

# Exploring the Impact of Facebook's Reaction-Button on Interpersonal Communication: A Study on Immediacy and Social Acceleration

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**Abstract** – In recent years, the evolution of social media, particularly Facebook, has introduced tools that significantly accelerate social interactions. This study investigates the usage of Facebook's reaction-button and its impact on interpersonal communication, focusing on immediacy, media richness, and the societal drive for speed. This paper argues that, while the reaction-button enhances the speed and ease of communication, it may reduce the depth and clarity of interactions, potentially leading to miscommunication.

This study employed a qualitative method involving in-depth interviews with 16 Facebook users. The participants provided insights into their experiences using the reaction-button and its effects on their social relationships. Results showed the widespread preference for the reaction-button over the traditional 'like' feature. Participants regard reactions as a time-efficient tool that enhances online engagement, though the immediacy of reactions sometimes undermines deeper communication.

This suggests that, despite promoting faster communication, the reaction-button may undermine meaningful engagement. These findings have significant implications for understanding the evolving nature of digital interactions and highlight the need for social media platforms to balance speed with clarity.

**Keywords** – Facebook, immediacy, media richness, social acceleration.

## 1. Introduction

Social media use is an important and ever-changing phenomenon [1], [2]. Facebook is the most successful social networking platform currently in use, thus, it is an exceptionally suitable platform to analyze in relation to social responses [1], [3]. There has been a surge in the use of wireless internet in the past few years, with nearly all individuals in the 18-29 age range using the Internet while on the go instead of at a fixed location [4].

Facebook offers a simplified grid of emotional statements and makes only one available choice. This obliges users to make possibly more complex, emotional states converge into one predefined emoji [5]. Facebook enhanced their "like-button" to these "reaction-buttons." With its use, Facebook users around the world can react to status updates with more than just a thumbs up; one can add five more emojis to your expression in addition to a "like." The emoji "reactions" such as: "love," "haha," "wow," "sad," and "angry" give people a plethora of new methods to express how they feel about a content.

Emojis are currently a widely used and universal communication tool that are incorporated into practically every instant messaging and social media platform [6], [7]. Emojis, like the more traditional emoticons, facilitate the expression of a wide range of content in a clear, concise, and visually appealing manner that is ideal for the casual tone of social media discussions.

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In his own words, Mark Zuckerberg [8] states, "we're improving people's lives and communities around the world". Owing to this significant influence, additional research is required to stay up with the evolving communication dynamics by exploring new features and methods of communication on the platform [9]. As Zuckerberg [8] puts it, one might debate whether these modifications are for the better or if Facebook's impact on society is producing unintended consequences. Under the umbrella of social media research, particularly Facebook, this study examines potential impacts and issues on users' continuous interpersonal communication as a result of new technological advancements [9], [10], [11], [2]. This study employs a qualitative interview approach with sixteen distinct Facebook users to better understand their usage and perspectives on the topic. Aside from clicking the "like" button, users' only option to communicate their emotions on Facebook was through the previous comment section. With the array of responses available to users today, it is reasonable to assume that different kinds of impacts will result from liking and commenting on postings. The reaction-button may have unintended implications, which must be addressed.

One could first claim that the comment function would be replaced by the reaction-button. Consequently, it can be considered a contributing element to society's ever-increasing use of high-speed communication [12]. In certain instances, a user may decide that leaving a comment is unnecessary if they believe that their selection of an emoji response suffices. This could lead to a decline in diversity and personal content on Facebook, which would make it harder for people to exchange personalized information at a deeper level. Additionally, it has the potential to impact individuals' perceptions of their own emotions in response to a particular post; users are presented with a range of categorized reactions from which to choose, and the visibility of others' reactions may restrict users from fully internalizing their own thoughts. This differs from previous methods, in which the comment section played a larger role and provided greater room for diversity.

Aside from the fact that individuals are compelled to emulate the way in which others have utilized the reaction-button, the predetermined nature of the reactions reduces the intricacy of human emotions. Facebook still blocks out a wide range of human expressions and feelings, even if it has grounded the set of reactions on research. It strengthens the social system that now governs the acceptable range of emotions to display in public. Positive themes predominate in Facebook content.

People are posting cheerful photos, humorous videos, and engaging stories.

This is because many users try to portray their lives in the most vibrant hues possible, which has an impact on the selection of reactions and makes them more favorable than negative. Although the user can express anger with the reaction button, fury is not the same as dislike, and one may wonder why there is a "love" button rather than a "hate" button. All of this points to the reaction button's limitations and the ways in which it supports socially acceptable conduct.

