Chapter 5
Geographies of Semiotics in Social Mediasphere in India

Abstract  We live in a world of signs and symbols. Deep meanings are often connoted through signs and symbols. Semiotics is the study of signs and symbols and emoticons/emoji are features that are used in graphical or pictorial representations in mundane expressions. The use of emoji across the platforms is inevitable and users used emoji very purposefully to express them or it works as a bridge between senders and receivers. Emoji facilitates digital language wherein users often express themselves accordingly. Emoji/emoticons are not mere a sign or symbol rather it represents spatial connotations between senders and receivers in varied expressions when two persons exchange greetings, anguish, sorrow, melancholy, pain, happiness, etc. This chapter is about to explore the meaning, pattern and nature of semiotics in social media.

Keywords  Signs · Symbols · Semiotics · Emoticons · Language · Communication

5.1 Introduction

Social media is a communication tool and having inbuilt semiotics features that facilitates the users to communicate with each other through signs and symbols, to exchange ideas, thoughts, opinions and feelings, whatever. Semiotics/emoticons played an important role in the process of communication on social media. There is a word limit (in case of Twitter or else when words are unable to express the feelings and expressions) through which one can’t express their feelings. Semiotics provides that scope through which the users can express their mood, feelings, body language, gesture and so on. ‘Factual information about an event to which people are reacting can be obtained from different types of (geo-) sensors, official authorities, or the public press, but not the emotional or attitudinal impact of events on people’ (Hauthal et al. 2019). Social media facilitates such spatiality where an emoji is enough to express them even without texts. These emotions/emoji have a range of features of living and non-living characteristics. These emojis often touch emotional values that texts are often unable to express or in other words when words are unable to express or not supportive or not allowed, in such conditions expression through emoticons/emoji found as panacea.
Emoticons/emoji emerged as digital languages in the information age what we believed that in the past when there were no languages, emoji/emoticons was the medium between them to be expressed. The use of emoji was not restricted to communication between two persons rather it was beyond that when two societies communicated with each other, and as consequences, emoji shaped the spatiality of civilizations. The spatiality of civilizations carries the same connotations in different names, race, caste, tribe, religions, culture and traditions.

5.2 Mapping Semiotics

Semiotic is a term broadly defined as the study of different signs conveyed through different channels and media. The term semiotics traced from ancient Greek formulations of semioticians, as symptom or sign. ‘In modern history, semiotics have been taken up in philosophy, literary, and cultural studies, language and literacy studies, psychology, and even biology’ (Prior 2014). Geography too accommodates signs and symbols to understand the spatial features. In other words, emoticons are spatial in nature where each emoticon tenders own spatial meanings.

5.2.1 Contours of Signs in Semiotic Theory

The semiotics were subdivided into pure, descriptive and applied areas. Different writers gave different meanings of semiotics, as Sebeok (2001) states it as ‘the antique doctrine of signs’. Halliday and Hasan (1985) state it as ‘the study of sign systems’. Human beings to represent their feelings, emotions to the world use signs and symbols. The major contributor in the semiotics studies is Charles Pierce (classification of sign),¹ Morris (the scope of semiotic theory),² Ferdinand de Saussure (Semiology and linguistics).³ Charles Pierce and Saussure were referred to as the founders of the semiology. The existence of semiotics is related to the process of meaning-making.

¹Charles Sanders Peirce found the term semiosis which mean an action, or influence, which is, or involves, a cooperation of three subjects—such as a sign, its object, and its interpretant. This tirade further developed as: (1) speculative grammar, (2) logical critics, and (3) speculative rhetoric.
²Charles Morris extended the semiosis/semiotics as the relation between the sign and science, to given a solid surface where semiotics established as scientific meaning. He had given another lease of life to the study of ‘the sign’.
³Ferdinand de Saussure was the actual architect of semiology and founder of linguistics of twentieth century. Along with Pierce and Morris, Saussure carries forward the study of semiotics.
5.2.2 The Saussurean Semiotics

In Saussurean semiotics the sign had the central part that consisted of signifier and signified. The signifier is a physical object while the signified is the mental state or meaning. Charles Pierce had a triadic concept of the sign, objects (conceptual or material), represent men’s (sign-vehicles) and interpretations (in mind of recipients) (Table 5.1). Pierce defines a sign that stands for something in some respect, observed by Prior (2014).

Roland Barthes (1915–1980) another semiotician contributed to semiotic studies of myth, theology, literature and narrative. He became famous for semiotics of various types of visual communication and semiotic model of signification. Barthes (1977) two orders of signification derive from the Saussurean model of signifier and signified.

- Denotation: The word denotation ‘to mark along with’. The literal meaning of this is sign. The objectified meaning which can be recognized and identified. It involves symbolic, historic and emotional matters. For example, a crow denotes a bird or a type of bird.
- Connotation: Connotative meaning is dependent on the denotative level. Connotative meaning derives from symbolic level. A sign can be interpreted by the reader connotatively which goes beyond the literal meaning (denotative).

