

## ***The Significance of Social Media in Communicating Emotions***

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***"Social Media is about Sociology and Psychology more than Technology." - Brian Solis***

### **Abstract**

*The expedition of human beings originates with the birth and follows a long alleyway that traverses various landmarks. For apparent reasons, at each and every instant, human beings are tangled in the process of communication - either intrapersonal or otherwise. The question that arises is can we communicate our emotions through social media? This article tries to answer this question in an objective and comprehensive way. It introduces social media as a means of communicating emotions. It deals with citizen journalism, polymedia, social media and emojis, all used to communicate emotions.*

### **Introduction**

The expedition of human beings originates with the birth and follows a long alleyway that traverses various landmarks. For apparent reasons, at each and every instant, human beings are tangled in the process of communication - either intrapersonal or otherwise. In every walk of life, human beings encounter various situations that encompass emotions. Emotions are a sort of messages that prerequisite a medium to be communicated. It reminds us of Marshall McLuhan's 'the medium is the message' as operational and practical fact.

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Communication is one of the basic features of any given society and human commotion. Indubitably, human beings cannot live and endure without communication - just like the way human beings cannot survive without basic amenities like food, water and shelter. Communication takes place customarily in everyday life.

Beginning with the printing press, technological innovations have enabled various media forms to reach an increasing number of audiences. This mass media has built and preserved a unidirectional connection between a few skilled expert media producers and many inexpert media patrons.

The word 'social' has different connotations- information, communication, communities and collaboration. We should be careful to specify which meaning of the word 'social' we are employing when we talk about social media. Thus, studying social media is in need of social theory and social philosophy. These tools of thought allow us to come to grips with the basic meaning of terms such as sociability, media, society, power, democracy, participation, culture, labour communication, information, the public sphere, the private realm etc. that are often employed when discussing social media but often poorly understood.

Based on the very fact that they stockpile and diffuse human knowledge that originates in social relations in society, all computing systems and associated web applications, over all forms of media can be considered as social - objectification of human social affairs and society. Whenever you use a computing system or medium, you take an account of objectified knowledge that is the outcome of social relations. However, direct communication between humans is not supported by all computing systems because such communication requires at least two humans to mutually exchange symbols that are construed as being momentous. Twitter and Facebook have inbuilt communication features that are frequently used (mail system, walls of comments, forums etc), whereas Flipkart mainly provides information about books and other goods one can buy; it is not primarily a tool of information. In this way, each and every platform of social media is meant for a specific purpose.

The question that arises here is can we communicate our emotions through social media? With the objective of answering this question in a comprehensive way, this chapter has been written to introduce social media as a means of communicating emotions. Let's begin the topic by introducing the concept of citizen journalism to further appreciate the role of social media in communicating emotions.

### **Citizen Journalism**

Citizen journalism refers to reporting of the news events by members of the society using the Internet to spread information (Anita Fetzer, Elda Weizman, Lawrence N Berlin, 2015: 118). In this form of journalism, reporting of facts and news that is largely ignored by large media companies is usually undertaken in artless expressions. Such a form of journalism has personal websites, blogs, microblogs, social media, and so on, as its platforms. Certain types of citizen journalism, by offering substitute analysis, also act as a check on the reporting of bigger news outlets.

Citizen journalism is known by many names. There is some touch to these usages, but all spin around online publishing and the distribution of information by members of the public as follows:

- Participatory journalism;
- Grassroots media;
- Distributed journalism;
- Networked journalism;
- Personal publishing;
- Open-source journalism;
- Indymedia;
- Citizen media;
- Guerrilla journalism;
- Hyperlocal journalism;
- Collaborative citizen journalism (CCJ);
- Stand-alone journalism;
- Bottom-up journalism; and
- Non-media journalism.

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that they consider more appropriate, the choice of medium acquires emotional intent in this milieu. As the selection of platform becomes progressively an issue of individual agency, users are held accountable for their choices. Indubitably, in this setting, it is conceivable to contend that polymedia highlight *the moral weight of communication (Ibid)*.

#### **Social media vs emotions**

People around the world use social network sites such as Twitter or Facebook to share messages on any topic - including emotionally charged and scholastically significant messages.

In a study carried out in the U.S., the findings reveal one particular fact that social media has prominence in the lives of US adolescents. Through online sites, they found the openings to share and express their emotions. It has been vastly studied that adolescents use social media to regulate their emotions. The proven positive results have been exposed among other non-participants to boost up their positive emotions or diminish negative emotions. This study definitely has contributed to our understanding of how adolescents engage in emotion regulation through social media.

