and promote a stronger intent to use their goods or services by focusing on cognitive stimulation, emotional connection, and action.

It is crucial to understand that, in the context of meme marketing, digital involvement alone could not have a significant impact on cognitive processing, attachment, and activation. Therefore, companies should concentrate on producing fascinating and engaging meme content that appeals to their target market. Memes that arouse feelings, especially those related to cognition, affection, and activation, can strengthen the bond between consumers and a brand.

While McDonald's and KFC's use of meme marketing showed a higher association between digital participation in the fast-food business and the CBE components, it is still important for companies to consider their unique target audiences and industry factors. To understand their preferences and create meme marketing strategies that reflect their interests and beliefs, brands need do in-depth audience research.

To understand the success of their meme marketing initiatives, firms need also routinely monitor and evaluate user feedback and engagement analytics. Brands may find areas for development, hone their tactics, and maximize their meme marketing efforts to get better results by examining the association between digital participation and the CBE factors.

There are a few limitations to the study that need to be noted. Firstly, the sample size is relatively small and unrepresentative. The findings' generality is constrained using a snowballing technique and the focus on the author's friends. Future studies should strive for a larger and more varied sample to address this and obtain more reliable results.

Another limitation is that the study did not directly measure involvement using the CBE model by Hollebeek, et al. (2014). The adaptation of questions from brand engagement to meme marketing engagement may have resulted in the loss of certain elements, which could have affected the factor analysis. It is advised that future research use a more thorough and verified measure of involvement that is particular to meme marketing and the model.

The fact that the factor analysis could not verify the CEB model's applicability in the context of meme marketing in the fast-food business is a significant study limitation. This implies that the factors of consumer engagement with memes may not be fully captured by the elements and structures suggested by the Hollebeek, et al. (2014) Model. Future study should investigate and create brand-new frameworks or models that are uniquely suited to meme marketing to overcome

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the problem. This might entail considering other factors like humor and visual appeal, all of which are recognized to be important in terms of meme engagement.

Lastly, the findings of KFC compared to McDonalds' may have been impacted by the skewed distribution of respondents, notably with an emphasis on Russian participation. It is suggested to increase the number of respondents to incorporate a wider range of cultural backgrounds and geographic areas to improve the external validity of the findings.

CONCLUSION

The author of the thesis conducted a study on meme marketing and customer engagement in the fast-food field. Even though fast-food market is competitive, and companies always try to find new approaches, there was a lack of information about the link between meme marketing and customer engagement in the fast-food sector. This catalyzed the interest in finding out the how meme marketing and customer engagement are connected and how the fast-food companies can benefit from it. The author used four companies (McDonald's, Burger King, KFC and Pizza Hut) for calculating Instagram Engagement score presented by Gong (2014) to answer the first research question and then narrow the research object to two companies (McDonald's and KFC) and conduct a survey on potential fast-food companies' customers among the author's friends and familiars to find out how meme marketing of fast-food companies affects their customer engagement.

As a foundation for the study, the author used Customer Brand Engagement Model by Hollebeek, et al. (2014), and Elaboration Likelihood Model by Petty & Cacioppo (1981). Two models formed a background for the questions in the survey and factors that were studied to answer the research question. The survey was conducted online, between the 22th of April 2023 to the 9th of May 2023 and received 175 replies. To reach the results of the study, correlation analysis was conducted using Spearman's rank correlation as well as factor analysis.

The first chapter of the graduation thesis covered the theoretical framework used for the study, explaining memes and meme marketing, factors affecting involvement with a focus on the Elaboration Likelihood Model by Petty & Cacioppo (1981). Moreover, the author introduced formulae by Gong (2014) for calculating Instagram Engagement Rate. Elements of the Customer Engagement Model by Hollebeek, et al. (2014) were also introduced in the first chapter, as well as previous studies about the usage of meme marketing and their connection to engagement.

The second chapter covered the brief overview of global fast-food businesses and companies and their use of meme marketing in social media, as well as research methodology.

The third chapter provided study results, discussion of the results, the author's proposal and recommendation, and limitations and suggestions for further studies.

Based on the results of the study, research questions were successfully answered. Providing an answer to the research question one, which fast-food companies have the most successful meme marketing campaigns, it could be concluded that McDonalds' and KFC had the most successful campaigns based on the calculation of the Instagram Engagement Score.

When studying the research question two: what the characteristics of meme marketing campaigns of successful fast-food companies are, the results showed that the most popular and resultative factors were funny and visually appealing.

Answering the research question three, what is the effect of meme marketing campaign to customer engagement for fast-food companies, it could be deduced that meme marketing customer engagement was affecting digital customer engagement and strongly correlated with the customer engagement consequences (brand usage intent and self-brand connection), whereas involvement was not crucial for brand's meme marketing interaction. Besides, the mean values for the CBE elements, including cognitive processing, affection and actions were relatively high.

The results showed that customers are using mostly peripheral routs when assessing memes following the Petty & Cacioppo (1981) Model, therefore, accordingly their involvement is low. Moreover, it could be seen that digital involvement is not strongly correlated with customer brand engagement and can stay low while the engagement level is high, meaning that customers tend to engage with meme marketing of fast-food companies without prior interest and interaction with a brand in social media.

Based on these results, fast-food companies should put effort to make their meme marketing funny and visually appealing to the customers and increase their engagement intent by focusing on cognitive, emotional and behavioral factors, thus they can achieve greater outcomes and build stronger connection. Nevertheless, further research should be conducted among wider scale of

respondents and with different engagement model that could be precisely applicable to meme marketing.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Meme examples by four fast-food companies used for calculating the Instagram Engagement Score.