Both denotation and connotation shaped the spatiality where an individual conceived, perceived and lived with such images (Table 5.2). An image of a rose (a symbol) connotes a love. A sign can make sense only with the background knowledge of culturally based codes. In a survey 2017–2018, around 58.52% used platforms to share something unlike other cultural traits that embedded in daily lives while

| Table 5.1 Pierce’s Triadic Matrix of semiotics relations |
|--------------------------------------------------------|
| Semiotics relations | Firstness | Secondness | Thirdness |
| Relation of sign to itself | Qualisign | Sinsign | Legisign (type) |
| Relation of sign to its object | Icon | Index | Symbol |
| Relation of sign to its interpretants | Rheme (term) | Dicent (proposition) | Argument |

Source Based on Moore (1998)

Table 5.2 Comparison of connotation and denotation

| Connotation | Denotation |
|-------------|------------|
| Figurative  | Literal    |
| Signified(s)| Signifier(s)|
| Inferred   | Obvious    |
| Suggests meaning | Describes |
| Realm of myth | Realm of existence |

Source Berger (2004: 17)
41.48% never shared anything on social media though they used it as usual, they do not believe its effective rather taken social media as passive technology (Graph 5.1). The active/passive participation on social media made users take the spatiality in two different ways. The connotation meaning is depending on background knowledge of concepts.

Barthes (1977) clarifies the concept of connotative and denotative in relation with the advertising images. The denotative meaning in advertising images is referred as non-coded iconic message whereas the connotative meaning is referred as coded iconic or symbolic messages. For Barthes (1977, 1980) there is also a third meaning other than denotive and connotative that he discussed in his study of press photographs and advertisements. The semiology of photographs can be understood in spatial contexts.

Barthes’s answer to this question pivots on the unique way that photographs embody time and space. When your camera’s shutter is released, a moment is simultaneously immortalized and gone forever. When we look at a photograph, we are confronted with what Barthes labels the “having-been-there” quality of its contents. It is a testament to the existence of a specific thing in a specific place at a specific time. I can paint your portrait from anywhere in the world, but I can photograph you only when you are in front of my camera. Similarly, a photograph offers a view of the world that you will never have access to except through the photo. You can look but you cannot touch. A photograph can only show the past—but it represents it in such a way that it appears in the present. This paradox lends every photograph a touch of nostalgia or longing.4

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4Ronald Barthes examined a photograph that how photograph carries spatio-temporal identity when both space and time are inseparable from the photograph. For details, https://www.bhphotovideo.com/explora/photography/tips-and-solutions/4-ideas-photographic-writings-roland-barthes. Accessed 20 June 2020.
Barthes advocated that both identity and time are inseparable from any photographs. Along with signs and semiotics, the spatial attributes and time gave other dimensions that are aesthetically, semiotically and spatially.

5.3 Landscapes of Semiotics in Communication

Modern semiotics analysis had been begun by two thinkers—Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913) and Charles Sanders Pierce (1839–1914). Charles Pierce called semiotics the science of signs. ‘Saussure wrote the linguistic sign unites not a thing and a name, but a concept and a sound image a sign, but in current usage the term generally designates only a sound-image’ (Berger 2004: 66–67). Saussure states the components of sign are the signifier (sound image) and the signified (concept). Charles Sanders Pierce had been analysed in three aspects—icon, index and symbolic. We often made rough diagram to illustrate someone when required to map something in order to do further clarification. Such diagrams are considered as symbol in raw shape or sign to identify the same.

In contemporary terms semiotics was applied to every field, to films, media, zoology used as a means of communication to transfer information. Pierce wrote that sign is something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity (Berger 2004). Through semiotics the meanings have been generated and conveyed and it is being used as a language. ‘Ferdinand Saussure write-up language is a system of signs that express ideas, and is therefore comparable to a system of writing, the alphabet of deaf-mutes, symbolic rites, polite formulas, military signals, etc. But it is the most important of all these systems. A science that studies the life of signs within society is conceivable; it would be a part of social psychology and consequently of general psychology; I shall call it semiology’ (Berger 2004: 7) (Table 5.3).

Berger (2004) analysed the television programme Star Trek to understand the signifiers and signified. This is a science fiction series. The science fiction adventure is the ‘signified’ while the signifiers include spaceships, advanced computer technology, strange power and magic/science. Berger (2004) further pointed out that people purchase the right products and assume (or hope) that these products will signify a certain social class, status, lifestyle or what you will. For example, during

| Table 5.3 Saussure’s diagram of a sign |
|----------------------------------------|
| **Sound image** (signifier)            |
| Concept (signified)                    |

*Source* Berger (2004: 8)
COVID-19 Facebook introduced a new emoticon in shape of care (see Fig. 5.2) to create a sense of caring among users. The sign of care indicates an intimate love.

### 5.3.1 Signs and Advertising

Media used for advertising, the signs are lighting, other materials form words and images. Signs such as designs and materials are made for establishment of the market. Signs and symbols used for the establishment of brand, identity because it is easy to remember the symbols or icons. The forms, colour, structure, specific words all made a corporate identity. Advertisements made use of signs to communicate with their target audience. The meaning of advertisements was defined when the story of the advertisement carried out and shapes our experience of reality. Advertisements make a good use of signs, symbols, codes and social myth. The meaning, which the advertisement carries, is the signs of that advertisement that are the linguistics signs (words) and iconic signs (visuals), and non-linguistics signs like graphics.

The brand’s name is created for connotative signification systems for the product. The product acts as a denotative system that allows the customers to identify the product they like to purchase. At a connotative level, the product generates its images and brand value that can be identified by name only. For example, Armani shoes, Gucci: denotatively the name allows us to identify the product. When we say or discuss brands it gives us an overall map in terms of who, where, when and what. That is somehow indicating a specific identity in terms of material culture—a section that is often associated with such connotation.

