

Digital Expressions: Exploring Cultural Emoticons and Changing Digital Speech Patterns

Raja Sana Gul

Department of Computer Science, Govt Post Graduate college
for women Haripur KPK, Pakistan

Email: turk76rajas@gmail.com

Abstract

With the development of technology and computing applications, communication among people become easy. Nowadays different platforms are accessible for expressing news, knowledge, and multiple emotions such as happiness, sadness, disappointment, thoughts, opinions. In the current digital world, emoticons play a vital role in computer-based communication. This study examined the usage of emoticons and the slight shift of words to emoticons in computer-mediated communication. The research also investigates how people understand the emoticon, and used them for clearing their meanings. The study investigates participants' views and interpretations of emoticons by utilising a mixed-methods technique that combines surveys and qualitative analysis of communication data. It investigates emoticons' cultural relevance and communication potency while taking into account variables like age, gender, and social environment that affect emoticon usage. The main focus of the study is to identify the demand for emoticons from a cultural perspective. The study is a good contribution from the cultural perspective, as it would help to identify the demand for cultural icons in Pakistan. It helps to understand the language change i.e., replacement of letters to emoticons. The findings have consequences for people, academics, and practitioners, highlighting how crucial it is to take cultural considerations into account when creating communication platforms and comprehending how visual symbols affect message perception. In addition to this study, the frequency usage of emoticons is also investigated.

Keywords: Emoticons, emojis, computer-mediated communication, cultural demand, language change, visual symbols.

Introduction

Communication is a process of interaction with the people and their environment for sharing ideas, beliefs, and attitudes of each other. Communication in the American Heritage Dictionary is defined as the exchange of thoughts, expressions, and or information. Human beings can communicate in two ways either verbally which is the act of sharing information between individuals through using speech, and non-verbally through non-verbal communication which is transmitting the message by mediums other than speech such as writing some type of cues, body language, facial expression, eye contact, emotions, and attitude [1,2]. With the development of technology and computing applications, communication among peoples are easy and nowadays we have access to many different platforms where we can express our feelings, happiness, sadness, disappointment, thoughts, opinions, news, and knowledge [4]. It is a very good opportunity that people can interact through trendy software programs including Facebook, Twitter, Viber, YouTube, WhatsApp, and Instagram. The role of these social media platforms increases rapidly and millions of people can share and collaborate information, ideas, thoughts, and opinions through these platforms [2].

In the current digital era where most of our communication is through computer-mediated and communication technology. Although plain text messages are very useful there is a lack of expression, emotions, and body language of the sender, the receiver cannot judge the sender emotional state as in the case of face-to-face communication, so there is a large number of chances for misunderstanding between sender and receiver especially in computer-mediated communication (CMC) [5]. Therefore, it is a need of how we express our emotions and facial expressions just as in face-to-face expression. To address this problem, communicators need some non-verbal cues, symbols, pictorial or graphical representation. For this purpose, the three most used tools have been created over the last three decades: emoji, sticker, and emoticons [2].

Emoticons are the graphical representation of facial expressions or non-verbal surrogates [3] Emoticons are the combination of two words “emotion” and “icon”. It can be produced by letters, punctuation marks, ASCII codes, and pictograms written in computer-mediated communication. The use of emoticons along text makes the correct interpolation of the nature of the message. The receivers can easily understand the nature, mood, and direction of the messages along with emoticons [5]. Moreover, an Emoticon can also soften the negativity of message and deliver the correct direction.

The use of emoticons, emojis, and stickers have been used in online communication for many years and become a part of different forms of computer-mediated communications (CMCs), with a rapid increase rate. These non-verbal cues are used to overcome the lack of personalization in CMC and offer more flexibility to the people for exchanging information [6]. Emoticons help in time-saving. The user just has to select the emoticon according to their emotion and send it, without typing anything which saves the time of both sender and receiver. According to a study in [13], emoticons are

mostly used with friends in informal conversations rather than formal writings with strangers.

