Watch Your Tone: How a Brand's Tone of Voice on Social Media Influences Consumer Responses ☆

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Abstract

Social media platforms enable firms to communicate directly and often publicly with individual consumers. In this research, comprising four online studies, the authors investigate how the tone of voice used by firms (human vs. corporate) influences purchase intentions on social media. Findings suggest that a human tone of voice is not always the firm's best option. Study 1a (N = 174) shows that using a human voice, instead of the more traditional corporate voice, can increase a consumer's hedonic value on social media and also purchase intentions. However, that influence of a human voice on purchase intentions is stronger when the consumer is looking at a brand page with a hedonic goal in mind (versus a utilitarian one). Study 1b (N = 342) shows that the presence of several negative comments about a brand on social media acts as a boundary condition, nullifying the influence of a human voice on purchase intentions. Studies 2a (N = 154) and 2b (N = 202) show in different settings that using a human voice can even reduce purchase intentions in contexts of high situational involvement, due to perceptions of risk associated with humanness. The results contribute to the literature surrounding the effects of conversational human voice, while also providing managers with a set of guidelines to help inform and identify which tone of voice is best adapted to each communications scenario.

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Introduction

The popularity of social media such as Facebook and Twitter with both consumers and companies has opened up opportunities for new business models and forms of online branding and social commerce. Worldwide spending on social media advertising has increased by 27% from 2015 to 2016, and social media users should reach 2.95 billion by 2020 (Statista 2017a, 2017b). However, while social media have become an important tool for branding and customer marketing, many questions remain concerning the best ways for brands to represent themselves or address their customers in this highly interactive, both personal and public, conversational environment. Given that social media enable more direct contact with customers, should a brand present in a more personal and human way in these contexts? Alternatively, should a brand keep its distance and adopt a less intimate approach?

In the professional press, many experts argue that brands should use a more human tone of voice on social media (Lund and Sutton 2014). However, there is still little evidence that this informal style is the optimal way to communicate with all consumers. Given the reports that brands are increasingly employing an informal style in their social media communications (Beukeboom, Kerkhof, and de Vries 2015), the lack of research on its effects on key aspects of consumer–brand relationships is striking. Even within the same industry, there is no consensus among companies as to the most appropriate tone of voice. For example, Visa's brand page on Facebook (@Visa) more often adopts a traditional corporate style of communication, addressing customers using formal language: "*Hi [customer]. Thank you for your interest in a Visa card. All Visa cards are issued by our client financial institutions. Each one of them has its own criteria for issuing cards, fees & T&C.*" On the other hand, MasterCard's brand page (@MasterCard) adopts a much more

informal and casual language, expressing emotions and using emoticons: "Hi [customer]! Do you have a MasterCard? If so, we may have a small #PricelessSurprise for you ☺ Hope you have an excellent long weekend!"

While these differences in communication style are associated with each brand's positioning, they essentially represent the concept of a conversational human voice, which refers to a tone of voice making the company or brand feel closer, more real and human (Kelleher 2009; Park and Cameron 2014). The tone of voice concept has deserved some attention in customer service literature, in which it belongs to the "humanics" category of clues about a product or service (Berry, Carbone, and Haeckel 2002). Such clues tend to address emotions rather than reason, and are just as important to the customer experience as the functional clues. When customers deal with frontline employees or call centers, the tone of voice, and general friendliness of the company's agent becomes a direct extension of the brand, and even a personification of the company (Brown and Maxwell 2002). However, in interactive marketing research, the concept of a conversational human voice is still a relatively underexplored concept though it has deserved growing attention due to evidence in the literature suggesting that it increases consumer engagement and brand evaluations (Schamari and Schaefers 2015; Van Noort and Willemsen 2012).

On social media, the brand's tone of voice can be particularly important during initial encounters, when consumers form opinions about new and unfamiliar brands. In such situations, non-verbal cues, such as communication style, play a central role in reducing uncertainties and influencing assessments of the brand's trustworthiness (Keeling, McGoldrick, and Beatty 2010). The way brands communicate with consumers can be thus decisive in shaping consumer attitudes and determining whether the relationship will progress beyond the initial encounters (Keeling, McGoldrick, and Beatty 2010). Nevertheless, some studies have shown that a personal and human communication style can negatively influence consumer attitudes (Gretry et al. 2017; Steinmann, Mau, and Schramm-Klein 2015), while others have found only limited effects (Verhagen et al. 2014). We suggest that these contradictory findings may be due to situational elements that have been overlooked in prior research.

Consequently, the present research aims to fill this gap in the literature by demonstrating how the adoption of a human voice by companies in their social media communications can influence consumer response towards the brand. In our investigation, we also consider the effect of interactions between the humanness in the tone of voice used for the brand and characteristics of the consumption context (namely the type of consumer goal and level of situational involvement) unaccounted for in previous studies, and which could explain these disparate findings. As a matter of fact, the type of consumer goal and the level of situational involvement are associated respectively with the hedonic value of the online experience and the perceived risk about the purchase, two constructs in consumer behavior known for influencing consumer responses towards the brand in online environments (for example, Dawson, Bloch, and Ridgway 1990; Eroglu,

Machleit, and Davis 2003; Pöyry, Parvinen, and Malmivaara 2013). Using four online experiments, we show that adopting a human (tone of) voice, instead of the more traditional corporate (tone of) voice, can increase a consumer's hedonic value on social media and also purchase intentions. However, in this notional framework, using a human voice does not increase purchase intentions for brands in utilitarian contexts (while it does in hedonic contexts), and it can even reduce purchase intentions in contexts of high situational involvement, due to perceptions of risk associated with humanness.

Hence, this research contributes to the incipient and still limited body of research in online marketing by exploring constructs related to humanness in communication on social media using an experimental approach (Gretry et al. 2017; Schamari and Schaefers 2015; Sela, Wheeler, and Sarial-Abi 2012). Our results shed some light on the effects of social presence and conversational human voice, showing that the effect of a human voice may be positive, negative or negligible depending on the consumption context. Furthermore, this investigation has managerial relevance as it informs managers on how to better communicate with consumers on social media in order to obtain more positive consumer responses. Since the products or services offered by the brand may be purchased to satisfy a hedonic or utilitarian goal, and be associated with different levels of situational involvement, the boundary conditions we tested have practical value. In this sense, we provide a set of guidelines to help managers identify which tone of voice is more appropriate according to specific contexts. Since social media constitute public environments in which communication between a brand and its customers is visible to all others, any consumer reading the conversations may also form an opinion about the brand. Hence, the tone of voice used by the brand can influence not only the consumers directly involved in the communication on social media but also all other consumers exposed to the conversation.

Human Voice in Online Brand Communications

Even though brands are not human participants per se, consumers can relate and react to them as if they were (Fournier 1998). On social media, the brand is always personified to a certain degree because it is an actor interacting with consumers on the same level as any other user, and using a discernible pattern of communication when talking to them. The stylistic choices in this pattern of communication – the tone of voice – include attributes such as humanness and closeness that underlie the concept of a conversational human voice (Kelleher 2009). Conversational human voice was originally defined as "an engaging and natural style of organizational communication as perceived by an organization's public based on interaction between individuals in the organization and individuals in publics" (Kelleher 2009). For the objectives of this research, we follow a conceptualization of "human voice" similar to Park and Cameron's (2014) and define it as a more natural, close, and human style of online communication, opposed to "corporate voice", which is the more distant and formal style traditionally used by companies. In practice, companies can use a tone of voice

with any degree of "humanness", and not only a voice that is either completely corporate or human. Moreover, even though the concept of conversational human voice is more often associated with the choice of words, the term is not restricted to precise operational guidelines (Gretry et al. 2017), referring more broadly to a "style of organizational communication" (Kelleher 2009). Accordingly, tone of voice "is more than just the words we choose. It's the way in which we communicate our personality" (Meyer 2016). Thus, what exactly constitutes human or corporate voice is largely contextual. Beside the choice of words, it can also include other elements of communication style, such as the musicality in spoken language, or graphic elements in websites, such as emoticons (e.g., Gretry et al. 2017) or the speakers' avatars (e.g., Park and Lee 2013).

In the marketing literature, Schamari and Schaefers (2015) studied conversational human voice as a mediator between webcare and brand–consumer engagement, while Van Noort and Willemsen (2012) studied it as a mediator between webcare and brand evaluations. Other studies have investigated the effects of communicating in a more human style using different concepts associated with human voice such as communication style (Steinmann, Mau, and Schramm-Klein 2015), closeness in language (Sela, Wheeler, and Sarial-Abi 2012), friendliness (Verhagen et al. 2014) or parasocial interaction (Labrecque 2014). The idea of a conversational human voice also converges closely to social presence context of online communication, as noted by Park and Cameron (2014) and Park and Lee (2013). Social presence theory posits that a critical aspect of any communication channel is the degree to which the counterpart is perceived as being real in a mediated communication environment (Short, Williams, and Christie 1976). Since a company's choice to use a human voice aims to foster the consumer's perception of the company or brand as being closer, and more real, from the perspective of social presence theory a conversation using this tone of voice is also a communication with greater social presence.

The importance of communication style and tone of voice on social media is that it can influence consumer responses towards the brand, although how and when this happens is not so clear yet. So far, only a few studies have explored concepts related to human voice, or humanized communication, on social media in an experimental way; and the findings have been dissimilar or inconclusive. For instance, Van Noort and Willemsen (2012) verified that negative brand evaluations engendered by negative word-of-mouth can be attenuated by means of conversational human voice in webcare interventions. However, Verhagen et al. (2014) found only limited effects of communication style on consumer satisfaction in service encounters, and Steinmann, Mau, and Schramm-Klein (2015) found the attitude of members of an online community towards a brand to be negatively affected when it addressed them in a personalized communication style. We argue that the underlying reason for these inconsistencies might have been the lack of consideration for the particular characteristics of each consumption situation when testing the effects. Since the consumer's goals and needs are very different in each situation, he or she can respond differently to the use of a human voice by a brand.