### 5.3.2 Material Culture

The objects and artefacts also serve signs and symbols. These objects convey a vast system of communication. The way people live can be identified through their lifestyle, their sense of wearing clothes, shoes and their ornaments which they wear or living style, it can identify from where the people belong to. Berger (2004) argues that some of anthropologists study people’s garbage to gain information about their lifestyles.

Culture as a language operates with a system of signs. When it is said about any culture, it can be identified through different images, signs and symbols. Their connotative meanings create pictures of that respective culture. The signifier can have different meanings across different cultures. For e.g. gift in English language means present but in German language means poison or toxic. So the connotative meaning of gift changed with the changes in cultures.
5.3 Landscapes of Semiotics in Communication

| Table 5.4 Misleading signs |
|-----------------------------|
| Area                        | Misleading signs                              |
| Wigs                        | Bald persons with different hair colour       |
| Elevator shoes              | Short persons made taller                     |
| Dyed hair                   | Brunettes become blondes, blondes become redheads and so on |
| Falsies                     | Women with small breast seem to have big ones |
| Imposters                   | Persons pretend to be doctors, lawyers or whatever |
| Impersonation               | Persons pretend to be someone else, steal 'identity' |
| Malingering                 | Persons pretend to be ill                     |
| Theatre                     | Persons pretend to have feelings, beliefs and the like |
| Food                        | Imitation crab, shrimp, lobster and so on     |
| Words                       | White lies told so as not to hurt people      |

Source Berger (2004: 13)

We are always engaged in a process of signification whenever we are in a process of communication. The field of semiotics includes several different projects—mainstream semiotics, interpretative projects, language-centred communication semiotics that studies images, gestures, music and socio-historic semiotics.

5.3.3 Activities and Performance

The body language, gesture, facial expressions, moods all are used as a sign to read people. This was an attempt to find the truthfulness, personalities and values. Actors for performance used facial expression and body language that reveals to their audiences (Table 5.4). Berger (2004) observed that poker players are also concerned with signs. They look for 'tells' (body movements and facial expressions) displayed by their opponents that telegraph information about the strength of their hands or intentions to act.

5.3.4 Music and Sound Effects

Music and sound effects provide certain kinds of emotions. A musical phrase we remember is a signifier and the emotion it generates is signified. As it was stated that the relation between the signifier and signified is arbitrary in nature. Music and sound effects gave the emotional touch to the films and television shows.
The signs lie and mislead too. The above examples are often confused by connotation but further clarify by denotation with respective images.

### 5.3.5 Signs and Truth

Signs were used to tell the truth as well as to lie also. Berger quotes, ‘Umberto Eco defines: semiotics is concerned with everything that can be taken as a sign. A sign is everything that can be taken as significantly substituting for something else. This something else does not necessarily have to exist or to actually be somewhere at the moment in which a sign stands for it. Thus semiotics is in principle, the discipline studying everything that can be used in order to lie. If something cannot be used to tell a lie, conversely it cannot be used to tell the truth; it cannot be used “to tell” at all. I think that the definition of a “theory of the lie” should be taken as a pretty comprehensive program for a general semiotics’ (Berger 2004: 13).

### 5.3.6 Language and Speaking

Language is used for communication, information, ideas, and to establish systems and rules that people learn. There is a grammar for writing and speaking. Saussure distinguished between language and speaking. Language as a social institution made up of rules and convention in a systematic form that enables us to speak. The television programme involves narratives as a language that is understood by the audience because the audience knows the language. The language as a sign and it can be understood from the in-built knowledge that they signify. Sometimes the codes, which were used by the programmer, aren’t the code that we used, in that case that was made as a bad communication. Now, people speak without saying it verbally. Their gestures, facial expressions, posture and many other things speak to those who have knowledge of signs and signifiers.

### 5.4 Social Media and Semiotics

The popularity of social media among users because of the platform allowed semiotics as mediums to express and convey their messages in lucid and clearly within limited words. Social media is embedded with stock of emoticons that help users to use instead of words to express feelings or whatever. The relation between social media and semiotics needs to explore further.
5.4 Social Media and Semiotics

5.4.1 Semiotics Communication Model

Mirsarraf et al. (2017) explains semiotics communication model that was proposed by Roman Jakobson (1960); he reread the Shannon Weaver’s communication model and gave six related elements of communication.

- Context
- Sender
- Receiver
- Message
- Code
- Channel

He explains that the sender transmits a message to the receiver through a channel and this message is expressed in terms of code and referred in terms of context. Jakobson’s semiotic studies focused on how language is used to draw reader attention (Fig. 5.1).

Media content depends on content and meaning. The semiotics analysed the meaning of media. Through semiotics the audience analysed the structure of media messages. Semiotics helps to understand the meaning of the content of the media. Different mediums transmit content in print, sound or pictorial image that the audience can analyse. Media content is polysemic (having multiple meanings for multiple audiences). Social media offers a platform for users to inform themselves and others through their thoughts, opinions, expression and feelings. Users use hashtags or keywords for expressing their ideas. The emotions can be expressed through the use of semiotics/emoticons in social media. The use of semiotics/emoticons as a language-pictorial representation of signs and symbols that shows faces, expressions, animals, objects.

