A Survey to Identify the Demand on Cultural Emoticon in Malay Context

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Abstract: The usage of emoticons is essential in computer-mediated communication. Emoticons solved the lacking in computer-mediated-communication which is the physical sense of the user. By using emoticons, the direction, attitudes and emotions of the sender can be determine easily by the receiver. The usage of emoticons also strengthen the content of the message and help in attention saving. If the concept of emoticons can be used in cultural perspective it could bring more benefit to society. Currently, the study regarding cultural-based emoticon is lacking. The objective of this study is to explore the need of cultural-based emoticons. The method used in this study is by doing literature review of past study and survey questionnaire to the public respondents. This study revealed that the usage of emoticon is important in improving the communication of society and benefiting the society particularly in cultural aspect. Results suggest that there is a need of cultural-based emoticons to be implemented in CMC.

Key words: Emoticons, computer-mediated communication, society, benefit, objective, cultural-based

INTRODUCTION

Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) now has become the global communication where there is no distance limit to communicate (Ho, 2009). People do not need to meet face-to-face anymore in order to have a communication. They can have an interaction anytime and anywhere as long as there are internet connection available. The likes of email, instant messaging and chatting are the examples of CMC. In CMC communication where physical appearance are not available, people used emoticons in order to express their emotions, expressions and attitudes. The usage of emoticons have been proved to be significantly improved the effectiveness of communication (Yuizono and Munemori, 2012). This is because the emoticons are able to provide what the text alone are lacking in CMC. The usage of emoticons are more effective than text alone because the emoticons add extra elements that the text cannot provide which are the cues of emotional information (Derks *et al.*, 2008; Ganster *et al.*, 2012; Lo, 2008).

The usage of emoticons also help in avoiding the misunderstanding and misinterpreting the content of the messages. According to Derks *et al.* (2008), the usage of text alone in CMC are lacking in terms of visual cues which could lead to message misinterpretation. By using text alone in CMC, the receiver cannot judge the correct emotion of the sender as in the face-to-face communication. Lo (2008) stated in his study that most people cannot interpret the correct emotions, attitude and attention intents without using emoticons. This situations may lead to misunderstanding in the communication. The usage of emoticons solved what the CMC is lacking, which is physical appearance of the user.

Skovholt *et al.* (2014) defined emoticons as the combination of "emotion" and "icon". Emoticons can be produced by using ASCII symbols based from keyboard characters or creating pictograms in CMC. The benefits of using emoticons include help in strengthening the intensity of the message. The receiver can correctly understand the level and direction of the message if the emoticons are added. This is because the emoticons can bring the physical sense between the sender and receiver. For example, if a person send an angry message to another person it can be seen as offensive expression. But if the sender adds the emoticons in the angry message it can be interpreted as a jokes or humor message. The used of emoticons soften the negative tone and the intensity of the message.

The usage of emoticons attract user's attention because of its design. The design of the emoticons play big role in determining the attractiveness of emoticons. An attractive emoticon make user feel convenient to use

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that relate with psychological motivation. Besides that using emoticons also result to attention saving (Cao and Ye, 2009). Attention saving means that user can reduce time for their attention to type, read and interpret the message. They just need to select which emoticons they want to use and send it. This action is faster compare to typing a text message. When user is using the text to message, both the sender and receiver require more time to type, read and interpret the message. This benefit helps user to obtain the most information with the minimal attention and time.

If the emoticons are used to express feelings and emotions other type of icon could be used to express something else for example cultural-based expression. The usage of icon to represent cultural contents can help user in sharing their cultures with other peoples. This situations can help user to gain more knowledge and understanding on other cultures. When people get to know other cultures, the communication can become more effective.