Reaction emojis can be taken in a variety of ways, which frequently results in misunderstandings due to human complexity [12], [31]. The wow-button, for instance, has both positive and negative connotations. Additionally, the angry button may indicate that the person is upset about the post's content or that they do not like the post itself. The reaction-button's constraints prevent one from challenging the symbolic meanings behind the selected response. This is not the same as the comment feature, where users can ask questions to fully grasp what other users are saying.

Hence, communication speed is increased by the use of the reaction-button; however, there is a possibility that interpersonal communications will lose their intended meaning. There may be too much emphasis placed on speed, and the constant need for instant communication might cause communication to become less valuable. Because of their quick responses, users might not give the actual message much thought, even though they think they are always there and learning new information—in reality, this might be the case. All of this makes the researcher wonder: How do Facebook users use the reaction button, and how does it impact their fast-paced, immediate social interactions?

## 2. Theoretical Basis

This study extensively incorporated Hartmut Rosa's [13] Social Acceleration, which asserts that contemporary society is experiencing a rapid pace of change that individuals may find difficult to comprehend due to the constant need to be present. People must simultaneously acquire the skills necessary to operate the newest technology and adapt to the changes it brings about [13], [14], [15].

That is to say, it goes beyond communication is a multifaceted acceleration of social processes and occurrences. According to Rosa [20], modernity marks the emergence of people's capacity to jointly construct their lives and to take charge of their social affairs in novel ways, such as through social media platforms. He further argues that the dawn of modernity brought with it promises for a peaceful and liberated social and political environment, but he portrays the real results of modernization as something different [13].

Consequently, the Media Richness Theory of Daft and Lengel [16] was also applied in this study. Media richness theory is a framework that explains how well a communication medium replicates the information that is delivered through it [16]. Rich media content helps people perceive society and can significantly affect how a user perceives and comprehends the content [17].

Another utilized theory was media immediacy [15], which has expanded in tandem with the advancing digital media. Media immediacy refers to the faster and potentially clearer communication facilitated by media. However, this immediacy and the rapid flow of information may prevent users from critically reflecting on its true implications [14], [15], [19].

Bolter and Grusin [20] also examined the concepts of immediacy and transparent immediacy, which refers to media that aims to vanish and create a sensation of being immersed in the visual realm. In order to establish a feeling of urgency and actuality, it is imperative that the virtual reality closely resembles the user's everyday existence, and that the virtual encounter remains uninterrupted by any system failures, sluggish frame rates, or visual blurriness. In conclusion, Bolter and Grusin [20] are discussing a form of immediacy that is high speed to successfully construct a complete virtual world in which digital media is becoming a part of the "real life."

The investigation predominantly relies on comprehensive interviews, as the study focuses on the thoughts, actions, and reactions of users while utilizing a particular media platform-in this instance, their thoughts and actions on Facebook.

Interviews have been conducted with a total of sixteen individuals, with an equal number of males and females, specifically eight men and eight women. The interviewees were selected based on their gender in order to obtain equal responses from both men and women, with a target of 50% representation for each group. The selection was additionally influenced by age, as research indicates that those in the 18-29 age group are the most frequent users of Facebook [6], [8], [21], [22], [23]. Thus, the study exclusively includes this particular age group as they are presumed to possess the requisite expertise to respond to the interview questions.

Furthermore, by maintaining a modest sample size, it can be anticipated that the responses from this group will accurately reflect the responses of the majority of Facebook users. Another criterion for selecting interviewees was their prior and subsequent usage of Facebook, in order to understand the potential disparities and similarities before and after the introduction of the reaction button. Nevertheless, there was no requirement stipulating that the participants must utilize the button; they must be familiar with its functionality.

