Facebook Reactions at the Beginning of COVID-19 Lockdown.

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Abstract

The COVID pandemic led to the closure of educational institutions worldwide. In Mexico, the education system went into lockdown on March 16, 2021. With people unable to interact in the physical world, virtual spaces provided alternatives where emojis and other graphical representations were used to convey emotions. This research aimed to investigate the Facebook reactions of four generations (Baby boomers, Generation X, Millennials, and Post-millennials) over three months: April, May, and June 2020. A mixed-method approach focused on a survey following an exploratory design was used to collect data. The data showed that participants had several reasons to click on emojis on Facebook during the COVID-19 lockdown. Baby boomers used emojis the most and relied on Facebook to share information about the pandemic. While more work is necessary to understand the emoji phenomenon deeply, data revealed that the cave paintings we left on Facebook walls at the beginning of the year 2020 reflect the impact of COVID-19 had on our lives.

Keywords: Facebook; emojis; reactions; COVID 19

Introduction

Education suffered greatly due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The scourge of the pandemic was felt globally and no country had a solution to continue schooling uninterrupted (Bozkurt et al., 2020). In Mexico, specifically, the educational system went into lockdown starting on March 16, 2021, with many relying on the newly implemented distance education process. This meant that for many people who grew up being able to express themselves in the physical world and communicate through their intonation and facial expression, they had to find an alternative through asynchronous means. The present study investigated the Facebook reactions of four generations (Baby boomers, generation X, millennials, and post-millennials) in three months: April, May, and June (starting the lockdown in 2020). The research took place virtually in Mexico, the fifth country in the world with the most followers on Facebook, with 85 million (Hernández, 2019). Using Puebla, a large city in the country as the context, the present study analyzed the phenomenon of Facebook reactions in Mexico.

Emojis Around the World

The word 'emoji' comes from the Japanese language; it consists of a small image or icon that conveys an idea or an emotion. One of the most striking features of the impact of emojis is that in 2015 "the Oxford English Dictionary selected the emoji for 'tears of joy' as its 'Word of the Year', showing how frequently it is used in communication" (Fullwood et al., 2015, p. 1).

To be very specific, "emojis are devices for demonstrating tone, intent, and feelings that would normally be conveyed by non-verbal cues in personal communications but which cannot be achieved in digital messages" (Alshenqeeti, 2016, p. 1). There have been studies to understand the emoji phenomenon.

An example is a study conducted on Twitter in 2015, which shows that 13.69% of all tweets contain at least one emoji (c.f. Pavalanathan & Eisenstein, 2015). Furthermore, a Spiegel article from 2015 titled "Invasion of the ❤️❤️❤️" claims that around 200 emojis are used per second on Twitter (Bethge 2015).

'The universe of Facebook has more insights than we can imagine, and we need to know what the universe of Facebook is telling us.'

Figure 1: Reactions nowadays used in Facebook

A study by Ljubešic and Fišer (2016) also analyzed the use of emojis in which countries is prevalent. In the study, the frequency of occurrence of emojis is much higher in South East Asia and South America. It is essential to understand the emoji phenomenon in Mexico and its implications.

Baby boomers, Millennials, Gen-X, and 'Post-millennials'

The evolution of technology continues to give rise to calls on how different people use whatever is considered emerging. Often the segmentation is by generations. In other words, research often attempts to determine how Gen-X, Millenials, Post-Millenials, and Baby boomers use technologies. The Pew Research Center (2020) came up with the following division of the specific generations:
- The Silent Generation Born 1928–1945 (73–90 yrs)
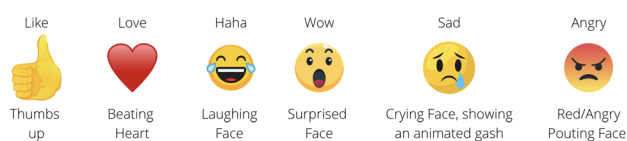- Baby boomers Born 1946–1964 (54–72 yrs)

Figure 2: Characters used the most on Facebook

- Generation X Born 1965–1980 (38–53 yrs)
- Millennials Born 1981–1996 (22–37 yrs)
- Post-Millennials Born 1997–Present (0–21 yrs)

The technology factor plays a pivotal part in the division of former generations. According to Alshenqeeti (2016), one group, in particular, those who are classified as Millennials members before the edge of the 2000s, are heavy druggies of technological bias. The new technologically smart to the Pew Research Center is nominated the "Post-Millennials" the oldest members would have been ten times old when the new iPhone 10 was introduced. In contrast, numerous Millennials will still have recollections of landlines touch-tones and rotary phones (Serafino, 2018).

