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FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE EFFECT ON CONSUMER ENGAGEMENT: AN EMPIRICAL INVESTIGATION FOR TURKISH AIRLINE INDUSTRY

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Abstract. Increasing consumer engagement (CE) on social networks is one of marketing problems that brands face in today's competitive environment. Although prior studies on this concept suggested that content strategies have essential role in improving CE, little is known about figurative language effect. Thus, a novel model and research design to examine how the use of figurative language influence CE behavior on Facebook were proposed. Drawing on Encoding/Decoding Model and brand-consumer communication studies, the 1687 brand posts of Turkish airline Facebook pages with Multiple Linear Regression (MLR) models were analyzed. The findings indicate that several types of figurative languages (idioms, personifications, and similes) are related to the various CE levels (likes, shares, and comments). The findings of this study give tips for understanding the role of figurative language, reshaping engagement level, and redesigning branded content in marketing communication practices on social networks. The experimental model that provides some clues to reconsider online communication strategies across CE based on figurative language is presented.

1. Introduction

As an outcome of rapidly developing technology, social networks are effective tools in reaching, informing, interacting consumers, making sales, and providing new ways (Mangold & Faulds, 2009; Lamberton & Stephen, 2016).

Leading consumers to engage with brand messages on social networks provides many advantages in today's dynamic business environments. Thus, CE helps to the development of creative marketing strategies and contributes to brands increasing their profit as well as providing competitive place compared to competitors (Brodie et al., 2011; Sedley, 2008). It also plays a primary role in viral marketing activities, and value co-creation for services (Van Doorn et al., 2010; Ashley & Tuten, 2015). Determining consumer engagement is one of the biggest problems in social media marketing literature. In this respect, previous studies use some social media metrics, such as likes, shares, and comments (Cvijikj & Michahelles, 2013; Leung et al., 2013) to mention CE.

In today's world, brands develop creative marketing strategies to increase CE on social media applications (Ashley & Tuten, 2015; Brodie et al., 2011). One of these strategies is producing effective content. Notably, informative, entertaining, or social messages (Cvijikj & Michahelles,

2013; Menon et al., 2019), texts, pictures, or videos representing vividness (Schultz, 2017; Sigurdsson et al., 2020), links denoting interactivity (Leung et al., 2013; Sabate et al., 2014), and emoji representation (Koçak, 2022a) may affect consumer engagement emerging as liking, sharing, or commenting behavior on social networking sites.

Another factor that may affect CE is linguistics typologies. Recent studies on psycholinguistics suggest that pronoun types (e.g., Chang et al., 2019; Labrecque et al., 2020) and certainties (Pezzuti et al., 2021) used by brands can be related to CE. Given this situation, there is very little information to guide brands on how to design their messages. Additionally, it is important to determine how message characteristics of airline brands, operating in a service-intensive sector, on social media affect CE (Menon et al., 2020). In this respect, airline brand posts on social media can influence brand loyalty (Sigurdsson et al., 2020) and consumer motivation (Seo & Park, 2018). Especially, the contents of these messages in the industry have a crucial role in determining CE (Sigurdsson et al., 2020; Menon et al., 2020).

As one of content strategies, figurative language has effects on people's perception of the world in communication (Richardson & Matlock, 2007), and stands out in psycholinguistic research as a form of expression that

enables complex ideas to be easily communicated with social and aesthetic concerns (Colston & Gibbs, 2021). Studies reveal that the use of figurative language can lead to increased attention (Leigh, 1994), encouraging, positive inferences (McQuarrie & Phillips, 2005), attitudinal or emotional effects (McQuarrie & Mick, 2003; Lim et al., 2009). Combining these past studies with insights gained from statistically proved experiments leads to a novel idea: the use of figurative language in brand communication can be related to CE, which occurs as behavioral or emotional reactions. Thus, current study seeks an answer to the question of how the use of figurative elements in airline brand posts impacts CE.

Theoretically, to describe the problem of how such communication process exists between airline brands and consumers, Hall's (1973) encoding/decoding model is used. According to the model, a sender (brand) starts communication process by encoding a meaning into the message through figurative elements (idioms, metonymies, personifications, similes) and a receiver (consumer) decodes this meaning while thinking whether to engage the brand message in terms of liking, commenting, or sharing (Labrecque et al., 2020).

The aim of this study is to examine the effect of figurative language usage on consumer engagement on social media. The current study builds on existing studies investigating the antecedents of CE (e.g., Cvijikj & Michahelles, 2013; Labrecque et al., 2020; Koçak, 2021, 2022a, 2022b; Koçak et al., 2024) and figurative language in brand-consumer communication (e.g., Kim et al., 2016; Djafarova, 2017).

Although previous studies explored the impact of message content on CE (e.g., Cvijikj & Michahelles, 2013; Schultz, 2017). However, with the best knowledge about the reviewed literature, none of existing study has examined the relationship between the use of figurative language in brand posts and CE on Facebook pages. Thus, this study extends the current work, specifically analyzing the effects of the use of figurative elements (idioms, personifications, similes, and metonymies) by brands on CE.

Significantly, this study differs from existing research in investigating four essential figurative elements as mentioned above and impacts of them on online consumer behaviour (likes, comments, and shares). Pronoun choices of brands, some message elements (e.g., photos, hashtags, message age, word counts), and message time structures (non-work hours and weekends) as control variables to determine their effects on the level of CE were also added. To test these predictions, 6 Turkish airline companies' official Facebook posts were used.

In the following parts of the study, literature review based on the theoretical background are given. Then, method and findings of the study are presented. In the end, discussion, and limitation with some possible directions for future research are provided.

2. Theoretical framework

In this part of the research, as one of the important theories, encoding/decoding model that is accepted in the communication literature and underlies these hypotheses is explained properly. The model, developed by Stuart Hall in 1973, offers insight into how meaning is produced between the sender, the message, and the receiver, by emphasizing semiotic concepts such as codes and signs. What distinguishes the model from classical communication models is its focus on discourse and meaning (Ross, 2011). Any discourse that exists naturally and is learned in society can be perceived by the receiver even if it is transmitted through a form or text. The model basically focuses on the production, distribution, consumption, and reproduction of meaning and enables the analysis of all these processes (Hall, 1980; Kasap, 2022).

