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A Paradox of Non-Verbal Communication on the Internet: Emoticons vs. Reaction-Gifs

The texts of digital communication lie on the frontiers of traditional orality and literacy (cf. Koch–Oesterreicher's notions of conceptual and medial orality and literacy), and visuality plays a far more important role in ICT than it played in earlier text transmission techniques (cf. Schriftbildlichkeit, Bildschriftlichkeit). These two basic characteristics result in novel ways of expressing emotions: in addition to the explicit verbal description of emotions and the use of interjections customary in traditional written texts, digital texts also feature verbal smileys (e.g.: facepalm, headdesk), stem-like "inflectives" (borrowing the German term Inflektiv which means a verb-form without inflection, mainly in the language of comics) inserted between asterisks (German example: *daumendrück*), and visual elements: emoticons and reaction gifs. While emoticons may take the form of keyboard characters or image files and can be static or dynamic, reaction gifs always represent an animated series of images, usually taken from a video. The presentation is an attempt to identify the communication-related characteristics of reaction gifs, as a form of expressing emotion unifying visuality and the time aspect.

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