Using Semiotic Theory to Analyze Online Communication Trends Like: Emoji, Memes, Gifs, Vines, Hashtags, etc.

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**Introduction**

Semiotics, also called semiology is the study of signs and usage of signs in the community or society. Semiotics are defined by a number of its funders but one of them defines semiotics as the study of “the life of signs and signature in a society.” The word of semiotics was firstly used in the 7th century by the English philosopher John Locke. Semiotics includes but not only signs, signatures, logos, gestures, and many other linguistic and non-linguistic methods of communication. The fine and accurate use and understanding of semiotics can be seen in one society while the understanding of semiotics cannot be done as fine in two different societies or communities because people and their thinking match to each other’s while the thoughts of people from different societies and communities differ from each other up to a very high extent. The word semiotics mainly describe the action of interpreting signs (Marchand, 2019).

Semiotics focuses on how individuals develop or create and interpret the meaning of signs and symbols which include how people visually communicate with the help of metaphor, analogy, metonymy, allegory, symbolism and other different means of expression (ThoughtCo, 2019). Hence, this paper is developed for the purpose to analyze and interpret the meaning and actual concept of semiotics. This term semiotics would be analyzed and interpreted by an in-depth analysis of its background, history, research studies, literature review, and exploration of founders and other main individuals.

**Thesis Statement**

It is the fact that the earliest form of communication was relied on signs and symbols while it can be seen everywhere in the present time. The signs, symbols, and a detailed concept of Semiotics can be seen applied to several things such as communication, animations, and conveying a particular message or concern, etc. The concept and implementation of semiotics in the communication for different purposes can contribute a lot to one’s experience with it (semiotics) by enhancing the understanding of the concept of Semiotics as it is a crucial equipment used in online communication.

**Literature Review**

The literature review of any topic under analysis or discussion is mainly proposed to elaborate on the concept and topic from its basis such as by studying the studies done about it in the past to present. So, the main concern and objective of this literature review is to investigate the concept of semiotics from every possible aspect.

Based on the statement of (Stables, et.al, 2018), a sign that helps in the communication is “something which stands to someone for something of meaning”. He stated that sign is one of the best tool to be used for communication. The sign is the tool that communicates and conveys a message which cannot be communicated verbally in some of the cases. This means that traffic symbols are the communication signs that communicate the messages which cannot be communicated effectively through verbal communication. From this study and explanation, a meaning can be gotten that a traffic signal such as DO NOT PARK HERE or DO NOT USE MOBILE WHEN DRIVING on the road and other specific areas are the best methods to communicate something important and in a credible way. In short, semiotics are the sources (signs and symbols) that are used to reveal the complexity of phenomena that look simple and clear on the surface but it does not include all of the variations and semiotics available. So, the same is the case with online communication. Many things can be communicated finely through the use of signs (semiotics) than a written message.

The study and contribution of (Stables, et.al, 2018), to the study of semiotics says that there are three, main categories of semiotics. These categories are; 1) Icon, that resembles its referent (e.g. different road signs), 2) Index, which is linked or associated with its referent (for example a smoke is a sign of fire or danger of fire), and 3) Symbol, which is linked with its referent only through its convection such a traffic signal etc. Beyond that, according to (Hodge, 2014), a sign or symbol can never give one and single all the time or in one time to different people or groups while the meaning of semiotics should be consistently qualified and changed as per the preceptor or observer and the situation or place.

(Islam, 2003), finds that three main colors work as signifiers in several signs and signals such as traffic signals whereas almost all of the main seven (7) colors are work in semiotics in signs and symbols used in online communication. While, in terms of practice, the person who is associated with the study of semiotics is called semiotician. In simple words, the person or individual who studies semiotics is a semiotician. There are several terms and concept which are used by contemporary semiotician. Hence, Saussure defined a sign of any motion, pattern, gesture, image or event that conveys something of meaning or that conveys a clear meaning (Oller, 1990). He defined language as grammar or structure and parole as a selection made by one individual as a speaker to communicate his or her meaning or convey his or her concern to the other (listener).

The analysis of human consciousness can be best done by studying the concept of semiotics. According to (Islam, 2003), the advancement of intelligence had occurred in three different steps. Analysis and understanding the nature of things, understanding and knowing that what to do or perform for achieving what is planned to be accomplished, and the ability to convey or communicate these things or concerns to others. Hence, semiotics has played a huge role in this development and enhancement.

According to (Li, 2017), Semiotics work the best when there is enough intelligence capable of learning and understanding from message and experience. Based on this argument or statement, modern semiotics look at the entire network and link of signs of symbols around one in a society, community, or culture and each of these signs and symbols mean different things in varying contexts, even sings and symbols that are similar and sound. In the tradition of the state of Australia, a sign is broken into three main parts based on the varying meaning and concept presented by each of the parts. These parts are, 1) the signifier, 2) the signified, and 3) the referent.

**Body**

There are several types of semiotics which are used in different areas especially in online communication. But! The most commonly used and known are;

1. Textual Signs
2. Writing or Writing Signs
3. Emoji, GIF, Memes

Each of the types convey a message and meaning differently. In short, our paper and next section of it would elaborate the above-mentioned types of semiotics.

