

Is your true response to a social media post under lockdown too?



Anirban Chaudhuri
Great Lakes Institute of Management, Gurgaon



It is not a news anymore that homo sapiens has imbibed the retro way of communicating through cave drawings as the coolest way of expressing emotions in current times. Emoticons or emojis are there in almost every kind of communication that we exchange on a device. It is but natural that a new language of visual words has emerged for not only the Digi-native millennials and Gen Z but has affected the older digital migrants too. In the recent past, the global obsession with the right emoji for burger debate is proof of the importance of this language in contemporary communication. So social media platforms have created an easy menu for people to react using a shortlist of emoticons much to the liking of the users.

Interestingly a mere 'like' does not have any marketing currency as many platforms think that they are turning out to be passive reactions. Digital marketers have been in harmony with the thought that 'likes' need not translate into engagement being a passive engagement. If engagement is an inevitable objective of a brand's content as a bait in the consumer journey, it has to do better than garnering just 'likes'. However, the point of discussion today is not about whether 'likes' matter or not but the user expression of feelings beyond 'likes'.

Socially the expectation is to be more active. As a consumer, one is supposed to comment, share and show active engagement. Coming to this concept of active engagement, different social media platforms have devised different prompts. While Instagram seems to have fused like and love to a heart shared icon, the world's largest professional network LinkedIn as well as the largest social network, Facebook feels that the users should be given a choice to express their feelings more specifically using explicit emoticons.

LinkedIn hence nudges you to ‘love’ or ‘celebrate’ by clapping or say something is ‘insightful’ or feel ‘curious’ beyond like. All through the use of emoticons. On Facebook, you can ‘like’, ‘love’, ‘laugh’ or are ‘wow’ed. You can also feel ‘sad’ or ‘angry’. A six-point scale made up emoticons.

Emoticons act as a shorthand in social media for making users’ feelings towards a post clear. In everyday users’ eco-system, even ‘like’ is still a measure of heightened acknowledgment of a post overglancing through it without a digital footprint. Apart from their role in optimizing conversion rates, social media posts are also a very potent way of measuring consumer sentiments. Whether it is branded content, an influencer viewpoint or a news story, emoticons can be a barometer of what the users are feeling about it.

But with COVID19, a stark truth seems to have come to the fore with regard to emoticons in social media and the conversations around novel coronavirus. The available bank of emoticons is inadequate when it comes to expressing feelings in current times. The dance of death across the world, the uncertainties around a clear view on what will be a medically approved way of shielding the virus or the dark days of a global recession looming large – conversations around such topics cannot be tagged using them. More than sorrow or anger, there is a large feeling of ‘anxiety’. The Unicode (the official emoji makers) library has a word for it. The emoji ‘Anxious Face with Sweat’ has been there since 2010. Another prevalent emotion during these turbulent times that is being pushed by many is to raise hope. Growing view of the malaria treatment drug Hydroxychloroquine coming to the aid of treating COVID19 positives, the start of the human trial of vaccination against COVID19 –make one feel ‘hopeful’ albeit with fingers crossed. ‘Fingers crossed’ is another emoji available in Unicode library since 2016 and widely used in social conversations to mean expectation of a favorable outcome.

The prevailing lockdown has these two trending emotions crying for a way of expression as social media users spend more time, with active engagement through various social posts. Can the platforms find a way to help them share their real feelings instead of locking them down within current choices? Current times, like many other changes, can push social media to come up with a more balanced scale for emoting.

Authored by Prof. Anirban Chaudhuri, Associate Professor, Marketing, Great Lakes Institute of Management, Gurugram

The article can be read online [here](#).