Figure 1.1. Meme example №1 by McDonald's
Source: https://www.instagram.com/p/CeOnY-2ux7r/?igshid=NTc4MTIwNjQ2YQ==
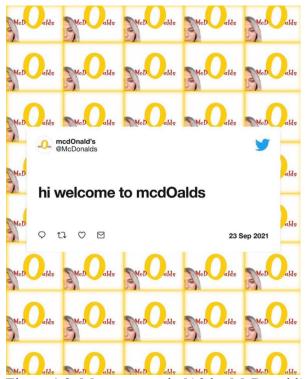
Appendix 1 continued
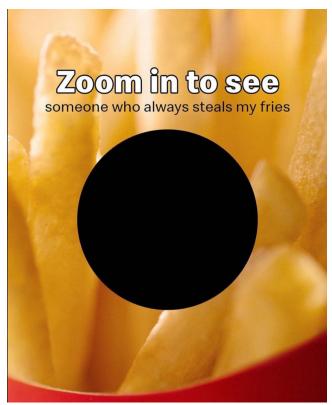
Figure 1.2. Meme example №2 by McDonald's
Source: https://www.instagram.com/p/COlUNyhJr2n/?igshid=NTc4MTIwNjQ2YQ==

Figure 1.3. Meme example №3 by McDonald's
Source: https://www.instagram.com/p/CUKxT56LV_k/?igshid=NTc4MTIwNjQ2YQ==

Appendix 1 continued

Figure 1.4. Meme example №4 by McDonald's
Source: https://www.instagram.com/p/CWEUjA0lCvR/?igshid=NTc4MTIwNjQ2YQ==

Figure 2.1. Meme example №1 by Burger King
Source: https://www.instagram.com/p/CqibrXnO6e8/?igshid=NTc4MTIwNjQ2YQ==

Appendix 1 continued

Figure 2.2. Meme example №2 by Burger King

Source: https://www.instagram.com/p/CHgCh5HFsDH/?igshid=NTc4MTIwNjQ2YQ==

Figure 2.3. Meme example №3 by Burger King

Source: https://www.instagram.com/p/CGKtGN5lPUq/?igshid=NTc4MTIwNjQ2YQ==

Appendix 1 continued

Figure 2.4. Meme example №4 by Burger King
Source: https://www.instagram.com/p/CVIqsUZlRZF/?igshid=NTc4MTIwNjQ2YQ==

Figure 3.1. Meme example №1 by KFC
Source: https://www.instagram.com/p/CoTUF2dO1a9/?igshid=NTc4MTIwNjQ2YQ==

Appendix 1 continued

halloween basket   KFC bucket

❌ No chicken included   ✅ Comes with chicken
   (🚩🚩)   in it

❌ Would be random with   ✅ Would be perfect with
   a colonel costume   a colonel costume

❌ Only good for one day   ✅ Iconic, timeless
   of the year

❌ Is only pretending to be   ✅ Is actually a bucket
   a pumpkin   of chicken

Figure 3.2. Meme example №2 by KFC
Source: https://www.instagram.com/p/CkY3tg0uuMy/?igshid=NTc4MTIwNjQ2YQ==
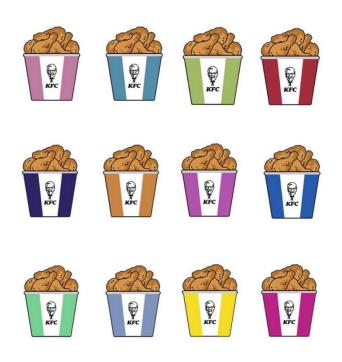
Figure 3.3. Meme example №3 by KFC
Source: https://www.instagram.com/p/CTU6hoQlkqr/?igshid=NTc4MTIwNjQ2YQ==

Figure 3.4. Meme example №4 by KFC
Source: https://www.instagram.com/p/Cmt_aHLOkxJ/?igshid=NTc4MTIwNjQ2YQ==

Figure 4.1. Meme example №1 by Pizza Hut
Source: https://www.instagram.com/p/CpS6o-xpQr4/?igshid=NTc4MTIwNjQ2YQ==

Figure 4.2. Meme example №2 by Pizza Hut
Source: https://www.instagram.com/p/ClodEPKymnT/?igshid=NTc4MTIwNjQ2YQ==

Figure 4.3. Meme example №3 by Pizza Hut
Source: https://www.instagram.com/p/CdEiBHvub5X/?igshid=NTc4MTIwNjQ2YQ==

Appendix 1 continued

Figure 4.4. Meme example №4 by Pizza Hut
Source: https://www.instagram.com/p/ClZASp4s0T9/?igshid=NTc4MTIwNjQ2YQ==

Appendix 2. Survey questionnaire (McDonald's)

Fast-food companies' meme marketing (McDonald's)

Dear respondents,

This research is conducted by a TalTech student Anastasia Cheburashkina to collect and analyse data about the consumer engagement and meme marketing by fast-food company (McDonald's) for thesis writing. . The phrase "Internet meme" is widely used to describe how various sorts of content, such jokes, gossip, films, or websites, travel from one person to another online (Shifman, 2013).

The author kindly asks you to participate an anonymous survey and fill the form, so she will be able to collect information requested for a thesis. The survey will take 10 minutes. Your answers will be used by Anastasia Cheburashkina on purpose of her thesis only. All analyses will be presented in an aggregated form and there will be no possibility to link any answers with the particular respondent. The author of the study takes the responsibility not to share the collected data nor make the raw data public.

In case of questions please, don't hesitate to contact.

Thank you in advance!

