

PARAMETERS OF NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION IN SOCIAL MEDIA

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Abstract

This article represents a research based on the existing literature and an analytical-descriptive study meant to answer the question: *which nonverbal manifestations complement the message transmitted through social media?* The methodology that was used in this study is descriptive, a qualitative analysis based on literature in the field and an analysis of different social networks. The present study examined the nonverbal behaviour of social media users, for which social networks such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok and Twitter were observed. We used the primary and secondary source to explore the objectives pursued, with the primary source for data collection in this study being the observation, and the secondary source being taken from books, scientific articles, and research papers.

Keywords: *communication, nonverbal communication, virtual reality, body language.*

Nonverbal communication complements verbal and paraverbal communication through body language (sight, mimicry, gestures, posture, facial and body features) and through all other aspects that complete our image and send messages about us to those around us (for example: clothing, accessories, perfume, driven car, space and time management, symbols used, design and colours of the PowerPoint slide chosen for a presentation, filters chosen for social media pictures, etc.).

Even though the nonverbal language is as old as the verbal one, its formal study has its roots in the Victorian era, Charles Darwin being perhaps the first scientist to systematically study how we use our bodies to communicate in "The Expression of Emotions in Man and Animals" (Kumari & Gangwar, 2022). Nonverbal communication has thus been the field of communication theory studied for a long time, having been "referred to as body language in the popular culture since the publication of Julius Fast's book of the same name in 1970," (Matsumoto et al., 2012) but according to Knapp, (Knapp, 1972), nonverbal communication

involves almost all human communication, except for the spoken or written word (Kumari & Gangwar, 2022). Moreover, nonverbal communication accompanies us permanently, given that we send nonverbal messages even when we do not communicate verbally, and "the final impression is actually given by the nonverbal dialogue" (Bîtcă, 2015).

There may be inconsistencies between what we want or think we convey to others through nonverbal language and what we actually transmit (which also applies to verbal and paraverbal language), and given that it varies depending on the person or group / social context, we cannot always put the equivalent sign between the nonverbal messages transmitted and the nonverbal messages received. However, there are norms of verbal and nonverbal communication to which the society adheres and through which, by adopting them, we occupy a certain place in the social interaction and "claim" a certain way of being treated by those with whom we communicate.

The speed with which communication through social networks has gained more and more ground in interpersonal communication has led to the change of the paradigm of nonverbal communication, having at hand new resources to send messages to others and form the image we want. The possibilities of photo-video editing, for example (crop, filters, brightness, etc.), help us to have much more control over the image and message we intend to convey. In the last two decades, there has been much interest in studying the nonverbal communication mediated by the so-called avatar communication (Becker & Mark, 1998), the parameters in which it takes place constantly change their limits, and, within it, the two key mechanisms of simulating nonverbal communication in the virtual world are the use

of emoticons and symbols (Bennerstedt & Ivarsson, 2010; Leavitt et al., 2016).

As communication in online social spaces evolves towards a more natural interaction, the following question arises: How can we mediate and support nonverbal communication in newer, more nuanced ways in these spaces? And how can online nonverbal behaviours expand our understanding of nonverbal communication? To address these issues, in this paper we focus especially on understanding nonverbal communication in virtual reality and the tools used for it.

In this respect, we viewed as relevant the results presented in the article "Talking without A Voice: Understanding Non-Verbal Communication in Social Virtual Reality," (Maloney, et al., 2020) published in 2020, reporting the findings of two empirical studies.

The first study collected observational data to explore RQ1: *What kind of nonverbal interactions are naturally used in social virtual reality?*, this study providing the information needed to create the research questions used in a follow-up study that investigated RQ2: *How do people perceive and understand nonverbal communication in social virtual reality?* and RQ3: *How does nonverbal communication affect interaction outcomes in social virtual reality?*

The findings of these studies highlighted the following:

- 1) offline nonverbal behaviours were naturally used to communicate in social virtual reality (RQ1);
- 2) communication and nonverbal behaviours in social virtual reality are generally perceived positively (RQ2);
- 3) Nonverbal communication in social virtual reality has enabled privacy, social comfort, and the protection of marginalized users (RQ3) (Maloney, et al., 2020; Innocent & Haines, 2007).