For instance, would someone looking for information about a hotel on Facebook and someone posting a complaint about the services of an internet provider have the same favorable attitude towards the company if it addressed them using a personal and human voice? In other words, there is a possibility of interaction between the tone of voice used by the brand and the consumption situation that has not been taken into account so far. To address this gap of knowledge, we investigate in this paper the effects of human voice when interacting with two different attributes of the consumption context that moderate its influence on the consumer: the type of consumer goal (hedonic or utilitarian) and the level of situational involvement (low or high). We argue that these attributes of the consumer's context change expectations about a brand and therefore affect her or his response to the brand when it communicates in a human or corporate tone of voice (see Fig. 1).

The Role of Hedonic Value and Consumer Goals

Hedonic value is one of two types obtainable in any consumption activity – the other one being utilitarian value – deriving from the emotional benefits and experience of the consumption itself (Babin, Darden, and Griffin 1994). Research on online commerce has historically been more interested in utilitarian value, i.e., the rational and instrumental attributes of websites and new media that facilitate online purchases and browsing (e.g., Childers et al. 2001; Zhang and Mao 2008). However, more recent studies have shown that the online experience with brands is shaped by the hedonic value the consumers obtain, for example, from the website's interactivity (Merle, Sénécal, and St-Onge 2012), socialness (Wang et al. 2007) and perception of flow (Sénécal, Gharbi, and Nantel 2002). On social media in particular, we may expect hedonic value to be related to feelings of enjoyment and sociability provided by the connection with the brand or other consumers. Previous works have shown the role of social presence in the transmission of emotions within a medium (McKenna, Green, and Gleason 2002) even when the presence of the other party in the communication is merely perceived (Kumar and Benbasat 2002). As argued before, since a conversation using a human tone of voice is also a communication with higher social presence (Park and Cameron 2014; Park and Lee 2013), a brand using a human voice should be able to transmit more emotions than one using a corporate voice. Hence, we propose that:

H1. The more human (corporate) the voice used by a brand on social media, the higher (less) is the hedonic value of the online experience for the consumer.

Furthermore, we may expect the increased hedonic value to create a more favorable disposition of the consumer to marketing stimuli, in a similar fashion to the effect suggested by Van der Heijden (2004) between the perceived enjoyment and the user's intention to use information systems. In fact, previous studies in marketing have related the occurrence of pleasant feelings in retail environments to positive consumer attitude and more favorable behavior towards the brand (Dawson, Bloch, and
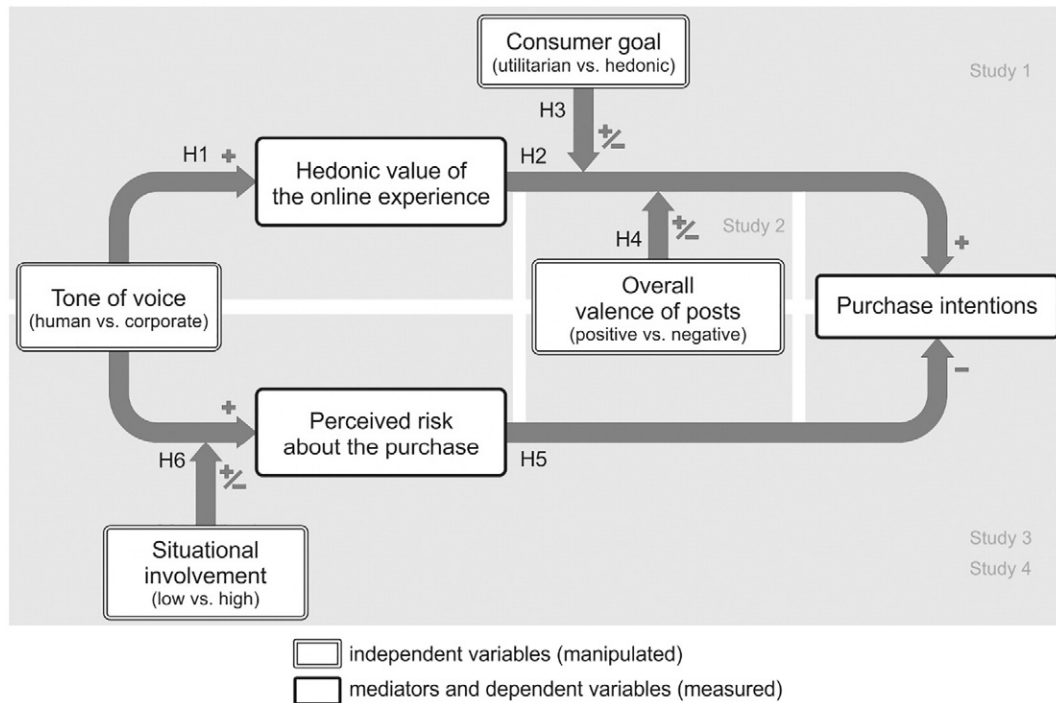
Fig. 1. Research framework.

Ridgway 1990; Pöyry, Parvinen, and Malmivaara 2013). Pöyry, Parvinen, and Malmivaara (2013), for example, have found a positive association between hedonic motivations in online brand communities and purchase intentions. Hence, we can expect the use of a human voice to have a positive influence on consumption behaviors towards the brand, such as purchase intentions, because of the increased hedonic value of the online experience (see Fig. 1). Hence:

H2. The influence of the use of a human or corporate voice on purchase intentions is mediated by the hedonic value of the consumer's experience with the brand on social media.

However, we can also expect the type of consumption goal to shape the results of the online consumer's experience with a product or service, and to moderate the effects of a human voice on consumer responses. The type of consumer goal (utilitarian or hedonic) emerges from the categorization of utilitarian and hedonic products or services (Hirschman and Holbrook 1982). While consumers with utilitarian goals focus on solving rational needs, and evaluate products according to their objective quality, consumers with hedonic goals look mainly for enjoyment and evaluate products subjectively (Hassanein and Head 2006; Hirschman and Holbrook 1982). Even though many products are primarily associated with a specific type of consumer goal, some can also be purchased to satisfy either of them. For example, one can buy a notebook for work (utilitarian goal) or gaming (hedonic goal). Moreover, the type of consumer goal should not be confused with the type of value: consumers may get both utilitarian and hedonic value in a consumption activity regardless of the type of goal (Babin, Darden, and Griffin 1994). In this sense, value is

considered a bidimensional concept (Batra and Ahtola 1990). A specific consumer goal, in the other hand, is a unidimensional categorization, ranging from purely utilitarian to purely hedonic (Hirschman and Holbrook 1982).

Nevertheless, some studies in electronic commerce have shown that the attributes most relevant to consumption decisions are usually the ones congruent with the consumers' goals. For example, Cai and Xu (2011) show that consumers value the expressive aesthetics of an online store (which are hedonic attributes) more when shopping for hedonic products than for utilitarian ones. Similarly, Choi, Lee, and Kim (2011) suggest that the level of social presence in online stores has a greater influence in reuse intentions for hedonic products than for utilitarian ones. Given the above, we argue that the influence of a human voice on consumer responses on social media should be increased when the consumer is looking at a brand page with a hedonic goal in mind, because the benefits of a human voice are emotional in nature, and thus more congruent with a hedonic goal. Conversely, the influence of a human voice on consumer responses on social media should be decreased when the consumer is looking at a brand page with a utilitarian goal in mind. Hence:

H3. The influence of the use of a human or corporate voice on social media on consumer responses is moderated by the type of consumer goal, such that that influence is stronger (weaker) when the consumer goal is hedonic (utilitarian).

Since the consumer goal moderates the indirect effect of the tone of voice on purchase intentions, the relationships hypothesized by H2 and H3 can be also understood as a moderated mediation effect (see Fig. 1).

On the other hand, we may also expect the positive influence of a human voice on consumer responses to be bounded by the overall valence of the content (posts and comments) on social media, regardless of the type of consumer goal. This is based on previous work related to the different weighting given by consumers to negative and positive reviews (for example, Sen and Lerman 2007). Even though using a human voice promotes feelings of sociability and connectedness, the presence of several negative comments about a brand on social media should act as a boundary condition, weakening or nullifying the influence of a human voice. Besides, as argued by McKenna, Green, and Gleason (2002), the use of a human voice is expected to increase the transference of emotions between participants in online communication, and that might include negative feelings of anger in complaints directed to the brand by unsatisfied customers. Conversely, in the situation of more positive posts and comments, the use of a human voice should increase the transmission of positive feelings. Hence:

H4. The influence of the use of human voice on consumer responses is moderated by the overall valence of posts, such that the positive influence of human voice on purchase intentions is weaker (stronger) when posts are mostly negative (positive).

The Role of Perceived Risk and Situational Involvement

The previous hypotheses argue that using a human voice on social media may have a positive effect on consumer responses by means of increased hedonic value. However, we propose that there are situations in which the consumer should not be receptive to a more personal and closer tone of voice. We argue that this should occur in consumption contexts that increase the consumer's perception of risk towards the brand. The perceived risk, a well-known concept in the study of the consumer decision process, is often conceptualized as the result of two dimensions: the severity of the possible negative consequences of consumer's choice and the uncertainty (or probability) of occurrence of these consequences (Campbell and Goodstein 2001; Dowling and Staelin 1994; Li, Yang, and Wu 2009). Using the example of Campbell and Goodstein (2001), a consumer purchasing a new brand of wine may perceive risk because she has never tasted it (uncertainty) or because her guests may be displeased if it tastes bad (consequences). Hence, both dimensions contribute jointly to the perception of risk.

Previous works have shown that, in the presence of a risky consumption situation, consumers may engage in certain behaviors to reduce either the severity of negative consequences or their uncertainty. For instance, Campbell and Goodstein (2001) demonstrate that consumers averse to risk tend to avoid uncertainty by sticking to familiar options. In this sense, when the consumption situation arouses feelings of risk, they should avoid options that do not correspond to the "norm". Accordingly, the use of human voice by some brands may be considered unusual or atypical if most companies in their industry do not communicate in this fashion on social media

or in general. Thus risk-averse consumers might avoid such situations. A similar argument is to be found in the services marketing literature. According to Sheth, Newman, and Gross (1991), customers typically evaluate services using two kinds of values: emotional (associated with relational feelings and experiential benefits) and rational (associated with the satisfaction of practical needs). Based on this typology, Li, Yang, and Wu (2009), identified that when customers perceive high risk and fear the negative consequences of their choices, their decision process focuses mostly on the rational value, i.e., the solution of the problem at hand. On the other hand, when risk is perceived as low, customers are less concerned with adverse consequences of their choices and may choose a service based on the emotional value offered. This rationale applied to the interaction with brands on social media corroborates the idea that using a human voice (whose benefits are emotional in nature) should have a negative influence in consumer response to the brand in those consumption contexts where brands communicating in a close or informal way are perceived to be riskier.

