The potentials of emoji in visual communication

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ABSTRACT

Emojis are developed from emoticons and commonly used to convey emotion in online communication. It frequently assists in delivering an emotion in text-centric media such as email, media social and instant messages. This paper focuses on emojis advantages in visual communication including its effects on human's feeling. Literatures based methodology applied in this research; the datas are collected from various literatures and then analysed. From the analysis of this research, it shows other functions of emojis in persuading people in visual communication. The limitation of this study is only certain types of emojis are used and measured in delivering emotion, feeling and message from the previous researches. In future research, the potential of emojis can be expended and tested to measure its impact among users by using various types of emoji.

Key Words: emoji, emotion, visual communication

1. INTRODUCTION

This conceptual research conducted a study on the review from the previous research in the related area. Hence, the data sources also come from the previous research. The gathered data compared and support one another, then come out with a new perception about emoji usage in visual communication.

1.1. History of emoji

Emoji comes from the Japanese words. 'E' means picture, 'mo' means writing while 'Ji' defined as the character (Davis & Edberg, 2016). Nowadays, the device keeps developing and becomes smarter through the decade. Therefore, emoticons are changing its design to suit with all kinds of devices. Emoticon is defined as a symbol of letters combination, showing human face that delivers emotion (Extejt, 1998).

The emoticon terminology actually came from the combination of two English words; emotion and icon (Tomic et al., 2013). According to the National Telegraphic Review and Operators Guide in 1857, a painter known as Morse contributed an invention of the telegraph system. Based on the Morse code, the number '73' gave meaning as best regard meanwhile the number '88' means love and kisses. Subsequently, in the year 1881, Ambrose Bierce introduced laugh emoticon \ ___ /. This expression consists of a few punctuation marks and published in Puck magazine in the United State. According to Tomic et al. (2013), that symbol also represents smile expression. In 1963, an artist called Harvey Ball created a new smiley symbol. The symbol was yellow color button completed with two black dots as eye and black curve as a mouth. Here was the starting point of the smiley addict and later it was upgraded as emoticon (Tomic et al., 2013).

Figure 1: First smiley symbol sketched by Harvey Ball
Source: Stamp (2013)

After that, smiley symbols are widely used all over the world. In September 1970 brothers named Bernard and Murray Spain from Philadelphia claimed the smiley symbol as their logo. They combined the smiley logo with a catchy tagline such as 'Have a nice day' to attract people's attention (Ibrahim,

2014). Due to the higher demand, two years later they managed to sell about 50 million buttons with the smiley logo. Then, the smiley symbol became a popular symbol. Both Spain brothers came out with the brilliant idea when they decided to print smiley logo on their merchandise items such as mugs, stationaries, trays, earrings, car stickers, and wristlets. However, some researchers claimed that the smiley symbol is really close with the 1960 event. They believe that the citizens of the United States were traumatized by the war in Vietnam as well as affected by the United State president's elimination (Ibrahim, 2014). As United State citizens were affected by continuous trauma; this situation gave opportunity to Bernard and Murray Spain to make the profit through citizen's anxiety. Hence, they decided to market a variety of merchandises with the smiley logo. Luckily, the smiley logo was able to heal citizen's trauma and keep them feel better (Ibrahim, 2014). Consequently, the smiley was recognized as pop culture in the United State, in fact, the symbol was also printed on a special stamp in the year 1999 (Ibrahim, 2014).

1.2. Emoticons in digital era

In the digital era, the very first smiley emoticon was invented by Professor Scott E Fahlman in 1982. He posted on the science computer general board in Carnegie Mellon University (Churches, Baron-cohen & Ring, 2009). As a result, emoticon has been used widely about three-decade after invented by Prof Fahlman. He put this symbol :-) and :-(to inform readers about his feelings in the next paragraph. Without any symbol of expression, people cannot differentiate between a sarcastic message and a serious message at that time (Ibrahim, 2014). Prof Fahlman have never expected that a few months later, the emoticons started to be used widely. The emoticons design was upgraded by using other punctuation marks to make it easy to be combined on a keyboard (Tomic et al.,2013).
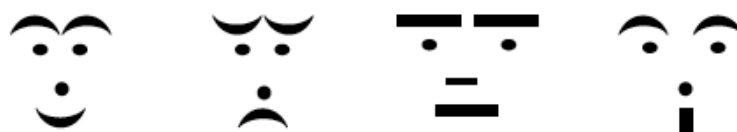

Figure 2: Another version of early emoticons on the Internet
Source: Tomic et al. (2013)

Expression	Sad/Cry	Pressure	Anxiety	Shy
Emoticon	(T_T)	(x_x)	(-_-;)	(///)

Emoticons became popular and the consequences of its demand, emoticons were modified to turn to be emoji (Davis & Edberg, 2016). The Japanese interface designer, Shigetaka Kurita was the responsible person inventing the old emoticons into the new emoji according to his company's request. Moreover, the emoji was developed for the purpose improving text communication that lacked emotions (Golden, 2015).

Figure 3: Examples of emoji
Source: Google

2. EMOJI intervention in visual communication

Generally, emoji can assist communication to be more efficient, effective, clear and fun (Huang, Yen & Zhang, 2008; Kindred & Roper, 2004; Varnhagen et al., 2010). From the statement, this proved that emoji could affect people's feeling and emotion. Moreover, emoji is possible to be cued to complement the text messages especially in describing facial expression (Stapa & Shaari, 2012). Facial expression in computer communication may increase the ratio of communication successfulness between human and computer (Takeuchi & Nagao, 1993). Indeed, it plays an important role in the social communication (Mehrabian, 1981). Subsequently, emoji could soften the negative tone, for example, condemnation (Locke & Daly, 2007; Stapa & Shaari, 2012).