Furthermore, the icons are known to be the culturicon. By the term culturicon, the combination of two words “cultural” and “icon”, that represent a cultural-based expression. Culturicon differs from emoticons in such a way that emoticons are used in computer-mediated communication for expressing someone's feelings, emotions, happiness, sadness, disappointment, thoughts, opinions, news, and knowledge while the culturicon is used for expressing something related to the culture in computer-mediated communication (CMC). In this paper, we focused on the usage of emoticons from a cultural perspective. By the use of emoticons from a cultural perspective, it helps the users to get more knowledge and information about other cultures. The objective of the proposed study is to examine the available emoticons in the culture domain and to estimate the demand for culturicon in computer-mediated communication (CMC).

Research Problem

Emoticons are graphical representations of facial expressions and are frequently used in computer-mediated communication. These are widely used in digital communication. Emoticons used are increased by people belonging to different ages, cultures, and graphical regions. In the current era with the evolution of smart technology, emoticons are replacing the use of actual words or letters in communications. Pakistan is an Asian country where many people are unable to take high education and it is very difficult for them to communicate in a clear way using textual way, in such case emoticons can be a very useful communicational source. Furthermore, it is necessary to examine that how much percent of the emoticons fulfilled the need for culture description. The frequency of using emoticons in computer-mediated communication, understanding its actual meaning, use, and demand of culturicon for the Pakistani nation need to be analyzed for better and effective communication.

Literature Review

Since the stone age, human beings were not educated and lived in caves and communicated with each other through signs, stone carvings, hieroglyphs, and symbols to express their emotions and deliver their information [11]. In the evolution of language, different types of symbols have been used for expressing thoughts and ideas. In Lasco-France about 17300 years ago the emoticons were used in paintings through which human beings were able to understand meanings, information and create sense and view the world. In 1648 Robert Herrick in his poem saying (upon my ruins (smiling yet :)) in which there is an unintentional printing mistake in the printing process.

Later in 1862, another same mistake has been done that the transcript of Abraham Lincoln 's printed by the New York Times which include the wink face. Traced back to 1887, Ambrose Bierce who was a critic wrote an essay titled “tongue in cheek”, in this

essay he used certain punctuation marks to employ to convey irony and humor. In April of 1857, The National Telegraphic Review and Operators Guide presented the use of the Morse alphabet of number 73 to express the “love and kisses” and later added into the expression “with respect”. In 1908 Manual Dodge showed that expression by the use of the number 88. Another prototype of emoticon is “typographical art” which was published on March 30, 1881, by the U.S. satirical magazine Puck, were proposed at the time when people use typewriters, and computers had not been invented yet. Ambrose Bierce in 1912 proposed a separate way of using punctuation in a sentence, by initiating a “period that chuckles”, or a sign that “laughs” and extracting the \ / characters as a token of the smile. These tokens or signs were later added into ironic sentences. In 1862 Victor Hugo a writer delivered a telegram to his publisher for asking about the selling of his new book Les Miserable, his telegram contain a single character,?, and a reply from his publisher is also a single character, !. One of the other prototypes of emoticon is the yellow “smiley face” created by the artist Harvey Ball in 1963. These signs are designed on the request of an insurance company which was widely used on buttons, desk cards, and posters, and these yellow face “smiley” with two dots and an inverted arch has become widely used in today’s graphic emoticons. These are created for a campaign that aimed to motivate and raise the spirit of employees for that particular company. As emoticons gained popularity in the early 1990s, so according to Wei, the first version of emoticon was presented in an article of the “reader Digest” in 1967 [1].

Although some suggest that the first emoticon was proposed in 1982 by Scott Fahlman, a computer science professor at the University of Carnegie Mellon bulletin board, when he posted a “:-)”, the first smiley face consist of smiling eyes, nose, and mouth [6]. The origin of anything did not arise from a single person or source, as there is a more complex story behind any creation and the same is that for the emoticon. There is a more complex story behind the invention of emoticons and Scott Fahlman is considered as the inventor of emoticon applications, firstly used as the text-based and then developed graphic icons.