Situational involvement has been shown to be correlated with perceived risk (Huang 2006). Situational involvement differs from enduring involvement in the sense that the latter is intrinsic, long-term, and refers to the consumer characteristics, while the former is extrinsic, transitory, and refers to the impact of the service or product consumed on the consumer's well-being (Huang 2006). Situational involvement is a state in which the consumption problem gains relevance and the consumer allocates cognitive resources to make better decisions (Houston and Rothschild 1978; Roser 1990). Some works have noted that the level of situational involvement influences the decision process of consumers, especially by exposing uncertainty about the brand or product (Houston and Rothschild 1978; Payne, Bettman, and Johnson 1993). Research in online commerce has also shown that situational involvement moderates the influence of atmospheric cues of online stores in consumer evaluations (Eroglu, Machleit, and Davis 2003).

In the context of brand communication on social media, we expect that the level of situational involvement of the consumer should moderate the influence of tone of voice on consumer responses. In consumption contexts of high situational involvement, the consumer is more sensitive to the outcomes (the proper delivery of a service, for example) and the uncertainty associated with the brand. Thus, as argued before, the consumer may perceive higher risk in brands using a human voice, since this type of communication is not typical or congruent with the consumer's expectations of a company trying to solve a serious matter. In contexts of low situational involvement, however, the consumer is not so concerned about the outcomes, and the uncertainty associated with use of a human voice should not be enough to result in a high perception of risk. With a low perceived risk, the consumer should be more open to the emotional benefits of using a human voice (associated with the hedonic value). Hence:

H5. The consumer's perceived risk towards the brand mediates the relationship between tone of voice on social media and purchase intentions.

H6. The level of situational involvement moderates the relationship between a brand's tone of voice on social media and the consumer's perceived risk, such that the use of a human voice leads to higher (lower) perceptions of risk and, consequently, lower (higher) purchase intentions, in contexts of high (low) situational involvement. Conversely, the use of a corporate voice leads to lower (higher) perceptions of risk and, consequently, higher (lower) purchase intentions, in contexts of high (low) situational involvement.

Taken together, the relationships hypothesized by H5 and H6 can also be understood as a moderated mediation effect (see Fig. 1).

Study 1a

Stimuli and Procedure

The first experimental study tested the influence of human voice on the hedonic value of the online experience (H1), the mediation of the effect of human voice on purchase intentions by the hedonic value of the experience with the brand page (H2), and the moderation of this effect by the type of consumer goal (H3). To test these hypotheses, we chose a 2 × 2 between-subject design (human voice vs. corporate voice × hedonic consumer goal vs. utilitarian consumer goal). We chose Facebook as the social medium for the studies because of its widespread adoption and relevance to business today (Snyder 2015). Facebook brand pages are also a type of social media where consumers can see conversations with the brand and among themselves, a feature that is useful for our purposes.

We created versions of a fictitious hotel brand page for the study. The use of a fictitious brand had the objective of testing participants' reactions to human voice without biases from previous attitudes towards brands. We chose a hotel as the context of study given the importance of relational aspects in service evaluation such as care and responsiveness (Bitner, Booms, and Tetreault 1990). The participants were recruited using Amazon MTurk and received a link to the survey (206 participants, U.S. residents excluding those from NYC). Following the recommendations of Peer, Vosgerau, and Acquisti (2014) for data quality, we restricted participation to MTurk workers with high reputation (above 95% approval ratings, minimum 500 HITs). They were randomly assigned to one experimental condition and instructed to imagine themselves going on a trip to New York City and looking on Facebook for opinions about a hotel named "The Whitaker Hotel New York". The purpose of the trip depended on the assigned consumer goal condition: either for business (utilitarian) or vacation (hedonic). Then, each participant was shown one of two versions of the hotel brand page on Facebook (using a human or corporate voice). After looking at the pages for as long as they wished, participants responded to a survey incorporating the measures of interest in the study.

To improve the quality of the answers in our sample, we implemented some control measures. First, we inserted JavaScript code in the survey to allow access only to laptops and desktops, thus avoiding the problem of having participants look at reduced versions of brand pages on the small screens of mobile devices. Second, we included a hypothesis-guessing question at the end of the survey to assess what participants thought was the purpose of the research. Responses indicated that participants were not cognizant of the hypotheses. Third, in order to avoid using rushed answers that did not actually reflect participants' opinions, we included an attention question[1] on the survey and removed from the sample the answers from two participants who did not comply. Finally, we also inserted a hidden timer on the online survey that measured how long the participants looked at the brand pages. Then, we discarded from the sample the answers of those who had not looked at the pages for at least 15 s (27 participants). 15 s was the minimum time measured in the pre-tests for the participants to make an initial evaluation about the brand.

Tone of Voice Manipulation

The two versions of the hotel brand page were exactly the same, except for the specific manipulations on human or corporate voice (see Table 1 and extracts in Appendix A). These manipulations were inspired by previous work (Park and Cameron 2014; Park and Lee 2013; Steinmann, Mau, and Schramm-Klein 2015) and consisted of choices of language and pictures that should increase (vs. decrease) the perception of the brand as being more human and close. To improve realism, all posts and replies were based on the content from the brand pages of real NYC hotels, however with names, pictures, and personal details changed. Both pages had 29 posts, 11 being initiated by the brand and 18 by users; 10 posts contained pictures and 9 were text-only; 13 posts were primarily positive (compliments by customers or self-promotion by the hotel), 6 were primarily negative (complaints by customers) and 10 were neutral (questions and answers).

Consumer Goal Manipulation

We manipulated the consumer goal through the instructions given to participants before looking at the brand pages. In the utilitarian goal scenario, participants were instructed to imagine themselves in need of a hotel for a business trip. In the hedonic goal scenario, they were instructed to imagine themselves going on a vacation trip. Use of the same basic service (hotel) for the two types of consumer goal had the objective of avoiding possible confounding effects of idiosyncratic differences between two unrelated services (Kronrod and Danziger 2013). In this sense, the choice of New York as the city for both scenarios was also useful because the city is a traditional destination for both business and vacation travels. As priming questions for the consumer goal manipulation, we also asked participants which attributes of hotels were more relevant to them on a business or vacation trip.

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[1] The exact question was "Check what is the primary aspect you consider when choosing a hotel for a (business/vacation) trip. Actually, we are interested to know whether, or not, participants follow the instructions correctly. To show that you read the instructions, please check the 'other' option in the scale below and write 'survey'." [A list of choices including "price", "location", "comfort", "staff" and "other" followed the question].

Table 1
Tone of voice manipulation in the studies [a].

Tone of voice	Manipulations	Examples
Human	Brand page uses the employee's avatar as the profile picture. Posts use informal language and express more often emotions like happiness or sadness. The author addresses consumers by their first names, refers to itself mostly in the first person ("I" or "we") and signs with his/her own name.	"Thank you very much, Marie! We're so happy to hear that! ☺" "Hello, Marta. We are very sorry for the delay in communication." "I will attempt to expedite your request. Thank you, Kate."
Corporate	Brand page uses the brand logo as the profile picture. Posts use formal language and avoid the expression of emotions. The author addresses consumers only by their last names or pronouns, refers to itself mostly in the third person ("the hotel", "the staff") and signs with the brand name.	"The Whitaker Hotel appreciates your kindly words, Ms. Harrington." "Ms. Harmon, we apologize for the delay in communication." "The staff will attempt to expedite your request. Thank you, The Whitaker Hotel."

[a] The manipulations were inspired by previous works relating language choices and feelings of closeness/humanness (Fournier 1998; Park and Cameron 2014; Park and Lee 2013; Sela, Wheeler, and Sarial-Abi 2012; Steinmann, Mau, and Schramm-Klein 2015).

Measures

We measured purchase intentions by assessing the participants' likelihood of staying at the hotel for a [business/vacation] trip in a 7-point Likert type scale. To measure hedonic value and to check for the manipulation of human or corporate voice, we used scales adapted from the literature (see tables in Appendix A). For control variables, besides the usual demographic variables (gender, age, and education), we included the measure of the participants enduring involvement with hotels, the participants' expertise in hotels, and the participants' Facebook usage intensity (see scales in Appendix A).

Pre-tests

We refined and improved the stimuli and study measures by means of three pre-tests. In the first pre-test (101 participants), we tested brand pages with different numbers of posts (15 or 30 posts) to determine the appropriate amount that the participants should read in order to exhibit different reactions to the tone of voice used. We considered the longer version more appropriate to our manipulations. In the second pre-test (52 participants), we tested all measures as well as the average perceptions of realism (M = 5.85 out of 7) and role-playing (M = 6.10 out of 7) and considered them satisfactory. In the final pre-test (63 participants), we added new refinements such as the code prohibiting the visualization of the brand pages on mobile devices, and removed one post considered too negative and potentially biasing purchase intentions for some participants. We then used this final version of the scenarios with 29 posts in the main study.

Results

The final sample (n = 174) comprised 88 men aged 34.5 on average. The manipulations of tone of voice (α = .91) and consumer goal were successful (M_{org} = 4.98; M_{human} = 6.30; F(1, 170) = 120.10, p < .001; $M_{business}$ = 3.46; $M_{vacation}$ = 4.76; F(1, 170) = 44.28, p < .001). As in the pre-tests, perceptions of realism (M = 5.79) and role-playing (M = 5.80) were satisfactory. We did not observe any significant differences in the means of the dependent variables in terms of gender, age, or education. However, enduring involvement with hotels (α = .95; M = 2.88) was a significant covariate for purchase intentions (β = −.17; F(1, 168) = 7.20, p < .01) and hedonic value (β = −.32; F(1, 168) = 27.82, p < .001). Facebook usage intensity (α = .89; M = 3.54) was also a significant covariate for purchase intentions (β = .25; F(1, 168) = 9.14, p < .01) and hedonic value (β = .28; F(1, 168) = 10.31, p < .001). The sign of the parameter estimates suggests that consumers with lower enduring involvement with hotels and heavy users of Facebook are more likely to make a reservation at the hotel and experience more hedonic value on the brand page.