*Attachment theory*<sup>3</sup> postulates that individuals organise their sense of self-worth and beliefs about others in stable ways. From the other end, a more dynamic *intentional theory*<sup>4</sup> posits that beliefs about the self and others remain independent of one another. In the case of social media vs. emotions, how youngsters integrate Facebook into their lives were identified to decide if they used social media as a tool for self-expression or for participating in social discourse. Findings of surveys point out that beliefs of the youth like desires, faiths, and reported actions amalgamated around two strong, independent intentional models - self, and other-focused models; each explained a fairly large percentage of alteration in the intensity with which adolescents used Facebook. The findings revealed the fact that adolescents can easily use social media to broaden their participation in society.

Beyond doubt, social media has changed the way we interact, build personal relationships, and communicate emotions. Today, everyone, who has access to the Internet, is exploring new ways to

utilise social media networks such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Pinterest, Instagram and Google+ to create relationships with their beloved. Though, in the beginning, the social media tools seemed like nothing more than a place to chinwag with friends, they have gone beyond that.

Social media in the contemporary world is optical, portable, individual, powerful, prompt and also irrevocable. Social media refers to the run-through of engaging in an interactive conversation on the web, and for a brand it can mean building a community, sharing personal feelings and emotions. Various platforms have been provided for this to happen viz. blogs; online newsroom; social networking sites such as Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter; reviews; and comments. The positioning of info on these sites unlocks the opening of a discussion of engagement and interactions - influencing opinion and distributing information by means of the power of social sharing.

Present-day statistics reveal that there are millions of users for each and every social media site, apart from a million blogs in presence. It is obvious why people are dedicating more time and resources to social media and influencing online conversation. One of the key reasons for this is sharing emotions. Social media is the chauffeur behind the social connections who helps us to get in touch with old friends and maintain relationships with loved ones on the other side of the world or just down the road. As it is rightly said, social media acquaintances are about partaking and propagating one's life online - conversing with friends and strangers, but significantly *in an always-on and always-connected manner*.

The basic idea behind any social networking site centres on making the world more open and connected. Of course, such an attempt to get everyone in the online world is splendid. Twitter users tweet 400 million times a day, whereas Facebook processes over 500 terabytes of new data every single day (Dhiraj Murthy & Sawyer A. Bowman, 2014: 1-12).

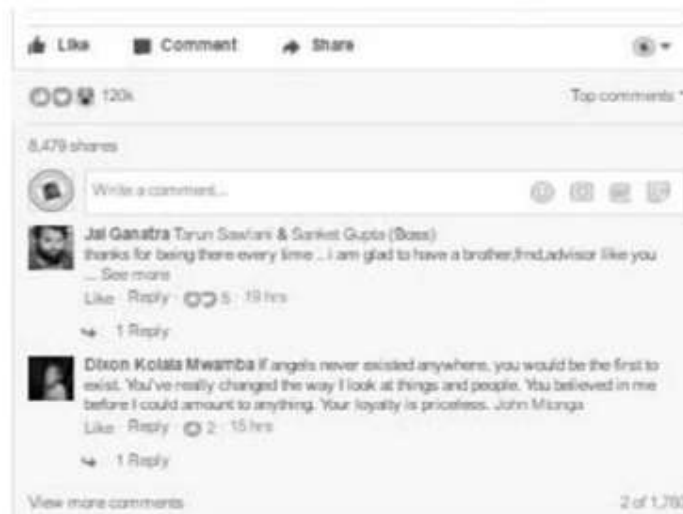
The world of social media is strident. In brief, for me, it's a wonder of wonders. The Internet has become such an ingrained and important part of our everyday lives that it has a very tangible

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detrimental effect on our wellbeing. Nevertheless, recent psychological research revealed that connection via social media can also have adverse effects on our levels of happiness. Profiles often portray an idealised, highly considered version of one's true self, which can engender feelings of insufficiency amongst those looking on. The high spots of an acquaintance's life and breakthroughs might seem a long way off to many which can make them sense as if they are missing out or being lingering. In this respect, social networks can act as a painful echo against which we instinctively measure ourselves and determine our own sense of worth. They are also an aide-mémoire of the welfares of true social collaboration.

*A picture is worth a thousand words*, an English idiom, is most suitable in the case of social media. Social media posts such as the one illustrated in Fig 1 gives us a thought and thereby compel us to react with various emotions in the form of comments. The instigation of a single comment against a particular post would result in a debate - a journey of an interpersonal, group and ultimately mass communication of emotional sharing.





**Fig 1 An Illustration of Facebook Post**  
(Source: Personal Facebook Wall of the Author)

### Emojis and emotions

As a vibrant set of rules and regulations, *emojis*<sup>5</sup> (See Fig 2) are not considered as a true language of communication. Nevertheless, due to their widespread popularity over the social media platforms, suppleness and distinctiveness, the communicative abilities of emojis are fortified. Another important characteristic about emojis is - they are not bound by linguistic rules; so, they engage a user in considering the vast potential emojis have in communication.



