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Emoticon Use in Mobile Communications :-)

Robert A. Nelson
Air Force Test Center, USA

Chad C. Tossell
United States Air Force Academy, USA

Philip Kortum
Rice University, USA

INTRODUCTION

Emoticons are defined as graphical representations of facial expressions used in text- based messages (Rezabek & Cochenouer, 1998). They were first introduced at Carnegie Mellon University in 1982 by Scott Fahlman in order to help his students identify portions of electronic text that he meant as a joke in his computer science course. Since then, emoticons have steadily increased in use and complexity as computer-mediated communication has become more pervasive. Mobile technologies, in particular, have allowed individuals to communicate electronically with their social network in a plethora of locations, whenever they have an opportunity, and on devices that fit into most pockets. What once started as basic facial expressions, such as the smiley :) and frowny :(, emoticons now encompass a wide variety of expressions that number in the hundreds (Gil, 2014). Although originally displayed using letters and punctuation marks, technological advances have allowed modern emoticons to also be selected and displayed as images. Additionally, standard word processing software systems, such as Microsoft Word, recognize emoticons in text when typed and automatically changes them to more illustrative icons (i.e., changing :) to ☺ without any user actions). The increased diversity in emoticons today has enriched mobile communication by allowing individuals to insert important contextual and emotional information which might otherwise be lost.

OVERVIEW

This chapter describes the use of emoticons in a number of different mediums including social networking (Park et al., 2013), instant messaging (Garrison et al., 2011), and text messaging (Tossell et al., 2012), with an emphasis on the use of emoticons in the mobile context. We also examine some of the factors that contribute to the variance of use in these domains, such as gender (Wolf, 2000) and culture (Park et al., 2013). Finally, we touch on the use of emoticons in other fields of research, such as linguistics, and provide recommendations for future research in this area.

CURRENT SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE IN EMOTICONS

Some of the earliest research on emoticons was done by Rezabek & Cochenour (1998) and Wolf (2000). Their work was instrumental in developing a foundation and direction for future research in functional uses of emoticons and gender differences respectively. Since then, some of the most

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important work in this area has been done by Walther and D'Addario (2001), Huffaker and Calvert (2005), and Derks and his colleagues (2007, 2008a, 2008b). Derks, Fischer, and Bos (2008) conducted an extensive review of emoticons which was later updated (Jibril & Abdullah, 2013). Research specific to mobile space was conducted by Tossell and his colleagues (2012) examining actual emoticon use that was telemetrically obtained from users in the field. They focused on both overall use in text messages as well as gender differences building upon research from previous technologies.

Beyond these seminal reports and reviews, the studies conducted on emoticons are as sundry as the types of emoticons that can be used in electronic messages (Table 1). Researchers from linguistics, psychology, computer science, and communications have all contributed to the extant knowledge of emoticon use across technologies. Emoticon use has been studied across a wide range of media, including instant messaging (Garrison, 2011), Facebook (Wei, 2012), Twitter (Park, 2011), Email (Rezabek & Cochenouer, 1998), and Weblogs (Huffaker & Calvert, 2005; Wolf, 2000). It should be noted that there are documented differences across cultures in the use of emoticons. One particularly noteworthy difference is that eastern cultures tend to use non-rotated emoticon representations like (^o^), rather than the rotated versions like :-) typically used in the western world. Additionally, non-latin characters appear to be used more in eastern cultures to allow for increased complexity (see some of the examples in Table 1).

FUNCTIONAL USE OF EMOTICONS

As mobile communication platforms such as smartphones become more standard, important information that is available in face-to-face (F2F) communication through facial expression and body language (see Williams, 1977 for a review) is absent. This change could have an effect on the connectedness of groups and contribute to misunderstanding in communications. Consequently, research on emoticons has largely been dedicated to determining whether emoticons can provide the necessary socio-emotional context required for meaningful communication.

In general, researchers such as Derks et al. (2008), Walther and D'addario (2001), and Lo (2008) have found that emoticons are useful to this end. These simple icons convey social and emotional cues that are otherwise not available in electronic communications (see Jibril & Abdullah, 2013 for a review). In F2F, these cues are critical for proper interpretation of the message, understanding intent, perceiving emotion, and a number of other reasons (e.g., Argyle, 2013). Before emoticons were used, this information was largely lost in electronic communications. After

Table 1. Examples of emoticons

Simple and Complex Emoticon Examples across Cultures					
:), :-), :],	Smile	_(._.)_	Respect	¯_(ツ)_/¯	Shrug
:(, :-(, :[	Frown	:-P	Tongue Out	\o/, ヽ(^o^)丿	Cheering
:'(, T_T	Crying	;p	Sarcastic Tongue Out	OTL	Praying
:D, :-D	Big Smile	:/	Frustrated, Annoyed	>:P	Devious
D:, :C	Big Frown	:s	Confused	O.o, :o, O.O, >.<	Surprise, Shock
;-), ^_-	Wink	>:(	Angry	>_<	Troubled
;(, ;-(	Winky Frown	(-_-)zz	Sleeping	:$, -_-;, ・_・;	Embarrassed