We observed a significant main effect of tone of voice on hedonic value (α = .89; M_{org} = 4.25; M_{human} = 5.44; F(1, 168) = 36.87, p < .001), supporting H1. Results from MANCOVA analysis also showed a significant main effect of tone of voice on purchase intentions (M_{org} = 4.87; M_{human} = 5.83; F(1, 168) = 25.17, p < .001) and a significant main effect of the type of consumer goal ($M_{business}$ = 5.21; $M_{vacation}$ = 5.59; F(1, 168) = 4.78, p < .05). More importantly, the results also show a significant effect of the interaction between tone of voice and consumer goal on purchase intentions (F(1, 168) = 4.47, p < .05; η^2 = 0.03; see Fig. 2). The use of human voice increased hotel reservation intentions more in the case of a hedonic consumer goal (vacation travel) than a utilitarian consumer goal (business travel). Hence, H3 was supported.

To test whether the hedonic value of the consumer's online experience mediated the relationship between tone of voice and purchase intentions, we ran a mediational analysis using the PROCESS SPSS macro (Hayes 2013; model 14 with 5,000 bootstrapping samples). In the regression model, the dependent variable was purchase intentions, while the independent variable was tone of voice, the moderator was type of consumer goal, and the mediator was hedonic value (Fig. 3). Involvement with hotels and Facebook usage intensity were covariates. The effect of the mediator on the dependent variable was significant (β = .29, SE = .08, t = 3.49, p < .001) and the interactive effect of hedonic value and type of consumer goal was also significant (β = .27, SE = .13, t = 2.15, p < .05). Confirming H2, the index of moderated mediation (index = .12, SE = .06, 95% CI [.02, .25]) indicated that the mediating role of hedonic value in driving the effect of tone of voice on purchase intentions is moderated by the type of consumer goal. When the consumer was looking for a hotel for a vacation trip, the hedonic
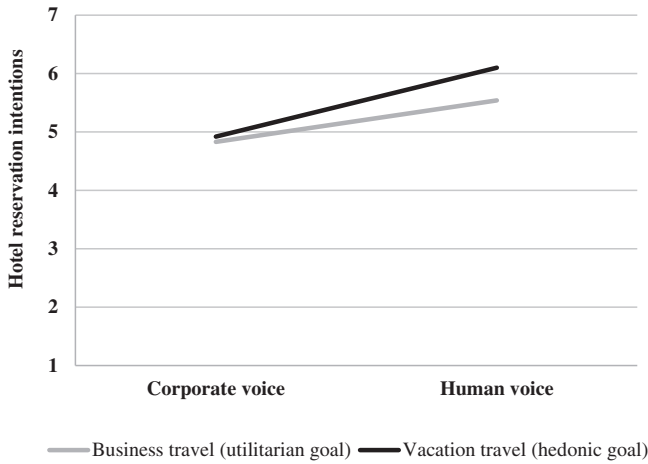
Fig. 2. Interactions between brand voice and consumer goal in Study 1a.

value of the online experience mediated the effect of tone of voice on purchase intentions (indirect effect = .19, SE = .05, 95% CI [.10, .31]). This was not the case, however, when they were looking for a hotel for a business trip (indirect effect = .07, SE = .05, 95% CI [−.02, .17]).

Discussion

The results of Study 1a support our first three hypotheses. The brand's use of human voice on social media increased the hedonic value of the online experience for the consumer (H1) and, as a result, also increased purchase intentions (H2). As hypothesized, the type of consumer goal moderated this effect (H3). The results also corroborate our reasoning for this interaction, i.e., the congruence between hedonic value and the type of goal. In addition, the findings show that heavy Facebook users and consumers with lower enduring involvement with hotels were more likely to make a reservation at the hotel and experience more hedonic value on the brand page. The positive influence of Facebook usage intensity was expected, since this variable represents the importance of this social medium in people's lives. Thus, intense Facebook users should get more hedonic value when reading brand pages

and are likely to give more importance to the posts they read. The negative influence of the level of enduring involvement, however, apparently contradicts the findings of Wang et al. (2007) on the relationship between hedonic value, involvement, and perceived social character of websites. Perhaps consumers more involved with hotels have greater knowledge for making a decision about a reservation on their own, and are less easily persuaded by peripheral action of the brand, such as the use of human voice. Study 1b expands this investigation and tests if the presence of overall negative posts also limits the influence of human voice, as hypothesized in H4.

Study 1b

Stimuli and Procedure

In the second study, we tested the moderating influence of the overall valence of posts in the consumer responses (H4). A 2 × 2 × 2 between-subject design (human voice vs. corporate voice × hedonic consumer goal vs. utilitarian consumer goal × positive vs. negative overall valence of posts) was used to test the hypotheses. The experimental procedure was similar to the previous study. We recruited a sample of participants from Amazon MTurk (401 participants respecting the same criteria used for Study 1a) and instructed them to imagine themselves looking for a hotel in New York City. Again, they were randomly assigned to the condition of human or corporate voice on the brand page and to the condition of business or vacation travel (utilitarian or hedonic goal). Then they had to report their likelihood of making a reservation at the hotel and answer the other measures of interest in the study. However, in order to test the influence of the overall valence of posts, we also designed brand pages with more positive or more negative posts. Hence, we used four versions of the hotel page in this study (human voice vs. corporate voice × positive vs. negative overall valence of posts). In comparison, while the brand pages with positive overall valence had 13 positive posts, 10 neutral posts and 6 negative posts, the brand pages with negative overall valence had 3 positive posts, 9 neutral posts and 17 negative posts. Positive posts contained primarily compliments from consumers, neutral posts contained general
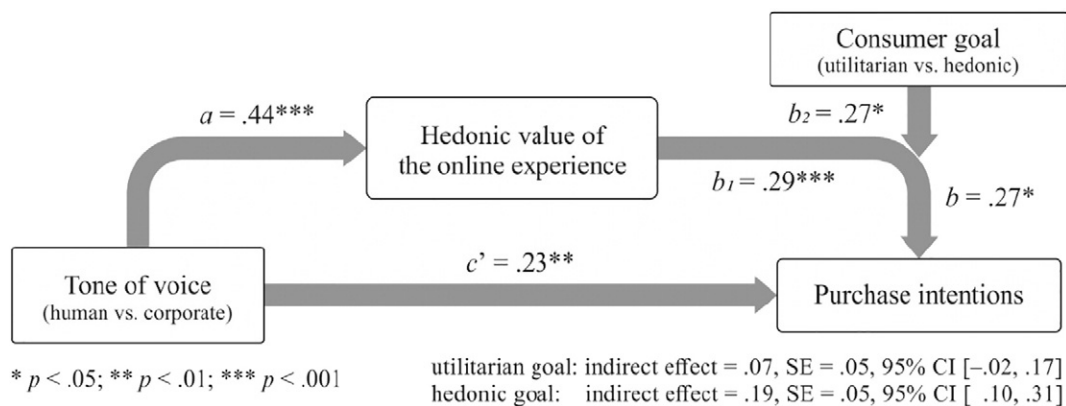

Fig. 3. Moderated mediation model for Study 1a.

information and questions, and negative posts contained mainly complaints from clients. Other than that, the number of likes, reviews and info about the hotel remained the same. We also kept an approximately equal number of replies by post, posts initiated by the brand or by customers, and posts with pictures or text-only. As before, all posts and replies were adapted from extracts of real brand pages of hotels in New York City. The manipulation of human voice followed the same principle as in the previous study. Manipulation of the consumer goal was also the same, as were the general measures and controls taken to improve internal validity such as the attention questions and the hidden timers on the brand pages. The general measures in the study were also the same.

Pre-test

The pages with positive overall valence of posts were the same used in Study 1a. We then designed the new pages with negative overall valence of posts with the criterion that overall perceptions should be considerably lower than in the pages used in the previous study, but not so low as to saturate the measure of purchase intentions at the bottom of its scale. A pre-test (n = 42) for the new brand pages showed that average purchase intentions across experimental conditions (M = 3.24 out of 7) were indeed lower than those of Study 1a, but still in the middle-range of the scale. Moreover, means of realism (M = 5.57) and role-playing (M = 5.51) were satisfactory. Hence, we considered the new brand pages with negative overall valence of posts appropriate for the main study.

Results

As in Study 1a, we removed participants who remained on the brand page for less than 15 s (n = 49) or who failed on the attention question (n = 10). Thus, the final sample consisted of 342 participants, of which 187 were men, with an average age of 35.9. Again, the manipulations of tone of voice (α = .91) and consumer goal were successful (M_{org} = 4.89; M_{human} = 5.56; $F(1, 340)$ = 25.67, $p < .001$; $M_{business}$ = 3.58; $M_{vacation}$ = 4.50; $F(1, 340)$ = 39.62, $p < .001$). Perceptions of realism (M = 5.79) and role-playing (M = 5.96) of the scenarios were satisfactory. We did not observe any significant differences in the means of the dependent variables in terms of the covariates.