Coding is the processing of messages produced by the sender through mass media. Decoding can be thought of as the process of interpreting the meanings encoded in the message by the audience. In theory, linguistic expressions hidden in media texts are analysed and interpreted by the audience. When explaining something in brand message contents, there is not only a plain expression, but the message contents also contain connotations and hidden connotations in addition to the basic meaning (Yaylagül, 2008).

If the model is adapted to this research, in the relevant process, the sender, that is, the airline brand, encodes the message by using figurative elements (idioms, personifications, similes, and metonymies) and initiates the communication process. Then, the buyer (consumer) interprets the message published by the brand and decides whether to support this message with behaviours such as liking, commenting, or sharing (Labrecque et al., 2020; Koçak, 2023). Based on the statements in Hahn and Berkers' (2021) study, it will be sufficient to adapt the situation to airline brands. Therefore, it is understood that brands present figurative language elements as a content strategy during the coding and decoding process, and in return, they may encounter consumers who react by making sense of these elements.

3. Literature review and hypotheses development

3.1. Figurative language in marketing research

As one of communication techniques, figurative language frequently used in daily language to make abstract situations concrete, can be placed in sentences for many purposes such as establishing intimate relationships (Gibbs, 1994), being witty, managing the dialogue, and attracting attention (Roberts & Kreuz, 1994). Figurative language is the expression of the message to be conveyed in indirect ways.

Although figurative language may seem a complex structure when viewed from the outside, it is one of the tools that can be produced and understood without requiring any special effort, and that can effectively convey emotions and experiences by passing them through cognitive and social processes (Colston & Gibbs, 2021). Figurative language can be a communication technique not only for individuals but also for brands. This consideration has pushed marketing research to investigate psychological and hedonistic/persuasive effects of language on consumers (e.g., McQuarrie & Mick, 1996; Djafarova, 2017; Wu et al., 2017; Pogacar et al., 2017; Fox et al., 2019).

According to previous studies on this field, figurative language is a conspicuous component of advertising discourse (Leigh, 1994; McQuarrie & Phillips, 2005; Kronrod & Danziger, 2013; Djafarova, 2017), personal communication with consumers (Choi et al., 2019), consumer behavior, and discourse of social media (Kim et al., 2016; Pogacar et al., 2017; Fox et al., 2019). So, understanding the intensity, and effects of this language usage in social media communication may help marketers redesign their brand messages. In this respect, Leigh (1994) found that most of the advertising headlines were composed of figurative language. McQuarrie and Mick (2003) revealed that the use of figurative language confers ad recall on consumers.

McQuarrie and Phillips (2005) revealed that indirect expressions, especially metaphors, in advertisements encourage consumers to have a positive view of the brand. In another study, Djafarova (2017) proposed that using figurative language in tourism services may attract the attention of consumers to destination image. Fox et al. (2019) examined brand posts on social media and determined that figurative content has the effect of increasing people's interest. Research in the area basically investigate how consumers those are exposed to figurative language respond. However, while the studies mostly consider the effects of the branded posts, some research considers the content produced by consumers. According to Pogacar et al. (2017), as a part of emotional communication, increase in the use of figurative language can persuade consumers more about hedonistic consumption.

Kronrod and Danziger (2013) concluded that the experiences associated with the hedonistic consumption are usually expressed in figurative language and that consumer comments containing this language create a positive attitude towards other consumers. Unlike previous research, Wu et al. (2017) found that figurative comments of consumers did not offer significant advantages in terms of persuasiveness. Sahoo et al. (2020) revealed that figurative comments on social networks increase online shopping experience and expectations of consumers. Briefly, including figurative language in brand or consumer-oriented content can be effective on cognitive or behavioral responses of consumers.

Previous work classified figurative language as idioms, proverbs, metaphors, ironies, and other indirect expressions (Gibbs & Colston, 2006). This study considers some important elements of figurative language that are idioms, personifications, similes, and metonymies used by airline brands on Facebook. Next, the importance, cognitive, and behavioral effects of these elements in marketing research are reviewed.

3.2. Idioms

Idioms are stereotyped phrases that have a certain grammar, attractiveness, and meaning and being not based on general rules (Aksoy, 1963). Idioms that have become an integral part of daily communication in many fields such as fashion, music and film can be used to make the language richer, more vibrant, and colorful and to express the underlying meaning or intention (Brenner, 2011).

According to Aksoy (1963), there are some rules that distinguish idioms from other phrases. First, idioms cannot be changed. Although, idioms are rarely translated to other languages literally, there are some international idioms, such as "Kill two birds with one stone!". This idiom means that you can do two tasks or handle two responsibilities with one action. It is also noted that this cannot be changed as "Kill two *monkeys* with one stone!". Second rule is the conceptual general invalidity that distinguishes it from proverbs. For instance, a famous proverb "A broken clock is right twice a day!" is one of the rules that can be realized in any situation. However, the idiom "Kill two birds with one stone!" mentioned before may not be valid under all circumstances.

Studies in psycholinguistics and neuroscience suggest that idioms in different languages can trigger cognitive participation more effectively on brain activities compared to other language infrastructures (Bohrn et al., 2012; Kana et al., 2012; Citron et al., 2019). As an important element of figurative language, idioms were commonly examined in advertising and although most of these studies were conducted on the frequency of idioms in brand slogans, idioms can affect understanding, processing of meaning, recall, and attitude (Lim et al., 2009). However, there are limited studies that investigate the cognitive and behavioral responses of consumers to brand messages containing idioms.

When viewed from the airline industry, the messages that airline brands publish on their social media accounts may create awareness and affect consumer loyalty (Seo & Park, 2018). Considering the contents of airline brand messages (Menon et al., 2019), determining the effect of idioms, which can be considered as a content type, on consumer participation will expand the knowledge. Thus, the first hypothesis can be developed as follows:

H$_1$: The use of idiomatic expressions by Turkish airline companies on Facebook affects CE in terms of likes, comments, and shares.