Anastasia Cheburashkina

ancheb@ttu.ee

nastyacheburashkina27@gmail.com Switch accounts

Not shared

* Indicates required question

To start please, look at three memes by McDonald's and answer the questions:

*you can skip answering this question

○ Meme example №1

○ Meme example №2

○ Meme example №3

Appendix 2 continued

Please look at the meme example №1 by McDonald's and answer following   *
question
1A. How likely you would:

	Very unlikely	Unlikely	Neither likely nor unlikely	Likely	Very likely	I do not know
1. press "like" (or similar) if you see this meme in social media?	○	○	○	○	○	○
2. share this meme in social media?	○	○	○	○	○	○
3. post a comment if you see this meme in social media?	○	○	○	○	○	○

Appendix 2 continued

1A.4. Please assess the meme *

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. It is funny, i like the humor	○	○	○	○	○
2. It is visually appealing	○	○	○	○	○
3. It corresponds to my beliefs and values	○	○	○	○	○
4. I like the message it conveys	○	○	○	○	○

Please look at the meme example №2 by McDonald's and answer following   *
question
1B. How likely you would:

	Very unlikely	Unlikely	Neither likely nor unlikely	Likely	Very likely	I do not know
1. press "like" (or similar) if you see this meme in social media?	○	○	○	○	○	○
2. share this meme in social media?	○	○	○	○	○	○
3. post a comment if you see this meme in social media?	○	○	○	○	○	○

Appendix 2 continued

1B.4. Please assess the meme *

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. It is funny, i like the humor	○	○	○	○	○
2. It is visually appealing	○	○	○	○	○
3. It corresponds to my beliefs and values	○	○	○	○	○
4. I like the message it conveys	○	○	○	○	○

Appendix 2 continued

Please look at the meme example №3 by McDonald's and answer following   *
question
1C. How likely you would:

	Very unlikely	Unlikely	Neither likely nor unlikely	Likely	Very likely	I do not know
1. press "like" (or similar) if you see this meme in social media?	○	○	○	○	○	○
2. share this meme in social media?	○	○	○	○	○	○
3. post a comment if you see this meme in social media?	○	○	○	○	○	○

1C.4. Please assess the meme *

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. It is funny, i like the humor	○	○	○	○	○
2. It is visually appealing	○	○	○	○	○
3. It corresponds to my beliefs and values	○	○	○	○	○
4. I like the message it conveys	○	○	○	○	○

Appendix 2 continued

2. Please, rank factors that are most important from your point of view. *

I think that McDonald's social media memes should be:

	Funny	Visually appealing	Correspond to consumers' beliefs and values	Convey important message
1st	○	○	○	○
2nd	○	○	○	○
3rd	○	○	○	○
4th	○	○	○	○

Appendix 2 continued

3. Please assess the following sentences: *

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither disagree nor agree	Agree	Strongly agree	I do not know
1. I often use social media to interact with fast food brands	○	○	○	○	○	○
2. I often use social media to interact with McDonald's	○	○	○	○	○	○
3. I spend much time on social media engaging with fast-food brands	○	○	○	○	○	○
4. I spend much time on social media engaging with McDonald's	○	○	○	○	○	○
5. I promote to my friends and others using social media to get engaged with fast food brands	○	○	○	○	○	○

Appendix 2 continued

4. Please assess the following sentences: *

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither disagree nor agree	Agree	Strongly agree	I do not know
1. Seeing a McDonald's meme gets me to think about McDonald	○	○	○	○	○	○
2. I think about McDonald's a lot when I see a meme by McDonald's	○	○	○	○	○	○
3. Seeing a McDonald's meme stimulates my interest to learn more about McDonald's	○	○	○	○	○	○
4. I feel very positive when I see a McDonald's meme	○	○	○	○	○	○
5. Seeing a McDonald's meme makes me happy	○	○	○	○	○	○
6. I feel good when I see a McDonald's meme	○	○	○	○	○	○

Appendix 2 continued

7. Memes created by McDonald's make me want to engage with their brand	○	○	○	○	○	○
8. I am more likely to purchase from McDonald's after seeing their memes	○	○	○	○	○	○
9. When I see memes related to McDonald's, I am more likely to interact with them compared to other brands' memes	○	○	○	○	○	○
10. I feel a strong personal connection to McDonald's	○	○	○	○	○	○
11. I often see myself as a loyal customer of McDonald's	○	○	○	○	○	○
12. McDonald's aligns with my personal values and beliefs	○	○	○	○	○	○

Appendix 2 continued

13. In my opinion, memes are effective in influencing my decision to choose McDonald's	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
14. I rather choose McDonald's that uses meme marketing over another that does not utilize it	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
15. I would recommend McDonald's that frequently uses memes in their marketing to my friends and others	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

5. Please specify you age *

Your answer

Appendix 2 continued

6. Please specify your gender

○ Male

○ Female

○ Others

7. Please specify your nationality *

Your answer

8. How many euros monthly in average you spend buying fast food? (if you pay   *
for more than one person then calculate based on your personal consumption)

○ 0 €

○ 1-5 €

○ 6-10 €

○ 11-20 €

○ 21-30 €

○ 31-40 €

○ 41-50 €

○ 51-60 €

○ 61-70 €

○ more than 70 €

Thank you very much for participation!

Appendix 3. Survey questionnaire (KFC)

Fast-food companies' meme marketing (KFC)

Dear respondents,

This research is conducted by a TalTech student Anastasia Cheburashkina to collect and analyse data about the consumer engagement and meme marketing by fast-food company (KFC) for thesis writing. The phrase "Internet meme" is widely used to describe how various sorts of content, such jokes, gossip, films, or websites, travel from one person to another online (Shifman, 2013).

