Impact of Emojis on use of English Language used on Social Media

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Abstract

Emojis have become an essential part of communication over social media. Communication over social media has some of the interesting attributes dedicated to usability and ability of an attribute to captivate the natural intent of users to express better and in newer ways. Emojis have been studied alongside their cousins’ emoticons and smileys for some time now. Linguists are curious if there is a new language coming up with emoji games and emoji quizzes making popular entertainment over the virtual world. The present study is based on a detailed study of research material pertaining to the emojis and an online survey (N=120) conducted through the social media platforms of WhatsApp and Facebook. Using Likert’s scale, the users have been assessed for factors like comfort, ease in expression, fun and confusion that these emojis might bring in. The population had a participation of 120 users. Interestingly, the analysis confirms a massive liking towards the emojis and shows a trend towards youngsters in the said group using them more often to enhance expression and reduce ambiguity. The set of participants administered even had a certain inclination towards preferring an altogether emoji book over a normal book written in text. Emojis, however, appeared to have a little impact on the use of the English language over social media.

Keywords: Social media, English on social media, audio-visual communication, language tools on social media.
**Introduction**

Communication facilitated by computers and internet has taken a sudden upslope in the last few decades. Reflecting back to the way language communication has evolved over human history we realise; Textual form of communication is a refinement from the pictorial scripts used in ancient times. With the higher advancements in language and more of machine communication coming at play in the times of social media we observe increase in the interactivity with intense audio-visual mediums. Among many in the list emojis are one of the most handy and popular tools used for adding expression in computer mediated communication.

Having realized that the non-verbal cues such as gestures, body language and tone, in communication radically affect the overall interpretation of communication (Archer, 1977) social media tried its best to incorporate these features right from the time of chatrooms to video conferencing tools today. Several textual formatting techniques were deployed time and on to suggest tone and expression in communication over internet. For example, capitalization for making a tone loud and outstanding from the rest of the conversation, excessive use of ellipsis to show intermediate thinking or continuity in thought process. In addition, a lot of abbreviated forms have also become popular over internet communications creating a different lingo for the social-media users and adding to the terms in modern lexicon.

A study by Harris and Paradice in 2007 reflects that the receiver’s understanding of the sender’s emotions increases if the emotional cues are incorporated in the communication. (Paradice, 2007) The same is endorsed in a paper titled, Emoticons and online message interpretation (Daantje Derks, 2007) Use of emojis has not only increased over the years but has also diversified with the pace at which social media has seeped in to the masses as a mundane need for communication. Emojis hereby have evolved from being semantic features impacting emotional tendencies. They have a vivid reach to various facets earlier unaddressed such as law, marketing, medicine and the other areas. (Qiyu Bai, 2016) Interestingly use of emojis as independent language has also been a subject of debate whereby it has been discussed that the emojis have semantic attributes and those that help qualify for an independent language or a paralanguage Concerns have been emerging regarding the effect of the increasing use of emojis hampering the written language. (Mody, 2015) the article on CNBC also mentions works of William Shakespeare and Charles
Dickens getting converted in emoji language. The subject of emoji being intriguing for the psychologists has brought in researches in understanding the impact of non-face emojis on conversation as well. (A.Riordan, 2017)

**Development of emojis**

The pictorial emojis we use all over the social media find their origin from the smileys that were inducted in computer mediated communication in 1960s. These forms simple and easily impressable were popular all over the stationery and clothing by the 1980s. (Luke Stark, 2015)

Emoticons came in by 1982 which were a combination of keyboard punctuation marks in order to make pictorial expressions resembling human faces. (Briggs, 2016) These were popular till the social media platforms picked up. The messaging through mobiles or over internet would usually make use of such paralanguage towards the end of conversations. These emoticons helped intensify or clarify certain emotion in context to the text. Emojis came into existence in 1999 created by a Japanese originator Shigetaka Kurita (栗田穰崇). “Emoji” is a transliteration of the Japanese word 文 (mo=write) 字 (ji=character) These are graphic symbols representing expressions of joy, sadness, anguish and hatred and many other abstract feelings. Non facial emojis representing signs, symbols weather, animals, plants and professions can also be seen. Ever since the bandwidth of emojis has grown in leaps and bounds. Each of these smileys, emoticons and emojis vary in content and usage. (Qiyu Bai, 2016)

**Objective**

With the use of emojis the textual use of English language is compromised to a certain extent. The study attempts to observe the users’ perception on the use of emojis, preferring it over text and extent to which the use of emojis affects the overall use of English language over the social media platforms.