For icon that represent cultural-based element, we suggest that the icon to be recognized as Culturicon. Culturicon is the combination of terms "cultural" and "icon". Culturicon is the icon that represent the cultural-based expression that can be used in CMC, same as emoticon. The different between emoticon and Culturicon is that the emoticon is used to express someone feelings and emotion through an icon in CMC while Culturicon can be used to express something related to cultural in CMC. This study aims to discuss on how the researcher determine the need of Culturicon in CMC.

Literature review: According to Cao and Ye (2009), emoticons can be used in variety ways as specified by their category. They stated that there are four categories of emoticons. The four categories are ASCII symbols (ASCIIS), Preload Static Images (PSI), Preload Dynamic Images (PDI) and Local Upload Images (LUI). ASCIIS is the emoticons that are made from keyboard character. User must know the combination of keyboard characters to create the emoticons. PSI is the cartoon images designed by professionals. For PSI, the cartoon images are already in the application. The user just need to select them without the need to type. The same steps applied to PDI, only that PDI is a short video or animation designed by professionals. PDI are different with PSI because for PDI, user need to play the video or animation first to know the content or meaning of the PDI before the use it while PSI is a static images where user already know the content or meaning just by looking at the images. LUI is the images upload by the user. The user are free to upload any images to the application and used it as emoticons.

Table 1: Emoticon usage style

Regions	Style	Example
Western	Horizontal	:) ;) :P :D :O :-)
Eastern	Vertical	^_^ T_T -_- @_@ o.o

Based from the literature of past studies, we found that there is a lack of study regarding the cultural-based emoticon that study on how cultural element can be embedded in the form of emoticon and use it in CMC. Past studies focused on sentiment of document or sentence (Derks *et al.*, 2008; Soranaka and Matsushita, 2012; Rojas *et al.*, 2012; Boia *et al.*, 2013; Nguyen and Fussell, 2013; Hogenboom *et al.*, 2013; Solakidis *et al.*, 2014), classifications of emoticons (Toratani and Hirayama, 2011; Ruan, 2011) social relation interaction (Lo, 2008) markers of attitudes (Skovholt *et al.*, 2014) type of feedback (Yamashita *et al.*, 2010; Vogel and Sanchez, 2012) and nonverbal communication cues (Ganster *et al.*, 2012) while the study by Park *et al.* (2013) and Urabe *et al.* (2013) only focused on the different emoticon usage style between westerners and easterners. In their research, they stated that westerners tend to use the horizontal style of emoticon while the easterners tend to use the vertical style of emoticon. The horizontal style focus the expression based on the mouth shape while the vertical style focus on the eye shape. Their study did not reflect on cultural element but only focus on how the different region are using the emoticons. Table 1 shows the emoticon usage style according to region and its examples.

According to Toratani and Hirayama (2011), current emoticons are still lacking and missing the aspects of human actions, emotions and expressions. We agree with this claimed that the current emoticon are lacking in term of cultural aspects. The current usage of emoticons are mainly used to express emotions, expressions and feelings in CMC. This reflect the term emoticons that are based from the combination of term's "emotion" and "icon". If the icon can be used in in a different perspective such as to express the cultural-based expression it could be more beneficial to society. The usage of icon in expressing cultural-based is advantageous because it help in introducing the cultures globally and people from different cultures and society can get to know each other's cultures better. If also can foster self-esteem regarding the cultures of the society. The representation of cultures via icon make the user easy to understand about the cultures compare to reading about it.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The objective of this research is to explore the need of Culturicon in CMC among Malaysian people. In gathering

the need of Culturicon, we used the survey questionnaire to gain feedback from the respondent. The results of the questionnaire are used to support the statement based from the literature review where we found that there is a lack of cultural elements in CMC. From this questionnaire, we can know whether there is a need for Culturicon in Malay context. The type of CMC used, frequency of emoticon usage, the sufficiency of current emoticons and the cultural aspects in current emoticon will be measured in order to determine the need for Culturicon.

