The Game of Communication: An Analysis of The Emoji Landscape in Social Media

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Abstract—The empowerment of social media makes us into the era of diversification of transmission. The spread of the mass media content production and social organization monopoly pattern is broken. The Internet emerges as one the most unique landscape within the framework of public discourse. As a communication tool, emojis gradually become a refuge for various ideologies. It can be said that the popularity of emojis on social media is the result of a power game between various forms of ideologies. On the one hand, the emoji landscape formed in social media can be seen as the awakening of the subject consciousness of the public and the objectified product of network quality, but on the other hand, people have to watch out for the dissolution of social solemnness brought by the excessive entertainment of emojis, and the public has since become one-dimensional creature.

1. INTRODUCTION
With the in-depth layout of mobile Internet and social media on a global scale, emojis, as a new form of network culture, have emerged. Emoji is becoming increasingly popular among netizens due to its ability to express emotions in online communication. From the initial single character emoticons to the self-created emoticons created by netizens, the forms and contents of emoticons are more diversified. Cartoon characters, hot events, popular film and television works, and pop stars have all become the inspiration sources for netizens to create emoticons. The continuous development of Internet technology has provided technical support for the dissemination of Internet visual culture represented by emojis. A generation of young Internet users who have grown up with the Internet express their emotions in life through emojis and by socializing with others, forming a carnival feast of Internet users' group interaction.

2. THE DEVELOPMENT OF EMOTICONS: FROM SIMPLICITY TO DIVERSITY
Internet emoticons are a popular cultural landscape in the Cyber society, and a unique form of discourse used by most young netizens in their daily cultural practices. Emojis are a form of communication and interaction that emerges with the rapid development of mobile phone and social media. The Internet has gone through a process from simplification to diversification in its 40+ years of development. The embryonic form of emojis takes characters as the main form. Character drawing emojis, also known as ASCII art, was born in the United States in 1982. It can avoid misunderstanding in communication and enrich the emotional expression in text communication, such as " :) ", which means happy and happy. After character emojis, the emojis included in the input method are also...
favored by netizens. Emoji, which include ideographs and smiley faces, originated in Japan in 1999. In
China, Emoji have become familiar to netizens with the popularity of Tencent's QQ chat tool and the
widespread use of Iphone. Emoji expression has occurred with the change of the meaning, such as the
most original “～” suggests friendly or happy. However, with the rise of a new network pop culture,
the smiley face gradually becomes a kind of ideographic symbol of sarcasm.

The third stage would be the netizen's self-made picture and GIF. It is made by netizens according
to their interests and hot spots, using chat software or emojis generation tools. It is more realistic to
restore the characteristics of characters' facial expressions and actions. GIFs and memes are mostly
based on the familiar public figures or movies and TV series, and it is more entertaining. GIF has been
popular on social media since 2010. At present, Internet emoticons are in the coexistence stage of
character emoticons, Emoji emoticons, self-created emoticons and gifs, which can to a certain extent
simulate the communication state of real life.

In general, the sources of emojis can be roughly divided into cartoons, hot news events and popular
movies and television works, as well as those made for idols.

Most of the cartoon images in the emojis are not original, and they come from certain image
sources, such as classic cartoon works or recently popular cartoon images on the Internet. Before
becoming memes, the characters had been created in anime stories, such as "Easy Bear" from Japan
and "Winnie the Pooh" from the American anime. The original cartoon emojis are created by a studio
or individual for the context of Internet communication and released through WeChat and other social
media emojis platform for Internet users to download and use.

Characters in popular shows or current events can cause resonance among netizens, thus becoming
the target of emoji creation in WeChat, Weibo and other social media. For instance, the expression of
"Ge-You Lay" package originates from the 1990s in China greatly popular family comedy "I love my
family". The paralysis sitting posture of the character named Ge-You on the sofa, serving as a big
contrast to the fast-paced life, accidentally fit the modern Internet users eager for a moment "decadent"
point of view. Within a short amount of time, it became a super Internet hit.

On the other hand, it is a popular activity among fans to make memes of their favorite idols,
whether they are "cute" or "funny". However, on Internet platforms, the presence of "black fans" – a
portion of people who dislike a particular idol - has also turned memes aimed at idols into tools of
personal attack or arbitrary smear.

Meanwhile, some companies profit by turning popular "idol" images into memes to market related
shows, or by placing them on WeChat memes, which users can download for a free. For example, two
famous Chinese actresses "little S" and "Angelababy" have all launched paid emojis in the WeChat
store. Papi jiang, who has become a popular micro blogger for her homemade short videos, also
launched a set of "middle-aged and elderly emojis" in the WeChat store. Emojis have become a new
marketing tool for celebrities.