The author kindly asks you to participate an anonymous survey and fill the form, so she will be able to collect information requested for a thesis. The survey will take 10 minutes. Your answers will be used by Anastasia Cheburashkina on purpose of her thesis only. All analyses will be presented in an aggregated form and there will be no possibility to link any answers with the particular respondent. The author of the study takes the responsibility not to share the collected data nor make the raw data public.

In case of questions please, don't hesitate to contact.

Thank you in advance!

Anastasia Cheburashkina

ancheb@ttu.ee

nastyacheburashkina27@gmail.com Switch accounts

Not shared

* Indicates required question

Appendix 3 continued

To start please, look at three memes by KFC and answer the questions:

*you can skip answering this question

○ Meme example №1

○ Meme example №2

○ Meme example №3

Appendix 3 continued

Please look at the meme example №1 by KFC and answer following question *
1A. How likely you would:

	Very unlikely	Unlikely	Neither likely nor unlikely	Likely	Very likely	I do not know
1. press "like" (or similar) if you see this meme in social media?	○	○	○	○	○	○
2. share this meme in social media?	○	○	○	○	○	○
3. post a comment if you see this meme in social media?	○	○	○	○	○	○

1A.4. Please assess the meme *

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. It is funny, i like the humor	○	○	○	○	○
2. It is visually appealing	○	○	○	○	○
3. It corresponds to my beliefs and values	○	○	○	○	○
4. I like the message it conveys	○	○	○	○	○

Please look at the meme example №2 by KFC and answer following question *
1B. How likely you would:

	Very unlikely	Unlikely	Neither likely nor unlikely	Likely	Very likely	I do not know
1. press "like" (or similar) if you see this meme in social media?	○	○	○	○	○	○
2. share this meme in social media?	○	○	○	○	○	○
3. post a comment if you see this meme in social media?	○	○	○	○	○	○

1B.4. Please assess the meme *

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. It is funny, i like the humor	○	○	○	○	○
2. It is visually appealing	○	○	○	○	○
3. It corresponds to my beliefs and values	○	○	○	○	○
4. I like the message it conveys	○	○	○	○	○

Appendix 3 continued
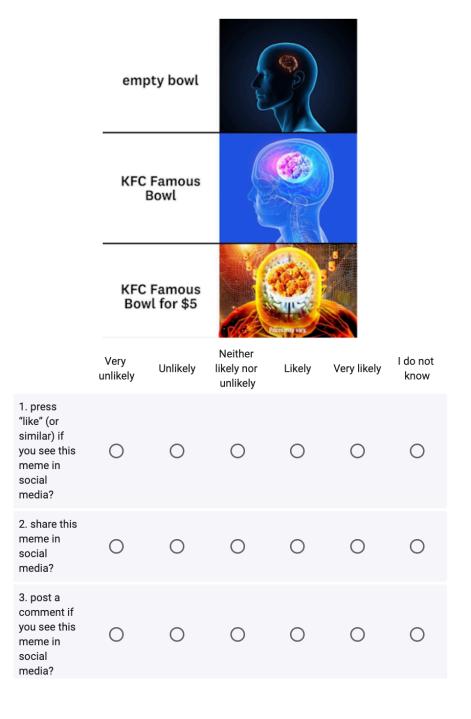
Please look at the meme example №3 by KFC and answer following question *
1C. How likely you would:

empty bowl

KFC Famous
Bowl

KFC Famous
Bowl for $5

	Very unlikely	Unlikely	Neither likely nor unlikely	Likely	Very likely	I do not know
1. press "like" (or similar) if you see this meme in social media?	○	○	○	○	○	○
2. share this meme in social media?	○	○	○	○	○	○
3. post a comment if you see this meme in social media?	○	○	○	○	○	○

Appendix 3 continued

1C.4. Please assess the meme *

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. It is funny, i like the humor	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
2. It is visually appealing	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
3. It corresponds to my beliefs and values	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
4. I like the message it conveys	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

Appendix 3 continued

2. Please, rank factors that are most important from your point of view. *

I think that KFC social media memes should be:

	Funny	Visually appealing	Correspond to consumers' beliefs and values	Convey important message
1st	○	○	○	○
2nd	○	○	○	○
3rd	○	○	○	○
4th	○	○	○	○

Appendix 3 continued

3. Please assess the following sentences: *

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither disagree nor agree	Agree	Strongly agree	I do not know
1. I often use social media to interact with fast food brands	○	○	○	○	○	○
2. I often use social media to interact with KFC	○	○	○	○	○	○
3. I spend much time on social media engaging with fast-food brands	○	○	○	○	○	○
4. I spend much time on social media engaging with KFC	○	○	○	○	○	○
5. I promote to my friends and others using social media to get engaged with fast food brands	○	○	○	○	○	○

Appendix 3 continued

4. Please assess the following sentences: *

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither disagree nor agree	Agree	Strongly agree	I do not know
1. Seeing a meme by KFC gets me to think about KFC	○	○	○	○	○	○
2. I think about KFC a lot when I see a meme by KFC	○	○	○	○	○	○
3. Seeing a meme by KFC stimulates my interest to learn more about KFC	○	○	○	○	○	○
4. I feel very positive when I see a meme by KFC	○	○	○	○	○	○
5. Seeing a meme by KFC makes me happy	○	○	○	○	○	○
6. I feel good when I see a meme by KFC	○	○	○	○	○	○