Questionnaire: In order to support the statement based from the literature review where we found that current emoticon is lacking in terms of cultural-based expression, we conducted a questionnaire session to the public. The questionnaire used mix method approach to gather the data. The target respondents are Malay because the researcher want to focus on one race only for the first Model of Culturicon. The questionnaire were conducted to the respondent that comprised from student, lecturer, teacher and clerk. The reason why the respondent were comprised from different profession is because the researcher want to gather information from various profession that may have different perspective regarding the usage of emoticon.

The survey questionnaire session took place in University Utara Malaysia (UUM) and school in Jitra, Kedah. The total respondents are 50 people. The questionnaire were distributed to the respondents and the respondents were free to ask the researcher if there are questions that they do not understand. The respondents took approximately around 3 min to complete the survey. The questionnaire consist of demography section, personal usage experience of CMC and emoticons and the opinion regarding the emoticons. The questionnaire results were analyzed using Microsoft Excel.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Data analysis and results: The questionnaire were distributed to 50 respondents and the researcher managed to get back all 50 of the questionnaires. The results of the questionnaire were analyzed by using Microsoft Excel. The demography section are as in Fig. 1. Based from the questionnaires for the demography section, the respondent profile indicated that 40% respondents are male (20 persons) while 60% respondents are female(30 persons). Rgarding the age of the respondents, 56% are in the range of 15-25 years old (28 persons), 26% are in the range of 26-35 years old (13 persons),
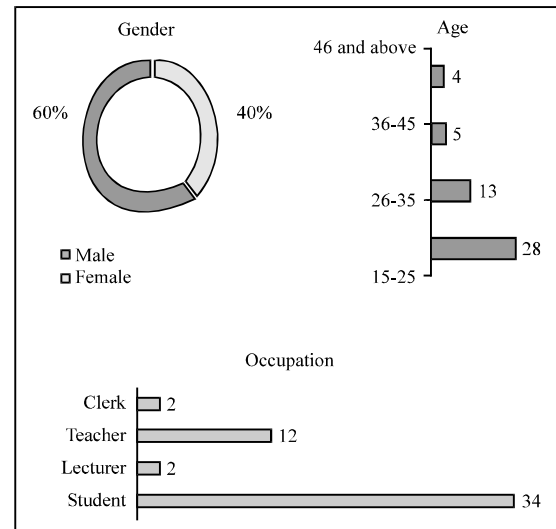

Fig. 1: Respondent's gender, age and occupation

Table 2: Type of smartphone

Types	Frequencies
Android	43
IPhone	7

10% are in the range of 36-45 years old (5 persons) and 8% are age of 46 and above (4 persons). From the 50 respondents, 68% are students (34 persons), 24% are teachers (12 persons), 4% are lecturers (2 persons) and 4% are clerks (2 persons).

For the user experience of CMC and emoticons section, there are five questions. Question 1 asked whether the participant is a smartphone user and the result is all of the respondents are smartphone user. Question 2 asked what type of smartphone they are using. Result shows that 86% are using Android phone (43 persons), 14% are using IPhone (7 persons) and 0% for both windows phone and blackberry (Table 2).

Question 3 asked participant to tick what application they are using to have a conversation with other people. Result shows that 100% participants are using WhatsApp (50 persons) 88% are using Facebook chat (44 persons), 42% are using WeChat (21 persons), 34% are using Telegram (17 persons), 20% are using Twitter (10 persons), 12% are using LINE (6 persons) and 6% tick other for the application that is not listed in the answer section (3 persons) (Table 3).