Results from ANOVA analysis showed a significant effect of tone of voice on hotel reservation intentions (M_{org} = 4.02; M_{human} = 4.34; $F(1, 334)$ = 4.873, $p < .05$), but also an effect from the interaction between tone of voice and overall valence of posts ($F(1, 334)$ = 4.92, $p < .05$; η^2 = 0.02). Analyzing the conditions of overall positive and negative posts separately, we found a positive effect of human voice on hotel reservation intentions when posts were mostly positive (M_{org} = 4.72; M_{human} = 5.45; $F(1, 164)$ = 12.246, $p < .001$), but no significant effect when posts were mostly negative (M_{org} = 3.32; M_{human} = 3.32; $F(1, 170)$ = .000, $p = .99$; see Fig. 4). This suggests that the positive effect of human voice on the dependent variable (also seen in Study 1a) vanished when posts
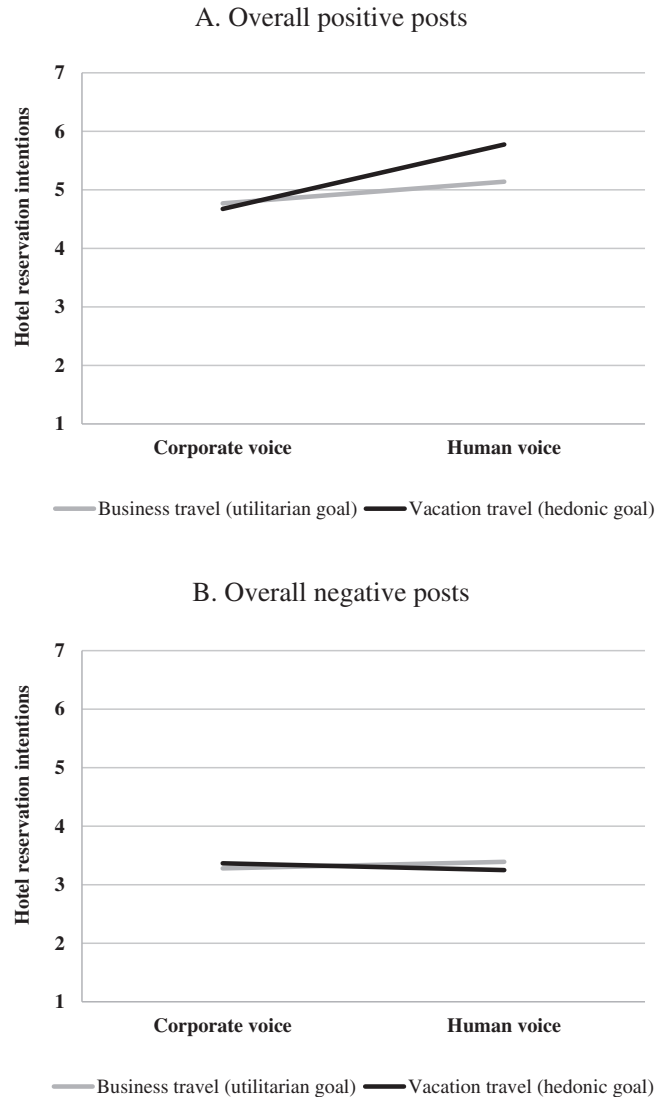

Fig. 4. Interactions between brand voice and consumer goal in Study 1b.

on the brand page were mostly negative. Hence, the findings support H4.

Discussion

Because of the negative opinions about the brand, purchase intentions were lower for the participants who looked at the brand pages with overall negative posts, which was evidently expected. More importantly, however, the difference between pages using human voice or corporate voice became insignificant in the experimental conditions of negative overall valence of posts. In other words, the overall negative posts about the brand on those pages decreased the influence of the tone of voice on the brand page and actually made it insignificant. Thus, when posts on the brand page are mostly negative, brands could opt for either a human or a corporate voice in their communication, since the overall effect is not significant. When posts are mostly positive, brands can opt for a human voice, as it increases purchase intentions.

Study 2a

Stimuli and Procedure

The objectives of this study were to test the mediation of the effect of tone of voice on purchase intentions by the perceived risk about the brand (H5) and the moderation of this effect by the level of consumer's situational involvement (H6). We used a 2 × 2 between-subject design (human voice vs. corporate voice × low SI vs. high SI) to test these hypotheses. We changed the context from hotels to restaurants to test the influence of the human voice in a different setting and therefore increase external validity. The use of a restaurant also served for manipulating the situational involvement, since a dinner may be more or less important for customers depending on the extrinsic meanings associated with the occasion. Thus, we created two versions of the Facebook brand page (using human and corporate voice respectively) for a fictitious Italian restaurant named Francesco's Pizza & Pasta. As in the previous studies, we recruited the participants using Amazon MTurk (200 participants with more than 500 HITs, 95% minimum approval, not participating in previous studies, U.S. residents only) and directed them to our online survey. Participants were instructed to imagine themselves in the situation where they were looking for a restaurant for dinner and found the brand page of Francesco's restaurant on Facebook. They were asked to examine the brand page freely until they had formed an opinion about the restaurant, and then proceed to the survey. The main dependent variable in this survey was the likelihood of them choosing to have dinner at this restaurant on that specific occasion.

Human Voice Manipulation

The manipulation of human voice followed the same principles as in the previous studies. Accordingly, the profile picture on the brand page using a corporate voice displayed the logo of Francesco's Pizza & Pasta, while the profile picture on the brand page using human voice displayed a picture of the restaurant's chef, and who could be regarded as Francesco itself. Both versions of the brand page had 16 posts and the same number of likes and reviews. The contents of the brand pages were the same, except for the manipulations in voice type. To improve realism, all posts and replies were based on real brand pages from real restaurants, but with names, pictures, and personal details changed.

Manipulation of the Situational Involvement

We manipulated the situational involvement by means of the instructions given to participants before looking at the brand pages. In the low situational involvement scenario, participants were told to imagine themselves searching for a restaurant to have a simple, casual dinner alone. In the high situational involvement scenario, participants were told to imagine themselves in need of a restaurant to have a birthday celebration with their family and friends. As before, the use of the same basic service (restaurant) for the two situational involvement scenarios had the objective of avoiding the possible confounding effects of idiosyncratic differences between two unrelated services (Kronrod and Danziger 2013). In this sense, we considered that an Italian restaurant would be suitable for dinners of both low- and high-levels of situational involvement.

Measures

We reused some measures from the previous studies such as the manipulation check for tone of voice and the control variables. We measured purchase intentions by assessing the participants' likelihood of going to the restaurant for a "casual dinner alone" or a "birthday dinner with your family and friends" with a 7-point Likert type scale. In addition, we measured perceived risk and checked for the manipulation of the situational involvement using scales adapted from the literature (see tables in Appendix B).

Pre-tests

The stimuli and measures of the study were refined and improved after two pre-tests. In the first pre-test (n = 49), we proposed six different occasions for dinner in a restaurant and selected the two which had scored the lowest and highest in the situational involvement scale. In the second pre-test (n = 52), we tested the final versions of the brand pages and verified satisfactory means for realism (M = 5.62) and role-playing (M = 5.84). We also tested if the manipulations of situational involvement would also have an unpredicted effect on participants' understanding of consumer goal and found no significant differences (M_{low} = 4.52; M_{high} = 5.18; $F(1, 51)$ = 2.29; p = .14). Hence, we tested an independent effect in this study.

Results

The final sample consisted of 154 participants (39 participants who remained less than 15 s on the brand page and 7 participants who failed on the attention question were eliminated), of which 77 were men with an average age of 34.3. The manipulations of tone of voice (α = .91) and situational involvement (α = .86) were successful (M_{org} = 4.86; M_{human} = 5.64; $F(1, 150)$ = 20.86, p < .001; M_{low} = 5.05; M_{high} = 5.69; $F(1, 150)$ = 13.15; p < .001). The average perceptions of realism (M = 5.73) and role-playing of the scenarios (M = 5.99) were satisfactory. We did not observe significant differences in the means of the dependent variables in terms of any of the covariates in the study. In order to further check for the independence of the manipulations of situational involvement in this study from the manipulations in consumer goal in the previous ones, we also measured the hedonic value of the online experience. We found no significant differences in terms of situational involvement (M_{low} = 4.77; M_{high} = 4.86; $F(1, 152)$ = .28; p = .60).

The results from MANOVA analysis did not show significant main effects of tone of voice ($F(1, 150)$ = .00, p = .99) or situational involvement ($F(1, 150)$ = .05, p = .83) on purchase intentions. However, we observed a significant effect of the interaction between tone of voice and the level of situational involvement on the dependent variable ($F(1, 150)$ = 6.43, p < .05; η^2 = .04; see Fig. 5). In the low situational
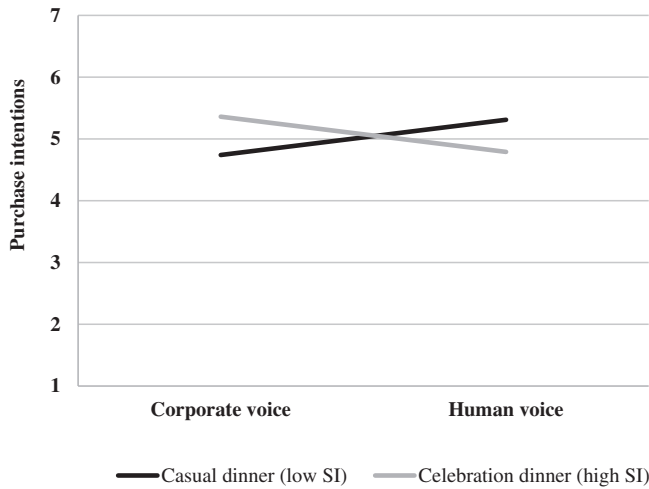
Fig. 5. Interactions between brand voice and situational involvement in Study 2a.

involvement condition, the use of human voice increased purchase intentions, while in the high situational involvement condition, it decreased. Hence, H6 was supported. In the same way, the results did not show significant main effects of the tone of voice (F(1, 150) = .00, p = .95) or situational involvement (F(1, 150) = .33, p = .56) on consumers' perceived risk (α = .92), but they showed a significant effect from the interaction between the two independent variables (F(1, 150) = 6.46, p < 0.05; η^2 = .04).

To test the moderated mediation hypothesis, we ran a mediational analysis using the PROCESS SPSS macro (Hayes 2013; model 7 with 5,000 bootstrapping samples). In the regression model, the dependent variable was purchase intentions, while the independent variable was tone of voice, the moderator was level of situational involvement, and the mediator was perceived risk (Fig. 6). The effect of the mediator on the dependent variable was significant (β = −.60, SE = .07, t = −8.57, p < .001). The interactive effect of tone of voice and level of situational involvement on perceived risk was also significant (β = 1.19, SE = .48, t = 2.49, p < .05). Confirming H6, the index of moderated mediation (index = −.71, SE = .31, 95% CI [−1.38, −.16]) indicated that the mediating role of perceived risk in driving the effect of tone of voice on purchase

intentions is moderated by the level of situational involvement. When the consumer was looking for a restaurant for a birthday dinner with friends, the perceived risk mediated the effect of tone of voice on purchase intentions (indirect effect = −.36, SE = .19, 95% CI [−.79, −.02]). The event evoked a high perception of risk, and this increased risk decreased purchase intentions. This was not the case, however, when they were looking for a restaurant for a casual dinner (indirect effect = .35, SE = .22, 95% CI [−.06, .81]).