**Fig 2 Emojis to Convey Various Emotions**  
(Source: <http://www.socialmediatoday.com/>)

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Emojis are capable of expressing our feelings, without even communicating a single word. Of course, it is true that the interpretation of the emoji rests completely in the mind of the receiver. Exchange of emojis conveys different meanings in different situations. Thus, the understanding of an emoji is exclusively flexible - depending on various factors such as who is sending it and in what context.

Undeniably, considering the fact that usage of emojis is too dynamic, in a sense, that the meanings of emojis are so flexible, not just from person-to-person but also text-to-text, there is a possibility of miscommunication. However, if the interaction between the participants is cordial and their understanding of using emojis in a suitable manner is adequate, there would not be any miscommunication. This idea is suggested by the definition of miscommunication, which bases the success of the communication on whether the other person comprehends exactly what the sender meant to say.

In order to communicate through text messaging with various types of people, we adopt a different style that best suits each category of people - each social role requires that we act differently. This is required in the realm of relationship. Such actions are called emotion work. In this milieu, it is very much essential to understand that the unique flexibility of emojis makes them impeccably appropriate to be tools for this emotion work.

Apart from conveying a great deal, emojis also convey a meaning that the receiver wants it to be. In this way, emojis are best suited to convey emotions. The very objective of any communication is to make the conversation successful.

In the case of conveying emotions, the emojis, beyond doubt, play a vital role. For this idea to make sense, it is important to recognize that emojis are not pictograms. They do not represent actual objects or facial expressions of a sender. In other words, people are not actually *laughing with tears* when that emoji is sent in response to a joke, nor are they actually indicating a real clap when they text the clap emoji in response to a conquering story. Instead, emojis are *ideograms*<sup>6</sup>, representing an idea of some sort. For example, in the above case, *the laughing with tears* emoji represents finding humour in something, and a clap emoji represents



congratulating the winner.

In view of the above, the meaning of an emoji is supple from person to person and text to text. The only factual agreement surrounding emojis is that they convey positive emotion of some kind - such positivity might construe into a specific context for a particular relationship.

Conversely, there is also negativity associated with emojis. In situations for conveying negative effect, adding an emoji to a negative message actually makes the message seem less negative. In an experiment, a message was rated as negative by almost everyone who saw it, whereas the same message with an emoji suddenly lost its significance turned into a less negative. This result suggests that emojis best represent positive emotions rather than negative emotions.

In view of the above, it is always better to restrain using emojis while communicating negative emotions. Emojis could help us engage in emotion-related work, and thereby maintaining and perchance constructing social relationships. Generating shared meanings, or inside jokes turns out to be one of the probable ways. For example, consider thinking emoji as shown in Fig 3 to denote thinking. A few months back, we family members were watching a cartoon show *Doremon* on television. In that show, a bubble-like shape surfaces as shown in Fig 3 from the nose of one of the characters of the show 'Jiyan'. That made us laugh, forgetting that someone has used that emoji in a group to mean thinking.



**Fig 3 Think Emoji**

(Source: <https://encrypted-tbn0.gstatic.com/images?>)

The meaning of the 'thinking' emoji among our family associates is very different from the meaning of the thinking emoji in common practice. Nevertheless, the purpose is the same.

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There is no doubt that understanding the role that emojis play in the construction of social relationships will be fundamental to developing technologies that help better support to human communication in expressing emotions.

#### **Conclusion**

Ever since Social Media emerged as a form of mass communication, the masses are taking a keen advantage of this media. A new concept in journalism called citizen journalism has emerged out of social media. Without any doubt, social media plays a significant role in communicating various emotions.

#### **References**

- 1 A word coined by Dr. Suman Kumar Kasturi to indicate the mass media that works in conjunction with satellite communications and its technology.
- 2 Polymedia is an anthropological notion that was introduced by Daniel Miller and Mirca Madianou in recognition of the way most people today use a wide variety of communication media.
- 3 John Bowlby first coined the term, attachment theory, as a result of his studies involving the developmental psychology of children from various backgrounds. Attachment theory states that a strong emotional and physical attachment to at least one primary caregiver is critical to personal development.
- 4 The intentional theory is developed by Daniel Dennett. It is in the first place an analysis of the meanings of such everyday mentalistic terms as 'believe,' 'desire,' 'expect,' 'decide,' and 'intend,' the terms of 'folk psychology'.
- 5 An emoji is a visual representation of an emotion, object or symbol. Emoji are modern communication apps such as your smartphone's text messaging or social networking apps such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Snapchat.
- 6 An ideogram or ideograph is a graphic symbol that represents an idea or concept, independent of any particular language, and specific words or phrases.

#### **Further References**

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