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## MOBILE DIGITAL PRACTICES – GROWING USE OF EMOJIS AND EMOTICONS IN COMMUNICATION

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### ABSTRACT:

*In the fast paced world of today where the essence of time has changed on the one hand and communication has become technology driven on the other, it is imperative to have a relook on the impact it is having on our day to day life in general and our methods of communication specifically.*

*With the easy access to digital technology via computers, laptops and smart phones the style of communication is changing. The methodical ways and art of letter writing used for over centuries is getting replaced by messaging and chats on the social media. Irrespective of the type of communication whether it is formal or informal shortest means and methods are being used to speedily convey the desired messages.*

*Inbuilt in our systems, instruments and software they are readily available for our use. As the saying goes that a picture is equal to a thousand words these small pictures are helping escape a thousand words. What role these small images built in our systems or constructed with assembling alphabets in a specific design to reflect an emotion are playing and whether they are getting the desired result is the area of study of this research article.*

**KEYWORDS :** Communication, Emojis, Emoticons, Social Media, Technology, Mobile Phones.

### INTRODUCTION:

Whats .com dictionary defines Emoji as -" a small image, either static or animated, that represents a facial expression, an entity or a concept (among other possibilities) in digital communications." <sup>(1)</sup> Etymologically the word has its origin in the Japanese language where the word is a noun consisting of two words (e) meaning an image and (moji) meaning character. Collection of different types of Emoji is available on social networking sites, various messaging platforms such as Facebook, Whatsapp, Wechat etc. and also in the Smartphone applications. Emojis depict varied emotions and expressions reflecting the whole range of human emotions and psychology. Ranging from simple smileys to complex expressions their vast range makes them open to personal



interpretation. Today they have become so firmly ensconced in day-to-day communication streams that in 2015, Oxford Dictionaries even chose an emoji known as the "Face with Tears of Joy" as its Word Of The Year <sup>(2)</sup>

Emoticons on the other hand are also the child of Internet and as internet grew they also grew. As specialist Alex Hern explains, an Emoticon is a small composition of characters used in western writings where the conjunction represents a human emotion, They are the text-based representations made by arranging alphabets and symbols present on the keyboard to convey feelings, such as :- ) to express satisfaction, :' to express sadness, :-o to express shocked, :| is a flat expression for I feel nothing etc. Because of the limits of our keyboard, most emoticons need to be read sideways. The universality of emoticons has further popularized them as they overcome the language barrier in communication. They help to make instant messaging and emails more personal by allowing graphical communication where people often struggle to convey meaning through words. They are succinct, can be used to soften the tone or add emphasis and have become a part of everyday communication <sup>(3)</sup>

### WHERE DID THEY ORIGINATE?

According to the Verge- the first emoji were created in 1999 by Japanese artist Shigetaka Kurita. <sup>(4)</sup> As the 20th century was drawing to a close, Japanese mobile-phone companies were under increasing pressure to support Japanese users' obsession with images. There was widespread frustration with text as a very limited medium to convey sufficient information. It was realized that including these symbols provided much-needed emotion to a message. When Kurtia failed to convince established companies like Fujitsu, Panasonic, and Sharp to design these emoji he put his design skills to work and along with his team deigned 176 characters that were 12-pixel by 12-pixel in size to reflect a range of human emotions. Today we can think of them more like a primitive language rather than a millennial messaging fad. The tiny, emotive characters represent the first language i.e. the sign language born of the digital world, designed to add emotions to the lexical text. Today they have become a hallmark of the way people communicate.

Emoticons - a portmanteau (emotion + icons) was popularized by Scott Fahlman, a computer scientist and researcher at Carnegie Mellon University, who posted a message on a bulletin board on September 19th, 1982. <sup>(5)</sup> And it was a smiley face :-). He suggested his students to use the emoticon to indicate which of their posts were intended as jokes, or was not serious. Today, many applications include a menu of emoticons that can be automatically inserted.

The development of the graphical user interfaces (GUIs), which allow the display of images, later led to image-based depictions of faces conveying similar emotions to emoticons. They are much more vital today than they were in 1982. Their popularity is conveyed by their use - approximately 6 billion emoticons are sent in a day. <sup>(6)</sup>

### HOW ARE EMOJIS DIFFERENT FROM EMOTICONS?

According to Encyclopedia Britannica Since body language and verbal tone do not translate in text messages or e-mails, an alternate ways to convey nuanced meaning is now developed. The most prominent change to the online style has been the addition of two new-age hieroglyphic languages: emoticons and emoji.

Emoji are pictographs that express an emotion, object or an idea. Associate Professor Michelle Lazar, of the National University of Singapore's Department of English Language and Literature, views emoji as another "communicational resource." According to her social and digital media platforms have given rise to new forms of communication, which is a mediated form of interaction –mediated by emojis? She on the other hand also suggests that emoji meanings are not rigid or fixed, and reside in the way users deploy the symbols in particular

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contexts. Emojis allow for creativity and greater ways of expression and novelty in interaction. Hence it can be rightly accepted that it is more a case of understanding and acquiring the literacy to acquire, use and navigate different symbolic systems for effective and satisfying communication.

Amid all this hubbub surrounding the spread of emojis, it's interesting to note what Scott Fahlman, the man who invented emoticons three decades ago thinks. According to an interview with the UK's Independent, he lambasts emojis as being unsightly: "I think they are ugly, and they ruin the challenge of trying to come up with a clever way to express emotions using standard keyboard characters. But perhaps that's just because I invented the other kind." So, if you come across a smiley face that contains a character you can find on your computer keyboard, it's an emoticon. If it's a little cartoon figure that is free from the binds of punctuation, numbers, and letters, it's an emoji.

