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How emojis can be used as a form of socialization in Facebook Groups

The use of emoji in conversations is important to note in different forms of the digital world in all sorts of different ways such as texting, other electronic messages, and especially in social media across various platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook. Emoji’s are oftentimes used to convey certain meanings or represent certain things to the people that are reading the emoji’s. However, the use of emojis are not exactly a new phenomenon and can possibly be traced back to an earlier form of communication. Recent studies have shown that there are possible parallels between emoji’s and early writing systems of hieroglyphs and cuneiform. Thus making it important to see how emoji’s are used today as a form of socialization in digital media.

In this paper, I look into how emojis are used as a form of socialization in a Facebook Group called My Hero Academia Official Fan Club. By first giving a detailed background of the group itself including gender, race, group performance that are shown in the group, while including a brief description of the anime to better understand what is being discussed in the group. Next by looking at posts that are made by group members including admins and moderators, then comments and responses that are made to other groups member’s posts or comments on the given topics that are being discussed in the group during my observations. While my next step is to contextualize the multiple transcripts of the group's videos to better understand how emoji’s are used as a form of socialization in this Facebook group. These are done by a literature review of multiple articles that are used to help explain how emoji’s are used in similar cases which are used to help with the contextualization process. Lastly, I conclude with what this research has accomplished and steps for future research.

The Facebook group My Hero Academia Official Fan Club was created on March 15, 2018, and has all most 500,000 members and growing since the group was first created. The group posts at least over 300 posts if not more a day and around 630,000 in the last month alone. While besides group members the group has multiple admins and moderators that are responsible for making sure that the group rules are followed for what is posted in the group itself. These rules have to with content and spoilers, language, appropriate topics, shipping, artwork and cosplay, disagreement, and respecting the group moderators. Group members use posts that can include either video clips that can be for example scenes from the anime and pictures as well as writings. While responses or comments are often time writings but can as well include pictures. Some of the group's topics that are related to the anime include news, merchandise, artwork, gaming, cosplay, music, screenshots besides the manga which is the graphic novel of My Hero Academia. It was hard to determine things like gender and race between group members including admins and moderators because often times profile pictures are of sometimes of characters, and other graphics thus making it impossible to determine things like race and gender. However, I was able to determine from a few profile pictures that used photos of people, to find things such as age, race, and gender. It was found that the group has a wide variety of different gender identities and ages from teenaged to young adult, including multiple different races. While group performance was shown in the posts and comments that are made in the group during a given time that was based on different social norms. Globalization is also used because this is a public group and has speakers from different languages such as French, Portuguese, Spanish, and German besides English which was shown in a few comments that were made from group members in the group.

To better understand what is being discussed by the group members in the group by understanding what the anime itself is about can be helpful in this case. The anime My Hero Academia is about a boy named Izuku Midoriya who lives in a word where currently most of the human population possesses superpowers which are called “Quirks”. While Midoriya is born without a Quirk of his own, dreams about becoming a hero even after his past of being bullied by his childhood friend Katsuki Bakugo for lacking a Quirk. But after Midoriya meets his favorite hero All Might after being saved by him, All Might reveals the nature of his Quirk "One For All" and passes it down to Midoriya to succeed him after seeing the youth's determination in the face of danger even without a Quirk. So after Midoriya begins his path to becoming a hero in attending U.A. High School to train to become a hero alongside Bakugo and the friends they make in Class 1-A. While trying to stop All Might’s nemesis "One For All” and his apprentice Tomura Shigaraki as they try to destroy the current society and its heroes.

After doing a couple of days of observation I was able to get a better idea of how emojis are used as a form of socialization in this Facebook group. On the first day of my observation while observing the group for a total of 45 mins it was found that most of all the comments had some sort of emoji’s in them and some of these emoji’s were a thumbs up, hearts, and laughing faces. One of the main topics of conversation had to do with one of the main characters for the anime, this character was Bakugo. Most of the posts that were about Bakugo’s birthday simply stated Happy Birthday with emoji’s that are related to the character himself. One post states “ Happy Birthday Bakugou” which is an alternative spelling of his name with emoji of firing explosions because Bakugo’s Quirk is an explosion which he shoots out of his hands. Then the comments that are posted are related to the character’s personality but the comments don’t use any emoji’s in them. Two comments are “ Happy Birthday Crazy hero” with no emoji and “ I hope Bakugo don’t use some explosions on his birthday” with no emoji’s. While a second post that is related to Bakugo’s birthday has a fan-made comic of Bakugo and another character called Ochaco. The comments however in this post do have emojis included in their comments which include explosion emoji’s beside the usual emoji’s that are used in the group. On the second day of observation that took place over the course of 30 mins, it was found that the use of emoji’s was higher then what was used in the first day of observation even though the same types of emojis were used. The use of emojis was most used in comments of cosplay pictures of the character Todoroki and a couple of other characters, and as well as from a gender-bent fanart of the main character Midoriya. While overall the gender-bent post had the most use of emoji’s with over 500 comments that include emoji’s such as laughing faces, hearts, and faces with heart eyes. While on my last day of observation that took place for 45 mins I noticed that there appeared to less use of emoji’s used in group members post but more emojis were used in the comments instead. Such as in one post which asked “ If you had a quirk, what are you gonna be? A hero or a villain? And why?”, while the post itself had no emoji’s, the comments had multiple uses of emojis. The emoji’s varied from laughing faces, winky faces, heart eyes face, and girl shrugging her shoulders. While other emoji’s that were shown throughout the other comments were hearts, confused face, an art palette, crying face, pleading face, flames, ok hand, and thinking face and including a nauseated face. These emojis were used in posts comments of videos, memes, and fanarts over the course of my observation on that day.