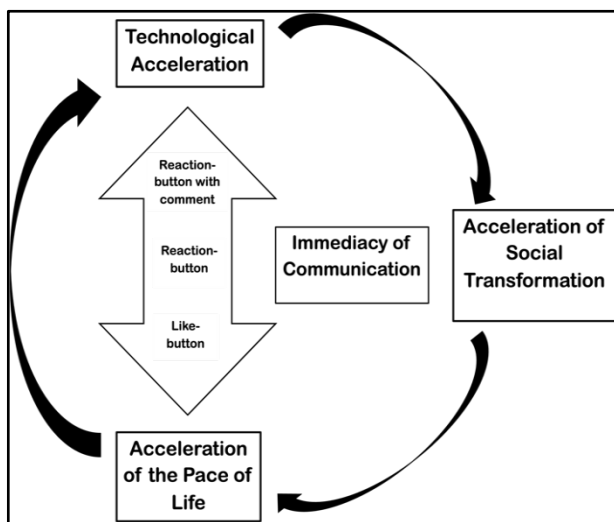


Figure 1. Conceptual framework of the study

### 3. Research Methodology

This research employs a qualitative critical approach to examine the potential societal repercussions of the accelerated pace of communication, with a particular emphasis on mediated reactions on Facebook.

#### 3.1. Ethical Consideration

This study is subject to certain ethical issues. The researcher sought informed consent from all research informants. The participants were informed regarding the objectives of the study, while they were reassured that the observation and answers from the interview are treated as confidential and will be used only for the purpose of the research.

### 4. Results

#### Reaction Usage

The interviews highlighted the widespread utilization of the reaction-button. The consensus among almost all participants was that the reaction button was a better option than the prior like button. As the participants employed and analyzed Facebook reactions, significant interpretations started to surface. The Facebook reaction-button is regarded as the most efficient time-saving tool as it allows users to express their views or emotions with minimal time and effort. Due to the accelerated interaction, the Facebook tagline 'connecting people' gained even more significance. A discussant elucidated:

“When the Facebook reaction button was added, it had a significant impact on my Facebook life.

Prior to its arrival, I always felt obligated to like or comment on posts, particularly those tagged with my name. I can now quickly reveal that I saw or agree with the post by clicking on a reaction-button. I recently posted something that got 1,000 reactions or comments from different people. I have not responded to almost half of them, but I reacted to all of their comments so they wouldn't think I was being snob. It saves a lot of time typing out comments.” [Discussant 16]

Participants perceived the reaction-buttons as markers of moral ideals. Irrespective of the criticism or response to her posts, one participant believes that ultimately, she will exercise autonomy and make her own decisions, rather than being influenced by others [Discussant 15]. Nevertheless, everyone persists in employing the 'like' button when looking through the interview materials. One of the participants describes:

“Whenever I click a reaction, I am thinking of what the owner of the post would feel. Like when I saw my friend's post on Facebook - what he said on Facebook was entirely different from what he told me in person; the picture was the same though. I wanted to react angry about his lie, but I ended up clicking like. I usually use the like button on some of my friends or when I know a person who owns the post, but we are not that close or we happen to pass each other often. I call it ‘auto-like’ because every time I scan posts and see their faces, I press like without reading their posts.” [Discussant 14]

Rosa [13] defines social acceleration as the phenomenon of a rapidly evolving society. Additionally, he elucidates the difficulty of keeping pace with this rapid acceleration. In order to grasp the concept of modernity and stay abreast of the rapid acceleration, individuals must actively engage with all technological innovations inside society. The advent of rapid and instantaneous communication has had a profound influence on individuals' lives, as it engenders certain expectations and convictions that necessitate fulfillment [24]. Although participants do not explicitly use the same terminology, they are also pointing to the concept of the culture of speed as described by Tomlinson [24].

“For a long time, we have utilized acronyms, emoticons, and emojis to speed up communication and compensate for the lack of body language in online discussions. People who don't want to ‘like’ something can now respond to it with the new reaction button.” [Discussant 2].

According to another participant, the reaction button is located within the ongoing social acceleration and rapid evolution of society.

Discussant 12 characterizes it as a seamless evolution and asserts that the ability for individuals to express their feelings rapidly is beneficial.

Moreover, it illustrates that individuals can acquire knowledge regarding social progressions in modern society and communication.

### *Immediate Reactions*

The Facebook reaction-button exemplifies the concept of telemediated life, as described by Tomlinson [24], by facilitating rapid digital contact and providing users with an additional means of expressing themselves on the Internet. The reaction-button can be examined in relation to its intermediacy and its function as a 'digital extension of real life' in various aspects. As stated previously in terms of immediacy, the reaction-button provides a quick way to convey feelings. The clarity of this communication approach and the extent to which the reaction-button makes the media richer are subjects of debate [16].

