The Use and Effect of Emojis in Communication

Dan Marchildon
Kennesaw State University

Abstract

This study focuses on how emojis are used and how they affect communication through both digital and online media. It also focuses on the impact emojis have on modern language and how emojis affect users' psychological state. This study is a literature review, which investigates and analyzes the impact of emojis on communication using various articles and studies from reputable scholars in the fields of communication, language, and psychology. This investigation shows the influence that emojis have on the way people communicate through digital media. This study concludes that emojis are a powerful communicative resource that can both help, and sometimes hinder, the way people express themselves through digital media, both emotionally and psychologically.

Keywords: emojis, communication, digital media, psychological, effect, impact

Emojis are small icons used to express ideas and emotions through digital communication. The far spread use of emojis to communicate condensed and complex thoughts into digital imagery has sparked heated debate throughout branches of Linguistic Theory, Language, Psychology, and Communication Studies. The purpose of this paper is to analyze and assess the meaning and function of emojis in the era of online and digital communication. The paper will also discuss in what way emojis have impacted the way we communicate with one another in digital media. Through a literature review, the authors cited present through their findings that emojis and online communication transcend traditional means of communication and go beyond our natural discourse. Psychology and human emotions both play vital roles in coming up with the proper answer. The question remains, How have the use of emojis affected the way we communicate?

Literature Review
Meaning

Robert Cincu (2017) pointed out that "several features specific to online communication correspond to what contemporary cultural studies refer to as a posthuman shift in discourse" (p. 88). One of the features of online communication that Cincu referred to is that of emoticons or emojis. Posthuman is a term that refers to the extension of natural human communication, or discourse, that has been seen throughout the internet age of digital communication (Cincu, 2017). Emojis are, at the same time, a throwback to ancient human communication as well as the simplification of modern language for digital media. In the world of real-time responses while chatting, the need for emojis became a natural progression and response to the rapid-fire speed of our conversations (Cincu, 2017). Emojis first came into being by way of emoticons, combinations of punctuation signs that generate a certain visual meaning (Cincu, 2017). This became the standardized way of expressing emotion through online discourse. The emoticons themselves became iconic signs, in the same sense of signs that have a direct connection and derive meaning from real human expression (Cincu, 2017). A smiling emoticon, ";)", is a universal sign that is acknowledged as a smiling face. Emojis, on the other hand, not only convey human expression, but they also resemble the same functions as ancient hieroglyphs—symbols that transcend linguistic barriers that became iconic signs (Cincu, 2017). A "rabbit" as a word does not resemble or describe the emoji of a white, furry mammal eating a carrot in every language. The emoji itself expresses what a rabbit is universally through its visual depiction, as a symbol (Cincu, 2017).

Before the time of emojis, emoticons were the definitive way to express emotion through non-verbal means—digitally, this was referred to as computer mediated communication (CMC) (Krohn, 2004). Franklin Krohn (2004) defines emoticons as "punctuation marks that viewed sideways resemble facial expressions" (p. 322). Ilona Vandergriff (2013) states that CMC cues, such as emoticons, have been used frequently in text-based digital communication (p. 1). They are regarded as stand-ins for nonverbal cues of oral interaction, and even seen as strategical markings of oralization (Vandergriff, 2013). Emoticons sometimes lack range and nuance, and doubt has been cast on how they translate nonverbal cues of face-to-face communication into text-based (Vandergriff, 2013). This is where the symbolic tone and nature of the more complex emoji shines through, being able to express concepts and emotions that emoticons can only slightly convey through digital media.

References

Cincu, R. (2017). Emoticons: Between linguistic innovation and symptom of the posthuman era. Journal of Media Research, 10(1), 88-95.

Goldsborough, R. (2015). Putting your emotions on screen. Teacher Librarian, 43(1), 64-65.

Kalb, J. (2015). Big talk, small talk: Why people who read should care about emojis. Brooklyn Rail, 42-43.

Kralj Novak, P., Smailović, J., Sluban, B., & Mozetič, I. (2015). Sentiment of emojis. Plos ONE, 10(12), 1-22. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0144296

Krohn, F. B. (2004). A generational approach to using emoticons as nonverbal communication. Journal of Technical Writing And Communication, 34(4), 321-28. doi:10.2190/9EQH-DE81-CWG1-QLL9

Vandergriff, I. (2013). Emotive communication online: A contextual analysis of computer-mediated communication (CMC) cues. Journal of Pragmatics: An Interdisciplinary Journal Of Language Studies, 51, 1-12. doi:10.1016/j.pragma.2013.02.008

Vangelov, N. (2017). Emojis in marketing communications. Balkan Social Science Review, 10(10), 131-147.

Zareen, N., Karim, N., & Khan, U. A. (2016). Psycho emotional impact of social media emojis. Isra Medical Journal, 8(4), 257-262.