### DO EMOJIS AND EMOTICONS IMPROVE OUR COMMUNICATION?

Whether emojis and emoticons improve or are a hindrance in the process of communication is a topic for debate with supporter from both sides taking firm stand. Their addition adds or takes away from self expression is also subjective view. Symbols that have a universally understood meaning can help to convey a sentiment without having to phrase it in a complex sentence. But if not so can alter the meaning or become meaningless for the recipient. They also help to reduce the ambiguity of a message's meaning among different parties, who generally understand emoticons to have identical meanings. A study of students at a secondary school and their use of emoticons suggested that they can help reinforce a message's meaning. Researchers found that emoticons, when used to supplement a written message, can help to increase the "emotional content" of its intended meaning (Derks et al, 2007).<sup>(7)</sup>

There are, however, drawbacks to conveying emotions using emoticons. A limited choice of emoticons restricts the range of emotions that can be expressed, and does not allow for the subtlety of emotion that experienced. Facebook's 'reactions' feature, for example, restricts a user's responses to one of just six emojis – multiple but incomplete representation of feelings. Both emoticons and emotions also reduce the need to develop the written skills needed to express oneself in the absence of such shorthand forms of communication. For example - only 7 per cent of people use the peach emoji to refer to the fruit. It is mostly used to describe a butt, or other non-fruit items and situations-Emojipedia,

### EMOJIS AND EMOTICONS FOR SOCIAL COMMUNICATION

Man is a social beings and social dwelling acknowledges and respects the expression of emotions in communication to improve understanding. Since so much of communication is embedded in the emotional they add different meaning and understanding to the same group of words. They are widely used for social communication especially during social media interaction which is carried out in the go saving time and conserving emergy. Embedded in the media and the application itself they lend an arm of ease in use. Easily incorporated while formulating a message or even used as 'reactions' - a range of options provided to Facebook users to communicate an opinion of another user's post- their utility is diverse. According to a survey on Facebook, 60 million emoji are exchanged every day and another five billion emoji are used on Facebook Messenger alone. They are also used extensively on Twitter and Instagram as well as on other social media and mobile messenger programmes such as WhatsApp, Wechat etc.

Mr Goh Eck Kheng, chairman of the Speak Good English Movement and publisher at Landmark Books, says: "Emoji remind us that there are different shades of expressing feelings in words. For example, annoyed,

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angry, furious." On the other hand, he cautions that people must distinguish when to use emoji. They have their place in phone messaging and on social media.

### REASON FOR SUCCESS OF EMOJIS AND EMOTICONS

In a world filled with people using different languages and the whole world becoming a global village in modern time emojis and emoticons are a blessing in disguise. As a visual form of communication, emojis have the potential to be more accessible, or universal, than traditional alphabetic scripts. Emojis make a direct link between the written form and the object or emotion being referenced. Owing to their widespread use they have become almost universally understood, and an entire vocabulary of emoticons now exists for users to communicate with.

The wide palette of available emojis ensure that there is one to portray every mood and emotion. They not just add personality to a text and generate empathy among users but also help to inject tone and body language into what otherwise would be plain text.

It can be foreseen that as people and especially youth with a view to using shortcuts and saving space and time emoji will become even more important tools for translation and communication—a lingua franca for the digital age.

Inclusion had been the goal of emojis and emoticons all along and their rapid evolution with frequent innovation and additions ensure that there is one for everyone and every expression.

### CAUTION REQUIRED IN THEIR USE

"People connect with emoji on a personal level—they use them to show their smiles and their hearts," says Tyler Schnoebelen, founder of Idibon, a text analytics company, who also wrote his Stanford Doctoral thesis on emoticons. Yet, for all the convenience that the shorthand of emojis and emoticons provide, there are several issues concerning their use.

Firstly after all, the meaning that one person associates with an emoji and emoticon can be lost on - even completely different to - the reader understands of it. The ambiguity of emoticons can lead to undesirable misunderstandings, particularly when two parties are not familiar with one another - for example, when cross-cultural work emails are interpreted differently.

Emoji are becoming increasingly politically charged. The presence or absence of emoji both hints at and contributes to cultural visibility and erasure<sup>(8)</sup>. It is reflected by the fact that between 2010 to 2015 very few nations flags were reflected in emojis - including that of Israel but when Palestine's flag was included it was cause for celebration as it reflected its existence as a country. Now many Kurdish users, for instance, want a Kurdish flag emoji.<sup>(9)</sup>

Hunt learned from conducting online surveys that there's a tendency in our culture to view things as masculine by default. So it was observed that a majority of emojis were either masculine or gender neutral. To overcome this shortcoming and address the issue raised by feminist activists there has been rise of emojis with dove eyes, hairstyles and lipstick etc. Similarly specific characteristics to depict child, adult, aged people were also created.

### CONCLUSION

It can be rightly concluded that whether we love or hate them, emoji and emoticon are here to stay and their effect on language is certain to grow even further. They act as apt assistants in conveying emotions successfully saving precious space and time with minimum inconvenience to receiver and sender. When used

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judiciously they can bring a smile on the receivers face. However, we probably won't see another emoji appear in the Oxford English Dictionary anytime soon!

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