After my initial observation, I was able to find two short videos that are just over a minute long, and unfortunately, these are only two of a few of the longer videos that are shown in the group and most of the videos are only a couple seconds long. The first video is a parody of the character Todoroki getting a part-time job and is a minute and 29 seconds long. Unfortunately there is Adult language and subject manner in the video as well, but I also had trouble finding video that had speaking in it rather than just music or no words. While the second video is about a person discussing an issue that he has noticed in the My Hero Academia fandom as a whole and his complaint about it which is just a minute long. The transcript of these videos is shown below at the end of the paper. Second there are only a couple of emoji’s used in the comments in the first video which are laughing face, smiling face with a hand over mouth, and closed eyes laughing. While unfortunately, the second video has no comments or emojis used. But there are multiple likes or thumbs up, including laughing face emojis and one angry face emoji instead of regular comments.

To contextualize these multiple transcripts of the group's video to be able to understand how emoji’s are used as a form of socialization in this Facebook group. I looked at multiple articles that explain how emoji’s are used in similar cases. These articles look at mobile devices and other electronic platforms with the use of emoji’s but they still can be used to contextualize these transcripts with how emoji’s are used in social media platforms. The first article is called *Analyzing and Visualizing Emotional Reactions Expressed by Emojis in Location-Based Social Media* which looks into how social media platforms like Twitter are extensively used for expressing and exchanging thoughts, opinions, ideas, and feelings, which are reactions about a certain topic or event ( Burghardt, Dunkel, & Hauthal 2019). It was noted that emoji’s are often used when it is difficult to express emotions only with words, which may be due to the absence of non-verbal cues that are found in written communication, and the inability to express countenances, physical gestures, and intonations which are a part of face to face communication(Hauthal, et al. 2019). The use of the laughing face and other emoji’s that are found in the comments in the first video that I transcripted are possibly used to convey their reactions to the video. However as Burghardt et al. explain the extent that these emotions are shown within different social contexts can differ, which is associated with the fact that according to the cultural context, or the emotions that can be either desired or undesired depending on the situation( 2019). So when a person reading a emoji believes that a certain emoji means one thing in a certain context it may actually mean something completely different to the person that is using the emoji in the comment. Like for example smiling face with a hand over mouth could be in response the in line 17 could mean that person who wrote the comment is trying not to laugh but it could be something else entirely even with the words that are used in the comment as well.

Then the second article is *Using Emojis: Self-Presentation and Different Meaning Creation Approaches*. This article looks to explain the dimensions and the importance of emoji usage by examining the motivational factors leading to the use of emoji’s, the positive and negative feature of emojis in terms of the meanings of emotional behaviors, and the different meanings behind them(Onursoy 2018). By examining the reasons why emojis are used in certain ways helps to understand why certain emoji’s are used in the comments about the videos.

While it was found in the article that the frequency of emoji usage varies according to the platform that is being used, depending on the age range and the user's experiences using emoji’s, and by the person’s gender(Onursoy 2018). Second that the use of happy emoji’s are more commonly used then crying or sad ones(Onursoy 2018). However, the first video is supposed to be comical and the second video is of someone describing their feelings about a given topic the frequency of emoji usage still works in this case. These frequencies of emoji usage appear to be the same in the comments that use emoji’s in the first video and the emoji usage in the second video. This is mostly based on profile username if they have a character or another symbol as their profile picture and as well as profile pictures that use regular photos.

The last article is called *How Effective Are Emojis In Surveys Taken on Mobile Devices.* In this article, it is examined how the use of emojis as an alternative to the use of text in the design of mobile surveys to keep respondents from leaving the survey and to improve overall user experience(Bacon, Barlas, Dowling, & Thomas 2017).

