

THE PRESENTATION OF THE PICTOGRAMMATIC “SELF” AND PERSONA: EMOJI’S HISTORICAL EMERGENCE AND PROLIFERATION IN DIGITAL CULTURE

P. DAVID MARSHALL CHARLES STURT UNIVERSITY

ABSTRACT

This article focuses on the history of emoji. From the identifiable smiley face from the 1960s and 1970s to the computer and early Internet culture of using emoticons, it describes how this form of communication filled certain gaps in our structure of conveying sentiment and feeling and works at the construction of a constructed persona of the self in contemporary culture. Connected to this study is the historical connection to pictograms and character-based languages; in that analysis and its linguistic emphasis, the article concludes with the possibility that the development of emoji helps us understand how language and its rearticulation in “text” and “image” has worked to produce collective and common meanings. Research into the differences in written languages – from alphanumeric structures to hieroglyphs and character-based systems – is integrated into positioning emoji and their collective meaning systems. The article concludes with a comprehensive reading of how emoji – in its massive migration and integration from its Japanese imagistic origins to its now routine play in across a myriad of cultures - constructs a strategic form of communication that conveys a tactical expression of self and our persona in and through digital culture.

KEY WORDS

Emoji; Emoticon; Pictograms; Hieroglyphs; Co-presence; Heraldry; Blazoning; Digital Culture; Expressive Remediation; Logos; Persona; Emotion; Mnemonics; Protobrands

INTRODUCTION

It would be wonderful if the origin of emoji were as simple as the way it has been generally characterized across popular sites in our pervasive digital reconfiguration of contemporary culture; the current relationship to emoji is that it is not significant to understand its history and that it is predominantly just a 21st century fun phenomenon of textual expression. At their communicative core, emoji have been designed and integrated into our online world as a pathway to convert thoughts, feelings, objects, and actions into clearly obvious shared meanings. It is both a simple and diverse method of expressing human feeling in its communication to others. This very form of online exchange – the conversion of sentiment that identifies an often-calculated translation of the self and our personas – is something that has been part of human communication for millennia. The very success of this language conversion identifies that it relies on recognizable forms, shapes, and meanings in some way. This study has the objective of establishing the historical patterns of related images, icons and forms of communication that help to explain emoji’s current status, activity, and regular engagement in

digital culture. It ties this historical analysis of emoji into its now routinised integration into contemporary expression of the self as a form of emotive-integrated communication in our current digitally-transformed human culture.

The first Emoji icon/pictogram

To get closer to understanding the origins and emergence of emoji, it is useful to look at what many would recognize as the first emoji and then determine if that accurately defines the way in which emoji became an internationally recognized code for mobile phones and computers. Generally, the smiling face – a very clear and visible expression of the presentation of the self and its strategic fictive reconstruction as a persona (Marshall et al. 2020) - is attributed at least internationally as the one of the first emoji-like pictograms:



Even its simplicity, however, has layers of complexity and elaborate variations.

Predating the pictogram production of the smiling face on computers and typewriters was the emoticon of the smiling face, a pictogram that was a combination of keystrokes of a colon, a space, and a closed parenthesis. Together they become:

:)

Variations, of course, can be achieved through changing parts. For instance, changing the semi-colon for the colon:

;)

is a sign of winking, an idea at least that what the author is conveying is to be taken with humour. And with equal ease:

:(

identifies a sad face with its downturned mouth image. All of these are made with greater accuracy when a dash becomes the nose and divides mouth from eyes:

:-).

And emotion is accentuated with doubling some aspect:

:-((- means very sad, while

:-o is a form of surprise.

Although this horizontal shaping of meaning - where typing produces a clear image would have been far from universal in the era before full image emoji - it nonetheless has had a long history. **Emoticons** were the shared - perhaps internal - language extension of the professions connected to typing and, with humour, they were on rare occasions linked to publishing as well. Rarely is this pre-history of emoji identified, but there is considerable evidence of serious play with making up facial images that expressed both personalised and collectivised emotion through type from at least the 19th century. For instance, British humour magazine *Puck* published an emoticon series of images in 1881. And throughout the next 100 years, periodic and playful deployment of type to indicate emotion and humour - essentially emoticons - appeared publicly in print (Tomić et al. 2013). This use of playful symbolic

emoticons expanded substantially into a cognoscenti group closely related to the first generation of computer programmers and pre-internet sharing cultures from the 1980s onwards when the actual name of emoticons was first coined.

What we have identified so far is a very specific origin of emoji from Western typographic and print culture. On a first order, distinct language groups had slightly nuanced typographic characters through the use of accents, in particular, and these produced culturally specific ranges of emoticons as individuals played with meaning through constructing recognizable images through type. On a second order, the origins of emoji - as its very name identifies - has an Eastern cultural base that has produced a further variation in the production of these conveyors of emotional script. One significant element of Japanese script is that - like Chinese and Egyptian hieroglyphs - it is **character-based**. This character-based quality of language conversion to script points us to the longer historical origins of emoji: on a basic level, emoji are a form of character-like **remediation** of spoken language and more widely human expression that generated in the last 20 years a relatively easy presentation of the digital self.

EXPRESSIVE REMEDIATION

Making sense of emoji as a form of expressive remediation draws us into a longer pattern of how new forms of communication are very much dependent on past forms. In their effort to explain the digital moment, Bolter and Grusin used the concept of remediation to help understand that our integration of the present newness is through the lens of media forms and technologies that predate it (Bolter and Grusin 1999). Designing computer platforms for users then was less about the newness of digital conversion, but a relation to something that was familiar. As Subrata Dey's research explains on the remediation of books through their contemporary conversion onto digital platforms, new computer platforms have relied on terms such as "folders" and "files" as they appeal to the familiarity of print and paper in the original and new personal computer platforms of the 1980s (Dey 2019, p. 37-38).