There have been recent studies on Millennials and their use of emojis. Bosch and Revilla (2018) conducted a check by the online fieldwork company Netquest in Spain and Mexico. They plant the following main results:

- Millennials substantially use emojis in dialogic interactions like instant-messaging apps and lower acquainted task-acquainted communication such as emails.
- Millennials use emojis more with musketeers, cousins, or same-age interlocutors than with hierarchical superior or aged persons.

Responses and Emojis Sentiments on Facebook

Facebook responses were released in February 2016 as an extension of the old" Like" button. Facebook provides animated "emoji" responses to posts. An extensively assumed view is that emojis express the emotional state of the stoner. When you or others upload, publish, and post, six main sentiments might be expressed. Facebook will take note of any Three Musketeers posts you have on your timeline. According to the emojipedia, the characters used most on Facebook are the following:

In April 2020, Facebook introduced a new "Care" response to its platform, and the response was in the form of a smile emoji hugging a heart. Nevertheless, because this study was conducted before the response's publication, the "Care" response was not included in the present study.

Research Questions

RQ1 What reasons did Facebook users have for using Facebook reactions starting the lockdown in 2020?
RQ2 What do users perceive when selecting the most Facebook emoji during the first three months of the lockdown in Mexico?

Purpose of the Study

The present study attempts to describe four subjects' Facebook perceptions differ in their interpretation when selecting an emoji on Meta (Facebook).

Method

The researcher selected the Four subjects in his English conversation clubs to answer the questions mentioned above. Four participants were selected for this study, employing a mix- method approach.

Table 1: How many years do you have?

Participants	Generation	Age
P.1.	Baby boomers	56 years
P.2.	Generation X	50 years
P.3.	Millennials	33 years
P.4.	Post-Millennials	19 years old

According to research, "mixed-methods studies can help to confirm or cross-validate relationships discovered between variables, as when quantitative and qualitative methods are compared to see if they converge on a single interpretation of a phenomenon" (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2008, p. 588).

The current study follows an exploratory design. In research from Fraenkel & Wallen (2008), they mention that "in this design, researchers first use a qualitative method to discover the important variables underlying a phenomenon of interest and to inform a second, quantitative method. Next, they seek to discover the relationships among these variables" (p. 590).

The instrument employed was a questionnaire elaborated in Google doc forms to know the participant's views on Facebook (asked eleven questions to the participants), which started with some demographic information ad then moved on to more specific information regarding the Facebook phenomenon.

The second instrument used for this study was an excel sheet sent to the participants. The study lasted over three months (April, May, and June). The chart contained: the dates of the three months, the categories, and the last column to express why they selected the reaction. The excel sheet included the seven reactions that Facebook has, categories, specific themes shared on Facebook, and why the participant reacted to a post. (See appendix 1).

Specifically, the paper analyzed why people gave or did not click on emojis over three months (April, May, and June), 2020. A mixed-method approach focuses on a survey to provide efficient experiential research. Furthermore, this research employed an excel worksheet sent to collect the quantitative data from the months of (April, May, and June).

The following reasons are provided

Reasons	Categories
Express my emotions I like the pictures	Covid 19 News
Everybody uses it	Politics
Other reasons	Phrases
	Selfies
	Other Categories

The table above mentions the age of the subjects. The research included three English teachers and a student from the faculty of (communication Sciences). Specifically, the study had one Baby boomer (56 years old), one Generation X (50 years old), one Millenial (33 years old), and one post-Millennial (19 years old).

The table above mentions the years that subjects have used Facebook. The data showed that the Baby boomer has been using Facebook for (11 years), Generation X (11 years old), one Millenial (13 years old), and one post-Millennial (about seven years old).

Table 2: How many years do you have with your Facebook?

How many years do you have with your Facebook?

Participants	Generation	Years using Facebook
P.1.	Baby boomers	11 years
P.2.	Generation X	11
P.3.	Millennials	13
P.4.	Post-Millennials	About seven years ago

Table 3: Why did you create your Facebook account?

P.1.	Baby boomers	To engage and promote my band.
P.2.	Generation X	To find old friends
P.3.	Millennials	Entertainment
P.4.	Post-Millennials	'Cause I needed to communicate with my friends out The school

Figure 3: How many hours do you spend on a regular basis on Facebook?