3.3. Metonymies

Metonymy is a kind of figurative language that can be defined as using an object or concept instead of another

without the purpose of simile. It reaches the whole of the intended meaning by talking about a related aspect of the concept (Toklu, 2003; Benzer, 2009). The name can be transferred by using the part instead of the whole, or by using the effect instead of the cause. For example, a passenger may say "We took off from London". In this sentence the passenger refers "Heathrow Airport". "Yeşilçam" generally refers to Turkish cinema. If someone asks you "Excited about exploring history of İzmir?" you can refer the expression "history" to "castles, museums etc.

Today, in marketing, many famous brands such as "McDonald", and "Louis Vuitton" use metonymies in their advertisements and discourses to make their expressions more effective (Schroeder, 2008). Metonymies can also shape our understanding of the place of marketing in the world (Dancygier & Sweetser, 2014).

Especially, using metaphor and metonymies in advertising discourse to draw attention to the interaction reveals conceptual, communicational, and discursive dimensions of ads (Pérez-Sobrino, 2016; Sweetser, 2017). Additionally, metonymies access the cognitive processes of the audience and listeners by referring to the discourse in the sentence (Zeng, 2019). Given these above-mentioned concerns and findings, the next hypothesis is proposed as follows:

H₂: The use of metonymies by Turkish airline companies on Facebook affects CE in terms of likes, comments, and shares.

3.4. Personification

Personification is an art of rhetoric made by attributing human characteristics to non-human inanimate beings, thoughts, abstract terms, or imaginary beings in figurative language (Ricoeur et al., 1977; Dodson, 2010). The understanding of personification by consumers stems from anthropomorphism (anthropomorphism). People are cognitively inclined to attribute human characteristics to objects and inanimate objects. Personification is an effective type of language in communication (Delbaere et al., 2011).

Personification can be more effective by invoking the metaphoric expressions beyond attributing human characteristics to inanimate objects. For example, inflation can be personified in the deduction that "inflation is an enemy". Along with the personification, this inference also includes a call to resist inflation, which is metaphorically hostile in the human mind (Lakoff & Johnson, 2008). Personification is not just a language issue, but also cognitively expresses our brain activities and the structure of our perceptions in the process of participation. Thus, it can be seen as a good communication tool that triggers emotion and thought (Turner, 1987; Krašovec, 2016).

The interpretation of creative experience and symbols is important to reveal what lies behind the thought and imagination in everyday language, art, literature, marketing, and many other fields. For this reason, personifications that are frequently used in advertising (Delbaere et al.,

2011; Suryasa, 2016) can push consumers liking the brand by activating their positive feelings (Delbaere et al., 2011).

Personification can have impacts on understanding, meaning processing, attitude, and behavior (Mackay, 1986; Lakoff & Johnson, 2008). Also, it can be analyzed using the structure and the language of the message, and determining the function of communication (Dorst, 2011). According to these studies, it is observed that personification is an important pattern in understanding consumer behavior. Thus, the next hypothesis is built as follows:

H₃: The use of personifications by Turkish airline companies on Facebook affects CE in terms of likes, comments, shares.

3.5. Similes

According to Cambridge Dictionary, simile is "an expression comparing one thing with another, always including the words -as or -like". A simile consists of three elements. These are subject, object, and the act/event. For example, in the sentence "The pepper I bought from supermarket tastes bitter like poison", the subject is "pepper", the object is "poison", and the act/event is "bitter". Similes are generally used in daily language and texts to embody the meaning and to make the word more effective (Ricoeur et al., 1977; Çınar, 2008). While similes reveal the discourse goal of speaker or author, they can also satisfy listener or reader about the topic (Harris et al., 2006).

In advertising and brand research, similes are used to reveal consumers' pre-purchase intentions and attitudes (Kronrod & Danziger, 2013; Pho-Klang, 2014). These studies also reveal that the use of similes can be effective on cognitive processes (Pho-Klang, 2014; Citron, 2020).

Cui and Zhao (2014) stated that the similes used in advertisements are catchy, persuasive, informative, and satisfy aesthetic needs in emotional context. Combining with this research, the last hypothesis can be developed as:

H₄: The use of similes by Turkish airline companies on Facebook affects CE in terms of likes, comments, and shares.

3.6. Conceptual model

Being drawn on Hall's (1973) Encoding/Decoding Model, this study tries to link between the use of figurative language on brand Facebook pages and consumer engagement in case of airline companies in Türkiye. Thus, our model that is based on what the behavior of consumers who interact with the airline posts on Facebook is affected by the figurative brand content under is represented in Figure 1.

In the model, the figurative language used by brands on social media affects each consumer engagement metric (likes, comments, shares), and this effect is controlled using pronouns (I, thou, h/she, we, you, they), message age, non-work hours, weekends, the use of photos, hashtags, and word counts.
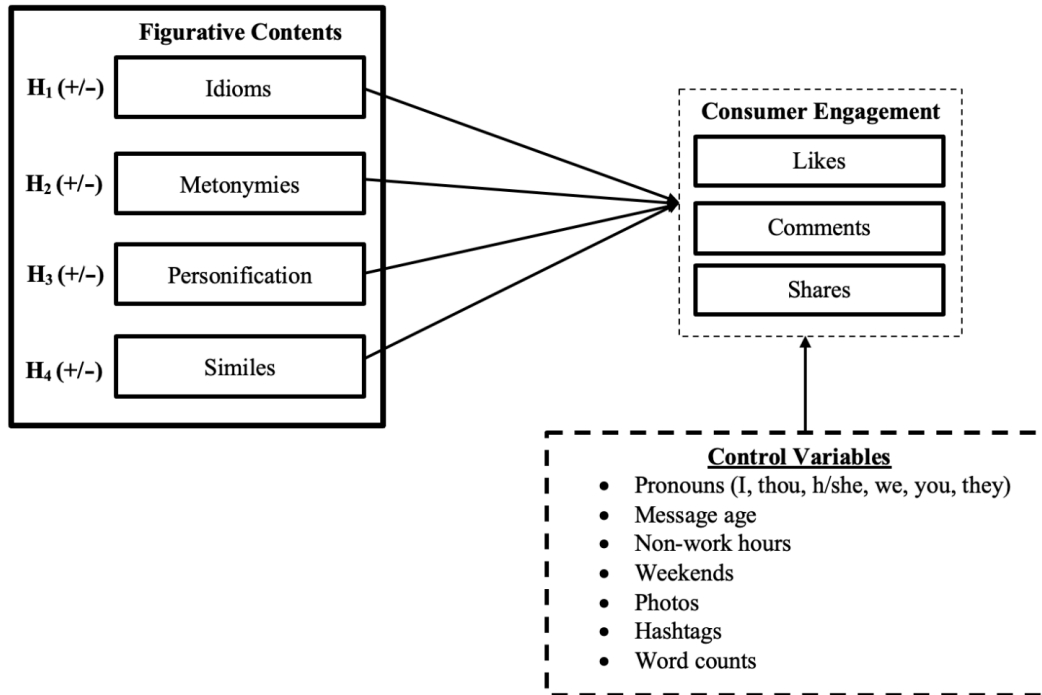
Figure 1. Conceptual model