From this perspective, the written transformation of language identifies a similar remediation. Our English alphabet with its 26 letters is now so abstracted from its signifying relationship to objects and actions, it is hard to imagine that it once had what could be described as remediation connections to something inscribed or seen visibly and caricatured. Marcel Danesi in his book *Semiotics of Emoji* identifies the origins of the letter **A**. Its original conversion into the Greek *alpha* was, actually, an attempt to copy and replicate the ancient Phoenician language and script. The symbol **A** resembled the look of an ox - an *aleph* in the original language, although over years of remediation it became a standardized form of script that eventually became part of the Roman alphabet. Beta was close to the Phoenician word for house - *beth*, while gamma was a variation of "*gimel*" or camel and its shaping similarly connected to the original image of the animal/object (See Danesi 2016, Loc. 240).

From this remediation perspective, writing is a remediation of language. It serves to reposition language outside of its oral exchange. Oral exchange, however, has to be understood as something that is filled with associated meanings that relate to facial expressions and bodily gestures and, very much, the spectrum of human emotion. As Tomlinson has written extensively about in his work on the pre-historical origins of music from hominids to humans, one of the key transformations that may define us collectively as humans is first co-presence in our forms of communication and further exchange of emotion through gestures and tone. Tomlinson, following in the tradition of Burling (2005, chs. 2 & 3), identifies these early hominid expressions as "proto-discourse" as they form the basis of future agreed-upon forms of exchanges among groups of hominids (Tomlinson 2015, p.109).

Tomlinson then projects that hominids and eventually homo sapiens advanced on being able to imagine ideas/actions without co-presence. To capture this key transformation of the

human condition, Tomlinson explains through what he and other proto-linguists have taken to call “cyberspeak” that hominids were able to work “offline” as opposed to the co-presence relations of “online” communication: “In online thinking a hominin reacts to the sabre-toothed cat in front of it; in offline thinking it imagines possible reactions to a cat while sitting safely at a campfire” (Tomlinson 2015, p. 62).

There are multiple insights to be drawn from this reading of gesture and forms of communication that are co-present or online and associative or offline - and eventually collectively shared - and how they relate to the emergence of emoji. Cave paintings as the first images of early hominids and generally attributed to Neandertals identify the offline imaginative reconstructions of online moments: at this very basic level emoji are indexically linked to gestural forms of communication that generally are dependent on co-presence (Alinejad, 2019; Bregman & Haythornthwaite, 2003). From this approach to a theory of language and linguistics, character-writing in certain languages and letter-construction in our own are similarly imaginative reconstructions of co-present sounds and images and actions. The very concept of how character-writing is a pathway to “co-presence” also identifies the manner in which our alphabetic systems of communication are also forms of setting up identity formation: the linguistic and symbolic co-presence produces one of the pathways for the very emergence of persona and its reading and articulation over many millennia (Dekel, 2011).

The apparent uniqueness of emoji has to be linked into the larger perspective of linguistic construction and forms of signification that humans’ co-presence, emotive expression and communication have developed and employed for particular ends. For example, in the teaching of Chinese character-writing it is a common technique to trace the character construction back to its original image: thus man - *rén*: 人 - is built from a depiction of a man carrying a field-like instrument or tool; a woman - *nǚrén*: 女人 - to reconfigure the holding of a baby and a woman sitting before the same symbol for man is shaped to identify clear gender connection and differentiation. The very movement of Chinese character writing from traditional to modern further identifies one modest step in the transformation of the thing/object into its formalistic and linguistically characterized symbol: to use a semiotic expression, they reveal signifying chains of related meaning. Each reformulation over time and for particular ends, refers to its past and relates to that past formulation; but it is built for generally more expedient and collective reading ends. The signifying chain of characters and letters identifies techniques of remediation that reached their zenith with their reformation in printing and typography.