Fig. 5.1 Jakobson’s model of communication space (Source Mirsarraf et al. 2017: 2)
Roland Barthes, a French semiotician, is the first that studies media in terms of their meanings it generated. Semiotics system is used for the generation of the meaning. McQuail (2010) too believed that the application of semiological analysis opens the possibility of revealing more of the underlying meaning of a text. Semiotics can be applied to ‘texts’ that involve more than one sign-system and signs (such as visual images and sounds). It is clear from the above statement that semiological analysis of media content presupposes a thorough knowledge of the originating culture and of the particular genre. Semiotics provides a method to establish cultural meanings of media content. Semiotic studies in social media can be traced for varied reasons:

- What something means or represents.
- How it exemplifies its meanings.
- Why it has a meaning.

The straightforward meaning of a sign is denotative. For example, the emojis in social media denote the mood and expressions of a writer; an advertisement used an actor’s photo for the perfume brand. That photo denotes the actor while the connotative can be understood from the cultural history. Media messages are powerful and effective because they have more than meets the eye (beyond what they at first appear to convey). In a survey 2017–2018, around 80.79% use emoji in their comments when found comfortable to express during communication while 19.21% avoid to use emoji during communication with others (Graph 5.2). Mostly, the users used emoticons during communication because they believed that emoji works or are able to fill the gaps which texts are unable to fill the gaps in the communication. During global pandemic COVID-19 Facebook unveiled a new attribute in the sense

**Graph 5.2** Role of available comment section on social media (Prepared after survey, 2017–2018)
of ‘take care’ to expand the caring across the tough time. Facebook launched an emoji ‘Take Care’ to prevail a sense of caring during COVID-19 global pandemic, when almost the whole world was under lockdown to observe ‘social distancing’/physical distancing⁵ in order to avoid social gatherings. However, such emoji are a notion to attribute to caring or take care at best. The intention behind such a move is to create a caring sense among users who can extend their sense of appreciation in their Facebook page. It needs further research to decode more. The notion of attribute is about smiley holding the heart in their hand or we can say that smiley caring the heart—a symbol of love (Fig. 5.2).

The best part of social media is the comment section when a known or unknown can make a comment on your post. In that way the attributes work across social media including the new attribute of Facebook of caring. In a survey 2017–2018, around 53.71% preferred to give comment either the ways, around 18.34% preferred to give comment when they felt or required either the ways, around 16.59% not regular or once a while when they felt, otherwise they avoid, while 11.35% never made any comments rather use other attributes though they preferred to go through the contents without acknowledging the post (Graph 5.3). The attributes work in the shape of emoji and each emoji has its own specific meaning that helps to understand the feelings of the counterparts whether he/she likes, caring, shared or comments. Each attribute draws a cognitive mapping in different perspectives whether its love or caring or like or shared or comment.

Social media as a semiotic system had varieties of signs and symbols that were used to communicate with feelings and expressions. The signs as well as the communication should be understood culturally. Media also became a media culture or youth culture. The semiotics dimensions on social media were easily understood and grasped by them. Social media culture annihilates national boundaries, cultures, sub-culture as well as the linguistics. There was a fusion of culture. The world is mediated through social media. But we should add: that every text (content) is only

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⁵Social/Physical distancing, World Health Organization (WHO) later corrected and said Physical distancing as a policy or guideline issued by WHO amid COVID-19 global pandemic, to avoid social gatherings in order to break the chain of COVID-19 virus, because it was contagious disease which spread through human to human.
meaningful when an individual subject decodes it himself or she and every text (content) presuppose a reader viewer/audience for whom its sign will make sense.

### 5.4.2 Semiotics for Sentiments and Affects

Human emotions have various components and one of the components is expressive motoric reaction like body language and gestures. The emojis/emoticons depict those gestures and represent emotions. There are various types of emojis that show faces or pictorials. Emojis can be seen as emotional signals that add emotions to the social media post. Emotions are difficult to express through written words, to express physical appearance, gestures which are important for face-to-face communication. What Hauthal et al. (2019) had identified was that universality is underpinned by seven basic emotions (joy, anger, disgust, fear, contempt, sadness and surprise) that empirically proved to be recognized in facial expressions irrespective of culture. These expressions can be decoded not only through the human faces but also from the emojis faces. But the use of these emojis is not culturally independent. There is a difference in emoji usage across different languages and culture. Emoticons are nothing except a way to express themselves on social media where words are limited or unable to express or else reasons including time to utilize as much as typing/texting. There are two approaches to analysis: first, sentiment analysis; second, affect analysis. The sentiment analysis is measured in terms of positive, negative and
neutral while the affect analysis consists of emotional content such as joy, sadness, excitement.

### 5.5 Nature of Emoticons/Semiotics

Emoticons are referred to as rational icons. Communication between humans is changing with the changing in the language structure and in social trends. Language takes many forms and one of the forms is emojis and emoticons. These emoticons/emojis form a visual language. The emoticons are a combination of symbols used in electronic mail and text messaging to indicate the state of mind of the author such as to express happiness or sadness or else.