4. Model and methodology

In this study, quantitative research approach is adopted to explain the relationship between the variables that were discussed based on the literature. Thus, conceptual model of this study and the research framework are outlined in this section.

4.1. Research design

The proposed framework is showed at Figure 2 and basically consists of four stages. The first stage is called as "preparation" for the research. In this respect, the research problem is defined as determining the effects of the use of figurative language on consumer engagement on social media. According to the literature, the message content (information, entertainment, sociability, etc.) and language styles (pronouns, adverbs, definite expressions, etc.) in brand posts can be effective triggers for CE (Brodie et al., 2011; Cvijikj & Michahelles, 2013; Labrecque et al., 2020). Moreover, brands use figurative language elements as a communication technique in their marketing communication strategies in advertising (Leigh, 1994; McQuarrie & Phillips, 2005) and social network research (Kim et al., 2016; Pogacar et al., 2017; Fox et al., 2019). Apart from our previous study, which examined the effect of figurative language elements on consumer participation through brands' Instagram messages (Koçak et al., 2024), no study examining this issue in the case of Facebook has yet been included in the literature. Notably, limited number of studies investigated CE from the airline perspective (e.g., Leung et al., 2013; Menon et al., 2019; Sigurdsson et al., 2020), especially from the case of Turkish airline industry (Koçak,

2021; Koçak et al., 2024). Also, when taken together, investigating the use of figurative language, which is a remarkable strategy in brand messages (McQuarrie & Phillips, 2005), and CE, which is an important tool for marketing communication, may fill these research gaps. The model is tested using the messages by Turkish airline companies and is intended to be applicable for all airlines operating in Türkiye. Then, the relevant literature is reviewed, and figurative language elements are determined.

In the second phase, social media data from the official pages of airlines are retrieved. Next, these data are filtered considering some social media metrics (the message, number of likes for each message etc.) that are needed for the research objective.

In the third phase, the coding procedure is done by preparing the coding scheme, sending it to the coders, and getting the coded variables that are derived from companies' messages on their official social media accounts. Moreover, other variables that could be coded by researcher(s) are coded and stored.

In the last step, the model is built by describing the data whether it needs logarithmic transformation or not. Next, regression analysis to examine the relationship between dependent, control, and independent variables was conducted. Then, the hypothesis of the study is tested.

To test the practical applicability of this proposed framework, the official Facebook messages of airline companies operating in Türkiye were analyzed. Thus, answering the following research questions (RQ) and exploring the effect of the use of figurative language on consumer engagement and identifying new content strategies are main goals of the authors:
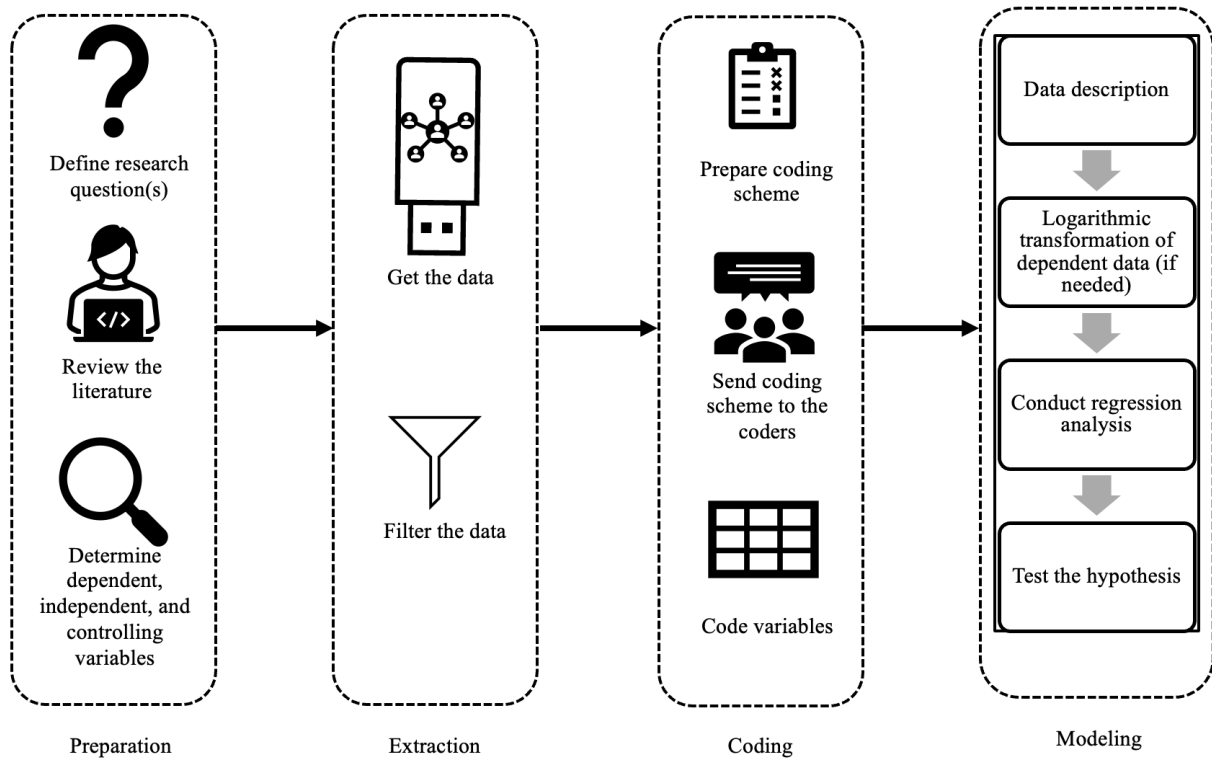
Figure 2. Proposed research design

RQ$_1$: What is the level of figurative language usage on Turkish airline companies' Facebook pages?

