



**INFLUENCE OF NON-VERBAL DIGITAL COMMUNICATION STYLE
(CUSTOMIZED STICKERS) ON SOCIAL INTERACTIONS: A STUDY ON
WHATSAPP USERS**

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ABSTRACT

This research investigates the role of non-verbal digital communication, specifically customized stickers on WhatsApp, in shaping social interactions. With advancements in communication technology, non-verbal elements like emoji and stickers have become pivotal in text-based interactions, replacing for the lack of traditional cues such as facial expressions or vocal tones. The research focuses on university students in Lahore, Pakistan, to understand the role of stickers in emotional expression, cultural identity, and WhatsApp group dynamics. This study employs qualitative research methods, data was collected through focus groups, analyzed using thematic analysis via NVivo software. Findings reveal that stickers enrich communication by adding emotional depth and cultural relevance but also pose challenges such as misinterpretation and ethical misuse. The study contributes to the literature on digital communication and suggests the evolving role of personalized stickers in enhancing interactions.

Keywords: Non-verbal Communication, Customized Stickers, Emotional Expression, Cultural Identity, Social Interactions, Miscommunication, Ethical Concerns, Thematic Analysis.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the study

Technology (telephone and the Internet) has influenced the medium and nature of communication significantly over the last few years (Rungta, 2015). The advancement of digital technology has totally transformed the landscape of human communication. In particular, messaging applications such as WhatsApp have revolutionized the way individuals connect, engage, and interact on various social platforms (Hasan, 2018). The sign language and non-verbal cues shows what person is trying to express than what person actually is saying in face-to-face interactions. In text-based communication, the absence of non-verbal cues can cause misunderstanding and confusion in communication. WhatsApp's platform serves not only as a text messaging tool but also as communication channel that offers various forms of non-verbal communication, the emoji's – small pictorial characters –Other pictures elements including stickers, avatars, memes and GIFs with a moving image structure (Barna, 2024). As we move from face-to-face communication to digital interaction, the role of non-verbal cues get new significance. Traditional non-verbal communication like facial expressions, gestures, body language, and tone of voice play a vital role in conveying emotions and intentions in physical interactions. However, in a digital environment, these cues are largely absent or modified, with the adaptation of digital communication styles to ensure effective exchange of messages. Digital media platforms have become central part of modern communication, influencing emotions and behaviors despite their virtual nature. Emoji and stickers are often viewed as replacements for verbal tone. The manipulative effect of stickers on user perception



of textual messages is of great importance. Previous studies clearly demonstrated that the usage of non-verbal cues (emoji's, stickers, GIFs) intensifies the effect of message. Using more signs in text messages increases the perception of expressions and emotions in social interaction. The negative cues increase the negative effect of message and positive signs intensify the positive perception of message (Khalid, Bukhari, & Maqsood, 2024). In recent years, the landscape of digital communication has evolved dramatically, with user-generated content (UGC) playing a central role in shaping interpersonal interactions. Among the multiple forms of expression representation, users-generated stickers on platforms like WhatsApp have emerged as an important non-verbal medium through which users convey emotions, humor, and identity. These stickers, often created by users themselves, enable a rich perspective of communication that minimizes language barriers and supports deeper connections in an increasingly globalized digital environment. Sticker usage on WhatsApp may lead to the formation of a new connection, and this relationship may be mediated by self-importance and expression of pure emotions. The emerging literature on stickers extends our understanding of emotional management and the formation of extended self during WhatsApp communication among young adults (Saharan, Antil, & Satyam, 2024).

This thesis aims to investigate the usage of digital objects, such as stickers (a type of user's generated graphics) on WhatsApp by exploring the consequences of user-generated non-verbal content, with a specific focus on custom stickers. By examining their role in digital communication, the study illuminates how these elements shape user interactions, enhance emotional expression, and supports community engagement. Through a comprehensive analysis of existing literature and qualitative data collected by focus groups, Researcher uncovered the significance of custom stickers in the evolving landscape of digital communication and their potential to influence user behavior and social relationships.