Appendix 3 continued

7. Memes created by KFC make me want to engage with their brand	○	○	○	○	○	○
8. I am more likely to purchase from KFC after seeing their memes	○	○	○	○	○	○
9. When I see memes related to KFC, I am more likely to interact with them compared to other brands' memes	○	○	○	○	○	○
10. I feel a strong personal connection to KFC	○	○	○	○	○	○
11. I often see myself as a loyal customer of KFC	○	○	○	○	○	○

12. KFC aligns with my personal values and beliefs	○	○	○	○	○	○
13. In my opinion, memes are effective in influencing my decision to choose KFC	○	○	○	○	○	○
14. I rather choose KFC that uses meme marketing over another brand that does not utilize it	○	○	○	○	○	○
15. I would recommend KFC that frequently uses memes in their marketing to my friends and others	○	○	○	○	○	○

Appendix 3 continued

5. Please specify you age *

Your answer

6. Please specify your gender

○ Male

○ Female

○ Others

7. Please specify your nationality *

Your answer

8. How many euros monthly in average you spend buying fast food? (if you pay *
for more than one person then calculate based on your personal consumption)

○ 0 €

○ 1-5 €

○ 6-10 €

○ 11-20 €

○ 21-30 €

○ 31-40 €

○ 41-50 €

○ 51-60 €

○ 61-70 €

○ more than 70 €

Appendix 4. Spearman correlation results for McDonald's and fast-food segment

Nonparametric Correlations – McDonald's			IVC_SCORE	INV_SCORE_COMP	SUM_CP	SUM_AF	SUM_AC	SUM_SBC	SUM_BUI
Spearman's rho	IVC_SCORE	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.691**	.419**	.387**	.548**	.415**	.388**
		Sig. (2–tailed)	.	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001
		N	90	90	90	90	90	90	90
	INV_SCORE_COMP	Correlation Coefficient	.691**	1.000	.236*	.297**	.467**	.327**	.417**
		Sig. (2–tailed)	<.001	.	.025	.004	<.001	.002	<.001
		N	90	90	90	90	90	90	90
	SUM_CP	Correlation Coefficient	.419**	.236*	1.000	.664**	.644**	.405**	.587**
		Sig. (2–tailed)	<.001	.025	.	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001
		N	90	90	90	90	90	90	90
	SUM_AF	Correlation Coefficient	.387**	.297**	.664**	1.000	.705**	.611**	.657**
		Sig. (2–tailed)	<.001	.004	<.001	.	<.001	<.001	<.001
		N	90	90	90	90	90	90	90
	SUM_AC	Correlation Coefficient	.548**	.467**	.644**	.705**	1.000	.638**	.675**
		Sig. (2–tailed)	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	.	<.001	<.001
		N	90	90	90	90	90	90	90
	SUM_SBC	Correlation Coefficient	.415**	.327**	.405**	.611**	.638**	1.000	.545**
		Sig. (2–tailed)	<.001	.002	<.001	<.001	<.001	.	<.001
		N	90	90	90	90	90	90	90
	SUM_BUI	Correlation Coefficient	.388**	.417**	.587**	.657**	.675**	.545**	1.000
		Sig. (2–tailed)	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	.
		N	90	90	90	90	90	90	90

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2–tailed).

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2–tailed).

Source: Calculations made by the author in the SPSS software for McDonald's survey results.

Appendix 5. Spearman correlation results for KFC and fast-food segment

Nonparametric Correlations – KFC			IVC_SCORE	INV_SCORE_COMP	SUM_CP	SUM_AF	SUM_AC	SUM_SBC	SUM_BUI
Spearman's rho	IVC_SCORE	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.574**	.541**	.563**	.572**	.600**	.419**
		Sig. (2–tailed)	.	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001
		N	85	85	85	85	85	85	85
	INV_SCORE_COMP	Correlation Coefficient	.574**	1.000	.367**	.292**	.412**	.484**	.296**
		Sig. (2–tailed)	<.001	.	<.001	.007	<.001	<.001	.006
		N	85	85	85	85	85	85	85
	SUM_CP	Correlation Coefficient	.541**	.367**	1.000	.684**	.767**	.588**	.611**
		Sig. (2–tailed)	<.001	<.001	.	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001
		N	85	85	85	85	85	85	85
	SUM_AF	Correlation Coefficient	.563**	.292**	.684**	1.000	.768**	.551**	.710**
		Sig. (2–tailed)	<.001	.007	<.001	.	<.001	<.001	<.001
		N	85	85	85	85	85	85	85
	SUM_AC	Correlation Coefficient	.572**	.412**	.767**	.768**	1.000	.605**	.719**
		Sig. (2–tailed)	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	.	<.001	<.001
		N	85	85	85	85	85	85	85
	SUM_SBC	Correlation Coefficient	.600**	.484**	.588**	.551**	.605**	1.000	.547**
		Sig. (2–tailed)	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	.	<.001
		N	85	85	85	85	85	85	85
	SUM_BUI	Correlation Coefficient	.419**	.296**	.611**	.710**	.719**	.547**	1.000
		Sig. (2–tailed)	<.001	.006	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	.
		N	85	85	85	85	85	85	85

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2–tailed).

Source: Calculations made by the author in the SPSS software for KFC survey results.