RQ$_2$: What is the relationship between the use of figurative language elements in Facebook messages of airline companies in Türkiye and CE?

4.2. Data

Current study analyzes 1687 Facebook posts (January 2020–October 2021) of 6 Turkish Airline companies (AnadoluJet, Corendon Airlines, Onur Air, Pegasus Airlines, Turkish Airlines, and Sun Express). The data was collected on 5 November 2021 with Supermetrics (Supermetrics, n.d.)[1], as a Google Sheets extension providing various metrics of social network applications. In data extraction process, Facebook metrics such as created time of a message, post type, content type, captions, message, the engagement scores (likes, comments, and shares) per airline post have been collected. Then, StatPlus (StatPlus, n.d.)[2] statistical program was used for descriptive, correlation, and regression analysis.

4.2.1. Dependent variables

Looking at literature, previous work suggest that consumer engagement can be determined using engagement metrics (likes, comments, and shares per brand post) (Cvijikj &

Michahelles, 2013; Schultz, 2017). In this respect, current study examines these metrics as dependent variables.

4.2.2. Independent variables

Previous studies in marketing area indicate that figurative language is one of communication strategies used in advertising (e.g., Leigh, 1994; McQuarrie & Phillips, 2005; Kronrod & Danziger, 2013; Djafarova, 2017), consumer behavior, and social media research (Kim et al., 2016; Pogacar et al., 2017; Fox et al., 2019). Also, elements of figurative language can lead consumers to recall message (McQuarrie & Phillips, 2005), to raise consumer attentions to posts (Sahoo et al., 2020), and to increase consumer attention in social networks (Fox et al., 2019). In this study, 4 types of figurative language (idioms, metonyms, personifications, and similes) are selected to investigates their effects on CE. As mentioned in literature review, idioms have impact on understatement, meaning process, recall, and attitudes (Lim et al., 2009). Thus, these elements as independent variables for this regression model were used.

4.2.3. Control variables

Prior work suggested that user reactions to social media posts may increase on weekends (Sabate et al., 2014) and non-work hours (McShane et al., 2019). Also, past research in CE literature used weekend activities of consumers as control variables (e.g., Cvijikj & Michahelles, 2013).

Brands also use hashtags to be interactive and lead consumers to like or comment brand posts (Schultz, 2017). In this context, brand hashtag activism is mostly used by marketing scholars as another control variable in

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the literature (Labrecque et al., 2020; Koçak, 2021). Thus, weekend, non-work hour, and hashtag activities to control figurative language effect on CE were estimated. Furthermore, existing studies showed that word count, message age (Labrecque et al., 2020; Pezzuti et al., 2021; Koçak, 2021), videos, photos (e.g., Labrecque et al., 2020; Koçak, 2021), and pronouns (I, you, he/she, we/our, they) (e.g., Labrecque et al., 2020; Pezzuti et al., 2021; Koçak, 2021) may affect CE. So, these were referred as control variables.

4.3. Coding procedure

Large volume of content coding is an important task for analyzing texts and revealing the hidden intensions underlying a message on mass media applications (Prasad, 2008; Gupta et al., 2017). In this respect, two independently coders were trained to read and assign each airline post to three figurative element classes (metonyms, personification, and similes) following the literature (Ashley & Tuten, 2015). 10% of all posts were randomly chosen (Lombard et al., 2005) and sent to the coder. Reliability between two coders were computed with Cohen's kappa statistics. According to the results, inter-coder agreement is 92% for metonyms, 94% for personifications, and 87% for similes that are significantly higher than the accepted statistic of 60% (Landis & Koch, 1977). Idioms were classified using Turkish Language Society (TDK) dictionary (Turkish Language Society, n.d.).[3]

All Turkish and English pronouns (I, you-thou, h/she, we, you, thet) by searching in the texts as dummy variable (presence vs absence) were coded. Work hours and weekend were coded as dummy variables (presence vs absence) whether the brand published the post on business time and weekend. Also, the use of photos and hashtags were coded as dummy variables.

4.4. Data description

Collected data come from official Facebook pages of 6 airline companies (Anadolu Jet, Corendon Airlines, Onur Air, Pegasus Airlines, Sun Express, and Turkish Airlines) operating in Turkey. As shown in Table 1, Turkish Airlines shared more posts than other airlines (Pegasus>Anadolu Jet>Sun Express>Corendon>Onur). Accordingly, it has the most number of likes, comments, and shares.

Table 1. Descriptives of brands

Brands	N. of Shares	Likes	Comments	Shares
AnadoluJet	295	17713	1422	895
Corendon Airlines	142	18242	4330	1942
Onur Air	39	4301	136	228
Pegasus Airlines	508	419251	14165	18898
Sun Express	180	17532	1600	1244
THY	523	1679638	71074	173577
Total	1687	2156677	92727	196784

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[3]   www.tdk.gov.tr (accessed: 5.11.2021)

Descriptive statistics detail independent, dependent and control variables of the study as exhibited in Table 2. Looking at the use of figurative language elements by Turkish airline companies, brands mostly use idioms per message (N = 513, M = 0.30) followed by metonymies (N = 185, M = 0.11), personification (N = 128, M = 0.08), and similes (N = 82, M = 0.05), respectively.

The effect of personal pronouns was controlled first. Most of airline brand posts indicates that first-person plural ("we-biz") (N = 308, 18%) and second-person singular ("thou-sen") (N = 253, 15%) take the most part of pronoun usage.