1.2 Digital Communication

Digital communication means the process of exchanging information through digital channels and technologies such as computers, smartphones, and tablets—and platforms like social media, email, messaging apps, ranging of formats such as text, audio, video, and graphics.

1.3 Non-Verbal Digital Communication

Digital non-verbal communication consists of a range of elements that serve to enhance and clarify the meaning of text messages. The key components include:

1.3.1 Stickers

Animated and customized images that can convey humor, or a specific emotional tone. These tools help users to express sentiments that are difficult to express with words alone.

1.4 Social interaction

Social interaction refers to the process by which individuals engage with one another, influencing and responding to each other's behaviors, thoughts, and emotions.

1.5 Problem statement

While many studies have highlighted the Influence of digital communication on social interaction but Non-Verbal Communication style especially stickers have not been specifically studied in Pakistan. Following are the important problem statements regarding this research.

1. Misinterpretation of context about stickers often leads to confusion in communication, affecting interpersonal relationships.
2. Fast technological changes and evolving preferences of user for more personalized stickers raise questions about their role in future digital communication.

3. Ethical misuse of stickers, such as cyberbullying or the use of offensive content, is not explored area in digital communication.

1.6 Significance of the Study

The study explores the transformative role of non-verbal digital communication, focusing on customized stickers on WhatsApp. As messaging apps dominate digital interactions, the understanding of concept that how these stickers shape emotions, expressions, and relationships becomes crucial. This research lights the cultural and emotional connection that how stickers go beyond linguistic barriers, making communication accessible and rich. By addressing a gap in understanding non-verbal elements in messaging, the study contributes to the ongoing discourse on digital behavior. Insights from the study can inform social media platforms, designers, and communicators to enhance user engagement and emotional expression tools.

1.7 Research Objectives

Following are the main objectives of this research:

RO 1. To examine the influence of customized stickers on communication dynamics among WhatsApp users.

RO 2. To identify challenges related to Non-Verbal i.e. sticker-based digital communication.

RO 3. To investigate the evolving nature of digital behavior and rapid advancement of the technologies like updated features of WhatsApp.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Overview of Digital Communication Style

The rise of digital communication platforms has transformed how people interact, especially among users of messaging applications like WhatsApp. While much attention has been given to verbal communication in these settings, non-verbal elements play a crucial role in shaping interactions. The use of stickers in personal messengers is common. Bhatt & Arshad (2016) studied that WhatsApp is medium of making communication easier and faster by enhancing effective flow of information, idea sharing and connecting people easier. The impact is so powerful that users give up their real-world interest and their entire emotional part is restricted to this application. Their happiness or sadness depends on the reply which they receive from other users. They cannot control themselves from constantly chatting, replying and sharing of ideas.

2.2 Overview of Non-Verbal Digital Communication

Stickers have become an important function in the chats allowing users to display affection and express emotions. Stickers have become an established trend in the messaging apps that sets them apart from other platforms (Liu, 2024). He further clarified the relationship within motivation (social and emotional), interaction, and arousal of sticker users. Analysis indicates that social motivation positively affects the interaction of sticker users. Emotional motivation (leisure and passing time) positively affects the interaction of sticker users. Customized stickers will attract the users' attention, thus attracting more people to download and use them. Saleem, Asghar, & Abbasi (2022) analyze a strong link between politico-religious association of content creator and political decision-making sources of users. By creating political relevant content in graphic form and non-verbal symbols these organizations engage their followers and maintain the engaging interaction between them.