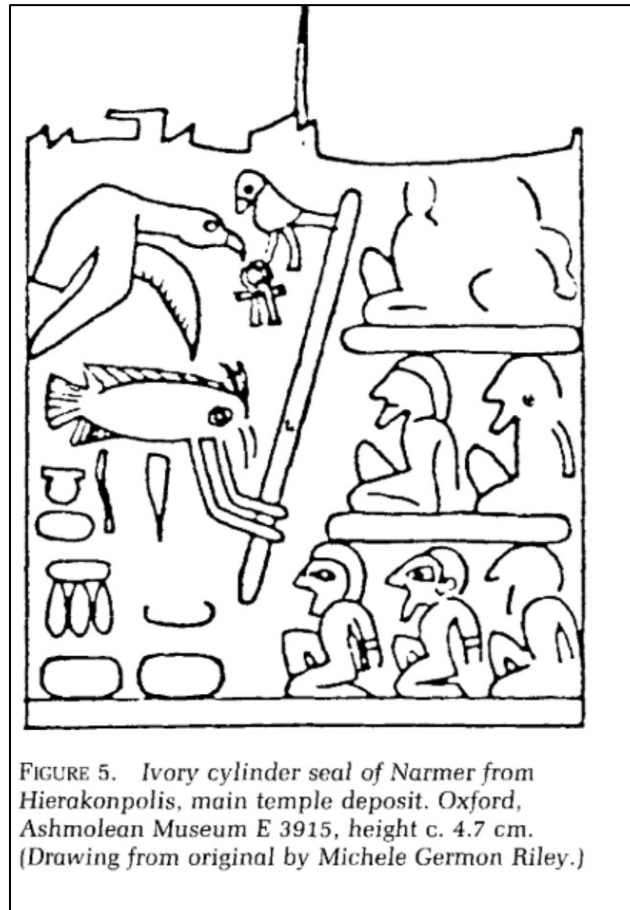
COLLECTIVE EXPERIENCE AND INTERPLAY: THE PLAY OF TIME AND SPACE

Tracing the gestural and character/letter origins of emoji and the long process of remediation is not to make the claim that these figures and forms of communication define some notion of progress or even human development. These transformations in forms of communication provide what could be better classified as affordances (Gibson 1979; Norman 1999; Wellman et al. 2003) for the organisation of human culture that may be better but easily could identify more trying forms of human collective experience. Emoji are best positioned as a further example of what language and writing have produced for millennia: they have provided pathways for connecting humans. This reading of human culture has been linked to “mind-reading” (Tomlinson 2015, p. 108; Tomasello, 2010) and understanding that gestures and human vocalizations and their conversion into shared language and writing are ways that one human can relate to another - something that is not different from other animals and their sharing of experience. These various forms of human communication have led to different constructions of collectives. A shared language provides something beyond kinship in notions of connection of a collective. Indeed, language and writing have also provided pathways for the extensions of

these formations of human collectives. For the economic historian Harold Adams Innis, these technologies of communication helped the production of different kinds of empires and civilizations. (Innis 2007(1951)) For Innis, the communication form might produce a bias in favour of time and thus a generational connection that established a longevity of a certain collective. In other cases, through moveable communication forms such as papyrus or paper, a bias towards space might be privileged and thus allow the movement of a collective into larger geographical territories.

It is perhaps a large claim to place emoji into Innis' reading of civilizations and empires and how communication forms shaped spatial and temporal controlling states and powers. After all, emoji appear to be innocuous and imagistic icons filled with humour and indirect forms of communication in online culture. Nonetheless, emoji are part of a shifting communication structure in the contemporary moment that is changing our relationship to notions of temporal and spatial connections. A non-language specific system of conveying emotions at least provisionally can be seen as expressing a potentially open-ended system of communication - a kind of universalizing conception of language.

To make sense of this particular value of emoji, it is worthwhile to explore, briefly, the precursors to universalizing communication systems to see their significance and whether there is any kind of parallel emerging in our online, social mediated and mobile culture. Like language itself, attempts at generating a system of extending or standardizing human connection and sharing has a long history. There is no question that techniques of extension of communication as a system were part of the emergence of literacy in Europe, Asia and North Africa. Ancient Egyptian pictographic hieroglyphs are perhaps one of the first identifiable systematic techniques to connect stories and messages to its people. As Baines highlights, forms of script in Ancient Egypt were divided in two. There was the much more cursive "hieratic" script used by the high priests for administrative purposes and only comprehensible to these small elites operating in close conjunction with power structures (Baines 1989). This script was connected to the second form of communication, hieroglyphs, that decorated monuments and memorials. Baines identifies hieroglyphs as "rebus" (Baines, 1989, 476) and further defines how their function was to connect the power of the elites to high echelons related to these power structures for reading and interpretation. The hieroglyph from the 4th millennium BCE collected in Baines' work (1989, p. 475), depicts a king re-presented as a powerful catfish showing his power through his weapon and via falcons over their Libyan - and depicted clearly as people - enemies:



(from Baines 1989, p. 475)

Much can be read into this hieroglyph and some of this depends on a familiarity with the Ancient Egyptian context and structures of power through representation. The early nature of this hieroglyph further identifies its relationship to who was permitted to see these pictographs and have access to their memorials. Nonetheless, hieroglyphs developed into a form of caricature in its godlike relation of Egyptian leaders to revered animals and its later efforts to depict and record events and ceremonies: through these depictions, hieroglyphs helped shape the relations of those in power to the people. Quite evidently, the masses of people who were part of the Egyptian state and empire in the period after the beginning of the 4 millennium BCE and onwards to the 4th century AD, used hieroglyphs to relate to those in power that they would perhaps never see. The pictograms then established their power and connected them to animals that were revered and gave the leaders god-like power in their ubiquitousness via the visible hieroglyphs.

Kendra Bryant's writing on integrating into teaching contemporary composition the



Ancient Egypt hieroglyph called "ankh" that attempted to pictographically embody fertility, eternity and life, highlights the way that image and pictograms have had a long and valued connection to both language and writing (Bryant 2018 191-208). The ankh still is something that is usable and recognisable in the contemporary moment. What her research identifies is the continued link even with written and abstract script of the relation to symbols, icons and pictograms in our forms of communication within and across cultures. Indeed, another Ancient Egypt hieroglyph then known as the Eye of Horus or the Evil Eye, has now become a visible contemporary emoji (Williamson,1992)



Eye of Horus



Evil Eye Emoji

This approach to the relation between image and written communication has endured as a way to expand the impact of a variety of ideologies over time is not hard to verify through any study of human history and culture. In a manner similar to the Ancient Egyptian monuments, religions have worked at establishing relationships with people through their architecture which has served as universalizing forms of communication. The spire of a church, the spherical shape of a mosque, and the architectural form of a synagogue have all spoken symbolically through their often-overwhelming size to the people in a given community of the religion's centrality to their lives. The church spire for instance throughout Europe works as an icon that spreads a pictogrammatic message to a larger geographical space than those that can actually either see or hear the priests and elite running the church.

