

VERSTEHEN-HERMENEUTICAL INTERPRETATION OF SOCIAL MEDIA

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Language is unquestionably one of the most phenomenal tools, for getting our ideas, emotions and feelings across. And just as our culture has changed over time, language has evolved to accommodate this development. Communication, today, is growing faster than ever before. Our understanding of communication has also progressed, the oscillating nature of language from symbols to words and back to symbols is evident. The authors delve into the possibility of a new language surfacing, with compression of lengthy writing into simple characters and replacement of alphabets with symbols.

Hermeneutics literally means 'to interpret', this branch of knowledge aims to achieve an understanding of a text, expressions and so on. The authors propose to look into a hermeneutical understanding of emojis or symbols which are commonly used today as a substitute for words on various social media platforms. While dealing with this aspect, the authors study the string of legal problems and issues which may arise owing to multiple interpretations of these ubiquitous symbols. We also attempt to understand the reduction of text into smaller forms on popular platforms such as 'Twitter' from a hermeneutical perspective, the ramifications and impact of the same on our understanding of communication as a whole. Concluding, we suggest for the expansion of horizons for hermeneutics, applying hermeneutical standards to understand what people are saying across various social media platforms, which are emerging as a powerful mechanism for communication.

Evolution of Language

Aristotle defined the nature of man as a living being with *logos*; implying that he is a rational animal, setting him apart from other living things. With this, the word *logos* is often associated the meaning reason or thought, however, *logos* literally translates to language; which is what differs man from animals. Language is central to all our lives and is arguably the cultural tool that sets humans, us, apart from any other species.¹ Animals tend to communicate their desires through actions, whereas man has developed a language, with alphabets and words which possess a meaning of their own and can be used in infinite ways and to represent infinite expressions and emotions.

¹ Cambridgeblog.Org, "Into The Intro: The Language Myth | Fifteeneightyfour," Cambridge University Press, <http://www.cambridgeblog.org/2014/11/into-the-intro-the-language-myth/>.

But has language, or communication remained the same? With the turn of the century, our understanding of communication has changed, and language has progressed to keep pace with this growing speed. Today, with so much information available on the internet, we are increasingly using our mobile screens to communicate. Since the rise of the Internet in the early 1990s, the world's networked population has grown from the low millions to the low billions. Over the same period, social media have become a fact of life for civil society worldwide, involving many actors -regular citizens, activists, nongovernmental organisations, telecommunication firms, software providers, government.² However, digital communications have always been a little socially handicapped. Unlike the written and typed communiques that came before, digital mixes immediacy with intimacy in a way that strips nuance and drains context.³

This elasticity of meaning is a large part of the appeal and, perhaps, the genius of emoji. They have proved to be well suited to the kind of emotional heavy lifting for which written language is often clumsy or awkward or problematic, especially when it's relayed on tiny screens, tapped out in real time, using our thumbs. These seemingly infantile cartoons are instantly recognisable, which makes them understandable even across linguistic barriers. Yet the implications of emoji—their secret meanings—are constantly in flux.⁴

The growing ubiquity of emoji in our everyday life and its far reaching impact has raised eyebrows. While it can be considered as a part of the evolution of language, some strongly believe that the use of emoji reflects the deterioration of language. The use of emoji has definitely changed the way in which we communicate but has it changed language? The idea of pictographic language is not a new one.

Francis Bacon and John Wilkins dreamed about developing a visual language that could take us back to the pre-Babel era. In the 1950s, a World War II concentration camp survivor named Charles Bliss devised a set of symbols he hoped would preclude war by facilitating communication among speakers of different languages. In 1969, Vladimir Nabokov told *The New York Times*: 'I often think there should exist a special typographical sign for a smile ... a supine round bracket.' In 1982, computer scientist Scott Fahlman granted his wish. Looking for a solution to the miscommunication that prevailed on early Internet message boards, he proposed that a rotated smiling face, composed of a colon, a hyphen and a parenthesis— :-) —should indicate that the writer was joking.⁵

Emoji could even mark a return to a more pictographic script. Our earliest examples of writing come from the pictographic hieroglyphs and cuneiform inscriptions from

² Foreign Affairs, "The Political Power of Social Media," Council on Foreign Relations, Inc. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2010-12-20/political-power-social-media>.