2.3 Social Interaction

Kiran & Srivastava (2018) examines the effect of WhatsApp usage on youngster's relationships among themselves and their friends and family. The dependency on WhatsApp has led to a



number of social, physical and psychological problems among youngsters. The impact of this application is so impact full that users give up their real-world interest and whole emotional quotient is restricted to the app (Monika, Ambarkarb, & Akhare, 2020). By the rapid use of WhatsApp and the regular updates in it, it is very much easier for the teenagers to spend their time through exchange of information videos, messages, and calling by video in WhatsApp. Most of the WhatsApp users spend half an hour to one hour every day on it. It helps to manage the time well. As per the overall interpretation teenagers liked that WhatsApp is a beneficial app (Suryawanshi & Suryawanshi, 2017). WhatsApp sends real-time messages and it is one of the world's most popular communication applications in the 21st century. Young people perceive WhatsApp as a 'convenient' communication application in their everyday lives. Some of the critical issues arising from the use of WhatsApp included distractions and exposure to unregulated messages or information (Ahad & Lim, 2014). Mangaleswaran (2017) sensed that the use of WhatsApp contributes to strengthen and maintain healthy relationship and social tie with friends, family and community, and diverse perception among the students about the WhatsApp dependency, the researcher highly focused and directed the research to look into the use of WhatsApp to fulfilling the belonging and love needs, and perception of students about the WhatsApp dependency. WhatsApp fulfils both emotive and cognitive needs, serving as a valuable tool for social connection and education (Shahzad, 2024). Highly favored by university students. While WhatsApp's widespread use in Pakistan highlights its importance for communication and information sharing, users must consider social, cultural and ethical implications. Students may be educated on responsible use to understand the impact of their online presence and maintain appropriate boundaries between academic and social interactions. Encouraging students to form study groups on WhatsApp can enhance understanding, build community and make learning more dynamic and engaging. Students use abbreviations, emoji's, and stickers to communicate more efficiently while reflecting cultural and social identities (Shahwani, Anwer, Bibi, & Mehmood, 2024). Cultural dynamics, including peer influence and the interplay between Urdu and English, further shape digital communication practices, highlighting a generational shift in language adaptability. Digital non-verbal communication styles are vital part of social interactions on platforms like WhatsApp. The use of emoji's, stickers, and GIFs enhances the richness of online conversations, helping users to showcase emotional aspects and cultural differences. As digital communication continues to evolve, further exploration of these non-verbal elements will be essential for understanding their impact on relationships and social dynamics like interaction in the digital age.

2.4 Research Gaps

Previous studies have discussed the Influence of Digital Communication Style on social interaction in detail, but following gaps can be observed:

1. The impact of user-generated non-verbal content, such as memes or custom stickers, on communication styles is not properly discussed in previous studies so this aspect needs to be explored.
2. The absence of understanding that how different contexts influence the interpretation of non-verbal cues on WhatsApp may lead to miscommunication and weakens the relationships. This perspective also needs further detailed research.
3. As WhatsApp introduces new functions, the existing literature does not adequately explore how these changes impact user engagement with non-verbal cues and overall communication quality.

4. There is limited research on how stickers reflect cultural identity and how they serve to the diverse cultural backgrounds of users.

2.5 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.5.1 Media Richness Theory

Media richness theory by (Daft & Lengel , 1984), states that different communication mediums are different in their ability to convey information.

The theory selects media based on “richness,” which refers to their ability to:

- Transfer multiple cues (like, verbal and non-verbal).
- Supports quick feedback.
- Develop a sense of personal focus.

In context of digital communication, especially on platforms like WhatsApp, non-verbal cues play a crucial role in shaping interactions, which makes Media Richness Theory as an appropriate framework for examining this dynamic. According to Media Richness Theory, richer media are more effective for complex messages. WhatsApp, as a rich communication medium, supports many non-verbal cues, including emojis, stickers, and gifs. They enhance the richness of message by adding emotional depth and clarity to text-based interactions. For example, an emoji can convey feelings such as joy or sadness, which might be lost in plain text.

