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USING STICKERS AND GIF ON SOCIAL NETWORK COMMUNICATION: USERS' EXPERIENCE AND PREFERENCE

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ABSTRACT

Owing to the technological advancement and innovation, communication nowadays can be done digitally, through a range of social network platform such as Whatsapp, Wechat, Telegram and so on. Apart from offering cost saving and convenient communication medium to the users, these platforms are built of interesting features and useful functions that will transform users' communication into an effective and meaningful one. Stickers and GIF are two brilliant thus popular features that are available in most of the social network applications. As such, the present study wished to investigate users' experience in using these two features particularly relating to their purpose and frequency of usage. To this end, 10 users were interviewed in the study. Most of the informants indicate very frequent use of these features where some of them have a higher preference for stickers over GIF. As far as the purpose of usage is concerned, the informants most of the time send stickers or GIF to emphasise meaning of messages they intend to send via communication done. They added that these features are practically useful in getting their messages conveyed much clearer. Nonetheless, the informants informed they only use stickers and GIF with family and close friends and avoid using it when formal matter is subjected in the communication.

Keywords: Sticker, GIF, social network communication, experience

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1. **INTRODUCTION**

Social network communication has become an important part of human life these days. Since the Covid-19 pandemic outbreak especially, the use of social network to exchange information, news and life updates is getting more popular than ever since people can no longer meet face to face to do their businesses. Social network communication is getting a highlight in various fields such as education, medical, journalism and so on as users actively disseminate information via the platform. Indeed, the rapid growth and increase in social network communication are led by the emergence and widespread use of individual portable technological devices such as smart phones, laptops and tablets (Kaufmann & Peil, 2020). Moreover, advancement in internet connection in wider areas had led to more active use of the social network sites by people to communicate in their daily life (Kaufmann & Peil, 2020).

When communicating via social network applications or sites, there are a lot of fantastic features that users can use to enhance their communication. Emojis, stickers and GIF are some of the various interesting features available on most of the social network sites. From the arise of these features, it raises several questions for us to ponder for examples on how social network users are benefiting and utilizing these features as they are communicating with each other and since there are more and more features being added to the social network applications nowadays, which of the features of are highly preferred by the users? To address this, the present study is therefore important to be carried out.

2. **LITERATURE REVIEW**

2.1 Social Network

According to Boyd and Ellison (2007), social network sites are web-based services that enable users to perform numerous things such as create and establish a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, produce a connection list of other users with whom they share a connection with as well as view and navigate their connections and those made by others within the system. The nature and nomenclature of these connections however may differ for different social network sites (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). Over the years, more and more social network applications are developed and widely used by users around the globe. In Malaysia for example, Facebook, Instagram, Whatsapp, and so on are very popular among the people. On top of mediating a less formal communication to take place, social network allows their users to involve in communication more comfortably and openly (Kaufmann & Peil, 2020).

When communicating via social network applications or sites, there are a lot of fantastic features that users can use to enhance their communication. Emojis, stickers and GIF are some of the various interesting features available on most of the social network sites. GIF is a short form for the Graphic Interchange Format. It was initially designed for ordinary images

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then improved to the ones with short, looping and soundless moving effects (Lohonen, 2020). On the other hand, stickers are what the users can créate themselves according to their individual personal needs. Stickers are said to relate closely to users' emotions as they are created and sent based on what the users are feeling about (Saeed et al., 2021).

The present study is interested in exploring users' experiences in using GIF and stickers in their communication via social network applications. To this end, the following research questions are addressed in the study.

Research question 1: How do users use stickers and GIF when communicating through social network applications?
Research question 2: What do users say about communicating through social network applications, especially when using stickers and GIF?

3.   METHODOLOGY

3.1 Participants

To understand users' experience of using stickers and GIF on social network communication, ten (N=10) informants were interviewed in the study. Five (n=5) informants are male and five are female. The informants' age ranges from 20 to 45 years old. When asked about the frequency of social network communication done in their everyday life, 80 to 100 percent of the informants performed their communication via social network applications installed on their phones every day, especially Whatsapp.

3.2 Instrument

The present study employed qualitative method as semi-structured interview was utilised in the data collection procedures. The interview questions had been constructed by the researcher to elicit the desired data hence provide answers to the research questions addressed in the study. The informants were interviewed individually in order to gain richer data from each of them.

The informants The informants' age ranges from 20 to 45 years old. They are from different education and social background (university students, lecturers and administrative officer). Nonetheless, all of the informants come and live in one state, which is Kelantan.

3.3 Data Analysis

The interview recording was transcribed and analysed in the study. In this regard, thematic analysis was performed to the obtained data.

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4.   MAIN RESULTS

As explained, the present study wished to investigate the users' experience in using stickers and GIF particularly relating to their purpose and frequency of usage.

Accordingly, the interview findings revealed that most of the informants indicate very frequent use of GIF and stickers features where some of them have a higher preference for stickers over GIF. For example, informant 1 mentioned that he loves stickers more than GIF as he can create his own stickers and send them to his friends. "*I really like it when I want to make jokes and have fun with my friends. Sometimes I use their faces to make the stickers, it is so funny.* "

As far as the purpose of usage is concerned, the informants most of the time send stickers or GIF to emphasise meaning of messages they intend to send via communication done. "I *always feel that my friends can understand what I am trying to say better if I put stickers or GIF in my messages. You know what, sometimes when I feel lazy to type long sentences, I would just pick one sticker or GIF then send it to my friends. It worked you know, they understood what I was trying to say well."* Said informant 4. They added that these features are practically useful in getting their messages conveyed much clearer. Sometimes, they claim that GIF and stickers represent their moods and feelings better than words.

Interestingly, the findings of the study also revealed that majority of the informants admit that they only feel comfortable to send or receive stickers or GIF from their close friends and family only. In other words, these features are rather useful when they are having casual conversations and they try to avoid using it when formal matter is subjected in the communication. As informant 8 explained, *"There is no way I will send a sticker to my lecturer. It is scary you know because I do not know how do they feel about the stickers they receive. Plus, I am not close enough to my lecturers. I will send one if our relationship reaches the point which I think comfortable to do so."* In a similar vein, informant 10 who is a public officer said that he never uses stickers or GIF when interacting with his boss. *He said, "Whenever a communication with the bosses come in, I would tune the mode of the conversation into a formal and serious one. I don't feel appropriate to do it with my bosses."*

5.   CONCLUSION

Social network communication is getting more popular and being used by more and more people around the world. With the advancement of technological features in the era of Industrial Revolution (IR) 4.0, it is likely posible for this platform of communication to go up to another level with many other interesting advanced features to be added on in the future. The joy and privelege of usage therefore will go to the users, with some challenges to also be embraced.

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