Figure 4: What is the main reason that you use Facebook?

Figure 5: What were the categories that gave you more reactions on Facebook? Starting the lockdown in 2020 in the period of three months: April, May, and June?

Procedure

The primary selection was considered using the age differences based on the Pew Research Center (one baby boomer, one generation X, and one Post Millennial). The subjects consisted of four English teachers and one university student. The present study attempts to understand how a focused group of four participants on Facebook differ in their interpretation when selecting an emoji on Meta (Facebook).

An excel sheet was sent to the subjects, divided into three months (April, May, and June). The chart contained: the dates of the three months, the categories, and the last column to express why they selected the reaction. The excel sheet contained the seven reactions that Facebook has, categories, specific themes shared on Facebook, and why the participant reacted to a post. (See appendix 1).
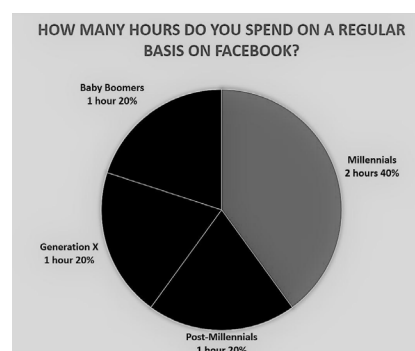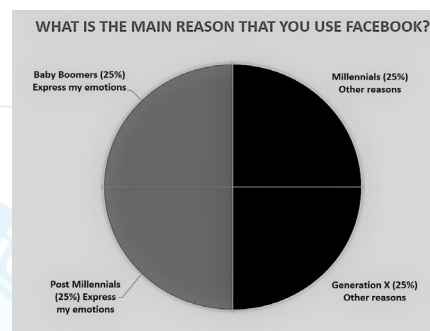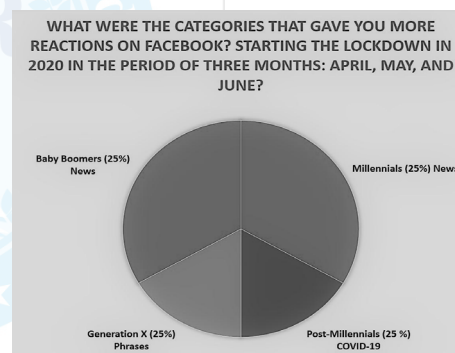
The first question in the instrument (Table 4) is to know why users create a Facebook account. The researchers found that the subjects opened an account to engage and promote a band, to find old friends and entertainment, and to communicate with friends from school. The results are shown in (Table 4).

The (Table 4) mentions why participants had to create a Facebook account. The data showed that the Baby Boomer created to (engage and promote their band), Generation X (to find old friends), one Millennial for (entertainment), and one Post-Millennial (to communicate with my friends out of school).

The data revealed various reasons to open a Facebook. However, the younger generations (post-millennial) mention that there is a need to communicate with her school friends even though she spends time with them in a physical manner. Early research from Joinson (2008) showed that younger Facebook users tend to spend more time on Online Social Networks and have a greater number of Facebook friends compared with older users (pp. 1028-1030).

The second question in the instrument (Fig. 3) aims to know how many hours participants regularly spend on Facebook. The data showed that three participants spent one hour daily, and one participant spent two hours on Facebook. The results are presented in (Figure 3).

The image above (Fig. 3) mentions subjects' daily hours on their Facebook accounts. The data showed that the Baby Boomer spent (one hour), Generation X (one hour), one Millennial (two hours), and one Post-Millennial (one hour). In particular, the use of the time

spent on Facebook is major in Millennials. According to the 2020 Consumer Culture Report, which examined the social platforms, millennials check posts and comment daily. It showed that 77% of 18 – 34-year-olds use Facebook daily, compared to 68% of 35 – 54-year-olds and 52% of the 55+ demographic (Pickard, 2020).

The third question in the instrument (Fig. 4) has the purpose of knowing what are the main reasons subjects use Facebook. Two participants, Generation X and one Millennial chose (other reasons); one Post-Millennial and one Baby Boomer chose (express my emotions). The results are shown in (Figure 4)

It can be mentioned from the data analyzed (Fig. 4) that there is a need to express emotions. Specifically, (post-millennials, also known as Gen Zers) "have adapted, perfecting typographical tones of voice. One interviewee, Elijah, boasted: 'I can express myself way better—even tonally— through text' " (Katz et al., 2021).