Table 2. Descriptives

Independent variables	N		M	
Idioms	513		0.30	
Metonymies	185		0.11	
Personifications	128		0.08	
Similes	82		0.05	
Control variables				
I-ben	51		0.030	
Thou-Sen	253		0.15	
He/She-O	20		0.01	
We-Biz	308		0.18	
You-Siz	245		0.15	
They-Onlar	17		0.01	
Message age	–		335	
Non-Workhours	360		0.21	
Weekends	356		0.21	
Photos	810		0.48	
Hashtags	1082		0.64	
Word Counts	51764		30.68	
Dependent variables	Sum	Mean	Std. Dev.	Variance
Likes	2156677	1278.41	4737.66	22445375
Comments	92727	54.97	217.1176136	47140
Post shares	196784	119.70	839.867149	705377

These are followed by second-person plural ("you-siz") (N = 245, 15%), first-person singular ("I-ben") (N = 51, 3%), third-person singular ("he/she-o"), and third-person plural (N = 17, 1%), respectively. Similarly, previous work done by Koçak (2021) found that airline brands operating in Turkey mostly use second person and first-person plural pronouns in their posts. In this respect, the findings are in line with this study.

Considering posting time, 21% of airline messages were sent on daily out of working times (N = 360) and 21% was posted on weekends (356). From posting date on Facebook to the retrieval date, an average of 335 days has elapsed per post. Besides, approximately half of the airline posts include photos (N = 810, 48%) and hashtags (N = 1082, 64%). Word count for each post show that airlines prefer short sentences (N = 51764, 30.68).

Lastly, engagement scores suggest that variances of the number of likes (M = 1278.41, V = 22445375), comments (M = 54.97, V = 47140), and shares (M = 119.70, V = 705377) overlap the means. This indicates that there is over-dispersion for the dependent data (Cameron & Trivedi, 2005; Menon et al., 2019). Thus, logarithmic transformations log(x+1) of all count data have been taken to reduce the negative effects of outliers (McInthosh et al., 2014).

4.5. Model

Based on the literature review, the effect of the use of figurative language on CE considering the hypothesis of this study was investigated, an empirical model was developed and the model with MLR that uses the least squares method was analyzed (Montgomery et al., 2021). As a widely used technique in the social sciences and practices, the method tests whether the dependent variable is directly related to a linear combination of the independent and control variables (Tranmer & Elliot, 2008). Thus, this technique with least square technique is commonly used to prove the relationship between brand post strategies and CE in the literature (e.g., Menon et al., 2019: Cuevas-Molano et al., 2021; Koçak, 2022b).

Because the predictive variables in the model are count data that follows a Poisson distribution (Cameron & Trivedi, 2005; Menon et al., 2019), the natural logarithm of control (word counts and message age) and dependent variables (likes, comments, and shares) for the analysis were taken. Thus, the model is represented in Eq. (1).

$$y_{ij} = a + \exp\begin{pmatrix} \beta_i idiom_j + \beta_i metonmy_j + \beta_i person_j + \\ \beta_i simile_j + \beta_i fps_j + \beta_i sps_j + \beta_i tps_j + \\ \beta_i sps_j + \beta_i tps_j + \beta_i fpp_j + \beta_i spp_j + \beta_i tpp_j + \\ \beta_i dnwh_j + \beta_i week_j + \beta_i mage_j + \beta_i photos_j + \\ \beta_i hashtag_j + \beta_i word_j \end{pmatrix} + \varepsilon_{ij},$$

(1)

where y_{ij} shows dependents (likes, shares, and comments i) for each brand post j, $idiom_j$ is dummy variable denoting that Facebook messages include idioms or not, $metonmy_j$ is dummy variable of metonyms, $person_j$ is dummy variable representing that the brand post include any kind of personification, $simile_j$ is dummy variable of similes in each post, fps_j is dummy variable representing whether the post include first person singular pronouns "I-ben", sps_j is dummy variable denoting that the brand post include second-person singular pronouns "thou-sen", tps_j is dummy variable indicating whether the post include third-person singular pronoun "he/she-o", fpp_j is dummy variable of first person plural pronouns "we-biz", ,spp_j is dummy variable of second person plural pronouns "you-siz", tpp_j is dummy variable representing that the post include third person plural pronouns "they-onlar" or not, , $dnwh_j$ is dummy variable denoting whether the post uploaded at daily non-working hours, $week_j$ is dummy variable for a brand post j published on weekend, $mage_j$ indicates logarithmic count variable presenting the total days since the

message was posted, $photo_j$ is dummy variable denoting that the post is uploaded with photograph(s), , $hashtag_j$ is dummy variable for hashtag(s) added in a brand post, $word_j$ is logarithmic count variable representing the number of words per brand post, and ε_{ij} shows normally distributed error terms.

5. Results, discussion and conclusions

MLR analysis is implemented in this study to investigate the effects of the use of figurative language elements (idioms, metonyms, personifications, similes) on CE under some controlling variables (pronouns, daily non-working hours, weekend activities, message age, the use of photos, hashtags, and words). When the Breusch-Pagan-Godfrey test results, which is one of common assumptions of the regression (Korga & Aslanoğlu, 2020), are examined, it has been determined that the models established for the number of likes (F = 6.46, p < 0.001), comments (F = 6.16, p < 0.001), and shares (F = 5.82, p < 0.001) are statistically significant, respectively. Another important regression assumption in this model has been checked by Durbin-Watson (DW) test (Durbin & Watson, 1950) and it was found that the statistics obtained from the models for the number of likes (DW = 2.003), comments (DW = 1.871), and shares (DW = 1.942) were in the range of 1.5<DW<2.5 (Cuevas-Moleno et al., 2021), which did not show autocorrelation. Lastly, Variance Inflation Factors (VIFs) and Tolerances indicate to determine a multicollinearity problem in the regression model and is calculated as follows (Alin, 2010):

$$VIF = \frac{1}{1-R^2} = \frac{1}{Tolerance}.$$

According to the results, VIFs are less than 10 and Tolerances are more than 0.1 showing that multicollinearity does not exist between the variables (Marquardt, 1980; Belsley et al., 1980; Lin, 2008) as shown in Table 3.