The reaction-button serves as an extension of expressing one's liking for a post. However, it does not have the genuine human expression found in words, leaving the true meaning behind the reactions uncertain. According to the Media Richness Theory [16], a medium that engages multiple senses is considered richer and therefore clearer. The reaction-button serves as an additional means of expressing emotions, aiming to enhance clarity and expressiveness on social media platforms. However, it is possible that the presence of the reaction-button may result in fewer comments being posted, which could undermine its intended purpose.

This critique aligns with Suh's [25] argument that "richer media," which include more pictures, do not necessarily enhance communication effectiveness. Although a remark consists of carefully selected words by the sender, it effectively communicates concepts with greater clarity than merely pressing a button. A discussant stressed:

“It is not enough to just leave a reaction to a post. You must still support it with a comment for them to understand where you are coming from and to avoid misinterpretation” [Discussant 6]. Another discussant added that sometimes it is hard to interpret words, and interpreting emojis, in this context - reaction, is even harder.” [Discussant 1].

If a user opts for a reaction instead of the 'like' button, the media might be considered more engaging, as long as the number of comments remains constant.

Nevertheless, while examining the usage of the reaction-button, it becomes apparent that Facebook is strategically anticipating a decrease in the number of comments.

This is because the reaction-button was specifically created to cater to the needs of modern users who have limited time available for commenting.

Consequently, actual interactions such as different responses could take the place of written exchanges.

As previously stated, the reaction-button generates an instant display of expressed reactions, precisely as intended by the founder of Facebook. While its effectiveness in achieving its goals may be subject to scrutiny: One participant mentioned that she often deliberates on which response to employ in order to effectively convey her emotions and prevent any misinterpretations. She claims that the reaction-button is a time-consuming task that necessitates extensive thought.

“For me, it is better to use the like-button because there is no hassle, you just click it without worrying on what people might think. Unlike reaction-button that you need to reflect a lot and analyze deep interpretations.” [Discussant 4]

Given these circumstances, the perceived immediacy of the reaction-button may be considered ambiguous. The objective is to achieve instant communication with nearly all individuals at any one time. However, if the functionality becomes excessively diverse, it may compromise its primary purpose as a rapid and efficient channel for information dissemination [15]. Given the rapid pace of events, Belk and Llamas [15] are also examining if the fast flow of information is hindering users from reflecting on its true significance. One of the participants also expressed this type of concern. According to her, the speed at which these exchanges occur could have negative consequences.

“I believe people will think less about what they read and more quickly move on to the next item in their news feed. When it comes to real life, we respond so quickly to words and other things. Communication and interaction should not be about how fast you can do it!” [Discussant 13].

She is, in essence, challenging and critiquing the reaction-button's functionality on Facebook, along with the potential disastrous consequences it may have on social interactions. She also discusses the diminishing value of communications as they progress within the limitations of societal accelerations.

### ***Virtual Social Reality***

The debate on the distinction between online interactions and face-to-face interactions can be traced back to the previous concern regarding impaired social ties [14], [15], [19], [18].

One could argue that the reaction-button influences how people express their feelings in everyday life.

Baym [9] covers the question of whether virtual meetings are less effective and accurate than in-person meetings.

When applying this theory to the functioning of the high-speed communicative reaction-button, it is crucial to take into account both its effectiveness and the potential occurrence of erroneous signals. A participant explicitly expresses a preference for engaging in discussions rather than replying to posts using emoticons:

“It would be better if you talk to him/her personally and tell him/her your feelings. I think it is going to make people less likely to be able to express their feelings in real life if they just use the reaction-button” [Discussant 4].

The participant raises concerns about the potential influence of the reaction-button on interpersonal or "real-life" relationships in the offline world. They suggest that people may refrain from writing personal comments on Facebook, feel less inclined to make phone calls, or become less expressive in face-to-face interactions. It is possible that Facebook users responded to one's post with 'love' and feel that this emoticon is enough to value their friendship temporarily. The increasing invisibility of media can be seen as a downside because it aims to integrate physical life with the Facebook experience [7]. The demonstration of virtual reactions, and the subsequent misconception that they are equivalent to actual ones, indicates that the digital frames are progressively becoming imperceptible to the user.

The participants are expressing concerns about the reaction-button's relatively impersonal aspect, since they believe it may adversely affect interpersonal interactions. The previously mentioned objective of the Facebook reaction-button [8], [28] encompasses an acknowledgment of the fact that individuals often utilize Facebook when they are short on time and hence have limited availability for commenting on posts. The reaction-button was developed to align with this tendency, as its purpose was to elicit swift responses without excessive contemplation of the content being consumed [28], [30], [27]. By utilizing these highly responsive devices, users immerse themselves in the virtual social world, enabling them to effortlessly demonstrate their engagement with the simple click of a button.

