Animated Emoticons for Men's Conversation

Yen-Fu Chen * Chris Rust **

** Sheffield Hallam University*
Sheffield, UK, yfchen68@gmail.com
*** Sheffield Hallam University*
Sheffield, UK, chris@chrisrust.net

Abstract: This pilot research focused on developing a tentative design method which is based on scenario-based design and interview/observation for creating the avatar of animated emoticons in men's conversation. These two approaches as the structure of helix proceed together. For testing and developing the tentative design method, two phases including interviews, observations and a workshop were employed for creating emoticons. In the end, seven new animated emoticons for male users to express four emotions were taken from Chinese four basic emotions: delight, anger, sorrow, and happiness. Except happiness, every emotion had two different emoticons for expressing in men's conversation. The research integrated two things: 1. as a designer completely obtained participants' perspectives and experiences, designer's concepts were much more complete then the design work would be much more effective; 2. when testing the animated emoticons, they successfully attracted recipients' notice but this confidence should be explored further.

Key words: Animated emoticons, Scenario-based design, Interview, Observation.

1. Introduction

In the last decade, the approach of interpersonal communication has been changed because of the development of technology. Emoticons as visual cues formed from ordinary typographical symbols are used in CMC (Computer-mediated communication) to indicate emotions [8, 11].With the development of emoticons, graphic emoticons and animated emoticons would be commonly used instead of the older text form because graphic emoticons could clearly present complicated emotions or particular situations. Graphic emoticons and animated emoticons, which are designed by designers and artists who have drawing emoticons skills and the experience of CMC, are employed increasingly in CMC systems.

Although these graphic emoticons or animated emoticons can be regarded as nonverbal visual cues for CMC users, the usage of emoticons would be affected by several possible factors which are as follows: level of communication ceremoniousness, cohesion of the communication users, age, gender, difficulty of icon reproduction, communality of meaning, and users' preference and experience [7]. Besides, gender differences indeed influence the usage of emoticons, males especially [5, 12]. Males rarely employ emoticons when

speaking with other males, but they employ more emoticons when conversing with females [5]. Why do males have different interactions in CMC when chatting with males and females?

Before thinking the above question, we should recognize the difference in discourse between men and women. As Holmes [3] described that females employ language in the cause of development of interpersonal relationships. By contrast, males seem to use language as a means to obtain their end [3]. In speech, females are prone to employ conversation as a tool for facilitating social interaction whereas males are inclined to employ conversation for conveying information [1]. Morahan-Martin [6], who believed that users' behaviours in CMC are continuance of real life, commented that female participants adopt "knacks" to intensify "positive socioemotional tone" for their online social presence yet male participants seem to ignore the social and emotional phases of CMC. Besides, according to Fullwood and Martino [2], they explained that impression formation could be influenced by the employment of emoticons.

Reviewing these studies, we believe that graphic emoticons and animated emoticons are popular among female users because these users avail themselves of emoticons to establish, cultivate and develop their interpersonal relationships. These emoticons appear to provide males opportunities to create idealized representations of their 'online personality' when interacting with female users; however, these emoticons do not appear to aid males to create desirable 'online personality' when interacting with other males. As mentioned above, we consider that current graphic emoticons and animated emoticons can't meet male users' needs while they have chats with other males in CMC.

2. Methods

In many design projects, scenario-based design is a normal approach for designers. However, we felt that this design approach lays more emphasis on the process of design but stresses less the collection of data from users. Because of the inadequacy of scenario-based design in investigating users' experience and views, another approach may be a necessary complement to the design process. Interview/observation seems to be useful for the design process because designers can explore individuals' perspectives and experiences in depth. In this study, these two approaches as the structure of double helix proceed together.