³ Wired, "Emoji—Trendy Slang Or A Whole New Language?" WIRED <https://www.wired.com/2015/06/emojitrendy-slang-whole-new-language/>.

⁴ New York News & Politics, "The Rapid Evolution of a wordless tongue," New York Media LLC, <http://nymag.com/daily/intelligencer/2014/11/emojis-rapid-evolution.html>.

⁵ New Republic, "How using Emojis makes us less emotional," New Republic, <https://newrepublic.com/article/118562/emoticons-effect-way-we-communicate-linguists-study-effects>.

Mesopotamia around 5,000 years ago. It was only around 1,200 BC that the Phoenicians developed the first alphabetic writing system. Could the rise of emoji mean we're going backwards?⁶ Maybe emojis are symbolic. Our ancient ancestors started communicating through symbols, pictographs, and carvings etched into walls. Maybe emojis signal a full circle. We began communicating through symbols, and we've 'evolved' to this continuation of talking through images. The only difference is that the present day world is a lot more diverse, so our communication symbols should illustrate that. Maybe one day our emojis can represent who we are as a world.⁷

However, the feasibility of a whole new language in the form of emojis has been challenged by a number of people. They argue that emojis lack the flexibility of words and technological constraints which effectively contains its development into a full-fledged language.

The debate ensues as people and language change and evolve over time.

With the increasing growth of social media in everyday lives, it becomes crucial to understand and correctly interpret what language means. The spike in the usage of emojis and tweets has transformed the concept of words and language to its very core. Not only do these forms of social media have multiple meanings but interpreting them can be a Herculean task. *Ergo*, with the aid of the art of interpretation, hermeneutics, we attempt to decipher these symbols and truly understand their meaning.

Hermeneutics – Theory of Interpretation

How does one read and understanding the meaning of a sentence? If interpreting parts of the sentence requires interpretation of the whole sentence, and interpreting the whole sentence requires interpretation of parts of the sentence, how can anyone achieve any interpretation? This phenomenon, a mind-boggling puzzle is a persistent issue in hermeneutics, known as the 'Hermeneutical Circle', highlighted by Wilhelm Dilthey. Hermeneutics, in very simple terms, can be understood as the theory of interpretation of language, dialogue, or spoken words.

Not long ago, the word 'hermeneutics' was absent from the world of philosophy, but that is not the case anymore. There has been increased interest in the subject, starting from references to the usage of this term in the works of Aristotle and Plato and moving on to some of the most eminent contributors in hermeneutics like Wilhelm Dilthey, Martin Heidegger, Hans-Georg Gadamer and Friedrich Schleiermacher.⁸

Etymologically, the term hermeneutics is derived from the Greek verb *hermeneuein* which means 'to interpret' and the noun *hermeneia* means 'interpretation'. The easiest explanation

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ The Huffington Post, "The 'Diversity' of Emojis," TheHuffingtonPost.com, Inc., http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/the-diversity-of-emojis_b_7038798.html.