With the development of technology, the internet user growing rapidly. Modern technology has changed the pattern of human life to become more modern and easier, as in terms of communication there are no longer any difficulties, anyone can communicate at any time and from anywhere with anyone else without thinking of the long-distance and time limit. Through these technologies, people communicate with each other verbally or non-verbally. Most people used symbols when they express their feelings to someone person. These symbols are emoticons. Emoticons are the symbols or graphical representations of facial expressions to express their feelings in online communication [14]. The popularity of using emoticons has attracted more researchers and made it easier for people to communicate and overcome the misunderstanding or confusion that may exist during computer-mediated communication. Due to the frequent use of emoticons, the term emoticon had been added to the Oxford Dictionary as an official internet lingo in 2001 [1]. Emoticons are divided into four categories, these

are ASCII symbols (ASCIIS), Local Upload Images (LUI), Preload Dynamic Images (PDI), and Preload Static Images (PSI). ASCIIS are the emoticons that can be created through the combination of keyboard character. The user must know about this combination for creating it. Local Upload Images (LUI) are the images that are uploaded by the user in an application, users are free to upload any image and can be used as an emoticon. Preload Static Images (PSI) are the cartoons images that are created by professionals and by default added in the application. The user just has to select it. Preload Dynamic Images (PDI) are the animations or short videos and same as the PSI but the difference is that the user needs to see the animation or video before using it, to know the exact meaning of that PDI, as it is a short video or animation while PSI is the static images where the user knows the exact meaning of images just by looking at that [5].

Methodology

A quantitative research methodology is adopted for conducting a proposed study. The survey is conducted for sample data collection. The population of the study consisted of students, teachers, and clerks above the age of 15. The targeted population is people of Pakistan, province Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, District Hazara, mainly Haripur, Mansehra, and Abbottabad education sectors. The education sectors include Government Post Graduate College for Women Haripur, University of Haripur, Hazara University Mansehra, Government Post Graduate College for boys, Government Degree College Khanpur, RITE (Female) Abbottabad, and some others.

A total of 312 people participated in this survey. The participants consisted of 252 females (80.8%) and 60 males (19.2%). The Likert scale is used for collecting research questions and written as a 5-point scale ranging from “Strongly Agree” on one end to “Strongly Disagree”. While on the other hand, ranging from “Agree” on one end to “Disagree”. The middle point is “Neutral”. This is a suitable scale for my research. The participants know about the aims and objectives of the questionnaire and also their response is voluntary.

An online questionnaire is used for data collection in my research. As in this pandemic condition, were not able to distribute the questionnaire by me. Therefore, I have used google forms for data collection. I have uploaded the questionnaire on google forms and data is collected, the forms are linked to google sheets so that the responses got from participants are automatically stored in google sheets. The data collected from the google sheet is then stored and analyzed for the conclusion. The questionnaire includes demographic section and research question sections which are based on the aim and objective of the research. During the survey, the participants have been assumed that their personal information and answers would not be used for any other purposes and their security would be the priority.

As the questionnaire has been distributed through online google forms. The responses were received in the time domain from 23/04/2021 to 03/06/2021. Many of the respondents gave feedback that it was interesting for them to participate in this online

survey. Hence 312 respondents participated in the survey and show their interest, and filled out the questionnaire positively.

Result Discussion

The parameters used for the survey involves people belonging to different age, gender, institute, professions, different level of familiarity with smartphone technology, and widely used applications for communication. The questionnaire is filled with a total of 312 respondents and the results of the questionnaire are analyzed. Based on people responses, results are calculated and categorized into three sections i.e., demographic section, basic information section, and emoticons for Pakistani culture. The demographic section includes the age, gender, and occupation of respondents. Whereas, the basic information regarding participants includes which type of phone they used, how much time they used, which application they prefer most, and the most important is to analyze how much they know about emoticons and their usage.

Demographic Parameters

The respondents' profiles indicate that 60.9% are in the range of 18-25 years old (190 persons), 21.2% are in the range of 26-35 years old (66 persons), 11.5% are in the range of less or equal to 18 years old (36 persons), containing the teenagers, 4.8% are in the range of 36-45 years old (15 persons), and 1.6% are in the range of 46-55 years old (5 persons) as represented in Figure 1.