Media Richness Theory also focuses on the importance of immediate feedback in communication. WhatsApp facilitates real-time communication, by allowing users to respond immediately through various means, like text, emojis, sticker, voice notes, or other elements. This provides an environment where users can adjust their communication style based on the feedback they receive. For example, if a user sends a humorous message including a laughing emoji, it encourages a lively tone in the conversation. The use of non-verbal cues, such as personalized stickers or specific emojis, can signal closeness and intimacy in relationships on users.

Media Richness Theory highlights the role of non-verbal elements in shaping social interactions. The medium’s abilities of quick feedback, emotional aspects, and personalization contribute to a rich communication environment that enhances user experiences. As digital communication continues to evolve, further exploration of these dynamics through the eye of Media Richness Theory will provide valuable knowledge into the complexities of social interactions in the digital age.

2.5.2 Social Presence Theory

Social Presence Theory, by (Short, Williams, & Christie, 1976) tells the degree to which a communication medium can allow users to perceive others communication as real and present. On digital platforms, non-verbal cues like stickers enhance social presence by creating a sense of closeness. Stickers can replace facial expressions and gestures, making conversations feel more personal and less detached. On WhatsApp, stickers often serve as starting point or tension diffusers, promoting a sense of community. The use of personalized sticker’s signals emotional investment in relationships, creating closeness and trust. Social Presence Theory highlights the importance of stickers in minimizing the gap between face-to-face and digital interactions. With help of visual and emotional depth to text-based communication, stickers help users feel connected instead of physical distances.

2.6 Implications of Theories to Research Questions

1. How do stickers influence emotional expression on WhatsApp?



- Media Richness Theory: Stickers provide visual cues that enrich emotional communication.
- 2. What role do stickers play in social interactions?
 - Social Presence Theory: Stickers enhance group interaction by creating a sense of closeness.
 - Symbolic Interactionism: customized stickers create shared meanings that strengthen bonds.
- 3. How do stickers reflect cultural identity?
 - Symbolic Interactionism: Stickers includes cultural values and humour, enabling users to express identity.
- 4. What are the challenges of sticker-based communication?
 - Media Richness Theory: Limited richness of some stickers may fail to convey complex emotions accurately.

2.7 Research Questions

These main questions have been catered in this thesis to know the influence of user-generated stickers in digital communication, considering how they are used, keeping in view the emotional and social impact among Pakistani WhatsApp users.

1. Are stickers playing any role in WhatsApp group dynamics? And how do stickers influence emotional expression, social bonding and reflect cultural identity on WhatsApp.
2. Are there any challenges of sticker-based communication like misunderstanding of the context, miss interpretation of the meaning, ambiguity?
3. What are the impacts of evolving nature of digital communication behaviors like to just react instead of writing a note about any content and technological advancement i.e. customize content like stickers creation, on digital communication users?

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Methodology

This study includes research design, which follows qualitative approach, including purposive sampling, and participants from various universities in Lahore, Pakistan. The data collection method includes focus groups. This study uses the data analysis techniques, thematic analysis using NVivo software.

Table 1: Conceptualization and Operationalization of Key Concepts

Concepts	Operational Definition	Indicators
Non-Verbal Digital Communication	Use of visual elements (stickers) in digital interactions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Frequency of use• Context of use
Social Interaction	Engagement through non-verbal cues that affect interaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Emotional expression• Social bonding
Miscommunication and Ethical Concerns	Risks of misinterpretation about customized sticker.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• misunderstanding• Ambiguity• Ethical concerns (misuse)

3.2 Research Design

This research uses a qualitative research design among university students in Lahore, Pakistan. The qualitative approach is suitable for this study because it allows an in-depth exploration of participants' experiences and perceptions of digital communication in their natural context.



This research focuses specifically on non-verbal digital communication, such as the use of emojis, stickers, gifs, and other visual elements.

The study utilizes interpretive approach (Stockdale & Standing, 16 September 2006) which helps in understanding the meanings of non-verbal communication. This approach enables researcher to examine the influence of social, cultural, and contextual factors on users about non-verbal communication in digital interactions.