⁸ Sodhi, Inderjeet Kaur, "Methods for understanding Sri Guru Granth Sahib A Hermeneutical Study" (PhD diss., Punjabi University, 2015), 15-46.

would be the one given by the Oxford English Dictionary, which defines the term 'hermeneutics' as 'the branch of knowledge that deals with (theories of) interpretation, esp. of Scripture.'⁹

Understanding Hermeneutics

The art of hermeneutics has developed, from thinkers employing this theory to understand and interpret ancient and Biblical writings to a more general approach towards human sciences and common text; the leitmotif of the art remaining constant: the study of interpreting a text. The goal of a hermeneutic approach is to seek an understanding, rather than to offer an explanation or to provide an authoritative reading or conceptual analysis of a text.¹⁰

According to Gadamer, the task of hermeneutics is not to develop a procedure of understanding, but rather to clarify the interpretive conditions in which understanding takes place. Gadamer suggests that understanding is reached within a *fusion of horizons*. Importantly, the conditions under which a *fusion of horizons* takes place include attention to the prejudices individuals bring to the interpretive event, these are beyond what we are able to see, however, they constitute the horizon of a particular present.¹¹

For Gadamer "Part of real understanding is that we regain the concepts of a historical past in such a way that they also include our own comprehension of them."¹² But at the same time, we must go beyond this historical past. For the process of understanding to take place a *fusion of horizons* needs to occur such that "as the historical horizon is projected, it is simultaneously superseded."¹³

Language and Hermeneutics

Language is the fundamental mode of operation from our being-in-the-world and the all-embracing form of the constitution of the world.¹⁴

As Wachterhauser writes: "Hermeneutical theories of understanding argue that all human understanding is never 'without words' and never 'outside of time'. On the contrary, what is distinctive about human understanding is that it is always in terms of some evolving

⁹ Oxford Dictionaries, "Hermeneutics - Definition Of Hermeneutics In English," Oxford University Press, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/hermeneutics>.

¹⁰ David Jardine, "Reflections on education, hermeneutics, and ambiguity: Hermeneutics as a restoring of life to its original difficulty," in *Understanding curriculum as phenomenological and deconstructed text* ed. William F. Pinar & William M. Reynolds, (New York: Teachers College Press, 1992) 116-130.

¹¹ Elizabeth Anne Kinsella, "Hermeneutics And Critical Hermeneutics: Exploring Possibilities Within The Art Of Interpretation," *Qualitative Social Research* 7 no. 3 (2006), http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/145/319&sa=U&ei=ssViU7yEHKet0QWql4CwBw&ved=0CCEQFjAB&usq=AFQjCNHJ_1emJ7oJ68R7uMqAZeo4UqOBIg.

¹² Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth And Method* (2nd ed. New York: Continuum, 1996), 374.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Hans-Georg Gadamer, "The Universality of the Hermeneutical Problem," In *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976) 3.

linguistic framework that has been worked out over time in terms of some historically conditioned set of concerns and practices.”¹⁵

Furthermore, according to Gadamer “language is the universal medium in which understanding occurs. Understanding occurs in interpreting”, suggesting that “in order to be able to express a text's meaning and subject matter, we must translate it into our own language.”¹⁶ Gadamer emphasises verbal interpretation as the form of all interpretation, even when what is being interpreted is not linguistic in nature. Hermeneutics identifies the role of language, the historical circumstances in which the words to be interpreted were spelt out and the prejudices attached with the individual expressing his ideas.

Despite trying to achieve better understanding, the art of hermeneutics leaves room for a wider scope of interpretation. Philosophers and thinkers realise the possibility of multiple interpretations arising out of a single text, they recognise that interpretation must be understood within a context. There cannot be any single interpretation that is correct in itself, as the historical life of tradition depends on being constantly assimilated and interpreted. In other words, Gadamer believes an interpretation has to adapt to the hermeneutical situation to which it belongs.

Interpretation of the Emoji

*‘When you communicate on the internet, it is very convenient to have emoji, because it’s hard to express emotions only with text. If you look at history, after handwritten letters, there came the telephone. Then, electronic messaging emerged. There was always a demand for something that can express emotions.’*¹⁷

- Shigetaka Kurita (creator of emoji)

The creation of emoji can be called as nothing short of revolutionary. The cute, yellow coloured smile brings colour to a dull black and white conversation. The credit of creating a whole new way of communication goes to the Japanese. The first emoji was a smiley face used in *circa* 1998 by Japanese mobile operators to facilitate easy communication and dispersion of ideas. Oxford Dictionaries has recognised the influential and complex function of emoji by giving one of the symbols its highest honour. For the first time in Oxford’s history, the Word of the Year was a pictograph.¹⁸

¹⁵ Brice R Wachterhauser, *Hermeneutics And Modern Philosophy*. (1st ed. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1986)6.