3. OF INTERNET EMOTICONS

Worldwide, use of emoji has become the norm for communication on the Internet. "Face with Tears of
Joy" (😂) is the most popular Emoji in the world, according to the 2016 Big Data Report "Emoji, the
Rise of a New Esperanto -- The Global Emoji Usage Behavior Report by Kika Input method". In the
"Chinese Netizens Emoji Report" released by Tencent in 2015, the number of emojis sent on QQ in
2014 exceeded 533.8 billion times. Among the 800 million QQ users, more than 90% used emojis in
chatting. In August 2016, Baidu Post Bar and Jiang Zhenyu, a research expert of "micro emoticons",
released a report on the use of emoji among Netizens born after 1995. The report shows that in the past
year, 30 percent of the netizens' replies on Baidu Post Bar contained emoticons. Compared with
netizens born in the 1980s, netizens born in 1995 are fond of original emojis, and the ratio of using
original emojis and systematic emoticons is 3:1.

“Doutu Masses” refer to those people who respond to each other’s texts by using emojis or gifs as a
form of entertainment. They generally believe that custom emoticons have rich personalities and can
be adapted to more subtle and complex chat scenes. We have witnessed the advent of the group-
communication era in which everyone can speak out and communication is prevalent. Internet communication challenges the mode by which the mass media allocate social resources solely to a small number of elite groups, unlike the new mode of information production which has for the first time a history of allocating social resources to ordinary people. The fact that online emojis could become a unique way of communication on the Internet has many comprehensive reasons.

3.1. Technological progress to facilitate the visual communication of the Internet
With the continuous expansion of Internet bandwidth, especially with the advent of 5G era, Internet users are sending and receiving pictures at a faster speed, which provides technical support for good visual communication experience. When one receives pictures quickly, the emotions can be transferred to the other side of the screen in the first time. Compared to textual information, pictures plus words or gifs can obviously convey much more information. Given the technology, it is natural for netizens to choose emojis to express their ideas. Tencent started with QQ emojis and developed the habit of using emojis among Chinese netizens. In WeChat function design, netizens only need a few short steps to make the pictures into emojis. The simple operation provides convenience for netizens to create their own emojis. If you want to create more complex emojis, such as "face changing" for pictures, you can also do it with the help of a great number of emoji-making software. User-friendly social software improves the enthusiasm of netizens to use emojis.

3.2. To convey emotions and fill the emotional gap expressed by Internet words
When people communicate face to face, in addition to the content of the language, they also convey non-verbal information such as body language and tone, which can effectively supplement the mood and attitude of a person and form a specific atmosphere between the speakers. However, when communicating in the Internet world, text can only replace verbal information, and the lack of non-verbal information will not only lead to misunderstanding between speakers, but also make the conversation blunt and boring. The appearance of emojis fills the emotional gap expressed by Internet words, making the dialogue vivid. The atmosphere or embarrassment or joy of the conversation can be felt through emojis, and the unpleasantness can also be easily resolved through emojis. For example, the image of “Tuzki”, a rabbit with a big face, has only two black lines forming the eyes and small ears. No other features can be found, and no expression can be seen, but its exaggerated dancing posture conveys a sense of joy, winning everyone’s favor.

3.3. Easy to understand, widely used by all age groups, strong participation
Emojis use picture language to convey information through actions. The information conveyed is dynamic and visual, making it easy to understand for groups of all ages. Emojis are widely spread through interpersonal and group communication on the Internet, which can avoid the silence of text communication. "topic terminator" – people who are not good at chatting and tend to end the topic very quickly - can activate the atmosphere by Posting messages, with strong interactivity and participation. One manifestation of the participatory nature of emojis is “Doutu”, an activity in which people send their own memes to each other for entertainment while chatting on social media platforms. The main purpose of “Doutu” is to have fun, with emojis as the only interactive tool. Both sides send each other emojis, and the context and content should be connected successively. In this entertaining "competition" process, netizens not only get a sense of achievement, but also increase their reserves of emojis.

3.4. Being playful and giving young people a window to express their feelings
In the midst of a fierce social transformation in our country, young people face fast rhythm of life. Pressure is big, and the traditional family and community structure is also facing challenges. Because of that, many youngsters become "urban empty nest youth" who appear to be vivacious and
extroverted but feel lost in themselves. The expression of Emoticons is very entertaining; it dissolves meaning and authority, in conformity with the masses of young people's social mentality, which provide the emotional release window for the modern young people. While using emojis, they mock both the symbols in the emojis and their dissatisfied selves and lives.

3.5. Customization of personality to meet the psychological needs of netizens to show their personality

When the "little Yellow Face" emoji was first used, there were only a limited number of it and all netizens used the same one. However, there are numerous "emojis" with diverse styles. Netizens can choose according to their preferences. They have the characteristics of "personaled customization", which can meet the psychological needs of the new generation of netizens to show their personality. As the process of homemade emojis becomes easier and easier, netizens' homemade emojis also have better performance in displaying personality and pertinence of situations.

For example, for netizens who like to follow pop stars, there are also gifs of stars in emojis. Netizens who love animation will collect a vast number of emojis of cartoon characters, or spoof, or show MOE. In short, things that netizens like can be made into individual emojis, and emojis can also reveal netizens' preferences.