3.3 Sample

A sample of 35 students has been selected from COMSATS University Islamabad, Lahore Campus, Superior University, University of Management and Technology (UMT), University of Punjab, Riphah International University, University of South Asia, and Government Collage University Lahore, in Punjab, Pakistan, specifically focusing on students' experiences with non-verbal communication in digital environments. The sample size is suitable for qualitative research, as it enables a rich, detailed analysis while capturing diverse perspectives from students across different academic and social contexts.

3.3.1 Rational for selecting these Universities

Researcher selected these Universities because of Lahore's cultural diversity, provides a rich context for exploring how non-verbal digital communication styles evolve across different social and cultural settings. Participants regularly uses digital platforms like WhatsApp. Students have multiple socio economic background as they belong to diverse area of the Punjab Pakistan.

3.3.2 Sampling criteria

The study uses purposive sampling. Purposive sampling (Campbell S, 2020) meets specific criteria relevant to the research questions. This allows the researcher to focus on users who are actively engaged with digital communication tools and whose experiences will provide meaningful insights. Specific criteria for sampling include:

- **Social Media Activity Level:** Participants are regularly using platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, and Instagram for daily communication.
- **Age Group:** Participants are between 18-30 years, reflecting the demographic most actively engaged in social media and texting.
- **Familiarity with Non-Verbal Communication:** Participants are actively using non-verbal forms of communication, such as emojis and stickers, in their digital interactions.
- **Owing their own gadgets:** All the participants owns their own digital gadgets including smart phones, computers and other.

The purposive sampling (Campbell S, 2020) approach ensures that the sample is representative of the students mostly involved in digital communication, making them well-positioned to provide valuable insights into non-verbal communication practices.

3.4 Participants Demographics

Research is collected through 7 focus groups having total number of students 35 each focus group consisting of 5 members from 7 different universities of Lahore, Pakistan Participants are students of 18–30 years age, showing demographics of actively using WhatsApp and digital communication tools. Their regular use of non-verbal digital communication elements made them ideal for this research.

3.5 Data Collection

Data for this research is collected through 7 focus groups each consisting of 5 members from 7 different universities of Lahore, Pakistan, allowing for an active exploration of non-verbal communication styles in digital interactions. Focus groups were conducted by seeking



permission via permission letter (See Appendix E) from different universities including COMSATS University Islamabad, Lahore Campus, Superior University, University of Management and Technology, University of Punjab, Riphah International University, University of south Asia, and Government Collage University, Lahore in Punjab Pakistan. Focus group discussions provide an interactive setting where students were allowed to share their experiences and perceptions of non-verbal communication cues such as emojis, stickers, GIFs, and other digital visual elements.

3.6 Tools of Analysis

Data is analyzed by using NVivo software, which facilitates thematic analysis (Clarke & Braun, 2006). The analysis followed these steps:

- Making initial codes.
- Identity of theme.
- review of theme
- refining of theme
- Thematic mapping, to establish relationships among themes.

4. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Thematic Analysis Process

Thematic analysis (Joffe, 2011) permits the researcher to combine analysis of the frequency of initial codes with analysis of their themes, subthemes, findings. Process is carried out through multiple readings of the transcribed data, during which initial codes were identified. These codes were then gathered into main themes.

4.1.1 Initial Coding

The initial coding revealed several key themes that were relevant across all focus groups. Some of the initial codes included:

- Stickers as emotional expression tools (e.g., conveying love, humor, anger,).
- Stickers as cultural symbols.
- Misinterpretations of sticker messages.
- Ethical concerns regarding sticker use like offensive, memes and funny stickers.
- Future perspectives and evolutionary nature of stickers.