¹⁶ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth And Method* (2nd ed. New York: Continuum, 1996), 396.

¹⁷ Ignition, “Why and How I Created Emoji,” Ignition Inc., <http://ignition.co/105>.

¹⁸ The Washington Post, “For first time ever, an emoji is crowned Oxford Dictionaries’ Word of the Year,” The Washington Post, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2015/11/17/for-first-time-ever-an-emoji-is-crowned-oxford-dictionaries-word-of-the-year/>.

With the increasing use of emoji in our daily lives, some people are excited to use emoji as an evolutionary form of language, for others, it is a linguistic Armageddon. The million dollar question is persistent: are emoji going to evolve as a whole new language?

The human skull has 14 facial bones and 35 muscles wrapping around these bones. That anatomy works together to form everything from grimaces to grins, to mouths agape. Beyond the face, there are all kinds of cues that you can use to understand someone: voice contours, body language, and eye contact, to name a few. All this context disappears when we switch to text.¹⁹ Communication not only involves spoken words but also body language, cadence in voice and facial expression. Consider the following example:

Example 1:

Anushka: Hey! How are you?

Cheta: I'm OK.

Example 2:

Anushka: Hey! How are you?

Cheta: I'm OK. ☺

This is a key point about language use: rarely is natural language ever limited to speech alone. When we are speaking, we constantly use gestures to illustrate what we mean. For this reason, linguists say that language is 'multi-modal'. Writing takes away that extra non-verbal information, but emoji may allow us to re-incorporate it into our text.²⁰

The usage of emoji magically fills in the gap in communication by text. Looking at the first example, it can be seen the words do not precisely convey feelings and emotions. On the other hand, in the second example, the insertion of the emoji improves the understanding and quality of the conversation. Further, emojis offer a way of communicating emotion offering a kind of visual equivalent to the tone of a person's voice.²¹ Ben Agger of the University of Texas, said: *"Emoticons bring the nuances of face-to-face or voice-to-voice interaction, those nuances and subtleties which are necessarily lacking when you're interacting by way of the screen. They attempt to make up for that alienation."*

Also, studies conducted reveal that the use of emoji directly and positively affects the levels of enjoyment experienced while engaging in a conversation. The indirect but positive correlation between emoticon use and information richness suggested that emoticons could

¹⁹ Qualcomm, "Humans can barely understand emojis. Will machines do any better?" Qualcomm Technologies, Inc., <https://www.qualcomm.com/news/spark/2015/09/18/humans-can-barely-understand-emojis-will-machines-do-any-better>.

²⁰ British Broadcasting Corporation, "Will Emoji become a new language?" 2016 BBC, <http://www.bbc.com/future/story/20151012-will-emoji-become-a-new-language>.

²¹ A Medium Corporation, "Emojis in Court Evidence," AMediumCorporation.com, <https://medium.com/@margolinmadison/emojis-in-court-evidence-557eadb5758a#.1hwbtdroz>.

affect communications among co-workers.²² All of this suggests that our connection to these characters and faces is anything but trivial. It has even been shown that emoticons provoke activity in our brains which is similar to brain activity registered when we look at a real human face.²³ The language of emoticons articulates feelings in a universal way. Therefore, we can conclude by saying that the use of emoji has brought a certain level of clarity and richness to simple textual communication.