**Methodology**

The study used an online survey containing questionnaire to collect data on the perception of users on use of emojis. Total respondents (N=120) had a representation of five age groups 12 to 17, 18 to 24, 25 to 35, 35 to 50 and above 50 respectively. Exhibit 1 and 2 reflect the population as per occupation status and age respectively.
83% of the participating population is studying and 80% population is in the age group of 18 to 24 years of age. The second largest users’ participation was observed in the segments of the age group of 36 to 50 years of age. Out of 120 participants 96 were in the age group of 18 to 24, 15 were in the age group of 36 to 50, 4 in the age group of above 50 and only 2 in the age group of 12 to 17 years of age.

Further the use of Likert’s scale was made to assess the preference for Emojis in social media interaction. 8 items were administered over the population of 120 respondents on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1= least agree, 2= somewhat agree, 3= partially agree, 4= mostly agree and 5= completely agree.
Interpretation of data

8 items were assessed on Likert’s scale of 5. Each of the eight items are discussed as follows.

**Item 1:  “I use emojis all the time”**

The participants were asked to grade their responses on the statement, “I use emojis all the time”. 18% of the total population graded 5 and 28% graded it as 4. It is clear that about 46% of respondents uses emoji frequently (Exhibit 3). A graphical presentation of age-wise responses is presented in Exhibit 3A. The total points on Likert’s scale $394/120=3.2$, reflects that the response in favour of ‘neutral’. Apparently, users have reflected a neutral attitude towards fondness of the use of emojis.

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**EXHIBIT 3: PARTICIPANT RESPONSES TO 'I USE EMOJIS ALL THE TIME'**

- Disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Neutral
- Mostly agree
- Completely agree

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**Exhibit 3A: Agewise preference for use of emojis**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Mostly Agree</th>
<th>Completely Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Above 50</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36 to 50</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 to 35</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 to 24</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 to 17</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Item 2: Emojis reduce ambiguity

A pictorial or graphical use along with the text in communication is often attributed towards adding certain meaning to the context of the text. The participants were asked to scale their level of agreement to the phrase, ‘Emojis reduce ambiguity’ whereby the responses received are reflected in Exhibit 4 and the age-wise participation is reflected in the Exhibit 4A.

Interestingly, in the highest responding section of the age segment of 18 to 24, those who feel that the emojis ‘do not’ bring about ambiguity (n=37) is higher than those who think that emojis ‘do’ bring about any ambiguity (n=28). Having evaluated the total points, 368/120=3.0 clearly favours the response, ‘neutral’. It can be said that the majority therefore is having a neutral attitude to any sort of ambiguity being reduced by the use of emojis.
Emojis over the years have multiplied over the social media, making available an emoji for every need. These emojis interestingly have incorporated pictorial forms of vegetables, plants, fruits, food and drinks, flags and festivals. The cross cultural interactions that are popular and possible through social media is effectively aided by the use of these emojis of objects that bring about clarity in communication and reduce ambiguity to a certain extent. The emojis that are forms of smileys with expression have a different usage and interpretation. These interpretations are dependent on the textual context and are often meant to heighten an emotion in the dialogue over social media. Interestingly websites like emojipedia.org and emojidictionary.emojifoundation.com are providing detailed assistance to help interpret the meanings of these vivid emojis.

**Item 3: Emojis add expression**

Taking this further the participants were asked to express their level of agreement on the item, ‘Emojis add expression’. When textual exchange is done there are tools of punctuation marks that are used to create a certain tone and expression in what is being communicated. Multimedia communication definitely has a better expression compared to textual interaction. Emojis make an additional tool to the textual exchange. Exhibit 5 and 5A reflect the responses of participants on their opinion on whether emojis add expressions.
It can be clearly seen that 45% of the population completely agrees that the emojis add expression and 38% population says ‘mostly agree’. Calculating the total points for this item $494/120=4.11$, favours the score in favour of ‘mostly agree’. On the whole one can realise that majority of the population believes that emojis do add expression.