Looking at regression results, the model in Eq. (1) significantly explains all engagement scores for the number of likes (R^2 = 0.182, p < 0.001), comments (R^2 = 0.166, p < 0.001), and shares (R^2 = 0.268, p < 0.001) representing that the use of figurative language elements in airline brand posts explain 18%, 17%, and 27% of the variances in case of likes, comments, and shares, respectively.

With respect to independent variables, the use of idioms in airline brand posts was positively and significantly related to the number of likes (ß = 0.0482, p < 0.01) and shares (ß = 0.0452, p < 0.01). These findings are in line with recent research indicating that idiomatic expressions can foster cognitive participation of individuals (Kana et al., 2012; Bohrn et al., 2012; Citron et al., 2019). However, no relationship between the use of idioms and commnet level (p > 0.1) were found. One possible explanation for this result is that consumers exhibit liking behavior because idioms can create humor, attract the attention of readers, and add persuasive force to the message (Joloud, 2014).

Lim et al. (2009) demonstrated that familiar idioms can provoke level of liking. They also indicated that idioms could take more processing time during marketing communication that may be the reason why consumers refrain from commenting on the message.

The use of metonymies in airline brand posts on Facebook exerts no effects on consumer engagement level in terms of likes, comments, and shares (p > 0.1) indicating that no evidence was found to support H_2. According to past research (Schroeder, 2008; Pérez-Sobrino, 2016; Sweetser, 2017), the use of metonymies in advertising discourse makes the expressions more effective and draw attention. Thus, results for metonymies are contrary to these studies.

Airlines' personification preferences in their brand posts were negatively and significantly affect the number of comments (ß = –0.0724, p < 0.01). However, this model showed that there were no significant relationships between the use of personification by airline brands and the number of likes and shares (p > 0.1). These findings were surprising, as one can expect that airline Facebook messages containing personifications would trigger emotion, thought (Krašovec, 2016; Turner, 1987), and consumers liking behavior (Delbaere et al., 2011).

Table 3. Regression results

Independent variables	Model				
	VIF	TOL	Likes	Comments	Shares
Idioms	1.03	0.98	0.0482**	–0.0321	0.0452**
Metonymies	1.03	0.97	0.0314	–0.0173	0.0048
Personifications	1.05	0.95	–0.0188	–0.0724**	–0.0155
Similes	1.03	0.97	–0.0254	–0.0519**	–0.0165
Control variables					
Non-workhours	1.02	0.98	0.0657**	0.0546**	0.0689**
Weekends	1.04	0.97	0.0521**	0.0483**	0.0340
Message age	1.08	0.93	0.0737***	0.2845***	0.2185***
Photos	1.04	0.96	–0.1356***	–0.1768***	–0.2129***
I-ben	1.08	0.92	0.0825***	0.0292	0.0528**
Thou-sen	1.30	0.77	–0.0653**	–0.0637**	–0.0920***
He/She-O	1.03	0.97	–0.0138	–0.0257	–0.0389***
We	1.16	0.86	–0.0787***	–0.0476**	–0.0423
You-Siz	1.21	0.83	–0.0234	0.0383	0.0195
They-Onlar	1.02	0.98	0.0673**	0.0477**	0.0605**
Word Counts	1.27	0.79	–0.1900***	–0.0595**	–0.1539***
Hashtags	1.08	0.93	0.2248***	0.1572***	0.2721***
Regression results					
N			1687	1687	1687
F			23.169	20.706	38.259
R^2			0.182	0.166	0.268
Adj. R^2			0.174	0.158	0.261
DW			2.003	1.871	1.942

However, Letheren et al. (2017) studied on personification text on tourism ads and showed that there is no significant relationship between personification on consumer intention. Hence, the findings partially support H_3. Our findings showed that the use of similes impacts the number of comments (ß = –0.0519, p < 0.01) that partially supports H_4. Similes in advertising discourse could be persuasive, informative, and satisfying individual's needs as stated in Cui and Zhao's (2014) study. Thus, these findings are inconsistent with previous research (Harris et al., 2006; Citron, 2020).

When controlling figurative language elements in airline brand posts, the use of first-person singular pronouns had positive and significant impacts on the number of likes (ß = 0.0825, p < 0.001) and shares (ß = 0.0528, p < 0.01).

Second-person singular pronoun usage in brand posts was negatively related to the number of likes (ß = –0.0653, p < 0.01), comments (ß = –0.0637, p < 0.01), and shares (ß = –0.0920, p < 0.001). Third-person singular pronoun preferences by airline brands had a negative impact on the number of shares (ß = 0.0389, p < 0.001). The use of first-person plural pronouns was negatively related to the number of likes (ß = –0.0787, p < 0.001), and comments (ß = –0.0476, p < 0.01). The use of third-person plural pronouns positively triggered liking (ß = 0.0673, p < 0.01), commenting (ß = 0.477, p < 0.01), and sharing (ß = 0.0605, p < 0.01) behavior of consumers. These results suggest that consumers mostly and positively interacted with the messages including first-person singular and third-person plural pronouns on Facebook. This study is partly consistent with Koçak's (2021) study suggesting that first-person singular pronoun choices of Turkish airline brands on Instagram also affects likes and shares as well as the use of first-person plural pronouns positively influence the number of likes. Additionally, these empirical findings are also in line with the study of Chang et al. (2019) and suggest that first person pronoun choices by airline brands may lead consumers to establish personal relationships.

With respect to posting time, brand posts published at the daily non-working hours were significantly and positively related to the number of likes (ß = 0.0657, p < 0.01), comments (ß = 0.0546, p < 0.01), and shares (ß = 0.0689, p < 0.01). These findings are consistent with previous studies (McShane et al., 2019). In addition, posts published on weekends had a positive and significant relationship with the number of likes (ß = 0.0521, p < 0.01), and comments (ß = 0.0483, p < 0.01). Message age positively and significantly affected the number of likes (ß = 0.0737, p < 0.001), comments (ß = 0.2845, p < 0.001), and shares (ß = 0.2185, p < 0.001). This situation probably refers to Facebook user behavior and suggests that airline consumers need time to read, to understand and to interact with the post. In this context, the findings support past research (Cvijikj & Michahelles, 2013; Menon et al., 2019).