This play in pictogram space is further accentuated in the formation of powers of connection. The long history of coats-of-arms, where groups built solidarity through emblems and symbols that could be reconstructed for mobility as well as longevity, represents one of the best examples of how images embody this emotional connection. Heraldry, which identifies both the handling of representation in the Middle Ages and the interpretation of coats of arms' forms of address through images fabricated into personal and collective meaning systems, according to Boutell was "mainly practical" "although" also "always been decorative" (Brooke-Little 1973) in its origins in the second quarter of the 12th century. Heraldry continued to explicate through these images – "differencing" - which is the way that status and connection to others could be identified:

Differencing" of arms therefore became necessary not only to distinguish the shield of a cadet from that of the head of the family, and of vassal from that of his feudal chief, but also to prevent identity between the arms of strangers who happened to have selected the same simple combination of form and colour. (Brooke-Little 9-10)

The use of animals - lions in England and Scotland - were not only forms of authentication, but also imagistic structures of emotional power and authority. Place also was embodied by plants and the colours and patterns chosen for coats of arms. From these origins of coats of arms originally for knight's jousting or actual battle differentiation, they migrated by the 18th and 19th century to be used by nations, regions and cities. When one is abstracted from, say, the Australian or Canadian coats of arms and loses the heraldry's elaborate system of interpretation of meaning, one sees an expression - emoji-like really - of connection and magical power and strength. The Australian Coat of Arms pictures a kangaroo facing an emu while balancing themselves in a wattle tree as they cradle another six Coats of Arms representing the states of Australia embedded and "marshalled" into one. When this is augmented with the full version of the various states and territories coats of arms, one further sees the emotional value placed on the presence of animals and their definition of place; but also, the clear connection to crowns, thistles and even lions that further provide emotional connections to the believed countries of origins such as Scotland, Wales and England.



The Australian (Commonwealth) Coat of Arms (Photo: Online: www.pmc.gov.au)

The Canadian Coat of Arms loses its sense of place as it appeals to the emotional connection to authority - magical or otherwise. A lion and a unicorn are the key animals holding the array of British-based Coats of Arms' indexical images. Some reference to some of the original provinces - with the *fleur de lys* identifying Quebec and its predecessor Lower Canada. At its lower apex, the three red Canadian leaves help at least identify "place" through vegetation that goes beyond the colonial origins. Certainly, the high prominence of the British crown defines the Canadian links to the British Empire itself.



The Canadian Coat of Arms 1921 (Photo: Online – Library and Archives Canada Blog: <https://thediscoverblog.com/tag/coat-of-arms-of-canada/>)

Like much of heraldry, these coats of arms are elaborate structures of what heraldry calls effectively - and usefully for our future analytical purposes in understanding emoji - "blazoning": this is heraldry's "deep skill" of "verbal description" where the different structures of backgrounds, foregrounds, images, animals, colouring and many other variations become a complex language-like system of meaning that informs these images. (Brooke-Little 1973, 14) Although heraldry's elaborate systems that have been built over centuries and by dedicated heraldry experts and craftsmen has created a system that requires major skill to interpret, it was meant to be practical - in its capacity of providing a visual summary of connection, power and role.

This relationship to connection is also a formation of communication privileged in the development of commerce. In itself, commerce can be thought of as an exchange of one sort or another. In human cultures, commerce and trade define the physical and symbolic movement of elements of one culture or community to another. Given that this movement of goods sometimes need to be explained across language, ethnic and cultural boundaries, the structure of trade has developed a related form of symbolic, pictogrammatic style of communication. There are without doubt a myriad of symbolic techniques employed by merchants to sell, with authenticity, their goods. The emotional connection of trust is essential

to the power of the market. Recognisable images have operated in commerce in a manner very similar to heraldry and coats of arms. Although by far not the first pictogrammatic form in commerce, the development of systems of money can be seen as a way to legitimize a symbolic transfer of value. The image of Alexander the Great on coins was a major method of trusted sense of convertible value with the first coinage produced. Not only were the images a way for Alexander to express a divine status across territories of his supposed empire, but they also conveyed the sense of secured and verifiable value of the actual silver used in their construction. The aura of power and the sense of legitimacy has been a continuing feature of money and its conversion of value across individuals and, ultimately, across cultures.



Alexander the Great Coinage (305-281 BC – From the British Museum.jpg)

Like the church spires, currency also established an ever-presence, ethereal yes, but tangibly carried by all individuals in public spaces. Currency connects as it plays a persona-like role of pre-existence and linguistically rich but convertible form of communication. Coats of arms, monarchs, key political leaders and national icons have become the templates for centuries of coins and paper currency that attempt to embody the trust, emotion, the sense of authenticity and the feeling of appropriate value exchange.



Australian 5-dollar note – up until 2022 (Photo: Author)

From within the orbit of commerce and exchange, the particular world of product promotion was similarly designed for its translation over time and place. The ancient agora throughout the Mediterranean cultures would be filled with symbols that identified a particular shopkeeper. The product itself - fish, poultry, or carpets - offers a kind of metonymic relationship to the nature of the trade. But the actual design of the goods, the structure of display and - significantly for our discussion - symbols that identified both the product and/or the merchant became part of the ambient meaning of the shop. In more contemporary parlance, this form of identification would have been classified as branding the concept of conveying one's work/craft/products beyond the agora was accomplished in a number of related ways. Style of dress, boat ornamentation for those involved in shipping, and actual imprimaturs into products were images of self but also images of product.



