



#LS EDITOR'S NOTE

Emojis: The shortcut to shallow conversations?

There is no doubt that over the past few decades, emojis have dominated digital media and communication. They are everywhere from our newsfeeds and comments to our messages and interactions. There have also been real-life emoji toys and even movies dedicated to emojis.

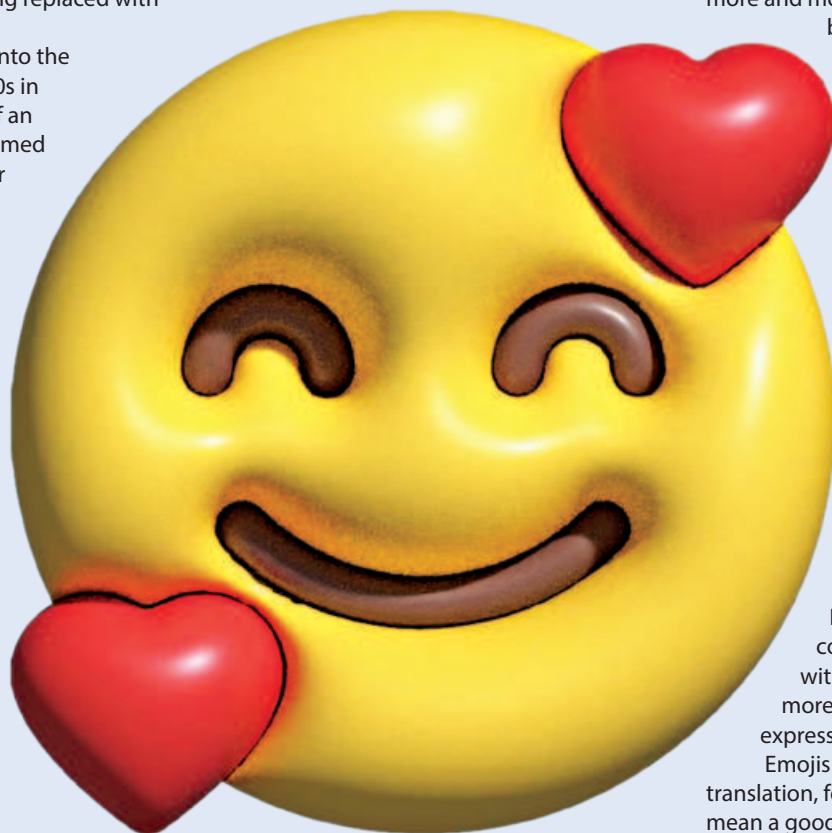
They seem to encompass every human emotion available and more adding personality and humour to our day-to-day interactions. But amidst the light-hearted nature of emojis, it does beg the question of whether they are slowly and eventually changing the way we express emotions. Are we headed into a world where words are being replaced with emojis?

Emojis first came into the scene in the late 1990s in Japan at the hands of an interface designer named Shigetaka Kurita. Ever since, the trend has gone viral across the globe. They started to evolve into a universal language regardless of age, culture or language of the people using them. No matter what emotion people were trying to convey, smiles, frowns, excitement and fright, emojis were able to capture the essence perfectly. Not only that but it also made communicating faster and more comprehensible for most people.

Now the bitter pill to swallow with the ever-influential use of emojis is that over the years, we seemed to be losing the depth of genuine connections especially emotionally. Instead of typing something

thoughtful we just click a few emojis and convey the same message swiftly. A good comparison or analogy is that emojis are like fast food. It's fast and convenient but not necessarily healthy.

Arik Hanson, a social media consultant for mid-sized and large companies in Minnesota,



USA who has over 25 years of experience in marketing and communications stated this about the looming concerns about emojis, "Learning how to think visually is a great thing. I'm not disputing that. But,

learning how to express your thoughts via the written word is a different skill. In my experience, most of the people I see ascending to senior-level PR/communications jobs are those with strong to very strong background in writing—not design/visuals."

Adding to the professional setting, more and more people seem to have been desensitised from emotional stimuli and responses because of the increasing use of visual cues like emojis. When we click on that laughing emoji, how often are we in real life rolling on the floor laughing?

This especially impacts children more as they become used to this kind of communication and therefore tend to not develop their written communication skills.

"Kids already have difficulty learning to write coherently, creatively and effectively in school.

Now, these kids are communicating less and less with written expressions, and more and more with visual cues," expressed Hanson.

Emojis can also become lost in translation, for example, a thumbs up can mean a good thing but without proper context it can come off as sarcastic. So, treading through that thin line and trying to figure out which one can it be is tedious on the mind and that is why most people seem to disregard it completely adding to the desensitisation. The use of emojis has been generalised to the point



where people especially the youth think you are a robot if you do not use emojis!

To the younger generation, emojis are second nature but for others, it could be a bit of a puzzle to figure out. It hinders one's ability to articulate deeper and meaningful emotions because the emoji does the job for you. Imagine a world where expressing complex human emotions is reduced to a few images. It is very efficient but is it worth what we are losing for it?

By Abdul Warith Khan
Photo: Collected