4.2 Identifying Themes

From the initial codes, several broad themes emerged across all focus groups. These themes highlight the complex nature of WhatsApp stickers in digital communication. Following main key themes were explored during the focus group discussions:

- **Use of Non-Verbal Elements:** How students use emojis, stickers, GIFs, and other non-verbal tools in their digital communication, and how these elements influence the tone and meaning of their messages.
- **Cultural Expression:** How non-verbal communication reflects students' cultural identities and personal expression in digital interactions.
- **Misinterpretation and Ambiguity:** The potential for misinterpretation of non-verbal cues in digital communication, especially when humour, sadness, or any other emotion is conveyed through emojis or stickers.
- **Future of sticker elements:** Stickers will evolve further, with more personalized and user-generated content likely to emerge.

4.3 Finding of Themes

Following are the findings of the themes, showing “Emotional Expression” “Cultural Relevance” “Misinterpretation” and “Future of Stickers” as prominent themes.

Emotional Expression via Stickers:

Stickers are commonly used to express a range of emotions, such as humor, love, anger, or sadness. Participants highlighted that stickers allow individuals to communicate emotions that may otherwise be difficult to convey with only words. This is mainly obvious in informal settings, where stickers add visual context and emotional tone to the communication.

According to Participant PB3,

"Stickers help to express feelings that words can't capture."

Similarly, another Participant (PD1) added,

"It's much easier for me to express, what I feel, through stickers as compared to writing it out."

Cultural Relevance and Identity in Sticker:

Focus group discussions revealed that stickers are also viewed as indicators of cultural identity. Participants from each university described that how WhatsApp stickers combine local humor, cultural references, and personal identities in one visual item. Custom stickers, often with local information and everyday symbols, are seen as a way of highlighting cultural bonds among users.

Participant PC4 highlighted that,

"We use stickers that reflect our culture, like local memes or funny sayings."

Also Participant PE4 said that,

"Stickers with local information or cultural references are a way to make the conversation more personal."

Misinterpretation and Ambiguity about Stickers:

Where stickers help to express emotions, they can also lead to misunderstandings. Misinterpretations of stickers, mainly in serious or politically sensitive discussions, are highlighted as a common issue. Participants highlighted that the emotional tone proposed by the sender could be misread by the recipient, depending on context and present emotional states.

In view of Participant PF1,

"Sometimes sending a funny sticker can be miscalculated, mainly if the person is sad."

While Participant PA2 added that,

"Once I sent a sticker as a joke, and it was taken as serious."

The Future and Evolution of Stickers:

Participants also revealed about the future of stickers in digital communication. There is a consent that stickers will evolve further, with more personalized and user-generated content likely to emerge. The evolving importance of stickers in modern communication is seen as part of a larger trend toward more expressive and visually focused communication.

Participant PD5 confirmed that,

"Stickers are future of digital communication; they'll keep evolving and become more personalized and creative."

Likewise Participant PG2 said,

"In future we will see more personalized stickers, especially in the situation of memes, coolness and fun culture."



4.4 Distribution of Subtheme

Subthemes are distributed, with “Conveying Emotions,” “Local/cultural Representation,” and “Evolution of Stickers” standing out as major parts, as these subthemes along with ambiguity covers 40% of overall subthemes.

4.4.1 Findings of subthemes

Important and major findings of subthemes of this study are explained below:

1. **Emotional Depth:** Stickers increase emotional communication. They serve as an effective and visually attractive alternate to textual expressions.

Participant PB1 shared,

“Stickers help to express emotions more clearly and in depth without the need of long text.”

Similarly Participant PD2 said that,

“Sending an angry sticker gives a clear signal of your bad mood.”

2. **Local/Cultural Significance:** Culturally rich stickers highlight their role in development of identity and connection in a digital age.

Participant PC4 emphasized that,

“Our sticker’s selection style is different, while American style of making and using stickers is different.”

However in view of Participant PE1,

“We friends do enjoy and make fun of our one friend by making his stickers sitting in his Alto while driving.”