Source: <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/travel/snapshot-athens-central-market-13725470/>

The work of Moore and Reid identify that ancient cultures including the Indus Civilization from nearly 4000 years ago tagged their products to identify their origin and their connection to valued symbols. (Moore and Reid 2010) For instance, the zebu bull was used as a “seal” in obvious trade from Lothal - a city of passage on the Arabian Sea in India. The bull as a seal or brand had been excavated/revealed ultimately in Mesopotamia - a further identification of its valued translation across vast space for the purposes of commerce and verification. (Moore and Reid 2010, 422-424)



Zebu Bull used on ancient Indian forms of seals. Source: Dept of Museums, Government of Pakistan

Moore and Reid cleverly identify these early seals as examples not of “brands” but “protobrands” (424) that essentially link their analysis of these early efforts at trademarks and identification of origins and value with the idea of proto-linguistics. Proto-brands thus predate the full economic meaning of brands, but nonetheless, articulate a relationship to trade and power in their presentation of image. Their extensive exemplification of proto-branding is mapped into Phoenician culture, Tyrian merchant work, and the Shang people of 1500 BCE as they signal historically the way that products and services move over space and time with a valued identification.

In later centuries, the model of emotional influence towards trust and credibility could be the branding persona achieved through the “facade” or storefront. Store’s facades capture the mask-like relationship to passers-by that were constructed by designers for merchants. By the 19th century, banks had built their facade with Corinthian/Doric or Ionian columns and the sensorium of Ancient Rome to build a feeling of permanence for their clients: after all, depositing one’s money into a bank demanded an incredible level of trust in the permanence of the idea of the bank as protector of the individuals’ wealth. The array of storefronts on a contemporary urban, main, high or commercial street provides the imagistic link that businesses have made to speak to potential passers-by and remake their self-identity into consumers. Once again, these different symbols are attempting to convey meaning across time and space into new configurations of collectives that affectively bonded - even if that emotional bond only last for moments - in any individual.





Street scenes of shops in Florence Italy: brands identified and promotional messages conveyed through their style (Photos: Author, 2018)

Commercial emotional connection thus defines one of the key long term symbolic constructions that operate as a highly visible precursor of emoji. From marketing literature, the idea of branding is very much a twentieth century phenomenon. But, as alluded to above through proto-branding, another commercial entity - the logo - needs to be investigated a little more fully in terms of how it manages the construction of identity and meaning of products across people, space and time. The images above of the street scenes of Florence work to construct a relationship of the products with an audience of potential consumers. Brand names, such as Tommy Hilfiger, MaxMara or the United Colors of Benetton - with their use of colour, font and stylistic flavour - define some of the essential features of logos in a contemporary world. They may be organised through text, but they work even more powerfully when they are converted to pictograms.



Yamaha and Côtes-du-Rhône: two "brands" that have words and a play with images (Photos: Author, 2021)

To capture this further connection of products and their stylized reformation into logos, it is useful to investigate the world of logos that allow brands to move seamlessly and with constructed consumer connection across massive areas of time and space. Most major automobile and technology brands and logos are virtually universally understood. Their universality is an amazing achievement that is built from an array of techniques - from the obvious advertisements to the way in which passers-by work to interpret what they are seeing. The logo privileges and shapes that interpretation through building a visual persona of value.

Danesi helps us understand this symbolic world of logos and divides them into categories. Logo comes from the Greek which means 'word' (Danesi 78-9 from Neumeier 2006 1), but it is also associated with how companies establish their differentiation from each other. Thus, a logo is a very visible version of a trademark in commercial and legal parlance. Logos can be symbolic, letter-driven, geometric (Danesi 91), and/or portrait in style. And each of these is embedded with wider cultural meanings meshed with the specific conceptions of the company itself. As we have seen in our review of hieroglyphs and other pictograms, a shape can become filled with rich signifying chains. Thus, geometric shapes such as circles may now indexically relate to the world itself; in Christian cultures, the cross has a ubiquity in terms of its identification of Jesus Christ's crucifixion and its extended sign of place of faith and piety. There may be similar forms of signifying relationships to the triangle: the American-based Delta Airlines drew from this idea of shape to link itself to its Mississippi delta basin home, but also a shape that implied a tail wing (Delta Flight Museum 2023).

These logos are also playing in the world of emotion, albeit in an apparently mildly affirming way. Like their precursors, they are trying to confer a notion of trust and connection with both potential consumers and those who have become part of their collective via their purchasing of the related product or service. From an external perspective, this is relatively weak affective bonding compared to families or even perhaps the modern nation-state; but nonetheless, the logo is establishing connections. If we think of the Apple computer logo, we can see that it is symbolic in form in its image of a bitten apple: but ultimately the logo is signifying the ancient idea of knowledge in the Garden of Eden, where the apple, the original forbidden fruit, represents a new awareness when consumed. Microsoft, one of Apple's key competitors, has had the ubiquitous four-square logo for decades. Its structure, whether on packaging or on a computer screen is designed to convey the idea of files, paper and information movement from the classical era into the contemporary silver or coloured computer reconstruction.