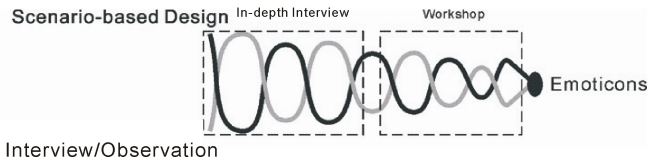

Figure 1 The process of double helix model in this project

For testing and developing the model of double helix, we adopted in-depth interviews and a workshop in this project. In in-depth interviews, there are two phases including interviews of the first phase and scenario-observing of the second phase. By means of these two phases, we could obtain not only participants' views on emoticons but also participants' expressive behaviours in real life. After observing participants' behaviours, we asked more details about participants' behaviours. We considered these expressive behaviours and personal perspectives as the concept of avatars' expressive behaviours of animated emoticons. In the workshop, we

employed three phases including brief discussion, character creation and drawing, and scenario creation. In this part, we not only interviewed participants' viewpoints but also shared knowledge that we got in previous in-depth interviews. Based on these viewpoints and creations of participant, we created two scenarios then discussed the detail of avatars' expressive behaviours for creating animated emoticons.

2.1 In-depth Interview

There were two phases in these interviews: 1. participants' experiences and viewpoints on emoticons through recording sound and taking note in the first phase; 2. making scenarios then observing participants' facial expression and expressive behaviours by means of photographing in the second phase. There were eight participants who are twenties in their age including two Taiwanese males, two Chinese males, one Japanese male, one French male, one Gabonese female, and one Indian male.

The aim of the first phase was exploring participants' experiences and viewpoints when they using instant messenger and emoticons. Therefore, twelve open-end questions in the first phase of interview were designed. Although there were only twelve open-end questions, additional questions which grounded on participants' answers for obtaining more detail were asked. In the second phase, four brief scenarios were designed for observing participants' facial expression and expressive behaviours. Because all participants were students, four scenarios were designed as below: 1. getting a high mark on an assignment; 2. failing in an assignment; 3. someone plagiarizing their ideas; 4. someone praising their behaviours.

2.2 Workshop

In this project, the workshop was extremely helpful to emoticon design, providing a base for scenario-based design. The main objective of this workshop was creating scenarios, characters, characters' detail and expressive behaviours of emoticons with four male participants. The interaction of participants who are from different cultures was observed including two Taiwanese males, one Japanese male, and one Sri Lankan male. There were three phases in this design workshop: 1.brief discussion of participants' experiences and viewpoints; 2. brain storm of creating characters and drawing gestures or postures; 3. scenarios creation for discussing and selecting the expressive behaviours of animated emoticons.

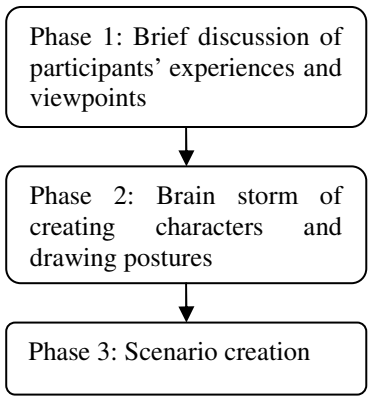

Figure 2 The procedure of workshop

3. Results

There were two phases in in-depth interviews, including: 1. exploring participants' experience and viewpoints on emoticons; 2. observing participants' facial expression and expressive behaviours via brief scenarios. All eight participants have the experience of using instant message and emoticons. Most participants like to employ emoticons for improving their online conservation. As these participants said, they do not need type any words but can express their emotions because of emoticons. Besides, online chatting will be interesting and soft when using emoticons. When asking about the usage of emoticons in online chats with males and females, all male participants answered that they rarely use emoticons when chatting with other males via instant message. Although these participants rarely employ emoticons in men's conversation, they would like to add new emoticons which are amusing.