Discussion

The results of this study confirmed our hypotheses. In the low situational involvement scenarios, the use of human voice has a positive influence on purchase intentions (as in Study 1a). In the high situational involvement condition, however, the increased sensitivity of consumers to risk was enough to reverse the influence of human voice and make it negative. Consumers in this situation preferred the more distant and formal voice on the brand page. The mediation analysis showed that the perception of risk mediated the relationship between purchase intentions and the interaction of human voice and situational involvement. The next study tests that interaction again but with a different approach.

Study 2b

Stimuli and Procedure

This study used a different experimental setting to increase the validity of the findings about the moderation of the relationship between tone of voice and purchase intentions on social media by the consumer's situational involvement (H6). In this study, we presented two different brands and asked the participants to choose one of them. Moreover, we used a product (wine) instead of a service to increase external validity. We used a 2 × 2 between-subject design (use of human voice by brand A or by brand B × low SI vs. high SI) to test the hypothesis.

The setting for the online experiment was the choice of a brand of wine brand for a specific consumption situation. Wine is an experiential product for which consumers usually look for

low SI: indirect effect = .35, SE = .22, 95% CI [−.06, .81]
high SI: indirect effect = −.36, SE = .19, 95% CI [−.79, −.02]
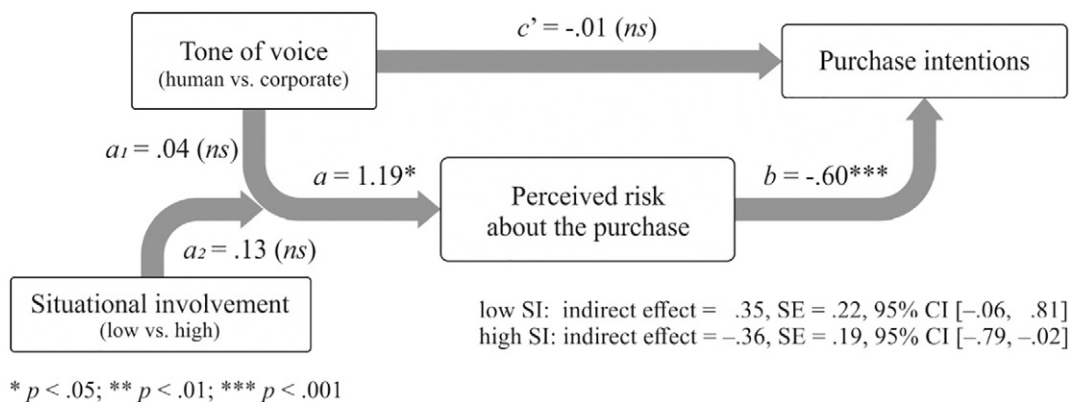
* p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001

Fig. 6. Moderated mediation model for Study 2a.

other people's opinions and brand attributes in their decision process (Sénécal and Nantel 2004), so we considered it an adequate choice for our experiment. The two fictitious brand pages of wineries created for the study (Valmont and Grenier) were based on actual posts from Californian wineries whose wines were included in a list of best affordable American wines. In order to avoid confounded effects of perceptions of quality, origin, and price, the two wine labels reflected designs of wines within the same price range and included the same varieties of red and white wine. We told participants to imagine themselves in the scenario in which they needed to choose a brand of wine for a given occasion and were then presented the brand pages for two Californian wines. They then had to choose one of the two wines and answer other measures of interest in the survey. Since the participants could examine each page freely, we included independent timers in both pages. The presentation order of the pages (Valmont or Grenier first) was random but recorded and included in the analysis to check for possible effects. As in the previous studies, the participants were recruited using Amazon MTurk (251 participants respecting the same criteria used for the previous study) and directed to our survey with the experimental stimuli.

Human Voice Manipulation

The manipulation of human voice followed the same principles as in the previous studies, adapted however to the brand pages of Valmont and Grenier wineries. Participants were presented with the version using a human voice on one of the pages and the version using a corporate voice on the other. Depending on the experimental condition randomly assigned to each participant, the brand page using human voice would be either Valmont or Grenier. The two versions of the brand pages had 11 posts (6 positive, 4 neutral, and 1 negative) and their contents (post length, number of replies, and comments) were similar, except for the tone of voice manipulation (see extracts in Appendix C).

Situational Involvement Manipulation

As in the previous study, we manipulated the situational involvement by means of the instructions given to participants before looking at the brand pages. In the low situational involvement scenario, we told participants to imagine themselves looking for a brand of wine to taste alone at home. In the high situational involvement scenario, they were told to imagine themselves looking for a brand of wine as a birthday present for someone special who loves wine.

Measures

Our dependent variable in this study was the brand chosen by each consumer (Valmont or Grenier). We reused some measures from the previous study such as the manipulation check for tone of voice and the control variables. We also included as control variables the order of presentation of the brand pages and the measure of the consumer's wine purchasing habits (by asking the estimated number of bottles bought per month).

Pre-test

The stimuli and measures of the study were refined and improved after a pre-test (n = 78) in which participants would randomly look at only one of the brand pages. The objective here was to evaluate individually the tone of voice manipulation (α = .92) in each version of the brand pages. In this sense, the difference in the means of tone of voice between the pages using corporate ($M_{Valmont}$ = 5.07; $M_{Grenier}$ = 5.02; $M_{average}$ = 5.05) and human voice ($M_{Valmont}$ = 5.60; $M_{Grenier}$ = 5.62; $M_{average}$ = 5.61) was significant ($F(1, 74)$ = 4.45; p < .05), while the difference in the means between Valmont and Grenier was not, which was expected.

Results

The final sample consisted of 202 participants (42 participants who remained less than 15 s on any of the brand pages and 7 participants who failed on the attention question were eliminated), of which 98 men with an average age of 37.7. Again, the manipulation of situational involvement (α = .95) was successful (M_{low} = 4.43; M_{high} = 5.78; $F(1, 198)$ = 40.89; p < .001). Since the manipulation check of human voice was already successful in the pre-test, we did not include it in the final study because it would likely suffer a bias from participants' brand choice, i.e., they could evaluate each brand in the sense of forcedly confirming their previous choice. Perceptions of realism (M = 5.81) and role-playing (M = 5.89) were satisfactory. The order of presentation of the brand pages (random in the study) was a significant covariate for brand choice (β = .29; 95% CI [.00, .57], p = .05), with the valence of the parameter estimates suggesting that consumers were a little more likely to choose the first brand of wine presented to them (i.e., primacy effect, Carlson, Meloy, and Russo 2006). We did not observe any significant differences in the means of the dependent variables in terms of the other covariates.

To investigate if brand choice is influenced by the interaction between human voice and the level of consumer's situational involvement, we ran a logistic regression using the PROCESS SPSS macro (Hayes 2013; model 1 with 5,000 bootstrapping samples). The voice used by Valmont (human coded as 1, corporate coded as −1) and the level of situational involvement (high coded as 1, low coded as −1) were the independent discrete variables, while brand choice was the dependent discrete variable (Valmont coded as 1 and Grenier as 0). The voice used by Grenier was the reverse of Valmont's by design, so it was not included in the model. The order of presentation of the brand pages was a covariate. Confirming our expectations, the interaction effect between tone of voice and situational involvement was significant in the model (β = −.30, SE = .15, z = −2.07, p < .05), while the main effects of tone of voice (β = −.04, SE = .15, z = −.27, p = .79) and situational involvement (β = −.27, SE = .15, z = −1.82, p = .07) were not. In the condition of low situational involvement, the number of participants who chose Valmont increased when this brand was the one using human voice (44.90% Valmont using corporate voice and 55.10% Grenier using human voice; vs. 56.60% Valmont using human voice and 43.40% Grenier using

corporate voice; see Fig. 7). However, in the condition of high situational involvement, the number of participants who chose Valmont decreased when this brand was the one using human voice (46.94% Valmont using corporate voice and 53.06% Grenier using human voice; vs. 31.37% Valmont using human voice and 68.63% Grenier using corporate voice; see Fig. 7). Hence, the results of the study also supported H6.

Discussion

The findings of this study again verified that the level of situational involvement moderates the effect of the use of human voice on purchase intentions. The consumers' preference between the two brands shifted, in the sense that the brand using human voice was favored when situational involvement was low, but the brand using corporate voice was favored when situational involvement was high. Evidently, the influence of a human voice in consumer decisions was magnified in this study

A. Low situational involvement

B. High situational involvement

Fig. 7. Interactions between brand voice and situational involvement in Study 2b.

in comparison to real-life situations, since all other factors that could influence consumer decision in that specific case were controlled. Nevertheless, it is important to note that a human voice can still influence product evaluations, as shown in this study, even though we might expect that influence to be greater in the evaluation of services due to the importance of relational aspects (Bitner, Booms, and Tetreault 1990).

General Discussion

In this paper, we analyzed how the use of human or corporate voice in brand communication influences consumers' responses towards the brand on social media. More specifically, we analyzed this influence in different contexts in which the tone of voice may have a positive or negative effect on a consumer's responses depending on its interaction with the consumer's context (namely, his/her consumer goal and his/her situational involvement with the service). From a theoretical contribution perspective, our investigation responds to a gap in the electronic commerce literature, i.e., the lack of constructs concerning the social aspects of communication between consumers and companies (Liang and Turban 2011). The concept of human voice is still underexplored in the marketing literature and it can address the effects of strategies with different degrees of personal or corporate tone of voice when communicating with customers. This work also contributes by highlighting circumstances likely to explain the disparate results of previous work about the effects of several factors associated with closeness and humanness in brand communication (for example, Steinmann, Mau, and Schramm-Klein 2015; Van Noort and Willemsen 2012). It is possible that different consumption situations in previous work were major conditioners of their results. As suggested by our findings, the use of human or corporate voice can interact with the consumer goals and the level of situational involvement. It is even possible that the tone of voice interacts with other consumption attributes not explored in this research that might have been a limitation of previous work's findings.

In addition, since the definition of human voice associates with social presence theory, our findings can also be compared to others following this theory to explain the effects of social interactions in e-commerce (e.g., Labrecque 2014). In the same way, the concept of human voice is also related to brand humanization in the sense that a brand using human voice is perceived as even more "human". Therefore, our findings are also relevant to studies on the anthropomorphism of brands (e.g., Puzakova, Kwak, and Rocereto 2013), specifically responding to the effects of humanized communication.