Appendix 6. Descriptive statistics results for McDonalds and KFC

Descriptive Statistics – McDonald's					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
INV1	88	1	5	3.15	1.120
INV2	90	1	5	2.61	1.078
INV3	88	1	5	2.53	1.028
INV4	88	1	5	2.16	.908
INV5	90	1	5	2.24	1.115
IVC_SCORE	90	1	3	1.74	.591
INV_SCORE_COMP	90	1	3	1.59	.579
CP1	90	1	5	4.00	1.142
CP2	90	1	5	3.79	.880
CP3	90	1	5	3.42	1.081
SUM_CP	90	3	15	11.21	2.603
AF1	88	1	5	3.75	.900
AF2	90	1	5	3.26	.906
AF3	90	1	5	3.66	.823
SUM_AF	90	3	15	10.58	2.303
AC1	90	1	5	3.62	1.001
AC2	90	1	5	3.44	1.092
AC3	89	1	5	3.28	1.055
SUM_AC	90	3	15	10.31	2.795
SBC1	89	1	5	3.03	1.027
SBC2	90	1	5	3.10	1.050
SBC3	90	1	5	2.93	1.079
SUM_SBC	90	3	15	9.03	2.758
BUI1	88	1	5	3.68	1.034
BUI2	89	1	5	3.80	1.089
BUI3	89	1	5	3.28	1.118
SUM_BUI	90	3	15	10.60	3.016
Valid N (listwise)	81				

Source: Calculations made by the author in the SPSS software for McDonald's survey results.

Appendix 6 continued

Descriptive Statistics – KFC					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
INV1	85	1	5	2.68	1.136
INV2	85	1	5	2.19	.838
INV3	85	1	5	2.32	1.026
INV4	85	1	5	1.89	.787
INV5	85	1	5	1.91	1.065
IVC_SCORE	85	1	3	1.55	.608
INV_SCORE_COMP	85	1	3	1.33	.521
CP1	85	1	5	4.02	.913
CP2	85	1	5	3.34	.946
CP3	85	1	5	2.96	1.074
SUM_CP	85	3	14	10.33	2.495
AF1	85	1	5	3.40	.928
AF2	85	1	5	2.93	.949
AF3	85	1	5	3.28	.959
SUM_AF	85	3	15	9.61	2.582
AC1	85	1	5	3.21	1.013
AC2	84	1	5	3.21	1.042
AC3	83	1	5	3.13	.997
SUM_AC	85	3	15	9.45	2.745
SBC1	85	1	5	2.47	1.064
SBC2	85	1	5	2.55	1.041
SBC3	82	1	5	2.66	.933
SUM_SBC	85	3	14	7.59	2.736
BUI1	84	1	5	3.44	1.057
BUI2	85	1	5	3.36	1.153
BUI3	83	1	5	3.12	1.075
SUM_BUI	85	3	15	9.81	2.843
Valid N (listwise)	78				

Source: Calculations made by the author in the SPSS software for KFC survey results.

Appendix 7. Correlation analysis of negative, neutral and postive engagement for McDonalds.

Nonparametric Correlations McDonald's (negative engagement)			SUM_CP	SUM_AF	SUM_AC	SUM_SBC	SUM_BUI
Spearman's rho	SUM_CP	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.866	.527	.205	.400
		Sig. (2–tailed)	.	.058	.361	.741	.505
		N	5	5	5	5	5
	SUM_AF	Correlation Coefficient	.866	1.000	.761	−.148	.000
		Sig. (2–tailed)	.058	.	.135	.812	1.000
		N	5	5	5	5	5
	SUM_AC	Correlation Coefficient	.527	.761	1.000	.135	.105
		Sig. (2–tailed)	.361	.135	.	.828	.866
		N	5	5	5	5	5
	SUM_SBC	Correlation Coefficient	.205	−.148	.135	1.000	.872
		Sig. (2–tailed)	.741	.812	.828	.	.054
		N	5	5	5	5	5
	SUM_BUI	Correlation Coefficient	.400	.000	.105	.872	1.000
		Sig. (2–tailed)	.505	1.000	.866	.054	.
		N	5	5	5	5	5

Source: Calculations made by the author in the SPSS software for McDonald's survey results.

Nonparametric Correlations – McDonald's (neutral engagement)			SUM_CP	SUM_AF	SUM_AC	SUM_SBC	SUM_BUI
Spearman's rho	SUM_CP	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.423**	.365**	−.051	.365**
		Sig. (2–tailed)	.	.002	.008	.722	.008
		N	52	52	52	52	52
	SUM_AF	Correlation Coefficient	.423**	1.000	.456**	.366**	.465**
		Sig. (2–tailed)	.002	.	<.001	.008	<.001
		N	52	52	52	52	52
	SUM_AC	Correlation Coefficient	.365**	.456**	1.000	.352*	.527**
		Sig. (2–tailed)	.008	<.001	.	.010	<.001
		N	52	52	52	52	52
	SUM_SBC	Correlation Coefficient	−.051	.366**	.352*	1.000	.368**
		Sig. (2–tailed)	.722	.008	.010	.	.007
		N	52	52	52	52	52
	SUM_BUI	Correlation Coefficient	.365**	.465**	.527**	.368**	1.000
		Sig. (2–tailed)	.008	<.001	<.001	.007	.
		N	52	52	52	52	52

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2–tailed).
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2–tailed).

Source: Calculations made by the author in the SPSS software for McDonald's survey results.

Appendix 7 continued

Nonparametric Correlations – McDonald's (postive engagement)			SUM_CP	SUM_AF	SUM_AC	SUM_SBC	SUM_BUI
Spearman's rho	SUM_CP	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.267	.239	.195	.324
		Sig. (2–tailed)	.	.133	.179	.278	.066
		N	33	33	33	33	33
	SUM_AF	Correlation Coefficient	.267	1.000	–.102	.066	.548**
		Sig. (2–tailed)	.133	.	.574	.717	<.001
		N	33	33	33	33	33
	SUM_AC	Correlation Coefficient	.239	–.102	1.000	.188	.265
		Sig. (2–tailed)	.179	.574	.	.294	.136
		N	33	33	33	33	33
	SUM_SBC	Correlation Coefficient	.195	.066	.188	1.000	.191
		Sig. (2–tailed)	.278	.717	.294	.	.287
		N	33	33	33	33	33
	SUM_BUI	Correlation Coefficient	.324	.548**	.265	.191	1.000
		Sig. (2–tailed)	.066	<.001	.136	.287	.
		N	33	33	33	33	33

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2–tailed).