The fourth question in the (Fig. 5) instrument has the purpose of knowing what were the categories that the subjects gave more reactions on Facebook? The data revealed that the Baby Boomer
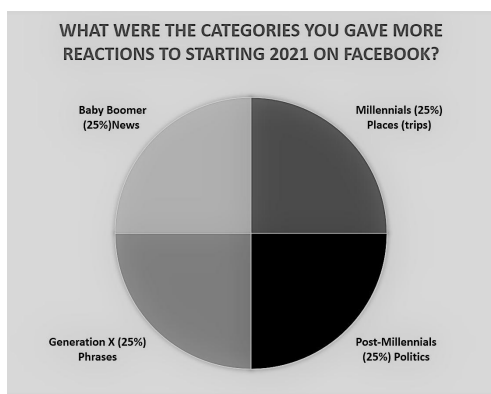
Figure 6: What were the categories you gave more reactions to starting 2021 on Facebook?
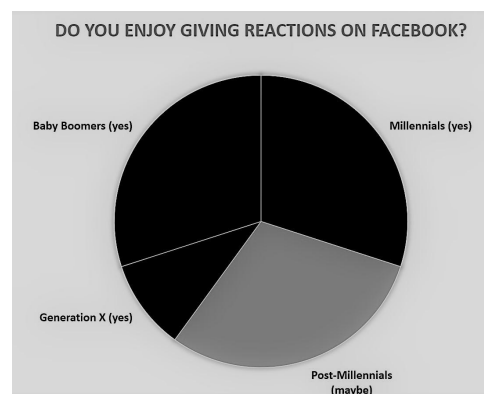

Figure 7: Do you enjoy giving reactions on Facebook?

gave reactions to (news), Generation X (phrases), one Millennial gave reactions to (news), and one Post-Millennial to reactions to (Covid- 19). The results are shown in (Figure 5).

It can be mentioned from the data (Fig. 5) that the objects of this study had to be informed on news and COVID-19. In a recent report by the World Health Organization (WHO, 2021) Social Media & COVID-19: A Global of Digital Crisis Interaction Among Gen Z and Millennials, it was found that "when asked what COVID-19 information (if any) they would likely post on social media, 43.9% of respondents, both male and female, reported they would likely share 'scientific' content on their social media". The finding appears striking since Facebook seems to be more likely a platform for entertaining.

The fifth question in the instrument (Fig. 6) has the purpose of knowing: What were the categories the subjects gave more reactions to starting in 2021 on Facebook? The data revealed that the Baby Boomer gave reactions to (news), Generation X (phrases), one Millennial gave reactions to (places-trips), and one Post-Millennial to reactions to (politics). The results are shown in (Figure 6).

An important fact to consider in (Fig. 6) is that Post-Millenials (generation Z) shared political views on Facebook. The Deloitte Global 2022 Gen Z and Millennial Survey (2022) found that over 22,000 gen Z and millennial respondents concluded that "gen Zs aren't passive. They position themselves on social and political issues."

The sixth question in the instrument (Fig. 7) has the purpose of knowing if the subjects enjoy giving reactions on Facebook. The data revealed that three participants (75%) enjoy giving reactions: the Baby Boomer, the Millennial, and the Generation X. However, the Post-Millennial (25%) mentions that she (maybe) enjoys giving reactions on Meta (Facebook). The results are shown in (Figure 7).

The specific data (Fig. 7) gives a clear glimpse that the subjects enjoyed giving clicks to Facebook reactions. According to Sturm et al. (2021), "these Reactions enable 'affective affordances'—the capacity for users to interact emotionally with content, 'making possible the expression of feeling in relation to content through discrete, preconfigured emotional choices' " (p. 15).

The (Table 5) mentions why participants reacted on Facebook accounts in the months of Abril, May, and June 2020. The data showed that the Baby Boomer created to (Solidarity), Generation X (It is a way of communicating), one Millennial for (Depending on every situation can transmit in my mood, joy, sadness, etc.), and one Post-Millennial (Because I want to interact with my friends). The seventh question in (Table 6) is to know what was the most

Table 5: Why do you react to Facebook posts?

| Participant	Generation	Reason to react on Facebook
P.1.	baby boomers	Solidarity.
P.2.	generation X	It is a way of communicating
P.3.	millennials	Depending on every situation can transmit in my mood, joy, sadness, etc.
P.4	post-millennials	Because I want to interact with my friends

Table 6: Baby boomers

Categories were selected on Facebook by a (Baby boomer) in the months of April, May, and June 2020.