Managerial Implications

The results of this work also have implications for managers. Even though each study used the same product or service for the manipulations of consumer goals and situational involvement (to minimize confounded effects), the product or service offered by a given brand may more usually be associated with a specific consumption context. In other words, the products or services
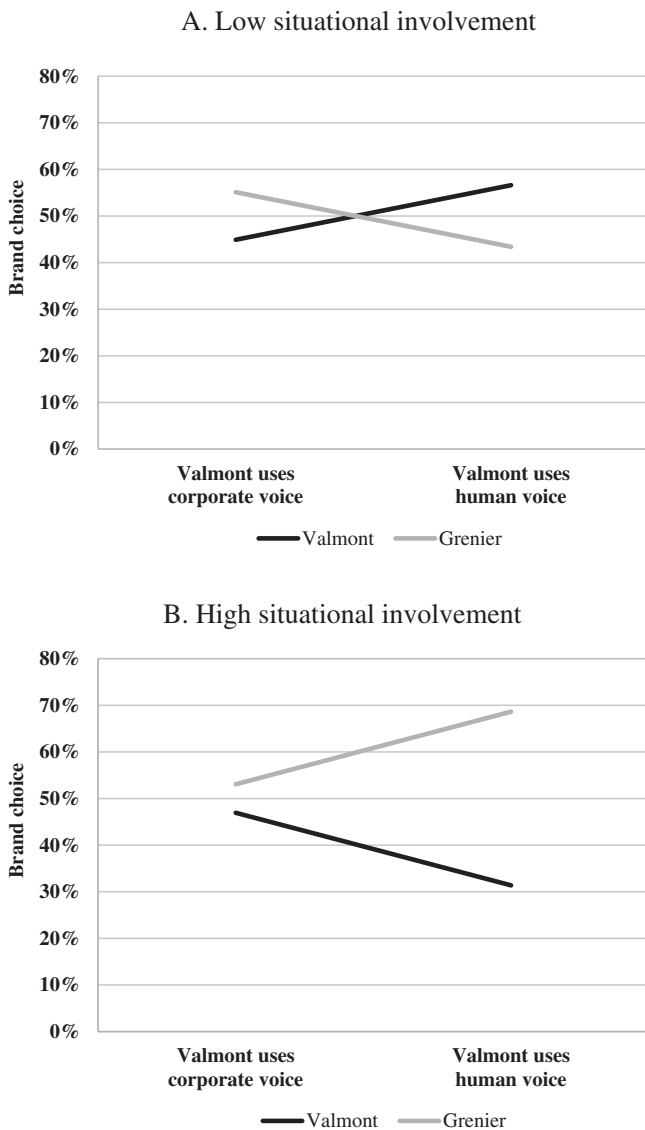
offered by the brand may be purchased more often to satisfy a hedonic or utilitarian goal and be more associated with a low or high level of situational involvement. Hence, some brands should benefit more by using a more human voice, while others should use a corporate voice. Because of this, we can present general guidelines for companies about the tone of voice more appropriate for their context (see Fig. 8).

Conditions Under Which Brands Should Use a Human Voice on Social Media

It is a good idea for a brand to use a human voice in its interactions with customers on social media if its products or services are primarily hedonic and associated with contexts of low situational involvement and risk. This should be the case for bookstores, travel agencies, sports clubs, etc. In addition, in this condition, the majority of posts about the brand should not be negative.

Conditions Under Which Use of a Human Voice on Social Media Makes Little Difference for Brands

If the brand's products or services are primarily utilitarian or if overall posts about the brand are negative, the benefits of using a human voice are limited or negligible. However, the brand may still choose to use either a human or corporate voice in these situations, provided that the products or services are associated with contexts of low situational involvement and risk. The choice of tone of voice should therefore follow what is most relevant in terms of brand positioning. Examples include technical schools, cleaning services, and many business-to-business services.

Conditions Under Which Brands Should Not Use a Human Voice on Social Media

It is not advisable for brands to use a human voice when their products or services are usually associated with contexts of high situational involvement and risk. In this case, it is better to adopt a corporate voice and maintain a certain distance when dealing with customers. Financial consulting, medical services, and real estate brokers are examples in this category.

These recommendations are especially relevant for services marketing, because of the importance of attendance and peripheral attributes in the customer experience (Bitner, Booms, and Tetreault 1990). They should also be relevant for experiential products, since customers are more inclined to search for the opinions of other people in this situation (Sénécal and Nantel 2004). Moreover, manipulations in human voice are possible on most social media, even though at a smaller level for some (e.g., the space for brand communication is more limited on TripAdvisor brand pages than it is on Facebook). Therefore, the findings of this paper, although extendable to social media in general, should be more useful for those in which the brand has more control over its contents.

Limitations and Further Research

In this paper, we focused on two attributes of the consumption context that moderate the influence of human voice on purchase intentions: the consumer's goal (hedonic or utilitarian) and level of situational involvement (low or high). However, other factors might also interact with the use of a human voice and make its influence positive, negative, or null towards the brand. For example, a tone of voice may elicit different expectations from the consumer depending on the brand's positioning, typicality, perceived authenticity, and so on. Future studies may explore other mechanisms through which tone of voice on social media influences consumer attitudes and behaviors. Similarly, this work focused on one social medium only – Facebook – since it is presently the most used social medium for consumers and the most relevant for marketing (eMarketer 2016). Future studies could extend the present findings by testing the effects of human voice on different social media in which the differences in the brand voice might be less evident (such as Instagram) or in personal communications (email).

The studies in this research were restricted to the investigation of the consumer's first contact with a new brand. While this constituted a contribution to the literature, it also raises the question of the effects of tone of voice after repeated interactions, such as in an extended relationship. Should the effects of using a human voice increase, tail off, or decrease with time? Another question concerns the effects of adopting a human voice on consumers already familiar with the brand. Could a sudden change in tone of voice also change existing
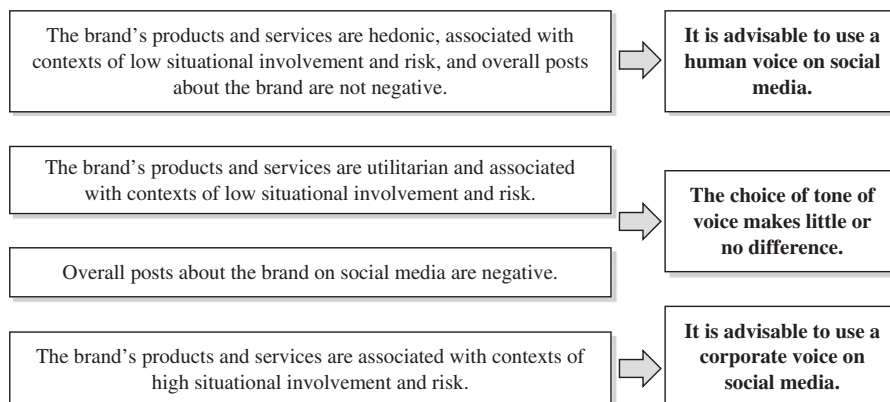

Fig. 8. Framework for decisions about using a human or a corporate voice on social media.

perceptions about the brand? Such an investigation should be particularly interesting for brands dealing with service failures. Further research, therefore, could also investigate the choice of a tone of voice to deal most effectively with complaints and unsatisfied customers.

Moreover, there are limitations to the methodological choices of this research. Although the performed studies relied on actual consumers, they used fictitious brands. Thus, studies based on consumer interactions with existing brands would be valuable to improve the robustness of the results and investigate additional boundary conditions. Further research

investigating other industries, such as B2B, can also help extend the external validity of the research. Finally, there is a limitation related to the characteristics of the participants of this research (all from the United States). What would be the results of the experiments when applied to participants of other cultures? It is a well-known fact that some cultures are more used to uncertainty and closeness/distance than others (Hofstede 2001). Even within the U.S., some market segments may be more open to close and personal communications than others. Cross-cultural studies should be of value to generalize the applicability of these findings.

Appendix A

Table A.1
Dependent variables, independent variables and covariates[a] in Study 1a.

Variable	Measurement items	Factor loadings	Alpha
Purchase intentions	How likely would you stay at this hotel for a [vacation/business] trip to New York? (1 to 7: very unlikely–very likely)	.77	–
Hedonic value (based upon Babin, Darden, and Griffin 1994 and Pöyry, Parvinen, and Malmivaara 2013)	Regarding your experience with the hotel page on Facebook		.89
	… I enjoyed passing the time on the hotel page	.85	
	… Visiting the hotel page was a pleasant experience	.78	
	… Compared to the other things I could have done, being on the hotel page was truly enjoyable	.79	
	… I enjoyed visiting the hotel page for its own sake, not just for the useful information I found (1 to 7: totally disagree–totally agree)	.81	
Enduring involvement (Zaichkowsky 1985)	In your personal perceptions, hotels are		.95
	… (1 to 7: important–unimportant)	.88	
	… (1 to 7: mean a lot to me–mean nothing to me)	.84	
	… (1 to 7: matter to me–do not matter to me)	.89	
	… (1 to 7: significant–insignificant)	.89	
	… (1 to 7: of concern to me–of no concern to me)	.86	
	… (1 to 7: interesting–boring)	.77	
Product expertise (based upon Cai and Xu 2011)	Compared to other people, how familiar do you think you are with hotels? (1 to 7: very little–very much)	.72	.72
	Do you usually know precisely what attributes of a hotel decide its benefits? (1 to 7: never–all the time)	.69	
	Do you think you can you make a satisfactory choice of a hotel based on only your own knowledge, without another person's help? (1 to 7: never–always)	.80	
Facebook usage intensity (Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe 2007)	Regarding your Facebook usage		.89
	… Facebook is part of my everyday activity	.80	
	… I am proud to tell people I'm on Facebook	.67	
	… Facebook has become part of my daily routine	.86	
	… I feel out of touch when I haven't logged onto Facebook for a while	.76	
	… I feel I am part of the Facebook community	.78	
	… I would be sorry if Facebook shut down (1 to 7: totally disagree–totally agree)	.80	

[a] Gender, age, and education were also measured as covariates.