Setting aside the obvious advantages of emoji, it suffers from a string of drawbacks which cannot be rectified easily. Despite the fact that emoji can be considered as a universal language, which cuts through borders and barriers of language and aids in communicating with people around the globe, the usage of emoji does not have a universal form of understanding. Meaning is a malleable function of the relationship between context and language, which includes emojis.²⁴ These pictures have a wide spectrum of interpretation and multiple meanings. Humans are adept at taking the resources they have at hand and fitting them into the kinds of meanings they want to convey.²⁵ Emoticons and emoji are changing the way we communicate faster than linguists can keep up with or lexicographers can regulate.²⁶ Also, emojis tend to have negotiable and flexible meanings which change over time and usage. The definition of an emoji cannot be found in any dictionary, hence, making it next to impossible to have a fixed definition. The problem arises in when the interpretation of emoji becomes crucial in the legal sphere. The increasing use of emoji in texts has forced the Courts to consider their implications before coming to a conclusion. In several cases across the United States, Courts have made an attempt to better interpret the facts of the case in conjunction with the usage of emojis. For example, at the Silk Road trial, the Federal Judge held that emojis form a part of the evidence and must be taken into account; text cannot be read in isolation, ignoring these nuances.²⁷

Further, studies confirm that emoji are used differently in different parts of the world. Tyler Schnoebelen has found that use of emoticons varies by geography, age, gender, and social class—just like dialects or regional accents. Friend groups fall into the habit of using certain

²² Albert H. Huang, David C. Yen and Xiaoni Zhang, “Exploring the potential effects of emoticons,” *The International Journal of Information Systems Theories and Application. Information & Management* 45 (2008), www.elsevier.com/locate/im.

²³ British Broadcasting Corporation, “Surprising Power of Emoticons,” 2016 BBC, <http://www.bbc.com/future/story/20141126-surprising-power-of-emoticons>.

²⁴ A Medium Corporation, “Emojis in Court Evidence,” [AMediumCorporation.com](https://medium.com/@margolinmadison/emojis-in-court-evidence-557eadb5758a#.1hwbtdroz), <https://medium.com/@margolinmadison/emojis-in-court-evidence-557eadb5758a#.1hwbtdroz>.

²⁵ Qualcomm, “Humans can barely understand emojis. Will machines do any better?” Qualcomm Technologies, Inc., <https://www.qualcomm.com/news/spark/2015/09/18/humans-can-barely-understand-emojis-will-machines-do-any-better>.

²⁶ New Republic, “How using Emojis makes us less emotional,” New Republic, <https://newrepublic.com/article/118562/emoticons-effect-way-we-communicate-linguists-study-effects>.

²⁷ The New York Times, “At Silk Road Trial, Lawyers Fight To Include Evidence They Call Vital: Emoji,” 2016 The New York Times Company, http://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/29/nyregion/trial-silk-road-online-black-market-debating-emojis.html?smid=pl-share&_r=0.

emoticons, just as they develop their own slang. 'You start using new emoticons, just like you start using different words when you move outside your usual social circles,' said Schnoebelen.²⁸ It has also been proved that women use emojis more than men do.²⁹ The assertion is based on the underlying assumption that women are more emotional than men, and therefore, make an excessive use of emojis in their conversations.

Our world is ever changing. The population is becoming more and more diverse every day. If technology is going to represent our culture, it has to keep up.

To conclude, we can rightly say that emoji are still very useful for enhancing and enriching the text of our contemporary digital conversations and interactions, injecting a note of humour, affection or even melancholy into the most concise message. Their increasing popularity serves as a reminder that there is a lot more to our communication than words alone. However, they pale in comparison to the richness or complexity of both natural written languages and the visual languages that already exist in the drawings we have used for millennia.³⁰

Twitter as a Network and the Interpretation of Tweets

So is Twitter the new Facebook? Evan Williams, one of the founders, provided insight into the ambiguity that defined the early days of Twitter in a 2013 interview: With Twitter, it wasn't clear what it was. They called it a social network, they called it microblogging, but it was hard to define, because it didn't replace anything.³¹