Concerning the impacts of vividness factors on airline brand posts, the use of photos was negatively and significantly associated with the number of likes (ß = –0.1356,

Table 4. Results of the hypotheses

Hypothesis	Likes	Comments	Shares
H$_1$: The use of idiomatic expressions by Turkish airline companies on Facebook affects CE in terms of likes, comments, and shares.	Supported	Not supported	Supported
H$_2$: The use of metonymies by Turkish airline companies on Facebook affects CE in terms of likes, comments, and shares.	Not supported	Not supported	Not supported
H$_3$: The use of personifications by Turkish airline companies on Facebook affects CE in terms of likes, comments, shares.	Not supported	Supported	Not supported
H$_4$: The use of similes by Turkish airline companies on Facebook affects CE in terms of likes, comments, and shares.	Not supported	Supported	Not supported

$p < 0.001$), comments (ß = −0.1768, $p < 0.001$), and shares (ß = −0.2129, $p < 0.001$). Our findings are inconsistent with most of recent research indicating that the use of photos in brand posts on social network increases CE in terms of likes, and comments (Schultz, 2017; Menon et al., 2019; Labrecque et al., 2020). However, these studies in terms of negative effect of photos on the number of comments are supported. A possible explanation for this result could be related to the content that meet consumer expectations (Schultz, 2017).

Also, hashtag usage had positive and significant effects on the number of likes (ß = 0.2248, $p < 0.001$), comments (ß = 0.1572, $p < 0.001$), and shares (ß = 0.2721, $p < 0.001$). These findings are in line with past research (Labrecque et al., 2020; Koçak, 2021).

Next, word count in airline brand posts negatively and significantly affected the number of likes (ß = −0.19, $p < 0.001$), comments (ß = −0.0595, $p < 0.001$), and shares (ß = −0.1539, $p < 0.001$). This indicates that as the number of words in the post increases, CE decreases. Previous work also found that message length decreases CE (Schultz, 2017; Menon et al., 2019). Although, the findings are consistent with these studies, they do not support some recent research (Labrecque et al., 2020; Pezzuti et al., 2021) that take word count as a control variable.

In sum, as shown in Table 4, H1, H3, and H4 partially supported. However, no evidence was found to support H2 based on the expectations from previous work.

6. Theoretical and managerial implications

In today's dynamic environment, CE is an essential way of creating intelligent marketing strategies, increasing profit, and having competitive advantage (Brodie et al., 2011; Sedley, 2008). Thus, determining factors that affect CE may help practitioners and scholars to reshape the level of engagement. Although some important previous research addressed brand post content, characteristics, and linguistic styles (e.g., Brodie et al., 2011; Cvijikj & Michahelles, 2013; Labrecque et al., 2020; Pezzuti et al., 2021), limited studies examined CE with airline companies from the perspective of branded content (Leung et al., 2013; Menon et al., 2019; Sigurdsson et al., 2020; Koçak, 2021). However,

to the best of our knowledge no study has yet empirically shown the impact of the use of figurative language on CE in the case of Facebook. Importantly, this study provides some theoretical and practical insights for airline industry. First, this study uses MLR models that reveal statistically significant differences between CE levels and figurative effects.

Second, the current study determines the use of figurative language types by Turkish airline brands on Facebook. Previous work in marketing area suggested that figurative language is an essential element for advertising discourse (e.g., Leigh, 1994; Kronrod & Danziger, 2013; Djafarova, 2017) and communication with consumers (Choi et al., 2019). In this respect, regarding the RQ1, it was found that the most used figurative elements in airline brand posts are idioms, metonymies, personifications, and similes, respectively. Although various studies demonstrated that different types of figurative language (e.g., personification) are frequently used (Delbaere et al., 2011; Suryasa, 2016) in different marketing efforts, this study points to the importance of how Turkish airline brands use figurative language types in their messages.

Third, the most important theoretical novelty of this work is to examine the effects of figurative language elements on CE within the perspective of Turkish airline industry. To answer the RQ2, the effects of the use of figurative language usage on Facebook by Turkish airline brands on CE were examined and it was found that the use of idioms, personifications, and similes influence CE in various ways. As one of the crucial ways to gain competitive advantage, social media provides brands to reach consumers in an effective way and to measure consumer feedback via engagement rates such as number of likes, comments, and shares. Thus, as mentioned above, investigating antecedents that lead consumers to engage with the post, like answering the RQ2, is an essential task for (re)designing content (Cvijikj & Michahelles, 2013).

As one of content strategies, figurative language can attract the attention of consumers (Djafarova, 2017), and increase interest (Fox et al., 2019). In this sense, it was found that the use of idioms, personifications, and similes in airline brand messages affect CE in various ways. From a managerial standpoint, these outputs will guide airline and marketing practitioners in redesigning branded content.

7. Limitations and future directions

Despite the contributions of this study to the extant studies on CE, several limitations, which grant directions for future research should be acknowledged. First, Turkish airline industry to examine the use of figurative language in brand messages was used. Previous studies examined the figurative effects of brand communication in different languages (e.g., Djafarova, 2017; Kim et al., 2016; Ahmad et al., 2020) in different languages. Thus, further research needs to investigate how figurative choices of brands in different languages may impact CE.

Second, four common types of figurative language (idioms, personifications, metonymies, and similes) were considered. Gibbs (1994) suggested that there are many types of figurative language such as colloquial tautologies, indirect speech acts, irony, sarcasm, and oxymora. Although it was searched for these elements before this analysis, only a very few examples in airline messages were found. Thus, future research could examine the use of other types of figurative language in brand posts.

Lastly, performed analysis includes a sample of airline industry. Future studies could investigate the impact of figurative representation of brands in other industries.

Disclosure statement

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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140   *C. B. Koçak, Ö. Atalik. Figurative language effect on consumer engagement: an empirical investigation for Turkish airline industry*

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