Table A.2
Factor reliability and discriminant validity[a] for variables included in Study 1a.

Variable	CR	AVE	Purchase intentions	Hedonic value	Enduring involvement	Product expertise	Facebook usage intensity
Purchase intentions	.59	.59	**.77**				
Hedonic value	.88	.65	.53	**.81**			
Enduring involvement	.94	.73	−.35	−.51	**.85**		
Product expertise	.78	.55	.26	.36	−.47	**.74**	
Facebook usage intensity	.90	.61	.32	.40	−.36	.31	**.78**

[a] The numbers on the diagonal represent the square root AVE of each construct. Numbers below the diagonal depict the correlation of each factor with all other factors.

Table A.3
Manipulation checks in Study 1a.

Variable	Measurement items	Alpha
Humanness in tone of voice (based upon Kumar and Benbasat 2002)	Regarding your perceptions about the hotel page on Facebook … The [brand] created a sense of closeness with its audience … I felt close to [brand] … The [brand] created a sense of distance … I felt that the [brand] was aloof in its interactions with its audience … I found the [brand] to be very detached from its audience … The [brand] was very impersonal in its dealings with its audience … I found the [brand] to be very detached in its interactions with its audience (1 to 7: totally disagree–totally agree)	.91
Consumer goal (Kronrod and Danziger 2013)	In your opinion, the type of benefits offered by a hotel in a [business/vacation] trip is: (1 to 7: completely utilitarian–completely hedonic)	–
Realism	How realistic do you think was the proposed situation? (1 to 7: very unrealistic–very realistic)	–
Role-playing	How easy was it to imagine yourself in the proposed situation? (1 to 7: very difficult–very easy)	–

Brand page using human voice

Brand page using corporate voice

Fig. A.1. Extracts from brand pages and post examples in Study 1a. (These pictures are only extracts. The participants looked at brand pages with 29 posts each.)

Appendix B

Table B.1
Dependent variables, independent variables and covariates[a] in Study 2a.

Variable	Measurement items	Factor loadings	Alpha
Purchase intentions	How likely would you go to this restaurant for [a quick dinner alone/a birthday dinner with your family and friends]? (1 to 7: very unlikely–very likely)	.76	–
Perceived risk (based upon Campbell and Goodstein 2001)	The decision to go to Francesco's Pizza & Pasta for [a quick dinner alone/a birthday dinner with your family and friends] would make you feel		.92
	... (1 to 7: not at all concerned–highly concerned)	.93	
	... (1 to 7: not at all worried–very worried)	.94	
	The decision to go to Francesco's Pizza & Pasta for [a quick dinner alone/a birthday dinner with your family and friends] would be		
	... (1 to 7: not at all risky–extremely risky)	.87	
Facebook usage intensity (Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe 2007)	Regarding your Facebook usage		.89
	... Facebook is part of my everyday activity	.79	
	... I am proud to tell people I'm on Facebook	.79	
	... Facebook has become part of my daily routine	.80	
	... I feel out of touch when I haven't logged onto Facebook for a while	.71	
	... I feel I am part of the Facebook community	.85	
	... I would be sorry if Facebook shut down	.79	
	(1 to 7: totally disagree–totally agree)		
Experience with restaurants	Excluding vacation time, in average how many times per month you have dinner in a restaurant?	.95	–

[a] Gender, age, and education were also measured as covariates.

Table B.2
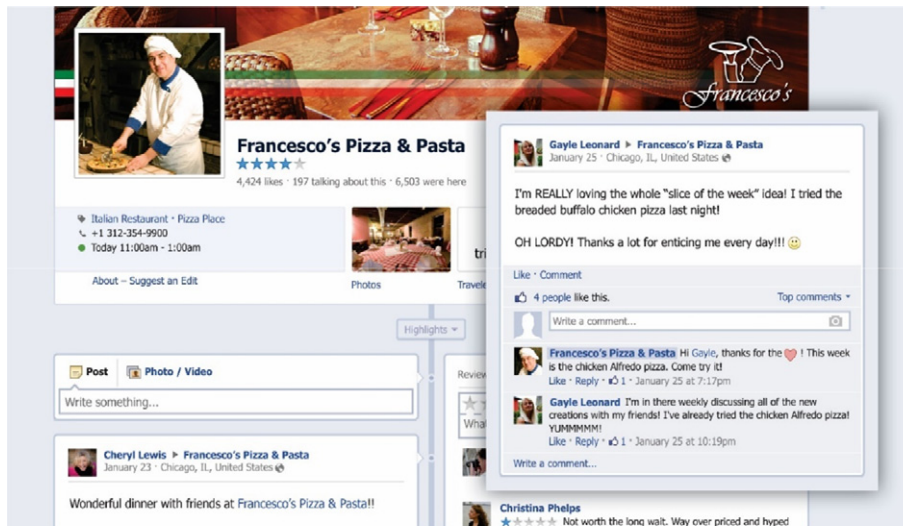Factor reliability and discriminant validity[a] for variables included in Study 2a.

Variable	CR	AVE	Purchase intentions	Perceived risk	Facebook usage intensity	Experience with restaurants
Purchase intentions	.58	.58	**.76**			
Perceived risk	.94	.83	−.63	**.91**		
Facebook usage intensity	.91	.62	.06	.04	**.79**	
Experience with restaurants	.90	.90	.09	.03	.14	**.95**

[a] The numbers on the diagonal represent the square root AVE of each construct. Numbers below the diagonal depict the correlation of each factor with all other factors.

Table B.3
Manipulation checks in Study 2a.

Variable	Measurement items	Alpha
Humanness in tone of voice (based upon Kumar and Benbasat 2002)	Regarding your perceptions about the hotel page on Facebook ... The [brand] created a sense of closeness with its audience ... I felt close to [brand] ... The [brand] created a sense of distance ... I felt that the [brand] was aloof in its interactions with its audience ... I found the [brand] to be very detached from its audience ... The [brand] was very impersonal in its dealings with its audience ... I found the [brand] to be very detached in its interactions with its audience (1 to 7: totally disagree–totally agree)	.91
Situational involvement (based upon Mittal 1989 and Okazaki, Navarro-Bailón, and Molina-Castillo 2012)	In selecting from many restaurants available in the city for the situation described, would you say that you would not care as to which one you choose? (1 to 7: I would not care at all–I would care a great deal) For the situation described, how important would it be for you to make the right choice for a restaurant? (1 to 7: not at all important–extremely important) In making your selection of a restaurant for the situation described, how concerned would you be about the outcome of your choice? (1 to 7: not at all concerned–very much concerned)	.86
Realism	How realistic do you think was the proposed situation? (1 to 7: very unrealistic–very realistic)	–
Role-playing	How easy was it to imagine yourself in the proposed situation? (1 to 7: very difficult–very easy)	–

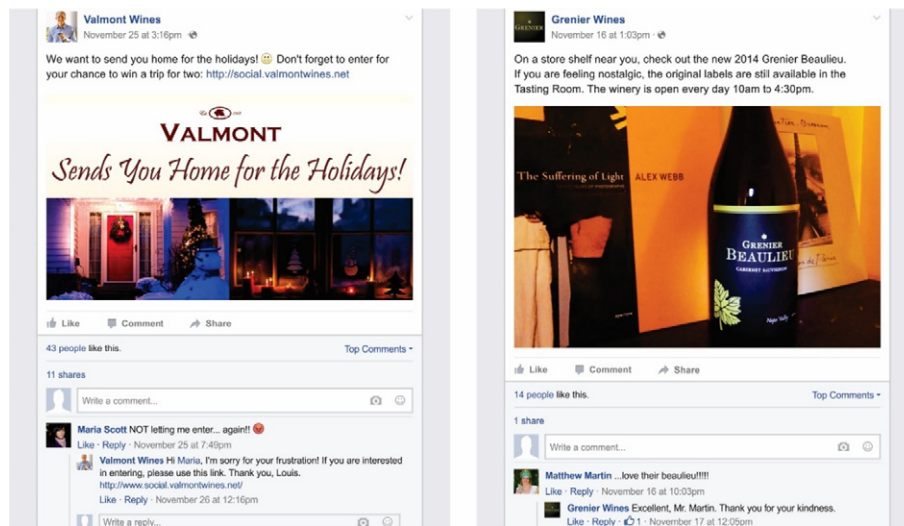Brand page using human voice

Brand page using corporate voice

Fig. B.1. Extracts from brand pages and post examples in Study 2a.(These pictures are only extracts. The participants looked at brand pages with 16 posts each.)

Appendix C

Condition: Valmont using human voice and Grenier using corporate voice

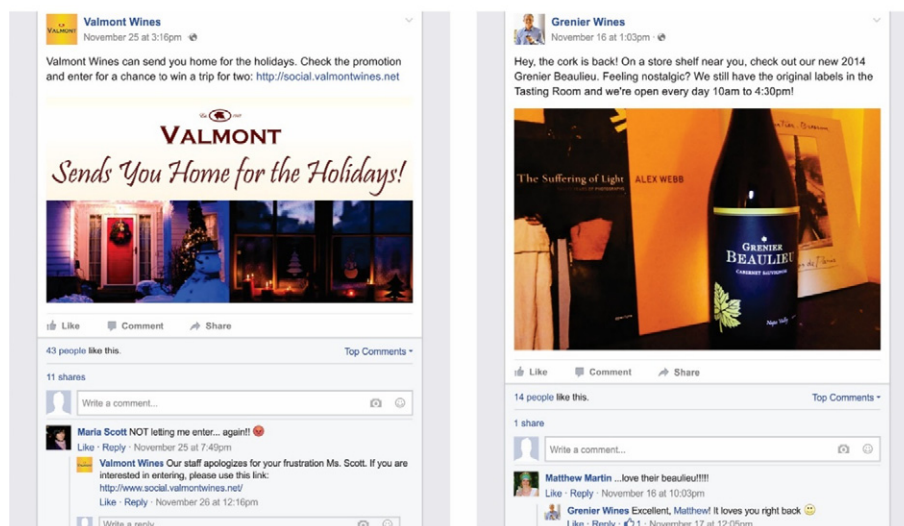Condition: Valmont using corporate voice and Grenier using human voice

Fig. C.1. Extracts from brand pages in Study 2b.(These pictures are only extracts. The participants looked at brand pages with 11 posts each.)

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