#### 5.5.1 Evolution of Emoticons/Emojis

Shigetaka Kurita in Japan first introduced in late 1990s that provide emotional context for mobile Internet platform or for social media. In a survey 2017–2018, around 70.79% used platforms to share emoticons to complete their messages while 29.26% never used emoticons rather written proper texts as much as what they can (Graph 5.4). Most social media users sent emoticons during communication. Thousands of emoticons/emojis are used individually or collectively to make meaningful communication. The emojis are visual representations of words that expressed emotions, thoughts of mind. Emoticons are a sign of the living nature of language. Humans always tried to communicate their feelings; emotions to one another and the evolution of those emoticons provide that platform to individuals. Meanwhile smiley was created by Nicolas Loufrani and Franklin Loufrani, a journalist who popularized smileys as an attempt to impart an optimistic tone to the print media and accepted globally as a mark of positivity and cheerfulness. There is also a criticism that the evolution of the emoticons led to the use of short text messages and the loss of literacy and communication skills. However, emoji/emoticons is a sign or language devolving when society is supposed to return to the pictorial representation of ancient history that are deemed less intellectual or intelligent. Jonathan Jones argued in different contexts and used a survey report to express that demand for emoji is massive: 72%

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6Around 1,800 emoji characters and still the number is going on. These emojis covered almost all topics and emerged as medium to chat across social media or we can say a digital language that helps both the sender and receiver to decode the meaning in the smartphone age. For details, [https://www.hindustantimes.com/world-news/smiley-faced-success-for-japan-s-emoji-creator/story-x28dr3rRZPzG1N11N5pmoL.html](https://www.hindustantimes.com/world-news/smiley-faced-success-for-japan-s-emoji-creator/story-x28dr3rRZPzG1N11N5pmoL.html). Accessed 27 June 2020.

7Both father and son established smiley.co as firm to fetch more market with the expansion of digital market. The yellow smiley stands for single purpose to being smile. For details, [https://www.livemint.com/Consumer/QZPronj81XrsKNTG0bzQjI/The-company-behind-the-smiley-gets-serious-about-India.html](https://www.livemint.com/Consumer/QZPronj81XrsKNTG0bzQjI/The-company-behind-the-smiley-gets-serious-about-India.html). Accessed 27 June 2020.
of 18 to 25 year olds find it easier to express their feelings in emoji pictures but he was opposite and preferred written word than emoji. Emojis also indicates sarcasm, euphemism, hints and affection that are not possible in a text. But instead of this the emojis also create confusion due to their digital nature. For e.g. the emoji of a smiley face can mean ‘I am happy’ or ‘I like this’. ‘Indeed it can be argued that emojis are in fact expanding linguistic ability, and opening up new possibilities for innovative communication channels and expansion of traditional writing, making languages more visual and playful and thus returning to a more creative form of languages’ (Alshenqeeti 2016: 58).

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8Jonathan Jones published a article on May 27, 2015 on The International Guardian, London edition and primarily endorsed the fact that how demand for emoji is increased in United Kingdom, in fact across the world the business turn over for emoji is multiplied over period of time. But his main concern was that—where we the civilization are heading forward or backward? He emphasized that written texts are better option to move forward than emoji—these are symbols of ancient civilizations, identity of backwardness. He preferred to go with words or texts in order to communicate rather use emoji. For details, [https://www.theguardian.com/visualdesign/jonathanjonesblog/2015/may/27/emoji-language-dragging-us-back-to-the-dark-ages-yellow-smiley-face](https://www.theguardian.com/visualdesign/jonathanjonesblog/2015/may/27/emoji-language-dragging-us-back-to-the-dark-ages-yellow-smiley-face). Accessed 15 June 2020.
In 2014, a new mobile texting network called ‘emoji’ was launched which allows the users to use the emojis for communication. The pictogram representation was the traditional form of writing as the cavemen used it to create ideas about their lives, their beliefs. Cuneiform was also a form of writing used by Sumerians in 3300 BC, those icons made by tools on wet clay. That system again could only be possible in the digital age. Digital emojis are the universally recognized icons or pictograms (Fig. 5.3). These symbols used as standalone depictions and were used as string communication to make a meaning.

5.5.2 Emoticons/semiotics as Non-Verbal Communication

Emojis provide the reader the facial expression, thoughts, feelings of the writer. Through them the writer can convey their feelings digitally, it enhances non-verbal communication. This system of language is universal and is globally understood. ‘As it is given the pictograph representation that provides the universality of emojis assessed by Instagram and indicates the usage and frequency of these icons across different countries’ (Alshenqeeti 2016: 60). The use of emoji is not restricted to one continent or one nation; rather it is found uniformly across the world in different proportions (Table 5.5).

This represents that the emoji were developed as a universal symbolic language. The rise of Instagram, blog posts and tweets became a platform for that new form of language. Emojis are similar to logographs, and they represent a singular word as one image indicates multiple emotional reactions. Emojis are a language with universal concepts. Emojis provide new possibilities for communication. Emojis were created with greater creativity and imaginations.
5.5.3 Generational and Cultural Variations in Usage of Emojis

‘In the same way that language is a constantly evolving phenomena and is subject to social, generational, and cultural variations, and technology and how it used’ (Alshenqeeti 2016: 61). As per Nishimura (2018), emojis were subdivided into different groups. These are:

- Typographic face marks which are used for facial expressions like ‘smile’ (:)), and ‘sad face’ (:().
- Non-linguistic symbols, which were used at the end of a sentence to create visual impact and added meaning.
- Emoji or graphics like beating heart, blinking stars.