Microsoft and Apple: two "brands" that have no words (Photos: Author, 2019)

Car logos are equally interesting in their techniques of ensuring that the company that makes the vehicles is valued, trusted, and put into a hierarchical social reputation. Car logos become embedded with the core meaning of the brand. In our grouping below, there is actually remarkable similarity in car brands. Most are silver and their symbolic shape appears to at least connect to the circle in some way. Volkswagen is the only one of these four that actually uses a letter-driven logo most evidently, while it is possible to say that Mazda is also playing between something symbolically embodying wings and the letter M. Mercedes Benz, much like the blends of coats of arms in heraldry, builds its logo from the two shapes of the two companies of Mercedes and Benz



5 Auto brands that we know well – and again – limited text: or perhaps emoticon conversion of text (Photos: Author, 2020)

Other car logos brand their product with other elements of historical structure. GM Holden in Australia and Porsche have brands that in Danesi's characterisations are most closely aligned with "portrait", but in reality, are plays and rebuses of heraldry. Alpha Romeo builds a sense of longevity and history in its logo as does the crown/tower/trident that rises above the name Maserati. GM-Holden's Lion closely resembles the animal's reconstruction and stance in English and Scottish coats of arms (in this case, heraldry would describe it as "lion passant" argent with dexter or right paw raised, head looking forward). Jaguar's logo is perhaps the most modern of this range of brands; it still has some resemblance to heraldry in its transfer of a sense of authority to an animal; but the jaguar itself embodies a connotation of sleekness, aggressivity and speed in its construction for this brand.



Autobrand with clearer Text and Image Brands linked to their pictograms of signification (Photos: Author, 2021)

The wider purpose of these arrays of logos is to distinguish the product from others and again, like heraldry, to blazon this identification with history, trust and authenticity. Logos then are pictogrammatic short-forms for trade and exchange. When the related products are acquired by consumers, they also transform into visible and material symbols that extend the range of the product's presence over time and space through their implication/integration into the collective of family or firm associated with the individual car and their own related construction of reputation and prestige. In the most basic sense, logos serve a very commercial purpose that makes it operate very similarly to national currencies where we are meant to quickly associate these range of positive sentiments and meanings with the brand as well as a simple trademark of value and origin. Over time, the logo cleverly enters into what advertising and promotion identify as a *mnemonic*: through the image we quickly remember what the brand is meant to convey to us: it could be related concepts of luxury, style, craftsmanship, functionality, speed and economy. The array of advertising messages is where catchphrases, jingles, texts and images become associated with this core symbol of the product and mnemonically become linked and associated (Danziger 2009).

AND NOW THIS: EMOJI EMERGE

Our review of the precursors of emoji elucidates that these new pictograms and their relation to expressing sentiment and feeling are not entirely new. Perhaps because of the dominance of the power of text, alphabets, and numbers, human communication has been characterized as being predominantly functional - even rational - and less concerned directly with emotion-related communication - which, of course, is close to a nonsensical claim given the emotional range of stories - from anger, hate and sadness to love, happiness and euphoria - that have been conveyed by text. Moreover, because of these symbolic reformations that are removed from direct visual references, there is a further disconnection from their relation to their very obvious and structured patterns of communication that visual images can sometimes embody. Nonetheless, what is clear from our study so far is that emoji are highly related to generations of human pictograms that have developed over millennia. This history of pictograms also identifies the way in which meaning moves across and between cultures - what we have identified above as the movement across space and time. Pictograms, hieroglyphs, currency imagery, heraldry symbols and their coats of arms, and logos become decipherable with emotional meaning that build self-to-collective formations and can translate and be "read" across cultures. Emoji are interestingly connected to this movement of information across time and space in their ability to be read and interpreted in different cultures and their associated capacity to reflect the presence and gesture of the individual self - essentially a pictogrammatic conversion of persona - into collective understanding.

Patterning meaning is the essential core function of emoji albeit connected to the now wide prevalence of other techniques and forms of communication - like photos, text and videos online - that are shared throughout our contemporary world. Like its pictogrammatic predecessors, it is aligned to institutions of power and influence. Revealing how emoji came into existence reveals the current structures of how communication is now translated and converted into new technological frameworks. What follows is an overview of the emergence of emoji from the perspective of the various institutional platforms that have allowed it to be appropriated for individual and shared expression.

As identified earlier in this article, emoticons represent one of the early formations of emoji-like expression. But we have to accept that emoji are not totally defined by this origin and emergence. It is as much linked to the original smiley face - at least in western culture's consciousness. With claims to its origins back to 1963 in its private use in building morale in a recently acquired insurance company in Worcester Massachusetts, to its transnational commercialization in the early 1970s as a pervasive image on stickers, coffee mugs, fridge magnets and buttons, the yellow smiley face has been a regular popular and commercial icon for most of the last quarter of the 20th century. It has also been appropriated and reconstructed for different meanings beyond a basic and naive expression of happiness by musicians and artists throughout that time. The smiley face's commercial success in the 1970s actually also generated copyright claims and associated companies, including one very dominant company based in France and called Smiley World that was earning as much as 100 million dollars in licencing by 1997. (Lawrence 2018)



Smiley® logo [via The Smiley Company](#)

Savage, Jon 2009 "A design for Life" *The Guardian*. Access 24 May 2019. Available online: https://docs.google.com/document/d/1g45sZeGGzaWU-jg8Tv2ls5yS7knxrV_dG9rbm6CsqB8/edit

However, as much as there are iconic structures of emoji-like pictographs, it has to be equally acknowledged that emoji was built on its relationship to turn-of-the millennium technology and the conversion by particularly large telecommunications entities for its current proliferation. Its very success is drawn on the constellation of power that built around the expanding emoji culture. At its start was the Japanese telecommunications giant, Nippon Telegraph and Telephone, with its expanding mobile structure known as NTT DOCOMO. NTT DOCOMO commissioned the artist/designer Shigeta Kurita to develop something for their new generation of i-mode mobile phone that allowed it potentially to go beyond just text/character use at the time (Gross 2017). Kurita developed 176 emoji which were at least inspired by the prevalent and popular story-telling genre of Manga and further connected to patterns of Chinese characters, the massive prevalence of iconic urban directional signs, but also clearly acknowledging the computer-based emoticons that were being deployed at the time with increasing frequency in email messages. The Museum of Modern Art in New York eventually acquired the originals in 2016 which at least further validated this particular popular art origin. (Galloway 2016).