**Textual Signs**

Textual signs or contextuality is a type of understated communication in which the things or message or concern that we write or say for the purpose to convey to others often is the process of recollecting shared between the sender and receiver. In online communication, the role of textual sign is very crucial and huge. It is so crucial and credible because textual signs help the most in one’s online communication with others. Beyond this, the textual signs also help to communicate a very huge message. For example, textual signs such as the name and logo Coca Cola and the style it has been written and designed to convey the entire company and its products to the public and the entire world. Despite this, there are several other references and examples exist which can be seen in today’s world and that are used the most for communicating meaningful information and message(s).

Metaphors can also act as meaningful stand-ins to the people and groups who are enough familiar with their cultures. One of the most credible and common examples of the metaphors is the statement “that coffee is much hotter than the Hades”. This is an intertextuality reference to the Judeo-Christian Bible, and it is even more than common. It even has no concern that whether where you have read the Bible. Furthermore, in the textual signs, the role of metonyms is also very common and used for communication an important message. The biggest example of the metonyms is “The Smoke”. The Smoke is a metonym for the London, United Kingdom. This directly conveys that one is talking about the London even it is an online communication or face to face discussion.

**Writing or Writing Signs**

Writing or Writing Signs are also a major part of semiotics. The writing or writing signs are used to communicate a concern or message to others in a very short and concise manner. There are several styles and shapes through which one can communicate an entire message while others can easily and clearly understand what has been communicated to him or her. For example, the Writings of William Shakespeare and Lewis Carroll are full of cultural references and witticisms (Peters, 2008). Sadly, but some of those signs are not valued and acceptable to several new or modern speakers and professionals. Those are not acceptable to some modern speakers because of several reasons but most of those signs are highly valued, accepted, and used more than commonly especially in online communication.

Besides, the writing signs of the Irish writer James Joyce are also used in today’s communication done by the people, groups, and communities. One and even the most commonly used writing signs of James is the book written by him “Ulysses”. The name of this book is highly used as a sign of communication from the past till today.

**Emoji, GIF, Memes**

In the current internet captured world, the use of emoji’s GIF, and Memes can be found very hugely. This can be seen with so much used because of the internet platforms and online communication done by people in their daily lives. It is a fact that the use of emojis in our communication is putting an inverse impact on one’s learning and capabilities. As an example, the use of emojis is damaging the written communication ability who are under the learning stage e.g. students of schools and colleges while it may not affect the adults of a bit higher age similarly. But on the other side of emoji’s make us poor communicator, emojis also allow us to show and communicate the expressions or messages which cannot be communicated or shared as well through written communication nor it these emotions can be communicated in front of someone (Killingsworth, & Gilbertson, 2018).

Based on the findings of the survey in the United Kingdom, around 72 percent of young people use emojis in their online communication and this helps them to express their emotions in a better way comparatively. For example, a feeling in the class or family while sitting with elders cannot be communicated with other while emoji is one of the best way considered mostly by youth to share a feeling or feelings through emoji’s and other gestures, body language, and tone, etc. Beyond that, based on the outcomes of the study done by the emotional marketing company Emoji, it has been found that individual use emojis because they think and believe that emojis help them the best to better share and understand the concern or a feeling an create more close and better connections (Bite, Global, 2017).

Several ways through which it can be seen that GIF is used up to a high extent by many people in their online communication. In the professional or organizational online communication, GIF is the thing or source that even to provoke an understood response from your receiver than putting some written jokes or statements in the mail or message (Cavano, 2016). Beyond that, GIF is also a great way to capture the attention of the receiver and to put your concern or message in a fine and better manner which even makes sense in not a good situation.

Memes and their use is the way or process done in online communication which is used to transfer ideas from one person to another but it needs to be adopted as per their fitness to one’s culture and values. The use of memes helps to get more cultural references and capture strong phrases (Bite, Global, 2017). Memes in online communication are considered as one of the most effective manners to discover one’s favorite culture while help to know and understand the culture of the person from whom a receiver receives a type of meme (Killingsworth, & Gilbertson, 2018). Beyond that, meme is also the best way to turn around into a shared jokes.

**Conclusion**

After an in-depth analysis of the main topic (Semiotics) and the associated terms, it has been found as well as it can be stated that each of the signs of semiotics is highly credible in today’s communication. Both, online and traditional communication can be filled and done effectively if there is enough involvement of semiotics (signs and symbols). The traditional communications (mentioned and discussed above) can be well done if we ensure the adequate use of symbols otherwise a message or concern cannot be communicated finely, nor it may ensure the desired results.

In the case of online communication, based on the analysis of online communication trends like emoji, GIFs, and memes, one cannot communicate his or her message without the use of these trends. This means that online communication can bring the desired and expected results if one uses the appropriate trends in his or her message. For example, one can show his or her love towards the concerned individual in a better way if he/she cannot directly use the word “LOVE”. Based on the research done in the paper, it can be concluded and stated that communication (which may be online or traditional) might not bring the desired outcome as per the expectations and concerns or the communicators. Despite this, the use of Semiotics (signs and symbols), including online communication trends such as emojis, GIF, and memes assist to have an insight, comprehension, and knowledge of the person or group involved in the communication.

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