There is a universal trend of using emojis, but frequency of using is different from culture to culture. The younger generation is to use or adopt these symbols in their conversation on social media. Nishimura (2018) and Lu et al. (2016) state that emojis use as a form of language and used both as universal and cross generation.

Social media became the biggest tool for the use of semiotics/emoticons. Social media led to the radical change in the use of language. WhatsApp became a specialized social media application used as a messaging app. WhatsApp messenger is on the top list of chat applications. It is the most cheaply and efficiently accessed to use for messaging, photos, trolls, videos and also for emojis. Brian Acton and Jan Koum invented the WhatsApp application in 2009. The idea behind this was to make social media activities easier. Due to this the plain verbal text is replaced by non-verbal language like animated gifts, smileys, emojis. It had so many emoticons, which
5.5 Nature of Emoticons/Semiotics

were used according to the moods, expressions. Facebook first launched the realm of *mojos* through the introduction of Facebook stickers. The Unicode 864 started\(^9\) in 2015 that made available hundreds of emojis and smileys with a unique script code used in social media widely. The mostly used emojis are smiley face and heart amalgamation.

The Nail polish emoji, for instance, is significant since it assumes a position between gender, race, and class that allows prospective platforms. It denotes a certain type of self-adorning culture. George (2018) referred nail polish emoji is in practice since 2014, the nail polish emoji has been used as an emotional tone marker to communicate sass, indifference or poise in text, the image evoking a sense of regal aloofness. The emoji act as practice of communication with both the characteristics of a code system and a language system. Henceforth, George (2018) listed some of the semiotic machines of the computer, whether embodied as laptop, touchpad or smartphone and its standardization graphical user interface (GUI), predominantly advances verbal signs over the verbal signs of face-to-face (F2F) communication. Consequently, computer mediated communication (CMC), short messaging service (SMS) and social networking services (SNS) all enclose a ‘semiotic vacuum’ devoid of behavioural codes (emoji is enlarging the human capability to communicate).

5.6 Relevance of Semiotics/Emoticons in Social Mediasphere

There is a constant growth in the development of information and communication technology and semiotics/emoticons became the genre to use in various aspects of computer-mediated communication (CMC). Emoticons were used as socio-emotional suppliers to social media to communicate particularly in short message service. The verbal type of communication requires content, grammar, expertise. The non-verbal type of communication is represented through non-words language that includes gestures, eye contact, facial expressions and body language. Non-verbal communication has the ability to communicate the writer’s emotions and attitude. The reader can understand the writer’s mood or feelings.

Danesi (2016) explains that emoticons as a form of computer-mediated communication are: string of keyboard characters that, when viewed sideways (or in some other orientation), can be seen to suggest a face expressing a particular emotion. Emoticon is often used in an email message or newsgroup posting as a comment on the text that accompanies it. Common emoticons include the smiley:-) or:). Before the advent of emoticons there is no way to indicate their mood changes. Emoticons are considered as visual cues that were formed from ordinary typographic symbols that indicate the emotions and feelings. Emoticons were also considered as coding systems like ‘ASCII glyph’ (computer coding technique) that is used to indicate emotions in email or news.

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\(^9\)Unicode 864 is a code page used to write Arabic in Egypt, Iraq, Jordon, Saudi Arabia and Syria.
5.6.1 Impacts of Semiotics/emojis on Message

Psychologist Albert Mehrabian believes that 93% of human communication takes place nonverbally.\(^\text{10}\) According to a research conducted at 3 M Corporation, the human brain processes visual elements 60,000 times faster than written texts. That is to say, the human brain decrypts image elements in an instantaneous method, while language is decoded in a linear, chronological manner requiring extra time to process (Jibril 2013). Emoticons had the capability to strengthen the effect of an unwritten message and also simplify the messages. Emoticons communicate a clear mental state of the writer. Now on social media when individuals try to communicate without emoticons they find it difficult to express their emotions. When emoticons combined together with the text it adds to the value of the communication that becomes clear and complete. It is stated that the positive message with the emoticon became more positive than the pure verbal positive message so as the negative messages too. It is clear that the emoticons have higher impacts on message in the baseness of exclamation marks. Both the emoticons and punctuation marks have an impact on how people perceive the message.

5.6.2 Emoticons and Social Mediasphere

It was argued that social media replaced face-to-face communication. Due to social media the nature of communication changed as most of the people communicate through social media not through face-to-face communication. Before the advent of emoticons there is a lack of expressions in digital media. Emoticons emerged as a platform that substitutes the missing human emotional touch of their gestures, feelings and expressions. The written text had the lack of gestures, facial expressions. Social media always incorporates to use the emoticons as visual cues to add to the meaning of textual text or messages. There is the same authenticity of using the emoticons as that of face-to-face communications. Social media, the emoticons used for verbal as well as for non-verbal communication. It not only adds to the meaning of the message but also plays a significant role in the formation of the sentences. Emoticons also had potential effects on enjoyment. Enjoyment has an effect on personal interaction. There is an abundance of semiotics as visual signs on social media. There is a self-representation and self-disclosure through images that were used for social interaction based on collective sense making and interpersonal negotiation on meanings.