These 176 original emoji were deliberately simple - composed of only 12x12 pixels - in order that they could be incorporated into the data flow of mobile phones in 1999 Japan. (Galloway 2016; Gross, 2017) Eventually, they became deeply associated and determined by the key companies of mobile technology. As is evident by three of the most powerful digital mobile-related companies – the actual emoji images are slightly different on Google, Samsung and Apple even though their associated meanings are quite well connected. Nonetheless, the structure of emoji's use has become part of a United Nations-like entity that is connected to online culture: Unicode – more or less unified across key online technologies and their play with their "users" – became the standard of emoji across platforms, apps and services. The Unicode Consortium normalised existing uses of emoji and then through a system of subcommittees to final allocation how new emoji would be accepted and integrated into our global world (Gross 2017).

Throughout most of the last 15 years, emoji as a form of communication has become normalised. And, in a very particular way, that normalisation has been most strongly developed in what can be described as online interpersonal forms of communication: essentially emoji has

become integrated and routinised in terms of integration in the dimension of mobile phones and the process of texting. Emoji provide the avenue to express emotive and affective structure for each individual and their now – virtually – continuous lives of emoji-aligned co-presence. As Steinmetz identified in 2017 from a Harris Poll, “36% of millennials ages 18 to 34 who use “visual expressions” such as emoji, GIFs and stickers say that those images [provide] better communication of their thoughts and feelings than words do” (Steinmetz 2017).

The integration of emoji as a form of communication has become an interesting manner in which personal identity is structured into online and digital persona. As Zappavigna and Logi in their study of emoji application and integration in work/home-life during the COVID19 pandemic, the social linguistic dimension of the pictograms has constructed and led to transformed ways of expressing affect, emotion and sentiment in contemporary social-mediated collectives (Zappavigna & Logi 2021).

CONCLUSION

This historically-comparative investigation of the meaning of emoji in digital culture has worked to identify the way that human collectives’ characterization of their worlds through icons, characters, letters, hieroglyphs and pictograms has been a consistent pathway towards the formation of identity and meaning for millennia. The structure of communication that emoji now reveals has been symptomatic of the way different cultures have constructed and conveyed their co-relations with others and their self-identity. Emoji relates specifically to two key areas. First, it is a strategic and tactical reconfiguration of feeling and emotion, a kind of reconfiguration that is linked to past efforts of shaping collectives and cultures throughout humanity’s existence (Marshall 2022). Second, emoji actually is also a technique to express the self to others: in this way it is profoundly connected to persona and the public presentation of the self. In digital culture, this presentation of emoji is curated with some abstraction from the self but a clear relation to emotion as each of us uses emoji to convey our sense and feelings without necessarily allowing the sense and feeling to overwhelm us. This study of connecting emoji to past developments of forms of expression allows future research – potentially through interviews – to see how past techniques of converting human identity, emotion and self to images intersects with the current transformation of culture via digital culture. It is hoped that this reading of emoji will help a further exploration of some of the key concepts that help elucidate the meaning and feeling of these pictograms – specifically the relationship of pictograms to “power”, “co-presence” and possibly “mnemonics”: these concepts define the structures and effect of iconic images/characters that define the emoji pictograms and how they play into the formation of all human culture and our reconstructed human digital culture.

WORKS CITED

- ALINEJAD, D. 2019. Careful co-presence: The transnational mediation of emotional intimacy. *Social Media+ Society*, 5, 2056305119854222.
- BAINES, J. 1989. Communication and display: the integration of early Egyptian art and writing. *Antiquity*, 63, 471-482.
- BREGMAN, A. & HAYTHORNTHWAITE, C. 2003. Radicals of presentation: visibility, relation, and co-presence in persistent conversation. *New Media & Society*, 5, 117-140.
- BROOKE-LITTLE, J. 1973. *Boutell's Heraldry*, rev edn. London.
- BRYANT, K. N. 2016. “The Writing’s on the Wall” Making the Case for Hieroglyphs in the 21st-Century Composition Classroom. *CLA Journal*, 60, 191-208.
- BOLTER, J. D. & GRUSIN, R. 1999. *Remediation: understanding new media*, Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press.
- BURLING, R., ARMSTRONG, D. F., BLOUNT, B. G., CALLAGHAN, C. A., FOSTER, M. L., KING, B. J., PARKER, S. T., SAKURA, O., STOKOE, W. C. & WALLACE, R. 1993. Primate calls, human