Source: Calculations made by the author in the SPSS software for McDonald's survey results.

Appendix 8. Correlation analysis of negative, neutral and postive engagement for KFC

Nonparametric Correlations – KFC (negative engagement)			SUM_CP	SUM_AF	SUM_AC	SUM_SBC	SUM_BUI
Spearman's rho	SUM_CP	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.218	−.074	.781*	.319
		Sig. (2–tailed)	.	.603	.862	.022	.441
		N	8	8	8	8	8
	SUM_AF	Correlation Coefficient	.218	1.000	.340	.385	.445
		Sig. (2–tailed)	.603	.	.410	.347	.269
		N	8	8	8	8	8
	SUM_AC	Correlation Coefficient	−.074	.340	1.000	−.027	.650
		Sig. (2–tailed)	.862	.410	.	.950	.081
		N	8	8	8	8	8
	SUM_SBC	Correlation Coefficient	.781*	.385	−.027	1.000	.227
		Sig. (2–tailed)	.022	.347	.950	.	.588
		N	8	8	8	8	8
	SUM_BUI	Correlation Coefficient	.319	.445	.650	.227	1.000
		Sig. (2–tailed)	.441	.269	.081	.588	.
		N	8	8	8	8	8

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2–tailed).

Source: Calculations made by the author in the SPSS software for KFC survey results.

Nonparametric Correlations – KFC (neutral engagement)			SUM_CP	SUM_AF	SUM_AC	SUM_SBC	SUM_BUI
Spearman's rho	SUM_CP	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.588**	.663**	.475**	.564**
		Sig. (2–tailed)	.	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001
		N	66	66	66	66	66
	SUM_AF	Correlation Coefficient	.588**	1.000	.660**	.509**	.710**
		Sig. (2–tailed)	<.001	.	<.001	<.001	<.001
		N	66	66	66	66	66
	SUM_AC	Correlation Coefficient	.663**	.660**	1.000	.514**	.675**
		Sig. (2–tailed)	<.001	<.001	.	<.001	<.001
		N	66	66	66	66	66
	SUM_SBC	Correlation Coefficient	.475**	.509**	.514**	1.000	.579**
		Sig. (2–tailed)	<.001	<.001	<.001	.	<.001
		N	66	66	66	66	66
	SUM_BUI	Correlation Coefficient	.564**	.710**	.675**	.579**	1.000
		Sig. (2–tailed)	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	.
		N	66	66	66	66	66

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2–tailed).

Source: Calculations made by the author in the SPSS software for KFC survey results.

Appendix 8 continued

Nonparametric Correlations – KFC (postive engagement)			SUM_CP	SUM_AF	SUM_AC	SUM_SBC	SUM_BUI
Spearman's rho	SUM_CP	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.005	.529	.552	−.104
		Sig. (2–tailed)	.	.988	.095	.078	.760
		N	11	11	11	11	11
	SUM_AF	Correlation Coefficient	.005	1.000	−.119	−.210	−.271
		Sig. (2–tailed)	.988	.	.728	.536	.420
		N	11	11	11	11	11
	SUM_AC	Correlation Coefficient	.529	−.119	1.000	.372	.413
		Sig. (2–tailed)	.095	.728	.	.260	.207
		N	11	11	11	11	11
	SUM_SBC	Correlation Coefficient	.552	−.210	.372	1.000	−.321
		Sig. (2–tailed)	.078	.536	.260	.	.335
		N	11	11	11	11	11
	SUM_BUI	Correlation Coefficient	−.104	−.271	.413	−.321	1.000
		Sig. (2–tailed)	.760	.420	.207	.335	.
		N	11	11	11	11	11

Source: Calculations made by the author in the SPSS software for KFC survey results.

Appendix 9. Descriptive Statistics for McDonald's and KFC (negative, neutral and positive engagement)

Descriptive Statistics – McDonald's (negative engagement)

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
SUM_SBC	5	3	7	4.80	1.789
SUM_BUI	5	3	9	6.00	2.236
Valid N (listwise)	5				

Descriptive Statistics – McDonald's (neutral engagement)

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
SUM_SBC	52	4	14	8.17	2.382
SUM_BUI	52	4	15	9.73	2.877
Valid N (listwise)	52				

Descriptive Statistics – McDonald's (positive engagement)

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
SUM_SBC	33	6	15	11.03	1.895
SUM_BUI	33	9	15	12.67	1.594
Valid N (listwise)	33				

Descriptive Statistics – KFC (negative engagement)

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
SUM_SBC	8	3	12	4.88	3.044
SUM_BUI	8	3	9	5.38	2.446
Valid N (listwise)	8				

Descriptive Statistics – KFC (neutral engagement)					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
SUM_SBC	66	3	12	7.55	2.374
SUM_BUI	66	5	15	10.00	2.334
Valid N (listwise)	66				

Descriptive Statistics – KFC (positive engagement)					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
SUM_SBC	11	4	14	9.82	2.892
SUM_BUI	11	5	15	11.91	2.737
Valid N (listwise)	11				

Appendix 10. Calculation for ranking peripheral and central routs.