In these observations, participants' presented their expressive behaviours in these four brief scenarios including: 1. getting a high mark on an assignment; 2. failing in an assignment; 3. someone plagiarizing their ideas; 4. someone praising their behaviours. In the first scenario, many participants said that they felt excited and happy then clenched their fists. In the second scenario, participants felt depressed but they showed two different postures. Some participants bent their heads and used hands to support foreheads and the other participants employed hands to cover their mouth. In the third scenario, participants also displayed two distinct postures for expressing their mood. Some participants were flinging something and the other participants were kicking something. In last scenario, all participants showed their smile but did not do postures.

As for the first phase of the workshop, this brief discussion was an opportunity for obtaining some specific viewpoints because this small group was composed of three distinct cultures. Due to brief discussion, participants not only shared their experiences but also stated their viewpoints on current emoticons. After the first phase, these participants chose delight, anger, sorrow, and happiness four emotions which were taken from Chinese four basic emotions for the second phase. In the second phase, participants had to create their characters and design the detail of characters such as name, age, occupation, personality, interests and so on. Furthermore, participants were asked to draw postures of characters based on these four emotions.

These four participants worried that they could not illustrate their concepts clearly on papers since they are not art and design students and not good at drawing as well. Based on this predicament, concepts presentation which allowed participants to explain their ideas in a clear manner was adopted in the end of this phase. Because of participants of different cultures, participants had different opinions on some postures of characters. Taking head hitting against the wall for an example, Japanese participant deemed that this posture means the posture of angry; however, other three participants thought that it means the expressive of sorrow.

During concepts presentation, participants not only presented their characters and drawings but also answered other participants' questions. The third phase is scenarios creation which was based on participants' concept of the second phase. Many characters and expressive behaviours were created in the second phase then two characters were selected from these concepts for creating scenarios. After deciding two characters, two scenarios were created according to characters' details.

According to these two scenarios, new animated emoticons for male users were created. Except happiness, every emotion had two different emoticons for expressing. Although we interviewed participants who are from different countries in this project, male participants' suggestions for designing men's emoticons are the same as below. Firstly, emotions should not be 'feminization' including avatars and behaviours because emoticons represent users. Secondly, avatars may be simple as possible, for example avoiding vivid colour. Thirdly, avatars may perform interesting gestures or actions to present humour. Fourthly, emoticons may express users' emotions by means of 'events' or 'stories.'

Based on these suggestions, we considered that animated emoticons for men's talk are simple without colour. In addition, we supposed that there would be events or stories in these emoticons and avatars performed gestures and actions to present. Based on the second phase of in-depth interviews and the creation and scenario of workshop, seven emoticons were created in this project. As to creating tools, we employed CorelDRAW 12, Adobe Photoshop CS2, and Adobe ImageReady CS2 to create these animated emoticons.

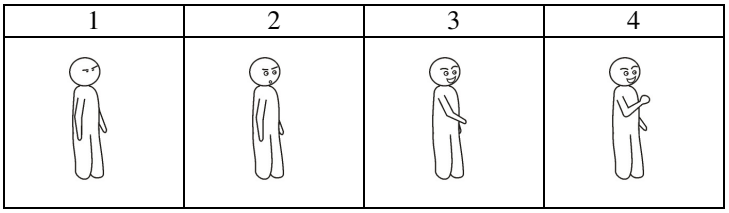

Figure 3 The process of the first animated emoticon of delight

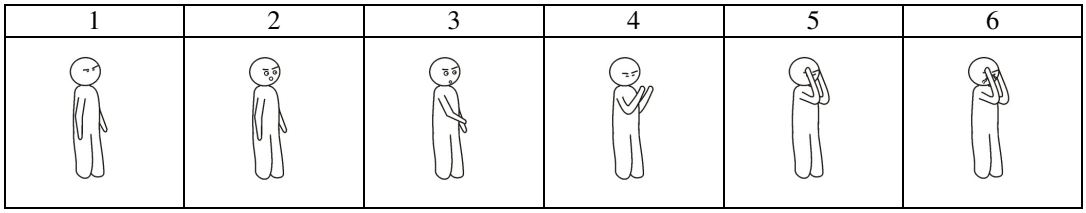

Figure 4 The process of the first animated emoticon of sorrow

4. Discussion

The concept of scenario-based design is employing scenario-oriented approach to explore the relationship among users, environments and tasks. Jonas [4] pointed out that "the scenario can be considered as an experimental stage set for design and planning practice, and a conceptual framework disciplinary." For designers, scenario-based design could be considered as an ergonomics method since it easily provides shared evidence of human factors issue [10].