- language, and nonverbal communication [and comments and reply]. *Current Anthropology*, 34, 25-53.
- DAHMEN, K. 2007. *The legend of Alexander the Great on Greek and Roman coins*, Abingdon Oxon, UK, Routledge.
- 2007, *The legend of Alexander the Great on Greek and Roman coins*, Routledge.
- DANESI, M. 2007. *Why it sells: Decoding the meanings of brand names, logos, ads, and other marketing and advertising ploys*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- 2016. *The semiotics of emoji: The rise of visual language in the age of the internet*, Bloomsbury Publishing.
- DANGERFIELD, W. 2008. 'Snapshot: Athens Central Market', Smithsonian.com. Online: <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/travel/snapshot-athens-central-market-13725470/>
- DANZIGER, K. 2009. *Marking the mind: A history of memory*, Cambridge University Press.
- DEKEL, A. 2011. "Letters & More" Exhibit at the Tower of David Museum [Online]. Midnight East. Available: <https://www.midnighteast.com/mag/?p=10496> [Accessed 2 December 2023 2023].
- DELTA FLIGHT MUSEUM. *History: Delta Brand* [Online]. Available: <https://www.deltamuseum.org/delta-history/delta-brand/the-widget#:~:text=Delta's%20Corporate%20Logo%3A%20The%20Widget,with%20its%20first%20jet%20service.&text=Resembles%20the%20swept%20wing%20appearance,alphabet%2C%20which%20is%20delta%20%E2%88%86> [Accessed 12 Dec 2023 2023].
- DEY, S. 2019. "Wicked Problems in Interface Design: Reflections on the Theories and Practices of Remediation", Doctoral Dissertation, University of Adelaide, Adelaide Australia. Pp.37-38
- GALLOWAY, P. 2016, "The Original NTT DOCOMO Emoji set has been Added to The Museum of Modern Art's Collection", 16 October 2016. Accessed 29 May 2018. Available: <https://stories.moma.org/the-original-emoji-set-has-been-added-to-the-museum-of-modern-arts-collection-c6060e141f61?gi=8d007ca50257>
- GIBSON J. J. (1979). *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt (HMH), Boston.
- GROSS, E. L. 2017. How Emojis Have Made Their Way Into Business :-). *Forbes*. Accessed 7 December 2018: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/delltechnologies/2017/12/15/how-emojis-have-made-their-way-into-business/#2d62e9d022bd>
- INNIS, H. A. 2007(1951). *Empire and communications*, Rowman & Littlefield.
- 2008. *The bias of communication*, University of Toronto Press.
- LAWRENCE, K. 2018 "The Sinister Corporate History of the Smiley Face". *Montag*. Accessed 24 May 2019. Available online: <https://www.montag.wtf/smiley-face/>
- MCDONALD M. 2018, "Newfoundland's coat of arms depicting 'noble savages' redesign". *Toronto Star*. 22 June. Online: <https://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2018/06/22/nfld-confronts-its-archaic-coat-of-arms-depicting-noble-savage.html>
- MARSHALL, P. D., MOORE, C. & BARBOUR, K. 2020. *Persona Studies: An Introduction*, Hoboken, NJ, Wiley Blackwell.
- MARSHALL, D. 2022. Correlating affect and emotion: Covidiquette and the expanding curation of online persona(s). *Thesis Eleven*, 169, 8-25.
- MIDDLETON, P. 2014. 'Marks, signs and images: the sense of belonging and commitment which pre-dates history but has now become a powerful global language', in Z Evripides (ed.), *Semiotics and Visual Communication: Concepts and Practices*, Cambridge Scholars, Newcastle Upon Tyne, pp. 310-21.
- MOORE, K. & REID, S. 2008. The birth of brand: 4000 years of branding, *Business History*, 50:4, 419-432, DOI: 10.1080/00076790802106299
- NORMAN, D. A. 1999. Affordance, conventions, and design. *interactions*, 6, 38-43.
- PARDES, A. 2018. "The Wired Guide to Emoji", *WIRED*. 1 Feb. Online: <https://www.wired.com/story/guide-emoji/>

- ROBBINS, B. 2005. *The talking ape: How language evolved*. Oxford University Press.
- SAVAGE, J. 2009. "A design for Life", *The Guardian*. Access 24 May 2019. Available online: https://docs.google.com/document/d/1g45sZeGGzaWU-jg8Tv2ls5yS7knxrV_dG9rbm6CsQB8/edit
- STEINMETZ, K. 2017. "Forget Words, a lot of Millennial Say GIFs and Emojis Communicate Their Thoughts Better than English", *Time*. 27 June. Available Online: <https://time.com/4834112/millennials-gifs-emojis/>
- STERN, B. 2006. What does brand mean? historical-analysis method and construct definition. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science* 34: 216. doi: 10.1177/0092070305284991. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0092070305284991>
- TAGGART, C. 2015. *New words for old: Recycling our language for the modern world*, Michael O'Mara Books.
- TOMASELLO, M. 2010. *Origins of human communication*, MIT press.
- TOMIĆ, M. K., MARINEZ, M. & VRBANEC, T. 2013. Emoticons. *FIP-Financije i pravo*, 1, 35-42.
- TOMLINSON, G. 2015. *A Million Years of Music: the Emergence of Human Modernity*, New York, N.Y. USA, Zone Books.
- WELLMAN, B., QUAN-HAASE, A., BOASE, J., CHEN, W., HAMPTON, K., DÍAZ, I. & MIYATA, K. 2003. The social affordances of the Internet for networked individualism. *Journal of computer-mediated communication*, 8, JCMC834.
- WILKINSON, R. H. 1992. *Reading Egyptian art : a hieroglyphic guide to ancient Egyptian painting and sculpture*, London, Thames and Hudson.
- WIKIPEDIA 2019. "Emoticon". Accessed 12 March. Online: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emoticon>
- ZAPPAVIGNA, M. & LOGI, L. 2021. Emoji in social media discourse about working from home. *Discourse, Context & Media*, 44, 100543.