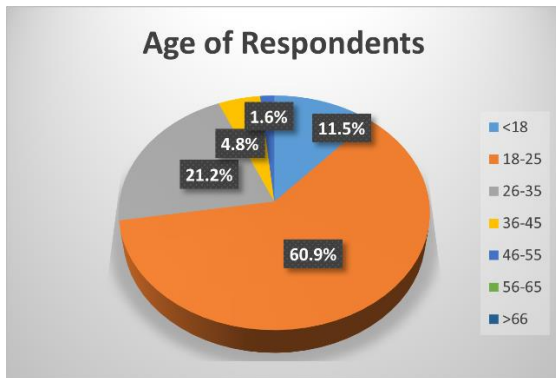


Figure 1: Age of Respondents

The respondents in the demographic section of gender indicate that the total participants of 81% are female and the total participants of 19% are male as described in Figure 2. The total sample size of the participants contains 252 females and 60 males. As the number of female participants is much higher than that of male respondents. This is due to the type of institute selected, as the participants are more of female's institute.

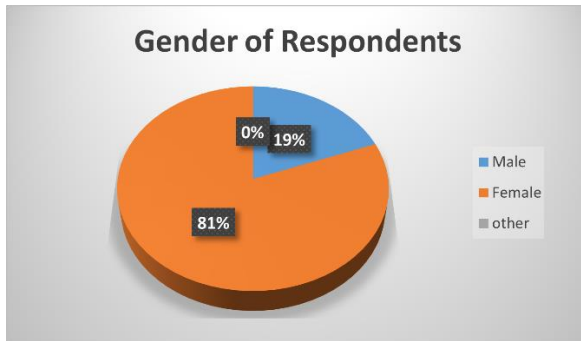


Figure 2: Gender of Respondents

Whereas Figure 3 shows the participants belong to different departments, some of them are students, some are teachers, clerks and some of them are others than that groups. The total sample size of participants contains 72% are students, 20% are teachers and 3% are clerks of different institutes. The 5% of participants are other than these groups which include students who currently completed their education and a few are housewives.

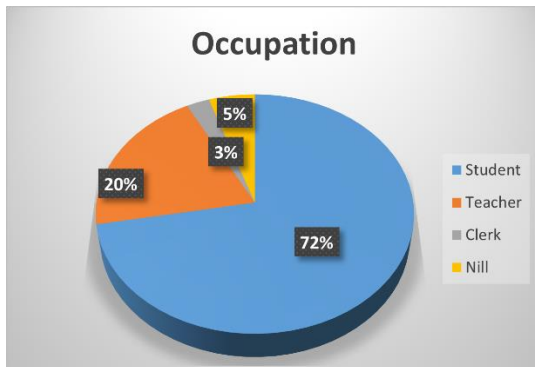


Figure 3: Occupation of Respondents

Basic Information Parameters

Basic information's regarding participants that which type of phone they used, how much time they used, which application they prefer most and the important is how much they know about emoticons and their usage are also analyzed.

Participants' responses show that they have different types of smartphones in use. The total sample size of participants shows that 85% are using an android phone, 6% participants are using iPhone, 1% are using blackberry and 8% are using some other model of the smartphone as presented in Figure 4.

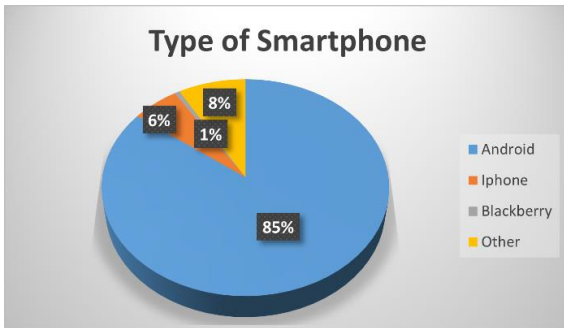


Figure 4: Types of Smartphones

Based on the type of application software used for communication, the analysis results in Figure 5 show that 93% of people used WhatsApp, 2% used Facebook, 1% used IMO, and 4% tick other for the application that was not listed in the options of question. Furthermore, due to unlimited facilities in the smartphone, most people spend a large period using it.