In the beginning of this project, we thought that scenario-based design could aid us to create new emoticons for users. However, the field of emoticons would be relevant to the discipline of socio-psychology and we fully need to recognize users' experiences and perspectives on emoticons. On the other hand, scenario-based design appears to lay more emphasis on the process of design but stress less the collection of data from users. Because of the

inadequacy of scenario-based design in investigating users' experiences and views, we tried to seek another qualitative approach to complement our research methods.

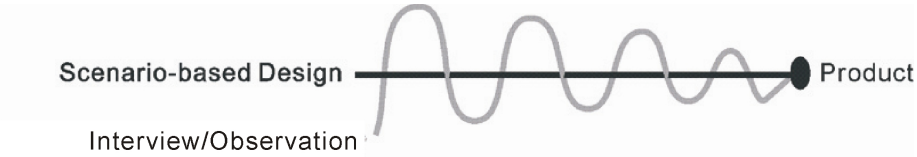

Figure 5 The initial model

Before undertaking this research, we though that scenario-based design could be the main approach. As for interview/observation, we considered that it would be the secondary approach for creating emoticons. According to this idea, we supposed the initial mode in the beginning. From the start to the end of design project, scenario-based design would be a beeline and interview/observation would be a single helix. However, we felt that these two approaches could place the same position when interviewing some participants. Based on this reason, we supposed that these two approaches as double helix may be undertaken simultaneously in this project.

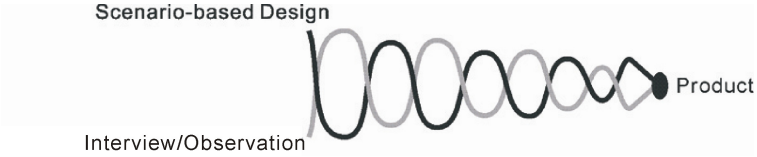

Figure 6 The model of double helix

For testing and developing the model of double helix, we employed two phases in these interviews, including exploring participants' views and experiences in the first phase and observing participants' facial expression and behaviours in four scenarios of the second phase. When obtaining these facial expression and behaviours, we asked participants more detail about their behaviours. After the interview, three phases were adopted in the workshop. In the first phase of workshop, participants' experiences and viewpoints were shared via group discussion. In the second phase, participants created their characters and postures. Based on these viewpoints and creations of participant, we created two scenarios then discussed the detail of avatars' postures in the third phase.

In the end of this project, seven new animated emoticons for male users were created, including one animated emoticon of delight, two animated emoticons of sorrow, two animated emoticons of indignation, and two animated emoticons of happiness. These new animated emoticons successfully attracted recipients' notice when testing via MSN messenger; however, we did not explore recipients' views on these emoticons in depth. When undertaking this project, we felt that these in-depth interviews and the workshop have their unique functions in this model. The function of the in-depth interview could be collecting and the function of the workshop could be focusing. Because of these two functions, designers could completely obtain participants' perspectives and experiences. After developing and testing this model, we think that this model could be working and designers may employ this model for other design projects.

5. Conclusion

This research showed the design process of new animated emoticons for male users. By means of scenario based design and interview/observation, participants' viewpoints and experience were presented completely. Besides, many design ideas were from the interview and the workshop. The research integrated two things: 1. as a designer completely obtained participants' perspectives and experiences, designer's concepts were much more complete then the design work would be much more effective; 2. when testing the animated emoticons, they successfully attracted recipients' notice but this confidence should be explored further.

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