2.2. Emoji in awareness campaign

Poor food selection might raise the obesity risk among children. As a result, it can cause several diseases. By using a low budget approach, some institution creatively used emoji in the awareness campaign for their campaign. For example, one private school in New York have placed the smiley face on the

healthy food container meanwhile they put the sad smiley face on unhealthy food container (Privitera et al., 2014). The emojis were displayed to children food container starting from three to eleven years old. The purpose of emoji is to assist the children to identify as well as differentiate between the healthy and unhealthy foods (Privitera et al., 2014). Amazingly, this approach can educate children about healthy foods yet avoiding unhealthy food (Privitera et al., 2014). The emoji expression gave children a good and bad cue about food. Indirectly, both smile and sad symbols are educating and assisting them in choosing food.

The same situation happens in Frederick Douglass Elementary School (FD) of the Cincinnati Public Schools. Green smiley face intervenes to encourage children to purchase healthy food such as grain, fruits, vegetables, and plain white fat-free milk in the cafeteria. The sign of green emoji placed next to this vegetable, fruit, plain white fat-free milk, and the entrée to encourage smart food selection and also increase the rate of purchase (Siegel et. al, 2015). As a result, the purchases of the plain white fat-free milk were increased rather than flavoured chocolate milk (Siegel et. al, 2015). From the result, it proved that green emoji was able to influence the rate of food purchases and also food selection among children. Without any explanation, the smile expression might give cues and convince them to choose healthy foods. Consequently, applying emoji in the awareness campaign was very effective, low cost and relevant to the target such as children (Siegel et. al, 2015).

Figure 4: The green emoji sign placed in cafeteria
Source: Siegel et al. (2015)

Besides preventing disease, other cases like bully is frequently attracting society's attention. It may happen to anyone in the world. For example, some of the people being bullied at school, college, a university in fact in office. From this phenomenon, big companies, for instance, Apple made a move by releasing anti-bully emoji. Even though it is digital, the emojis are not merely for the text

communication but more to awareness campaign in supporting anti-bully (Clover, 2015; Miller, 2015). The purpose of this campaign is to inspire teenagers to be brave to make a report if they are bullied or seen other people been bullied (Miller, 2015). This campaign is strongly supported by other giant companies like Adobe, Google, Twitter, Facebook, and Youtube. They suit the eye emoji from Apple into their platform as a supporting move. Users can use this emoji to remind a bully to stop.
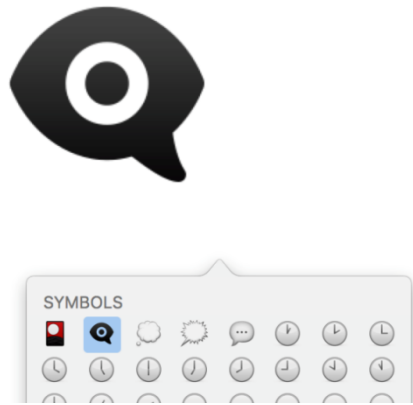

Figure 5: The eye emoji for preventing bully
Source: Miller (2015)

With the support from other platforms, this campaign is widely promoted all over the world to help the users or victims of bullying. Figure 6 shows the established posters from Apple.

Besides using emoji in the awareness campaign, it can also be modified to suit other channels. Modified emojis were used as traffic sign as a warning to drivers, and encourage drivers to be more careful while driving. Here are four modified emojis; emoji (a) refers to aggressive drivers, emoji (b) refers to anger drivers, emoji (c) shows distracted drivers and (d) shows fatigue drivers.
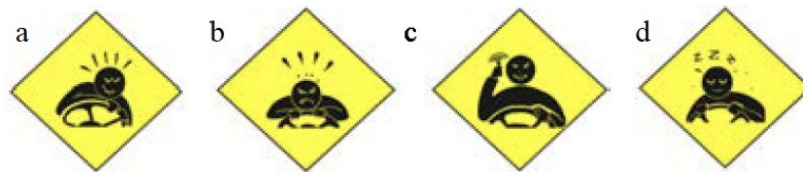

Figure 7: Modified emojis for traffic system
Source: Sodikin et al. (2016)

These four emojis were tested on 50 students who have a driving license, consist of 35 male and 15 female. From the result of this research, it shows that pictorial symbol such as modified emoji in traffic system is such an innovative approach (Sodikin et al., 2016). This kind of traffic system can assist to break through the communication of instructional information among drivers (Sodikin et al., 2016). Furthermore, the modified emojis in traffic system are also easy to be understood broadly (Sodikin et al., 2016).

Based on the discussions of the previous study made on emojis, modified emojis and ordinary emojis give powerful effect in visual communications. Here, it is proven that emojis are not only functioning in text messages, in fact, another communication channel like a campaign poster.

3. CONCLUSION

As a conclusion, emoji has a lot of potentials in visual communication. The previous research and phenomenon proved that emoji could be used in the various channel for different purposes. Emojis are appropriate for different age levels including children, teenagers and also adults. It can quickly convey the message to people. Subsequently, the facial expression can save time without long reading because the displayed emotions are easy to be understood by people. Meanwhile, the institution only needs a low-cost budget using emoji alternative. Hence, it would save money and can be implemented easily rather than another medium. Besides that, emoji can soften the tone as well as persuading people easily. However, the previous studies only focus on the selected design of emoji

with limited area. In the future research, aspects like the design of emoji and the potential area in visual communications should be widely explored.

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