As of June 2016, Twitter has 313 million monthly active users³² and, on average, every second, around 6,000 tweets are tweeted on Twitter, which corresponds to over 350,000 tweets sent per minute, 500 million tweets per day and around 200 billion tweets per year.³³

Despite so much information pouring in every second of everyday and media to share information, are we really expressing ourselves as well as we think we are? One would think that tweets are easy to process due to their short length. A more exhaustive analysis though, reveals that these short messages demand the whole range of inferential steps that are applied to the schematic logical form of the message in order to turn them into relevant interpretations. Tweets demand inferential activity similar to the one we apply to the

²⁸ New Republic, "How using Emojis makes us less emotional," New Republic, <https://newrepublic.com/article/118562/emoticons-effect-way-we-communicate-linguists-study-effects>.

²⁹ T. Schnoebelen, "Emotions are Relational: Positioning and the Use of Affective Linguistic Resources." (PhD diss., Stanford University, 2012).

³⁰ British Broadcasting Corporation, "Will Emoji become a new language?" 2016 BBC, <http://www.bbc.com/future/story/20151012-will-emoji-become-a-new-language>.

³¹ Inc.com, "Evan Williams on Twitter's Early Years." 2016 Mansueto Ventures, <http://www.inc.com/issie-lapowsky/ev-williams-twitter-early-years.html>.

³² Twitter, "Twitter Users/Company Facts," 2016 Twitter, Inc., <https://about.twitter.com/company>.

³³ Internet Live Stats "Twitter Usage Statistics," InternetLiveStats.com, <http://www.internetlivestats.com/twitter-statistics/>.

interpretation of other utterances, with the additional task of turning schematic 140-character messages into meaningful interpretations.³⁴

On the other hand twitter users have devised another nomenclature to forward tweets by and to other users, the so-called re-tweeting. This poses an additional challenge to the readers of re-tweeted messages is that very often these messages form a chain of forwarded messages and this makes the tweets difficult to interpret correctly and it is also difficult to locate the initial author of the message.

An interesting feature to note is the usage of # in these tweets, or in tweets generally. The # sign is a nomenclature in Twitter that refers to a specific topic of interest that the user labels as such, so that other users can locate the tweets that deal with this topic. It is, therefore, a sign of thematic labelling. It is also a sign that favours collective action on the Net: users may be very widely dispersed and usually unknown to each other. Twitter provides a structure for them to act together as if in an organised way, for example, through the use of hashtags – the symbol # and keywords that signpost topics and issues. This provides a mechanism to aggregate, archive and analyse the individual tweets as a whole.³⁵ Therefore, collective and as a whole, the tweets will draw a completely different picture than one tweet alone will.

Let's take a look at a set of tweets by Devdutt Pattanaik, an eminent mythologist and storyteller. He tweeted the whole story of Mahabharata in 40 minutes with the help of 36 tweets.³⁶ A few of them are mentioned below –

01/36 Prince of Hastinapur is named Bhishma after he gives up sex & inheritance so that his father can marry an ambitious fisherwoman. #Jaya

31/36 Bhim kills all Kauravs; drinks Dushasan's blood; washes & ties Draupadi's hair; unlawfully strikes Duryodhan fatally on thigh. #Jaya

36/36 Yudhishtir finds Kauravs in paradise! He is furious until he realises: as long as he clings to rage, heaven can never be his. #Jaya

Capturing the entire story of Mahabharata – one of the great epics consisting of 1 lakh verses contained in 18 chapters is nothing less than epic itself. However, how well has it been summarised in a series of 36 tweets is questionable. It can be understood that the essence of the epic cannot be replicated in brevity, as its charm lies in the details. Hermeneutics emphasises on the historical context of the text, it aims to arrive at an interpretation by going into the depths of culture and situation in which the expression was made. In the above case, it is difficult, if not impossible to come to an understanding of the

³⁴ Francisco Yus, *Cyberpragmatics: Internet-mediated Communication in Context*. (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Pub., 2011).