	Covid- 19	News	Politics	Phrases	Selfies	Places and trips
April	12	0	0	0	0	0
May	10	0	0	0	0	0
June	14	0	0	0	0	0

selected category by (Baby Boomers) in the months of Abril, May, and June 2020. The data shows that the most selected category was COVID- 19 (36) times. The results are shown in the following table.

The eighth question in (Table 7) aims to know the most selected categories by (Generation X) in the months of Abril, May, and June 2020. The data shows that the most selected category was COVID-19 (19 times). The results are shown in the following table.

The ninth question in (Table 8) has the purpose of knowing what was the most selected category by a (Millennial) in the months of Abril, May, and June 2020. The data shows that the most selected categories were Phrases (6 times) and Selfies (6 times). The results are shown in the following table.

The tenth question in (Table 9) aims to know the most selected categories by a (Post-Millennial) in the months of Abril, May, and June 2020. The data shows that the Post-Millennial most selected category was Selfies (23). The last category selected was Politics (5). The results are shown in the following table.

The eleventh question in the instrument (Fig. 8) has the purpose of knowing the reasons a Baby Boomer gives reaction on Meta Facebook. The data revealed that during Abril, May, and June 2022, he selected "Express my emotions" 17 times. Furthermore, the minor

Table 7: Subject 2. Generation-X

Categories selected on Facebook by (Generation X) in the months of April, May, and June 2020.

	Covid- 19	News	Politics	Phrases	Selfies	Places and trips
April	11	0	0	1	2	0
May	5	1	0	4	4	0
June	3	2	0	10	1	0

Table 8: Subject 3. Millennial

Categories that were selected on Facebook by a (millennial) in the months of April, May, and June 2020.

	Covid- 19	News	Politics	Phrases	Selfies	Places and trips
April	1	2	0	2	3	1
May	1	1	1	2	2	2
June	1	2	0	2	1	1

Table 9: Subject 4. Post-Millennial

Categories selected on Facebook by a (post-millennial) in the months of April, May, and June 2020.

	Covid- 19	News	Politics	Phrases	Selfies	Places and trips
April	1	5	1	4	11	2
May	2	1	0	10	8	5
June	9	1	4	3	4	3
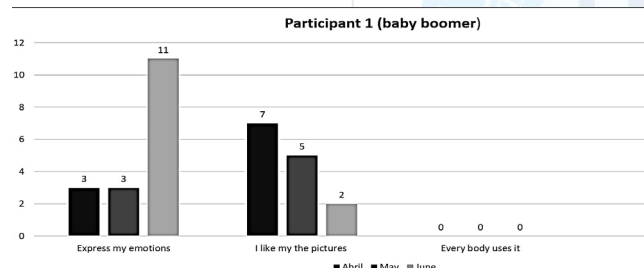
Figure 8: Participant 1. (Baby boomer) reasons to give reactions in Meta Facebook
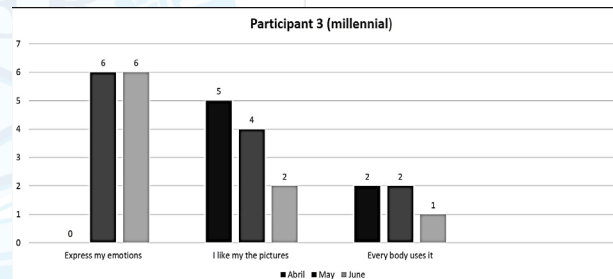
Figure 9: Participant 3. (millennial) reasons to give reactions in Meta Facebook
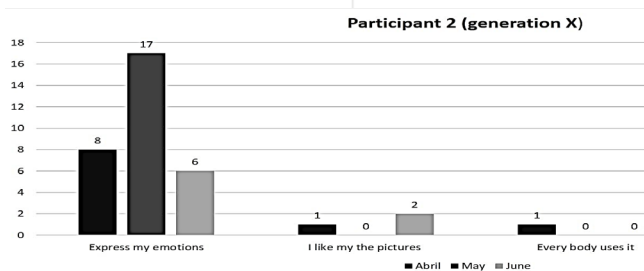
Figure 10: Participant 2. (Generation X) reasons to give reactions in Meta Facebook
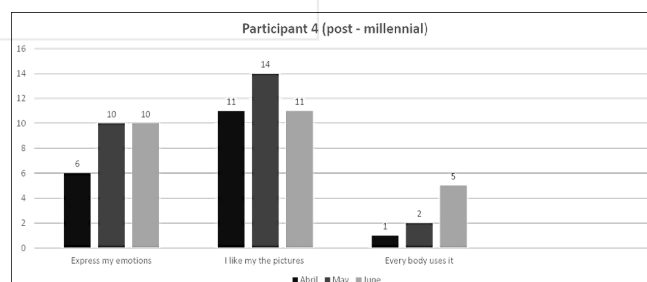
Figure 11: Participant 4 (Post-Millennial). Reasons to give reactions in Meta Facebook