\(^\text{10}\) Albert Mehrabian’s research provided an over-simplified empirical understanding for the effectiveness of spoken communications and categorized in three different ways where 93% are non-verbal. 1.7% of message pertaining to feelings and attitudes is in the words that are spoken. 2. 38% of message pertaining to feelings and attitudes is paralinguistic (the way that the words are said). 3. 55% of message pertaining to feelings and attitudes is in facial expression. For details, https://www.businessballs.com/communication-skills/mehrabians-communication-theory-verbal-non-verbal-body-language/. Accessed 25 June 2020.
5.6.3 **Emoticons as Linguistic Components**

Emoticons use in social media led to the shift from verbal to pictorial representation of meaning. The meaning is codified into a form of pictures or emoticons to represent the moods. Jibril (2013) argued that attributes of the graphic symbols when used in written form of communication facilitate the flow of semantic properties from the grammatical structure. Signs that express meanings are symbolic resemblance of objects through pictograms. Emoticons are the pictograms that combine with the graphemes (the smallest segment of the graphic system). Jibril (2013) further used categorization, emoticons are alphabetic graphemes or alphagrams; poncho-typographical or topograms; and logo grammatical graphemes or logograms. The tweets containing emoticons are more emotional. The pictorial sign influences the reading on social media.

5.6.4 **Production and Distribution of Semiotics on Social Mediasphere**

The visual signs on social media were treated as a machine of symbolic world making. The pictorial signs are technically produced, modified and used. Erdmann (2015) argues that layers of media technology can thus be conceived as process chains through which signs from station to station are constantly transformed. The production and distribution of semiotics is considered as a semiotics practice that is performed on social media. The technological and practice of pictorial signs were used as Barthes (1977), denotative, connotative and linguistic dimension of semiotics. The signs and symbols, which were used, originate from different mediums. Erdmann (2015) illustrated that Facebook give an automatic view of the picture when the uniform resource locator (URL) is copied into a text box and even encourages users to share visual content from other websites with other network members through a ‘share on Facebook’ function that is embedded on websites like news sites and other popular media. The emoticons in social media are highly standardized. The sign box was designed according to the users profile and newsfeed. The symbolic technique allows the users to express the emotional response to the post. The emoticons are used on social media to share, comment or affirm. So, the visual may be dissociated from its original producer’s profile.

Semiotics as a field deals with signs, concepts, and thus the analogies with the social media will be derived. Instagram—a social networking site used as a photography application. Social media users can produce visual and textual impressions through Instagram.
5.6.5 **Semiotics Communication Model of Instagram**

Social media is used for the dissemination of content. Through Instagram users can send videos, pictures, captions, texts, hashtags and geo-location information. Instagram provides varieties of semiotics to their users such as visual and written, captions and images. Instagram allows you to create personal profiles and to make friends. The semiotic system of language focused on how people used it.

The sign serves three functions simultaneously: they express something about the world (ideational metafunction), position people in relation to each other (interpersonal metafunction) and form connections with other signs to produce coherent text (‘textual metafunction) (Halliday and Hasan 1985). In social media, the ideational metafunction of semiotics is to comment, giving feedback from the readers who receive those signs. The interpersonal metafunction of signs is the community of friends who received the signs while the textual metafunction is the capability of producing the signs and symbols by using pictures, videos and caption text.

The ideational metafunction of signs on Instagram generates through the pictures used to share through Instagram. The users create the visual images through their logical combination of experiences. The user gets familiar with the visual signs and its grammar. The images were a composite of the multimodal text, containing more than one code and meanings. In social networks the signs are the posts generated, commented, broadcasted, forwarded and liked through the community of users subscribed to social networks (Mirsarraf et al. 2017).

Social semiotics is created according to the environment where it was used. Signs that were used in Instagram are the pictures captured by the users. These signs will be saved in the profile history of the user and these signs had memorable features. These signs are highly distributed across the friends circle and some became the viral signs that have distinguished features and became a striking message. Instagram had a feature to represent the visual post that was generated as a semiotic resource. Social media provides the community where users interact through commenting and liking the post.

5.7 **Semiotics Changed the Mode of Communication Through Social Mediasphere?**

On social media billions and billions of emojis are sent a day. Whatever people like to communicate, emojis are there for each and every type of communication. The emoticons were everywhere from personal communication to marketing to advertising campaigns. Different brand companies used signs and symbols for seeking attention. Emoticons now became a part of our culture. Social media is unimaginable without the emoticons. On social media people explore different ways of communication. The emoticons/semiotics are one the most influential forms of non-verbal form of communication that was used as text messaging. According to a study,
5.7 Semiotics Changed the Mode of Communication …

in 2016, roughly 92% of online users reported sending emojis in their own communication, with nearly half of all messages sent including an emoji with more than half of this audience using emojis in the majority of their sent messages (Daniel and Camp 2018). Social media had a limitation of length like SMS only had a limit of 160 characters, and twitter could only have 280 characters limit. In respect of that emojis can convey information in character and give full meaning with the writer’s moods and feelings and visual cues to online text. The emoticons provide emotional context to communication that can be possible through social media. These visual cues enhance the positive connotation to an uplifting statement and negative connotation to pessimistic statement. The emoticons and emojis do not replace the existing words and characters; it can change the meaning of a sentence through the selection of signs and symbols. The use of emoticons provides the writer’s emotions about how it feels when face to face communication. On social media it was found that the users fell more comfortable to use emoticons than using the text. The text became more playful with emoticons than using plain text. The information flow with the images is more pleasant as the symbols are easier to perceive. Chang (2013) elicited fluency in advertising, showing that advertisements were more effective, when images were relevant to advertising copy. In a survey 2017–2018, around 67.25% used platforms to tag something in their loop, while 32.75% never tagged to anyone rather remains passive on social media (Graph 5.5). How to use the platform of course depends upon the users, some might tag and some might not to anyone rather remain passive and follow the same without any acknowledgement.