3. **Challenges of Interpretation:** Misinterpretations highlight the importance of context and the need for users to be careful in sticker usage, mostly in sensitive conversations.

Participant PF2 shared that,

“I was talking of food, but my sticker of coke studio got misinterpreted with music.”

While according to Participant PA5,

“People might misinterpret funny stickers, thinking it’s an attack or insult.”

4. **Future Evolution/Potential:** evolving demand for personalized and self-motivated stickers hints their increasing importance in shaping digital communication styles.

Participant PD1 stated that,

“Do you think stickers are enough for WhatsApp? We need many more.”

Likewise Participant PG5 thought that,

“Stickers might replace a portion of communication, but human interaction is irreplaceable.”

4.5 Thematic Analysis

The following table summarizes the thematic analysis process including, initial coding, main themes, subthemes, and frequencies found in the analysis.

Table2. NVivo Thematic Analysis

Theme	Sub-theme	Code	Frequency
Emotional Expression and Communication	Conveying Emotions	Stickers for humour, love, sadness, etc.	15



Cultural Relevance and Personal Identity	Local Representation	Custom stickers with local memes or cultural symbols	12
Misinterpretation and Ambiguity	Context Dependence	Misreading emotions from stickers	7
Ethics and Morality	Respectful & Ethical Usage	Avoiding offensive & harmful stickers	9
Future of Stickers	Evolution of Stickers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More personalised and user-generated stickers • Stickers with trending memes 	11

Thematic analysis (Joffe, 2011) shows that WhatsApp stickers play a significant role in digital communication, particularly in informal contexts. Stickers are widely used as tool for expressing emotions, allowing users to express feelings that are often difficult to communicate with words. Also, the cultural significance of stickers, their ability to impact the tone of conversations, and their potential for misunderstanding highlight the complexity of their usage. Ethical concerns, especially about cyberbullying or inappropriate content, are also prominent in focus group discussions.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 Discussion

The discussions of focus group along with findings, theoretical perspectives and existing literature provide a broad understanding of the phenomenon of “Influence of Non-verbal Digital Communication Style (customized stickers) on Social Interactions: A Study on WhatsApp Users.” Following are the main discussions emerged from this study:

5.1.1 Emotional Expression by Stickers

Stickers serve as tool for emotional communication, especially in the absence of traditional non-verbal cues like facial expressions and verbal tones. The discussion and results indicate that stickers allow users to express emotions like humor, love, and sadness more efficiently than only text.

- **Theoretical Integration:** findings relate with Media Richness Theory, that richer media are more effective for showing complex emotional expressions. Stickers add depth and richness to digital conversations, reducing doubt in emotional communication.
- **Practical Implications:** Participant PD1, highlighted that:

"It's much easier for me to express, what I feel, through stickers as compared to writing it."

These findings make stickers an option to reduce the effort of typing and help users to convey in depth emotional messages, making them a useful and time-saving tool for digital interactions.

5.1.2 Cultural Representation

The discussion and results reveal that stickers are not only a means of communication but also tools for cultural representation. Users select stickers that reflect their cultural identity, including local memes, languages, and values.

- **Theoretical Integration:** It connects with Media Richness Theory, which explains how individuals use symbols (in this case, stickers) to create shared meanings.
- **Practical Implications:** In view of participant PC4,

"We use stickers that reflect our culture, like local memes or funny sayings."

These findings conclude that stickers offer a way for users to maintain cultural

relevance in globalized digital spaces. But, limited availability of culturally specific stickers can restrict their effectiveness.

5.1.3 Challenges of Misinterpretation

The discussion and result show that stickers can lead to misunderstandings. The interpretation of a sticker often depends on the context of the communication and the emotional state of the receiver.

- **Theoretical Integration:** In Accordance with Media Richness Theory, stickers add richness to online communication, but still lack the feedback of face-to-face communication, leading to misinterpretation.
- **Practical Implications:** According to Participant PA5,
“People might misinterpret funny stickers, thinking it’s an attack or insult.”