Question 4 asked if the participant is using emoticons to express their feelings, actions and reactions during online conversations or CMC, results shows all of the participants are using emoticon in CMC (50 persons). Question 5 asked participant the frequency of emoticons usage during the conversation. Result

Table 3: Type of application used

Types	Frequencies
WhatsApp	50
Facebook	44
WeChat	21
Telegram	17
Twitter	10
LINE	6
Other	3

Table 4: Frequency of emoticon usage

Usage	Frequencies
Frequently	27
Sometime	19
Rarely	4
Never	0

Table 5: Mean results

Questions	Mean
Do you think that the current emoticons available are sufficient enough to express your feelings, actions and reactions during the online conversations?	4.02
Do you agree that current emoticons available are lacking in term of Malaysia's cultures?	6.02
If new emoticons based on Malaysia's cultures are created for example Hari Raya celebration, national dress and traditional foods, do you think it will be useful?	6.58
Do you think by using the Malaysia's culture emoticons would help in introducing Malaysia's cultures worldwide?	6.56

shows that 54% of the participants frequently use the emoticons (27 persons), 38% of participants use it sometime (19 persons), 8% of participants use it rarely (4 persons) and 0% never use it (Table 4).

In the opinion regarding emoticons section, there are 5 questions. Four questions used the Likert-scale format and one question asked user to describe Malaysia's culture that should be implemented in Culturicon. Table 5 shows the mean result based from the opinion section in the questionnaire.

The opinion section of the questionnaire used the Likert-scale format. The result were compared by the range of answer from strongly agree (7), agree (6), neutral (5), disagree (4) and strongly disagree (3). For the first question, Table 5 shows that the mean result is 4.02 which is in the range of disagree. This result shows that the participants think that current emoticons available in the CMC are not enough to express feelings, actions and reactions during online conversations. For second question, the result shows the means result is 6.02 which is in the range of agree. This result shows that participants agree that current emoticons available are lacking in terms of Malaysia's cultures for them to use during online conversation. The result for second question is adhere with the result for the first question where the insufficient emoticons available in CMC results to the lack of Malaysia's cultures to be used. For third

Table 6: Cultural opinion by respondent

Categories	Frequencies
Malaysian national costume	12
Malaysian food	8
Malaysian celebration	8
Malaysian traditional game	5
Malaysian historical place	2
Malaysian flower	1
Emoticon with patriotic sound	1

question, result shows the mean result is 6.58 which is in the range of agree. This result shows that the new emoticons that are based on Malaysia's cultures could be useful, beneficial and in demand among Malaysian where the current emoticon are lacking in term of cultural aspect. For fourth question, result shows that the mean result is 6.56 which is in the range of agree. This shows that participants agree by using Malaysia's cultures emoticon could help in introducing Malaysia's cultures worldwide by using it in the online conversation.

The last question of the questionnaire asked participant to optionally describe the Malaysia's culture that is not exist yet and should be implemented in Culturicon. Total 64% of participants gave their opinions while 36% of participants did not answer. The participants gave their opinion either by writing or drawing to illustrate their opinion. The opinion described by the participant are as in Table 6.

Table 6 shows the result of question 10 after we have made an analysis where there are 7 category of cultural opinion from the participants. Malaysian national costume has the highest frequency with 12 answer, followed by Malaysian food and celebration with 8 answer, traditional game with 5 answer, historical place with 2 answer and Malaysian flower and sound with both 1 answer.

CONCLUSION

The objective of this study is to explore the need of Culturicon among Malaysian people. The participants comprised of Malay race with variety range of ages and professions as the first model for culturicon. Based from literature review and survey questionnaire, we found that there is a need for a cultural-based emoticon to be implemented in CMC where it will be recognized as Culturicon. This findings are supported by Toratani and Hirayama (2011) where in their study they stated that current emoticons are still lacking and missing the aspects of human actions, emotions and expressions.

Based from the survey questionnaire we categorized the culture into national costume, food, celebration, traditional game, historical place and flower where Malaysia are rich with this cultures. If this can be utilized

into the form of culturicon and be implemented in CMC medium, user can use it to improve their daily communication. Culturicon also can foster the self-esteem of the cultures among the people.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For future research, we will focus on developing a model for Culturicon. The opinion for Culturicon category by the respondents will be considered. Since, the keyboard characters are limited in order to create the Culturicon, we will choose the PSI category to develop Culturicon model.

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