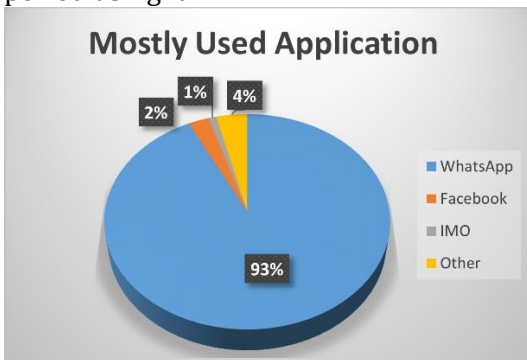


Figure 5: Mostly Used Application

The participants are also asked about the average time they spent with a smartphone. Results in Figure 6 show that the respondents answer to this question that 55% of people spend 2 to 4 hours per day, 26% of participants spend 5 to 7 hours per day, 11% of respondents spend 8 to 10 hours per day and 8% participants spend 11 to 13 hours per day in online communication with others.



Figure 6: Time Spent

Moreover, it is very important to analyze the results of emoticon use in terms of familiarity by users, frequency of use, time-saving, enjoyment, expressing emotions, conveying the exact meaning of communication, and as an effective communicational source. The results of corresponding parameters are described in Figures respectively.

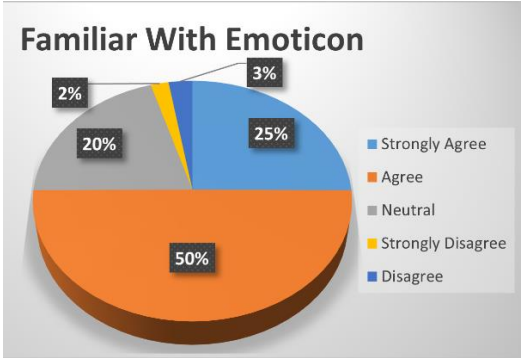


Figure 7: Familiar with Emoticon

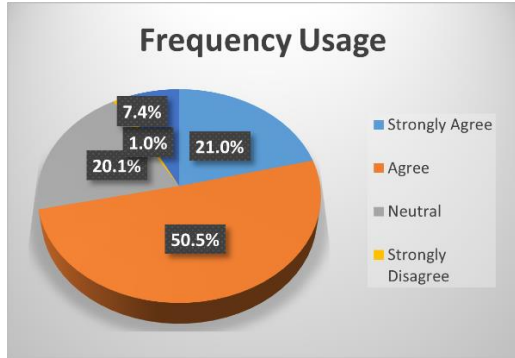


Figure 8: Frequency usage

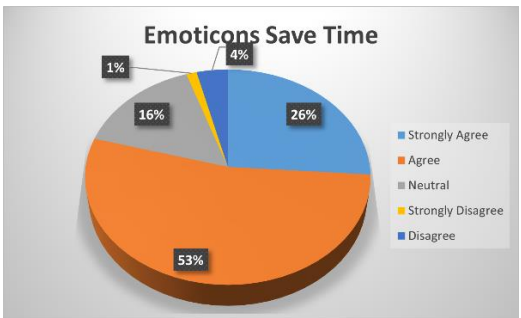


Figure 9: Emoticons save time

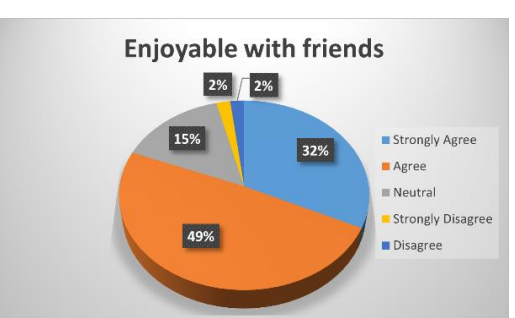


Figure 10: Enjoyable with Friends

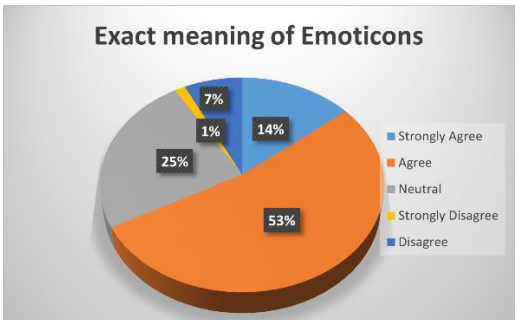


Figure 11: Exact meaning of Emoticons

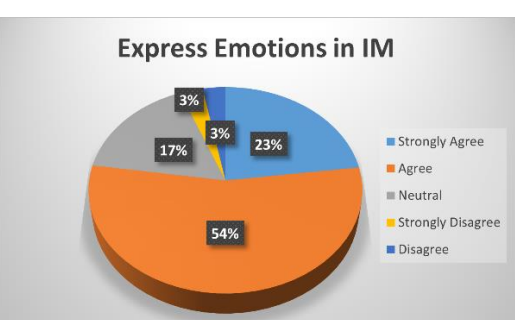


Figure 12: Express Emotions in IM

Expressing culture of Pakistan

The main aim of the proposed study is to analyze the use and need of emojis for representing Pakistani culture. The first question to this section is that emoticons are an effective way of expressing the culture of Pakistan. To answer this question, the participants show 37% agree, 9% strongly agree, 31% neutral, 19% disagree and 4% strongly disagree. The total sample shows that 40% agreed that emoticons are the effective way for expressing the culture of Pakistan while 31% of participants may not think that emoticons are the effective way for expressing the culture of Pakistan. The other question is asked to participants about the usage of emoticons to help in introducing the culture of Pakistan. The results are shown in the figure, 33% Strongly agree, 30% agree, 25% neutral, 7% strongly disagree, and 5% disagree. The results in Figure 13 and 14 show that the emoticons that are created based on Pakistani culture could be beneficial, useful, and help in introducing Pakistan's culture during online communication by using it in their conversations.