**Item 4. Emojis help when words fail**

In order to understand if the emojis act as an alternative to language tool for the users a projected item, ‘Emojis help when words fail’, was induced in the questionnaire. Exhibit 6 and 6A reflect the overall responses and the age-wise split of responses respectively.
The score of total 120 respondents on Likert’s scale of 5 results to 3.73 showing majority inclining towards ‘mostly agree’. It can be clearly seen that majority of population finds emojis as a means to express when they do not have sufficient words to express their thoughts. It may also be noticed that the neutral segment is minimised in most age segments and is to a minimal level of 13 participants and 4 participants in the age group of 18 to 24 and 36 to 50 respectively, clearly indicating the discrete choice in the use of emoji in place of language.

**Item 5. Emojis reduce the task of typing**

Social media proposes to make the experience of its users comfortable and enriching. The researcher attempted to intrigue if by any means emojis serve as a tool to reduce the task of typing. In a sense that the emojis act as a complete sense group and may allow avoidance of certain verbal exchange. On the Likert’s scale the item scored 460/120= 3.8, stating that the majority feels that emojis do reduce the task of typing to a great extent. The Exhibit 7 and 7A show the overall responses and the age-wise split of the same respectively. The age segment of 17 to 24 appears to be using emojis more frequently as a substitute for text compared to other age segments.
Item 6. I prefer emoji’s over text

Participants were asked whether they prefer emoji’s over text to further endorse the findings of item 5. The graphical representation of the overall responses received and their age-wise split has been presented in the Exhibit 8 and 8A respectively.
A score of $\frac{349}{120} = 2.9$ reflected a clear choice of the users that though the emojis were interesting and could add expression users would not completely do away with text and use emojis as replacement. The emojis in this sense do not appear to replace the use of text in social media communication.

**Item 7. Emoji’s have their own grammar**

To understand the understanding of emoji language by the participants it was asked if emoji’s have their own grammar. By saying so the researcher intends to understand if the respondents feel that there are any rules governing the use of emojis and that they are aware of it. The responses to the item are reflected for the overall numbers in Exhibit 9 and for the age-wise responses in Exhibit 9A respectively.
Total points for this item were 386/120 = 3.2, indicating a neutral outlook. The respondents seemed not to be either aware of any rules that may be existing in the use of emojis or did not see emojis to be having an independent language as a whole.

**Item 8. Emojis rescue when I feel less confident of my English skills**-

Participants were asked if they felt that emojis rescue them when they feel less confident about their English writing skills and emoji’s become substitute for English communication.
Exhibit 10 reflects that 28% of the total participants completely disagree to the phrase, ‘emojis rescue when I feel less confident about my English language’ while 10% completely agree to it. The Likert’s score of 312/120= 2.9 clearly indicates that the respondents somewhat disagree with the phrase.

In addition to the above items which were assessed through the Likert’s scale the participants were also asked, if they were to get a book in emoji language would they prefer it over the normal book in text format?’. Interestingly 37% of the population expressed interest in such a book. Though majority of 63% did not approve of the idea and responded ‘no’ in response, it seems to be curious that a certain proportion of social media users have become so acclimatised to emojis that they may be interested in reading a book in emoji language. Exhibit 11 reflects the responses received.
Conclusion

The study clearly elucidates the growing influence of emojis but does not establish emojis to be a replacement to the use of text or as a rescue from not knowing English language. The Likert’s scale of 8 items has been supported from mostly agree to completely agree in 6 items. The majority has accepted emojis as an add-on to enriching communication by adding expression in the mundane textual interaction. The 37% of participants having accepted that they may be interested in reading a book altogether in emoji language is an indication of the growing comfort that people are having with the heightened use of emojis in day to day interactions over social media. It is also understood that users are interested in using emojis but are not completely dependent on them and do not find it as a replacement to English language exchange over social media.

References