So, users must carefully consider the suitability of stickers in specific contexts, particularly in professional or complex discussions.

5.1.4 Ethical Considerations

The discussion and results highlight ethical concerns about sticker usage, such as cyberbullying, offensive content, and misuse in sensitive settings.

- **Theoretical Integration:** Ethical concerns relate with Social Presence Theory, as misuse of stickers can create negative meanings and also can harm interpersonal relations.
- **Practical Implications:** participant PE1 stated that,
“We friends do enjoy and make fun of our one friend by making his stickers sitting in his Alto while driving.”

So, there is need to educate consumers about responsible sticker usage on platforms like WhatsApp to reduce ethical issues.

5.1.5 Future of Stickers in Digital Communication

The discussion and results underlined the evolving nature of stickers, with an increasing demand for personalized and culturally significant customized stickers.

- **Theoretical Integration:** The discussion and analysis links with Media Richness Theory, as users actively find media that meet their social, emotional, and identity needs.
- **Practical Implications:** According to views of participant PD5,
“Stickers are future of digital communication; they’ll keep evolving and become more personalized and creative.”

So, by keeping in mind users review inventors should focus on creating more wide and customized stickers to meet user demands.

5.2 Conclusion

The discussion and results of this study prove that stickers play a significant role in WhatsApp communication, increasing emotional expression. Saharane et al. (2024) Mentioned sticker usage on WhatsApp may lead to the formation of a new connection, and this relationship is mediated by expression of pure emotions. The emerging literature on stickers extends our understanding of emotional management and the formation of extended self during WhatsApp communication among young adults. WhatsApp stickers are also raising cultural identity. In form of stickers communities and groups are saving their culture by converting the main cultural components into meme stickers and into many occasional stickers and GIFs etc. Usage of nonverbal communication is also influencing group interactions. WhatsApp fulfills both emotive and cognitive needs, serving as a valuable tool for social connection and education



(Shahzad, 2024). Although stickers improve interactions by adding emotional depth and cultural significance, but their risk for doubt and misuse highlights the need of cultural relevant and ethical usage. Critical issues arising from the use of WhatsApp included distractions and exposure to unregulated messages or information (Ahad & Lim, 2014). The findings suggest that as digital communication continues to grow, stickers will play a gradually vital role in shaping social interactions, their presence in digital communication platforms is likely to become more personalized and culturally significant, making them vital tools for future interactions. Shahzad (2024) Suggested that widespread use of WhatsApp in Pakistan highlights its importance for communication and information sharing; users must consider social, cultural and ethical implications. WhatsApp fulfills both emotive and cognitive needs, serving as a valuable tool for social connection and education. The results highlight ethical concerns about sticker usage, such as cyber bullying, offensive content, and misuse in sensitive settings. The negative cues increase the negative effect of message and positive signs intensify the positive perception of message (Khalid et al. 2024).

5.3 Future Implications

1. Technological Development: Messaging Apps like WhatsApp should generate context-aware sticker to minimize misinterpretation. Customization features can be improved to promote cultural relevance.
2. Cross-Cultural Communication: further studies can discover the interpretation of stickers in different cultural contexts to understand their influence on global communication style.
3. Educational and Professional Communication Tools: Addition of customized stickers into e-learning and workplace communication tools could be studied to estimate their potential for increasing engagement and teamwork.
4. Ethics and Policy Formation: Research can direct the officials and developers to solving ethical issues, such as misuse of stickers.

5.4 Recommendations

1. Awareness Campaigns: Messaging Platforms like WhatsApp should promote awareness programs to educate users about the ethical use of non-verbal digital communication tools like stickers.
2. Design Enhancements: Developers should focus on creating culturally and contextually appropriate stickers to reduce ambiguity and misinterpretation.
3. Future Research Expansion: Future studies should include larger sample sizes and quantitative approaches to generalize findings across broader population.

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