What does emoji do to us: emojis in online communication

As an alternative to written language, emojis make up for the lack of non-verbal cues and are very suitable for social media communication, so they are used more and more frequently in online communication. In the field of communication, the research on emoji mainly focuses on two aspects: one is to study the emotional communication and language functions of emoji (Boutet, LeBlanc, Chamberland & Collin, 2021), and the other is to explore how different factors affect users' preference for using emojis.

Why do we use emojis?

Generally, people use emojis for three reasons. First, the use of emojis to experience a virtual face-to-face interaction enables participants to communicate emotionally. At the same time, a deeper understanding of semantic information and reducing the ambiguity of written discourse are the basis of digital human psychology (Kaye, Malone & Wall, 2017).

The second point is social attribution, where the use of emojis can convey social information. Boutet et al. (2021) argued that people are perceived as more gregarious, serious, and open when they post content with a lot of positive expressions on social platforms. In an experiment by Rodrigues et al. (2022), different emojis represent different interpersonal intentions, such as friendship, love, and sex, when messages are received for the first time from strangers. Sometimes emojis can even affect interpersonal trust relationships. Zhang et al. (2021) conducted three experiments on whether people will give more money when receiving requests including emojis to study the impact of positive emojis, negative emojis and sending emojis to acquaintances on college students' online interpersonal trust. The conclusions suggest that emoji can have an impact on social behaviors, social interactions and even personality traits, as it conveys subtle cues of trust, reducing psychological distance and increasing the likelihood of trust.

In addition, the use of emojis can also improve the efficiency of information processing. Boutet et al. (2021) set up an experiment where participants judged the semantics of pairs of sentences and emojis that also had positive/negative/neutral attitudes and rated the semantics as positive/negative/neutral properties, and they all used a head-mounted video eye-tracking system to judge how efficiently participants processed this information by the time spent on each item. When there are emojis in the sentence,

people need less information and spend less time building digital interactions.

How do we deal with emojis?

Emoji preferences are affected by many factors. Current research mainly starts from three directions: individual differences, cultural backgrounds, and different operating systems or social platforms. Individual characteristics known to influence usage preferences are gender and age. Prada et al. (2018) and Rodrigues et al. (2017) conducted experiments on individual characteristics, respectively. The former assessed people's motivations for using emojis by measuring their agreement with nine statements, such as using emojis to express feelings to others, while having participants self-report the frequency of emoji use. They found that compared with men, women were more willing and agreed to use emojis; and young people had a higher frequency and a more positive attitude to use emojis, accompanied by a positive correlation between frequency, attitude and motivational identification. The latter experiment, which provided participants with a large number of stimulus sets (emoji, GIF, etc.) and asked them to record an instantaneous definition of each stimulus, showed that women's definition of stimulus sets was clearer and more meaningful.

Zabrodskaja, A. (2020) pointed out that the use of emojis can indeed promote cooperation and reduce uncertainty, but it requires people to have the same language and cultural background. He mentioned an example of cross-cultural communication, in which a Nigerian chatted with a Kazakh student on WhatsApp, and the Kazakh student responded with emojis about his feelings about university life. While this particular emoji means "in trouble" in Nigeria, the Nigerian is quick to ask if there is a problem, while the Kazakh explains it means "everything is ok". At the same time, Rodrigues et al. (2017) also mentioned its limitations in the article. Since the experiment was only carried out in Portugal, the cultural background involved is too single and not universal.

Rodrigues et al. (2017) conducted experiments on both IOS and Android platforms, and the results also showed that people felt that emojis on IOS were more beautiful. Rodrigues et al. (2022) conducted experiments on two platforms, Facebook and Tinder, where people are more inclined to seek friendship or love, while for the latter, people are more likely to pursue sexual relationships. Although emoji has Unicode, the way emojis are displayed in different operating systems is different due to the development compatibility limitations of these software. Different social networking platforms like Twitter, Facebook and Instagram also have their specific emoji usage patterns.

References

Boutet, I., LeBlanc, M., Chamberland, J., & Collin, C. (2021). Emojis influence emotional communication, social attributions, and information processing. *Computers In Human Behavior*, *119*, 106722.

Kaye, L., Malone, S., & Wall, H. (2017). Emojis: Insights, Affordances, and Possibilities for Psychological Science. *Trends In Cognitive Sciences*, *21*(2), 66-68.

Prada, M., Rodrigues, D., Garrido, M., Lopes, D., Cavalheiro, B., & Gaspar, R. (2018). Motives, frequency and attitudes toward emoji and emoticon use. *Telematics And Informatics*, *35*(7), 1925-1934.

Rodrigues, D., Cavalheiro, B., & Prada, M. (2022). Emoji as Icebreakers? Emoji can signal distinct intentions in first time online interactions. *Telematics And Informatics*, *69*, 101783.

Rodrigues, D., Prada, M., Gaspar, R., Garrido, M., & Lopes, D. (2017). Lisbon Emoji and Emoticon Database (LEED): Norms for emoji and emoticons in seven evaluative dimensions. *Behavior Research Methods*, *50*(1), 392-405.

Zabrodskaja, A. (2020). The Emoji Revolution: How Technology is Shaping the Future of Communication Philip Seargeant. *Sociolinguistic Studies*, *14*(3), 405-410.

Zhang, M., Ding, S., Liu, Y., Li, H., Zhu, Y., & Qin, C. (2021). Influence of Emojis on Online Trust Among College Students. *Frontiers In Psychology*, *12*.