³⁵ Alfred Hermida, "From TV to Twitter: How Ambient News Became Ambient Journalism" *Media/Culture Journal* 13, no. 2 (2010), <http://journal.media-culture.org.au/index.php/mcjournal/article/view/220>.

³⁶ India TV, "Mahabharata Retold in Just 36 Tweets," 2009-2016 Independent News Service, <http://www.indiatvnews.com/news/india/mahabharata-retold-just-36-tweets-42696.html>.

Mahabharata by reading a few Tweets, for it lacks the beautiful composition of detailed literature and culture.

Websites and applications like Twitter also highlight the difference between a spoken and written conversation. There are significant variations in the two – in a normal face-to-face conversation, you infer meaning from not only the words but the body language as well. But with texting, we all can manipulate words, can write and rewrite to present a different picture entirely. This can easily lead to misunderstandings as the text has been detached from its living component. An example of this would be of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, when the courtier Laertes tells his sister Ophelia, 'O, fear me not,' he doesn't tell her to not be afraid of him. Readers today have to make some effort to understand the meaning of archaic text, the actual meaning of Laertes' words is 'Don't worry, I won't.'

Several legal issues arise when it comes to Twitter, defamation, intellectual property right and misunderstanding the Tweet are to state a few. In a landmark case of defamation in the UK, the Judge went into deciphering the Tweet and interpreting it by going into the historical context and circumstances in which it was published. By differentiating between the ordinary meaning and an *innuendo* meaning of any text, the Judge, relying upon the ordinary meaning of the text and the environment in which it was made, decided that the Tweet did not qualify as defamatory in nature. The dispute dealt with achieving the best interpretation of the Tweet to further simplify its meaning, by using hermeneutics.³⁷

To conclude, it can be validly inferred that Twitter is one of the upcoming platforms of social media and the text published on it is subject to the study of hermeneutics. It is difficult to achieve a plausible interpretation of a Tweet, however, efforts must be made to do the same; a failure of which could lead a number of legal issues and conflicts.

Conclusion

Aristotle rightly said, 'Man is a social animal.' He is gregarious by nature and he uses words and language to communicate his thoughts and ideas. The complexity of language and the problems faced while understanding or interpreting words triggered for the development of a new art called hermeneutics.

In recent times, language has evolved considerably. With the dawn of social media, symbols have replaced lengthy messages and ideas are communicated more freely. However, these symbols and short texts, like words have multitudinous meanings. The 'correct' understanding of this new form of language is pertinent. We conclude that the application of hermeneutical interpretation to social media would make it easier to understand what people are trying to say. Also, the scope of hermeneutics should be broadened to include not only words but also the newer forms of communication - such as emojis, tweets and much more - which have cropped up.

³⁷ McAlpine v. Bercow, [2013] EWHC 1342 (QB).

Emoji have sprung up in daily conversations, with growing use of instant messaging and social media, these smileys have become extremely common. Emojis often help in overcoming gaps in communication, by adding colour and a hint of humour to the dialogue. However, interpreting emojis has become a task of its own, the authors suggest the application of hermeneutics to understand what the speaker is trying to convey. Emojis have also given birth to a number of questions in Courts of law, several eminent scholars in the legal arena have started recognising the impact of emojis on the functioning of law and arriving at better judgements.

The authors also look into Twitter the compression of lengthy writing into shorter messages, wildly strewn over the internet. Twitter has rapidly grown popular, posing a challenge to its users to communicate in nothing more than 140 characters. From a hermeneutical perspective, this shifts the burden on people who read and interpret the Tweet. The authors recommend using hermeneutics as a dominant tool to better understand the Tweet. The authors also question the strength of a Tweet to convey a significant idea, as it lacks the richness of detail.