Even though the article has to with mobile surveys instead of social media platforms it can still be used to help contextualize these multiple transcripts of the group's videos and for the use of emoji’s as a form of socialization in Facebook groups. This is because the article looks into the effectiveness of emojis as alternatives to more traditional labeled response scales in a mobile survey which can be applied to social media platforms as well. It was found that use of emoji did not have a major impact on the dropout rates over text-based options but it did, however, pose some limitations in things such as Food satisfaction ratings, Top-box survey satisfaction, Emoji scales and alignment with of survey question, and that not all emoji’s are created equal (Bacon et al. 2017). This is a similar case in the Facebook group as well, while things food satisfaction ratings and top-box survey are not a concern in the use of Facebook groups there are other limitations in evaluating the effectiveness of emojis in these platforms. As well the use of emojis did not seem to affect the number of comments for the videos nor did many of the comments have emoji’s in them. The lack of emoji usage has contributed to limitations for evaluating the emojis in this Facebook group. These limitations are, how group members determine what each emoji means and how they are supposed to be used and why these emojis are considered appropriate to use for the subject matter compared to others.

After doing this research some of the ways that emojis are used as a form of socialization in Facebook groups were found. By looking at the overall effectiveness of using emoji’s in Facebook groups, the reasons why emojis are used in certain ways, and that when emoji’s are often used when it is difficult to express emotions only with words. While some steps for future research would be to look at why certain emojis are used in some cases and not others, and the social context of the meanings behind different emoji’s to get a better idea of what group members are trying to communicate with each other and for what purpose. As well ways to better evaluate the effectiveness of emoji’s in Facebook groups.

Transcripts:

Transcript One: Todoroki’s Part-time Job

Video Link: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/MyHeroAcademiaTV/permalink/517750738832730/>

Todoroki: Hi, welcome to the mall, thank you for bringing all of your children.

Todoroki: My name is Elmor and have been a mall security Cop for one week which is just enough time to suck out my soul.

Todoroki: I’m going to hang myself.

Other Character : Are you Emore?

Todoroki: Elmor.

Other Character: oh it’s ( ?) And (?) It looks it (?) ass in here...

Todoroki: I got my bachelors for this.

Todoroki: Sir please don’t throw hot dogs at me

Todoroki: I got my Bachelors for this.

Todoroki: that’s going to be 3.76

Todoroki: Are you trying to give me a Fucking seizure

Todoroki: Stop that ass whole

Todoroki: Can someone help me place the escalator is stuck and someone is rubbing the jewelry store.

Other Character : Ok, candy, please

Todoroki: Enjoy

Other Character: Oh my word these are all sugar-free, diabetes is half my disability (?) ass whole

Todoroki: Welcome to Mashy Mart. Thank you for bringing your fucking kids.

Todoroki: I possess the ability to transform my speed from human to raptor

Todoroki: This is human speed right… This is raptor

Todoroki: you couldn’t keep up with me there could you.

(2) Other Character: oh yeah that was really fast.

Todoroki: I know.

Todoroki: Hello sir

(3) Other Character : (?) why are filming me

Todoroki: I’m filming a crime happening in my mall. I couldn’t help but notice that you’re eating a whole cake entirely by yourself

Todoroki: Do you realize how disgusting you are?

(3) Other Character: I do, I want to eat my cake in peace, please

Todoroki: One strawberry

(3) Other Character : No

Todoroki: are you two enjoy the ride so far?

(2) Other Character: I’m going to need you to turn up that ac for me for a favor

(2) Other Character: Ok, I’ll like the heater now place.

(2) Other Character: Ok I’m gonna need that air again.

Todoroki: I’m choosing to no longer understand English, please

Todoroki: you want to talk to the manager

Todoroki: Bae some bitch wants to talk to you (Over loudspeaker)

Todoroki: I take my job very seriously

(3) Other Character: Yeah well someone just stole your laptop.

Todoroki: (?) Yeah shit

Todoroki: I swear to god that I am going to set myself on fire.

Transcript 2: My Hero Academia Fandom Complaint

Video Link:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/MyHeroAcademiaTV/permalink/453729545234850/>

Line 1: So, I’m seeing a bunch of people post about the My Hero Academia fandom as a whole be super toxic and just wanted to share my thoughts on that.

Line 2: People often like to take the blame and place it on the younger fans of the My Hero Academia fandom when there’s just as bad stuff happening with older fans.

Line 3: A lot of times people forget that My Hero Academia is show about kids and more importantly Minors.

Line 4: People have been sexualizing them and doing stuff like that and using the excuse of that ageing them up, even though literally the character is that their a kid and thing that you like about them is that their childish.

Line 5: There are bad parts of any fandom you can be a part of and what we can do is that we can be the kind of people to post good content that doesn’t make the fandom toxic.

Line 6: Not just ignore the entire thing.

Line 7: That’s kind immature.

References

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