reason selected was "Everybody uses it." (0 times). The results are shown in Figure 8.

The twelfth question in (Fig. 9) the instrument has the purpose of knowing the reason (Generation X) responses on Meta Facebook. The data revealed that during Abril, May, and June 2022, the subject selected "Express my emotions" 31 times. Furthermore, the slightest reason specified was "Everybody uses it." (1 time). The results are shown in Figure 9.

The tenth question in the instrument is to know why they give reactions (post-millennials) on Meta Facebook. Showed that Participant 4 (Post-Millennial), during (April, May, and June 2020), selected "I like the pictures ', 36 times. Furthermore, the least reason selected was 'Everybody uses it" (8 times). The results are shown in Figure 11 The instrument's thirteenth question in (Fig. 10) is to know why they give reactions (Millennial) on Meta Facebook. The data revealed that the subject selected "Express my emotions" 12 times during that time. Furthermore, the slightest reason selected was "Everybody uses it." (5 times). The results are shown in (Figure 10).

The fourteenth question in (Fig. 11) the instrument is to know why they give reactions (Post-Millennials) on Meta Facebook. The data showed that the subject during Abril, May, and June 2020, selected "I like the pictures" 36 times. Furthermore, the least reason selected was 'Everybody uses it" (8 times). The results are shown in Figure 11.

Conclusions

Reasons to react on Meta Facebook starting the lockdown in the months (April, May, and June 2020).

The researchers can mention that even though the excel sheet had four reasons to select, it became an evident reason to "express my emotions," which was the response most selected. During the lockdown, social media become an extension of ourselves to feel connected and express our feelings. McDool et al. (2020) found that the time spent on social media increased during the pandemic.

Most selected categories during the first three months of the lockdown in Mexico.

The most selected category (April, May, June 2021) in the platform Meta, Facebook by four participants was done by a baby boomer. The data revealed that the participant (baby boomer) selected COVID- 19 (36) times. The data revealed that COVID- 19 has become a must on our social platforms. The data showed that for the baby boomer, there was a need to share information related to the pandemic on Facebook. Research from Malik et al. (2021) mentions that "Facebook is a good platform to get updates about your near ones, alleviate their anxiety, and overcome their fear of isolation by sharing information related to COVID-19" (Implications and limitations section, para. 2).

In order to conclude, I would like to mention that there seems to be a real potential to analyze the emojis phenomenon. The present study was done to analyze the grumps that a group of four participants from different generations leave on a Facebook page. According to Brockman (2014), "In the big data world, we don't just leave bread crumbs behind, we voluntarily and involuntarily leave giant, detailed pointillism portraits of our every day" (p. 450).

Those specific tattoos or grumps that we live in our lives become reflected and stay for a very long time on a Facebook page. According to Brockman (2014), "In a sense, we electronically tattoo ourselves, our preferences, our lives, in a far more comprehensive and nuanced way than inked skin." The cave painting that we left at the beginning of the year 2020 reflects the impact that COVID- 19 had on our lives. There seems to be a real potential to analyze emojis in different generations, and the "Care emoji" could be added in the subsequent case study.

Implications

Regarding the methodological implications of this present study, further studies should consider a more significant sample. This case study was only done with 4 participants. To be very specific, the "reasons" to react on Facebook were selected and used in this study need to be analyzed using a more significant sample of participants because of the four participants subjected to this study. It was found that the most selected reason during (April, May, and June 2020) was done by participant 3 (millennial) selected "Other reasons," (48 times). "It would be interesting to understand those other reasons." Moreover, this study can be analyzed in a long-term process to fully understand the implications of the semiotics, using Facebook to analyze the emoji phenomenon resoundingly.

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Appendix 1: (April, May, and June). The excel sheet contained the seven reactions that Facebook has, categories, specific themes shared on Facebook, and why the participant reacted to a post.