Nonverbal communication in social media has a significant impact on the way we interact and interpret online messages, nonverbal elements transmitting information and emotions sometimes subtle, but which play a very important role. The parameters of nonverbal communication in social media are determined by the following digital nonverbal communication tools:

- **emojis and emoticons**, which are designed to add tone and expression to written messages. For example, a smile or heart indicates a positive attitude, while an emoji depicting a sad face may express dissatisfaction or sadness. On some platforms, users can use emoji to react to stories or posts, expressing their emotions nonverbally.

- **GIFs**, which have become very popular lately, being used even by online publications in articles, especially when the subject has a strong visual component. The use of GIFs in digital communication can even replace the use of words, without requiring a complete sentence to express ourselves, when a simple GIF can do this for us and in a funny way;

While most people use emojis, emoticons, and GIFs when engaged in informal discussions, in formal communication they may seem inappropriate. That's not to say that nonverbal language is completely lost in digital conversations in a formal setting. As more and more companies add new team communication solutions in addition to the classical email, the dialogue becomes more open and friendly (by communicating on a group formed on WhatsApp, for example).

- Sharing **images** and **videos** provides a powerful way of conveying information nonverbally. Being observable, facial expressions, gestures or tone of voice contribute to a richer communication, and the possibilities of improvement through filters, effects, crop, editing brightness, contrast, colour intensity, etc. allow users to add nonverbal elements to personalize their content and they might influence the perception of those who look at them;

- **symbols**, the use of which can indicate the intention and intensity of what we transmit in written communication;

Text formatting: Text size, style, or colour can be used to emphasize the importance or change the tone of a phrase.

- **reactions and comments:** pressing the "like," "love," "sad," "laugh" or "angry" buttons on social media platforms may indicate users' feelings or agreement/disagreement with the posted content;

- on platforms such as Facebook Messenger or WhatsApp, **the availability status** (online, offline, busy, etc.) can provide information about a person's availability or mood;

- the timing and frequency of content posts, may also convey nonverbal information.

We suggest that the uniqueness and benefits of nonverbal communication in virtual reality consist of:

- 1) increased control over the transmitted message;
- 2) efficiency in conveying meaning;
- 3) flexibility and less awkwardness than the offline world due to the Proteus effect ((Maloney, et al., 2020).

Among the disadvantages of nonverbal communication in the virtual world we bring into account the following:

- 1) The image formed and the messages transmitted on social media may not be in accordance with reality;
- 2) increasing the possibilities of being/letting ourselves be manipulated;
- 3) As the research suggests, the excessive use of social media causes decreased nonverbal communication skills in offline communication, especially with regard to body language (Bucher, 2019); As young people in particular rely more on digital communication, they lose their ability to read and interpret the subtle cues that are essential for face-to-face interactions. This decrease in body language proficiency leads to negative social interactions, and some cues or manifestations can be misinterpreted or ignored (Fullwood et al., 2017). Such interactions can cause low self-esteem, social anxiety, and isolation, thereby increasing the dependence on social media for connection, acceptance, and validation.

In conclusion, we can see how social networks have become an integral part of our daily lives, shaping the way we interact with each other. As we have been able to see, nonverbal communication adapts to the technological evolution, nowadays being able to reconstruct most oral communication even without using words. Even if it is not exactly the same, nonverbal cues are received and emotions, thoughts and feelings are understood without the need for words. In conclusion, nonverbal communication is not lost in a digital world, but evolves alongside it.

We emphasize the importance of studying and further revealing the complexities of nonverbal behaviours in online social interactions. Given that information and knowledge related

to nonverbal communication in cyberspace is still at an early stage, we hope that these insights point to potential directions for understanding online nonverbal behaviours that are redefining our social lives today.

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