3.6. Hidden interests, merchants take the initiative and dive into the "expression economy"

With the increase of Internet users' demand for the use of emojis, businesses have taken the initiative to participate in the production of emojis, and there has even been an "emojis economy". For instance, LINE – a social networking app - has an excellent operation of emojis featuring personified characters such as Keri and Brown. The emojis are highly profitable, and the peripheral products of the characters sell well offline as well. In October 2011, just four months after its launch, LINE introduced its first sticker: Moon, a bald man. The company launched paid stickers in April 2012, and by March 2016, LINE had 218 million monthly active users, sending nearly 390 million stickers on average every day. LINE's sales reached 28.7 billion yen ($272 million) in 2015, accounting for 23.9% and a quarter of the total revenue in 2015.

Although WeChat in China does not directly produce or sell emojis, it provides a platform for "emoji artists" to display and sell their products. From the early days of “Tuzki” and “Ali” to the later violent comics, and more recently, Mr. Egg and other teams are all doing emoji business.

4. THE PROPAGATION EFFECT OF INTERNET EMOJIS

In a broader frame, emojis can boost the popularity of online public opinion. After the occurrence of an Internet public opinion event, netizens further spread the event through emojis to increase its entertainment, and emojis will be used in interpersonal communication and group communication on the Internet, thus increasing the popularity of public opinion. Even after the event, emojis may still be used by netizens to keep public opinion hot. For example, the video event of "lan shou xiang gu" in 2016 ("lan shou xiang gu " means "Uncomfortable, want to cry"). Originated from Guangxi Zhuang pronunciation of no warping tongue sound, no aspirated sound caused by. The cause of the incident was a video recorded in October 2016 by a young brother Wei Yong in Nanning, Guangxi province after he was lovelorn. This originally insignificant incident, relying on the emojis produced by " lan shou xiang gu ", has caused massive impact on the Internet.

Digging deeper, emojis can enhance the effect of communication. Internet users can promote the "re-dissemination" or even "multiple dissemination" of public opinions through self-made emojis. In the process of multiple dissemination, information will be encoded and decoded again, thus strengthening the dissemination effect. Rio's Olympic in 2016, for example, the national table tennis team coach Liu Guoliang and athletes Zhang Jike, Malone's expression attracted countless fans on Weibo and WeChat platform. Netizen who was live streaming on their phone also attach the emojis or GIF they just created, letting those audiences with a minimal understanding of the table tennis start to really care about and fall in love into the sport and the athletes.
At the same time, we cannot ignore the effect of online emojis as Internet culture, which can strengthen national cohesion and identity in major events. Contemporary young people are more inclined to express patriotism and fight for national interests on the Internet. Some netizens even use memes to fight back when they feel that their national interests are violated. For example, in the South China Sea issue, “China-us relations are fraught with problems...Now the most prominent issue is the South China Sea. From time to time, the US sends a warship to frighten us I won't give you a fish in the South China Sea” and other series of emojis are entertaining to some extent, but they also show their role in strengthening patriotic emotion and rallying people in the face of important events.

It is undeniable that there are some problems in the use of Internet emoticons, such as fragmentation and pan-entertainment tendency. The characters are playful, giving them the power to neutralize authority. For some objects and events that are not suitable to be entertained by netizens, the emergence of emojis may lead to the tendency of pan-entertainment in public opinion.

5. DISCUSSION ON THE FUTURE DEVELOPMENT TREND OF INTERNET EMOTICONS

5.1. It tends to be micro-video-based with more diversified forms of expression
At present, Emoji developed and designed by American companies show a trend of globalization around the world. For example, the Emoji developed by Apple Company has multiple skin tones to choose from in order to reflect racial equality. Emojis developed and designed by Japanese companies show a symbolized trend, with the development of emoji composed of various symbols and the operation of emoji business model based on mobile communication software. In China, emojis are still dominated by the spontaneous use of graphic combination by Internet users. With the IOS system accepting the function of album saving gifs, more gifs are used as emojis. The popularization of 4G network and mobile WIFI, as well as the reduction of network traffic cost, have solved the cost worry for Internet users to send micro-video. In Weibo and WeChat platforms, videos, especially micro-videos, have been strongly supported technically. Micro-blogs can send short videos, and WeChat can also send short videos in albums. More micro videos can form hot spots in netizens' public opinions. The "memes" or "jokes" of these hot videos can easily become the inspiration source for netizens to create emojis. Screenshots and screenshot's re-creation of the latest hot videos are the trend of emojis.

5.2. Emojis have become an important form of expression of group subculture
There are gender and age differences in the production and use of emojis. In China, according to statistics, men prefer "vulgar" emojis, while women prefer cute emojis. Middle-aged and elderly people prefer emojis with bright colors, more direct emotional expression and positive energy. Young people, on the other hand, have their own "emoji characters.” During the process of using emojis to communicate, such differences may lead to blocked paths of emotion transmission. There are young people who use “middle-aged and old” emojis, but only as a joke. As part of a subcultural group, individuals are able to master some "emoji" language that only one subcultural group can understand. Such language builds a barrier to other cultural groups and psychologically enhances group identity within the subcultural group. However, it is worth warning that such closed communication among specific groups increases the difficulty of information supervision and needs to attract the attention of relevant department.

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