Number of counts (McDonald's)				
	Funny	Visually appealing	Correspond to consumers' beliefs and values	Convey important message
1st place	63	12	7	8
2nd place	15	42	13	20
3rd place	8	25	24	33
4th place	4	11	46	29

Funny**: 63 × 5 + 12 × 3 + 7 × 2 + 8 × 1 = 380**

V**isually appealing: 12 × 5 + 42 × 3 + 25 × 2 + 11 × 1 = 247**

Correspond to **consumer's beliefs and values: 7 × 5 + 13 × 3 + 24 × 2 + 46 × 1 = 168**

Convey important message: **8 × 5 + 20 × 3 + 33 × 2 + 29 × 1 = 195**

Appendix **10 continued**

Number of counts (KFC)				
	Funny	Visually appealing	Correspond to consumers' beliefs and values	Convey important message
1st place	62	7	9	7
2nd place	15	42	6	22
3rd place	2	28	24	31
4th place	6	8	46	25

Funny**: 62 × 5 + 15 × 3 + 2 × 2 + 6 × 1 = 365**

V**isually appealing: 7 × 5 + 42 × 3 + 28 × 2 + 8 × 1 = 225**

Correspond to co**nsumer's beliefs and values: 9 × 5 + 6 × 3 + 24 × 2 + 46 × 1 = 157**

Convey important message: **7 × 5 + 22 × 3 + 31 × 2 + 25 × 1 = 188**

Appendix 11.Statistics for meme examples by McDonald's

Statistics – McDonald's (Meme example 1)							
		FUNNY_1A	VISUAL_A1	VALUES_1A	MESSAGE_1A	LIKE_1A	SHARE_1A	COMMENT_1A
N	Valid	90	90	90	90	89	90	89
	Missing	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Mean		3.79	3.38	2.86	3.38	3.48	2.43	1.96
Std. Deviation		1.022	1.034	1.001	1.087	1.235	1.200	1.043

Statistics – McDonald's (meme example 2)							
		FUNNY_1B	VISUAL_1B	VALUES_1B	MESSAGE_1B	LIKE_1B	SHARE_1B	COMMENT_1B
N	Valid	90	90	90	90	90	90	88
	Missing	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Mean		3.90	3.59	3.08	3.58	3.80	2.81	2.30
Std. Deviation		1.112	1.090	1.083	1.081	1.192	1.226	1.105

Statistics – McDonald's (meme example 3)							
		FUNNY_1C	VISUAL_1C	VALUES_1C	MESSAGE_1C	LIKE_1C	SHARE_1C	COMMENT_1C
N	Valid	90	90	90	90	89	90	89
	Missing	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Mean		3.11	3.16	2.36	2.77	2.89	2.09	1.85
Std. Deviation		1.136	1.080	1.042	1.162	1.162	1.056	1.040

Appendix 12. Statistics for meme examples by KFC

Statistics – KFC (meme example 1)							
		FUNNY_1A	VISUAL_A1	VALUES_1A	MESSAGE_1A	LIKE_1A	SHARE_1A	COMMENT_1A
N	Valid	85	85	85	85	83	85	84
	Missing	0	0	0	0	2	0	1
Mean		3.22	2.81	2.24	3.00	2.88	1.94	1.61
Std. Deviation		1.039	1.075	.972	1.058	1.224	1.106	.905

Statistics – KFC (meme example 2)							
		FUNNY_1B	VISUAL_1B	VALUES_1B	MESSAGE_1B	LIKE_1B	SHARE_1B	COMMENT_1B
N	Valid	85	85	85	85	83	85	85
	Missing	0	0	0	0	2	0	0
Mean		3.53	3.32	2.46	3.08	3.35	2.13	1.87
Std. Deviation		.853	.862	.894	1.049	1.204	1.067	.997

Statistics – KFC (meme example 3)							
		FUNNY_1C	VISUAL_1C	VALUES_1C	MESSAGE_1C	LIKE_1C	SHARE_1C	COMMENT_1C
N	Valid	85	85	85	85	85	85	85
	Missing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mean		2.71	3.26	2.24	2.78	2.61	1.81	1.61
Std. Deviation		1.045	1.002	1.043	1.095	1.114	.906	.860

Appendix 13. Factor analysis for McDonald's

Rotated Component Matrix – McDonald's				
	Raw Component		Rescaled Component	
	1	2	1	2
CP1	1.025	−.022	.898	−.019
CP2	.629	.232	.715	.263
CP3	.727	.324	.673	.300
AF1	.618	.365	.686	.405
AF2	.388	.598	.428	.659
AF3	.571	.380	.694	.462
AC1	.733	.374	.732	.373
AC2	.555	.660	.508	.605
AC3	.641	.566	.608	.536
SBC1	.194	.792	.189	.771
SBC2	.321	.733	.306	.698
SBC3	.090	.908	.083	.841
BUI1	.576	.666	.557	.644
BUI2	.643	.555	.591	.510
BUI3	.378	.772	.338	.691

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

a. Rotation converged in 3 iterations.

Appendix 14. Factor analysis for KFC

Rotated Component Matrix – KFC				
	Raw Component		Rescaled Component	
	1	2	1	2
CP1	.590	.172	.646	.189
CP2	.572	.382	.605	.404
CP3	.744	.445	.693	.414
AF1	.715	.359	.770	.387
AF2	.751	.183	.792	.193
AF3	.753	.292	.785	.304
AC1	.822	.326	.812	.322
AC2	.820	.201	.787	.193
AC3	.735	.449	.737	.450
SBC1	.306	.960	.288	.902
SBC2	.337	.870	.324	.836
SBC3	.206	.748	.220	.802
BUI1	.892	.191	.844	.181
BUI2	.719	.450	.623	.390
BUI3	.702	.422	.653	.392

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.
 Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

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