Do you think that tagging is an important tool of social media

Graph 5.5 Role of tagging is an important attribute on social media (Prepared after survey, 2017–2018)
Social media is a shorthand visual communication. Semiotics changed the way and nature of communication. It is breaking down the language barrier and increased human interaction. Chris O’Brien, tech journalist, covered the mobile world congress in Barcelona. Where the article covered the statements made by D J Koh, the head of Samsung’s IT and Mobile communication division, boldly pronounced, ‘nothing is more important than how emojis are replacing words’. Koh explained that images are becoming the new mode of expression, and that ‘clearly, the social media generation has revolutionized the way people communicate, noting that 1.2 trillion photos were taken on smartphone in the past year, and five billion emojis were sent’. The importance of emojis increased, as most of the people communicate through online, not through face-to-face communication. Vyvyan Evans (2017) decoded the different dimensions of emojis that help to reproduce characteristics of human communication that are present in the real world, in the digital environment.

There is a lack of emotional context in a text message that is present in face-to-face communication with others. Even in writing when it needs to be expressive the emoticons help. Emojis can be more accessible, universal. The semiotics/emoticons make a link between the writer and their emotional context. The use of semiotics is an easy way to communicate your emotions. Bevan Hamilton found that around six billion emojis are sent on mobile messaging apps every day, according to Digiday, a media company that specializes in digital media. Nearly half of the comments and captions on Instagram contain emojis. Today there is nothing that can be imagined without emoticons. If it tried to post on social media without the emoticons, it wouldn’t be possible. These were used creatively, as people used them according to the situation or as per their post.

5.7.1 Expressing Ourselves

Emojis are useful as it helps in better communication. They have also become sensational as communicating through text becomes a part of humans life and the emoticons provide another way to communicate. People are always fond to express themselves and the emoticons provide a way of doing that. The semiotics/emoticons are not about to take away the language but they are adding an expressive meaning to it. Hamilton (2016) analysed that they expand the way we communicate. That’s one of the reasons they’ve taken off. It gives people an opportunity to be polite, to be funny. It gives people a chance to express themselves. Emojis also remain in a trend

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11 Chris O’Brien covers world mobile congress at Barcelona where leaders of mobile phones are supposed to unveil their future business strategy along with some new features including how camera or smiley/emoji became important; similarly, how emoji became a medium to chat on mobile phones. For details, https://venturebeat.com/2018/02/25/samsumgs-camera-focus-nothing-is-more-important-than-how-emojis-are-replacing-words/. Accessed 15 June 2020.

12 Bevan Hamilton argued that the meaning for emoji is different for everyone, someone liked it while others not fond of it. The choice for emoji is conditional. For details, https://www.cbc.ca/news/technology/emojis-online-communication-1.3500734. Accessed 23 May 2020.
5.7 Semiotics Changed the Mode of Communication …

as people always try to write in shortcuts. Everything became fast. Social media also acts as a fast communication. In a survey 2017–2018, around 49.78% respondents used attributes (tagging) to share on social media, around 2.82% tagged to all when they felt required to share something, around 32.31% often tagged when they felt required to do or otherwise they avoid, while 15.28% never tagged anyone on social media (Graph 5.6).

**5.7.2 Collective Semantic Intelligence**

Collective semantic intelligence (CSI) is shared or group intelligence that emerges from the collaboration, collective efforts and competition of many individuals and appears in consensus decision-making (Mirsarraf et al. 2017). This was used for peer review and crowdsourcing application. People shared more signs through their post, sharing and tagging content, reviews and comment. Instagram became important social networking site where pictures were shared a lot.

It increased the participation and interaction and the pictorial information then converted into visual semantic intelligence. According to 2015 statistics Instagram users have shared over 40 billion photos and share an average of 95 million photos per day. This big number of pictures is a rich data source to be used for extracting semantic intelligence by big data applications. The attracted feature of these pictures is their supplementary information such as their location tag, time tag, captions, the per cent of people who liked it and the written text which can be considered as their metadata (Mirsarraf et al. 2017).
5.8 Conclusion

Social media is a two-way communication between the author and a reader. Semiotics/emoticons is nothing more than a medium to bridge the communication between two people across social media. The emoticons/emojis are primarily used in social networking sites. The emoticons/emojis are used for both positive and negative tone in order to reflect the best to convey the message. Smiley was used to express happiness and the other types of emoji are also used as per mood and feelings of the senders. As Danesi (2016) states that human communication continued by using emojis that could only be possible in digital media. The emoji/emoticons not only prevailed the positive or negative expressions rather created a spatiality where both author and reader were equipped with such connotation and denotation for better understanding between them. The semiotics of digital gadgets of course need more study to disclose the pattern, nature and mapping of emoji/emoticons to decode depression, stress, anxiety, frustration and anguish. The used emoji/emoticons create a sense of spatiality when both the author and reader went through it without much confusion.

The next chapter is about economic activities and social media in order to map the potentialities of digital business in marketing and Human Resources perspectives. This section apparently discussed including e-commerce as one of the major aspects of social media.

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