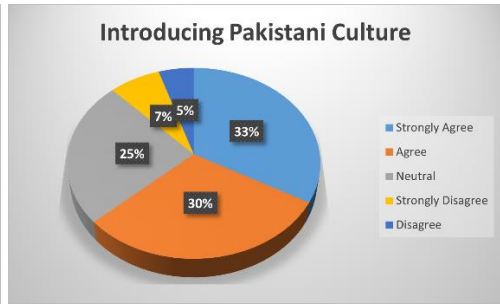
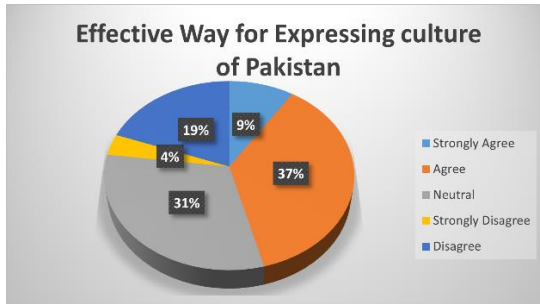


Figure 13: Way for expressing culture

Figure 14: Pakistani Culture

Conclusion

The objective of this study is to investigate the usage of emoticons, examine the use and place of language change into emoticons and determine how people interpret and understand the exact meaning of emoticons. The research is conducted to investigate and explore the need for a culturicon among Pakistan's KPK Hazara division of different institutes. The respondents took participate in the survey. This survey covers up the large set of research papers published after 2015 till now. Based on the literature review and survey questionnaire the result has been drawn that there is a lot of need for an emoticon that were based on the culture and these emoticons are used in computer-mediated communication, where these will know as the culturicon. These findings are supported by the literature review and responses of the respondents.

Based on the findings of the survey questionnaire, found that emoticons are mostly used with friends for an emotional exchange instead of using words. Moreover, most people think that they know the exact meaning of emoticons while they are using them. The prime objective's responses show that the emoticon is mostly used for expressing the

culture and there is a need for culturicon that has to be recognized and implemented in CMC. These responses are categorized as the culture into games, national dress, foods, and festivals. These emoticons are a necessary element to improve daily communication from a cultural perspective. These cultural-based emoticons have to need to be implemented in the form of culture and utilized in CMC. Culturicon can improve and foster the self-esteem of culture among the different peoples having different cultural backgrounds.

In the future, the research will be extended by doing work to hold on creating the set of dynamic character emoticons that reflect the culture of Pakistan.

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