These arguments align with the findings of Livingstone's [16] study, which raises concerns about the real online behavior of users. In addition, Livingstone [16] explains the collective experiences and actions that users may have in the modern digital world. Users can have a sense of engagement by choosing a reaction.

Nevertheless, the interviews conducted for this study revealed a continuous pattern of behavior that aligns with Livingstone's [16] views and concerns regarding actual engagement in digital environments.

While browsing their Facebook newsfeeds, the participants exhibited a prevalent inclination, with nearly all of them, as previously observed, employing the 'like' button and occasionally the 'love' button. Most of the time, the participants reacted to the contents posted by their close friends and family members, which was another common occurrence. The majority of the content shared by the participants' Facebook friends appears to be uninteresting and lacks value, making it not worth their time. Thus, is the pursuit of social acceleration in digital domains truly desirable? One can argue whether this widespread practice can be attained simply speeding up digital communications. By simultaneously being in multiple locations, one may argue that people are effectively absent from any specific place, instead but in their imagined virtual social reality where they think that they are active users.

### ***Chosen Reactions***

The reaction-button can be described as both impersonal and potentially detrimental to social interactions. Additionally, as previously said, it can also serve as a misleading means of communication. One of the participants in the interviews openly voices concern about users overthinking their choice of reply and the potential for misinterpretation:

“Maybe individuals think too much about which reaction to employ and there might be misconceptions as well.” [Discussant 9]

Another discussant expresses concern about the interpretation of the different reactions from his experience:

“It has been two months since I wrote something sad. The story is about dogs that are being hurt and dogs that die. My post was meant to show how sad I am about dogs that are hurt or killed because I have always loved dogs. Then, one of my friends gave me a haha-reaction; she was the only person who did that. It was hard for me to tell if her "haha" response was because she likes dogs that die, because she was laughing at how I feel about dogs, or because she is like an "auto-liker" but with a "haha" reaction.” [Discussant 16].

On the other hand, one discussant revealed that she once asked her partner where he was, and he replied that he was in a restaurant with his boss. He even attached a photo of himself with his boss as proof. A minute later, the discussant noticed a tagged photo of her partner with two girls.

She really wanted to leave a comment on that uploaded photo, but she could not do so because it was uploaded by his partner's boss. Thus, she left a 'wow' instead of 'angry' reaction.

She went on to clarify that the 'wow' reply was a form of sarcasm since she was upset with his boyfriend [Discussant 1].

One would contend that the 'wow' and 'haha' buttons in particular can be somewhat difficult to interpret. When the 'haha' button is selected, it can be difficult to determine whether the user is laughing positively or negatively. Likewise, the 'wow' button can be interpreted in both a positive and negative light. The true definition of the word 'wow' is simply the expression of astonishment. This may cause the recipient to have numerous doubts concerning the true significance of the reaction. A parallel circumstance arises when an individual is uncertain whether the 'angry' button signifies disapproval of the content presented in a post or agreement with the user. A discussant disclosed:

“When my gay friend asked for help, it was because he did not understand why his friend outside of school was mad about the post he made about liking a guy. My friend did not know if his friend's reaction was because she does not like seeing gay posts like that or because she likes him even though she does not know he is gay” [Discussant 16].

These highlighted concerns raise doubts about the suitability of the reaction-button for all types of posts and suggest that it may be a time-consuming form of engagement, requiring users to be highly attentive to prevent misunderstandings.

Furthermore, a participant in the interviews expressed disapproval towards the selection of responses. Discussant 7 contended that the 'love' button is a continuation of the 'like' button, while asserting that the 'angry' button does not encompass more intense feelings. Similarly, this can be applied to every selected reaction-button. As previously said, Facebook's research was used to develop the reaction button, which aims to accurately portray the reactions that people want to use. Thus, the reaction-button is a product of social construction. Deuze [26] highlighted the concept of mediation, which can be applied to enhance the discussion.

The reaction-button was created with the aim of encapsulating human thoughts, emotions, and communication into a compact interface [8], [28], [30]. However, due to the inherent complexity of persons, it is inevitable that problems will arise. The reader must assess if the main concerns reside in the damage inflicted on social connections, a loss in communication efficacy, or the passive behavior induced by the obsession with accelerating speed. However, it is essential to thoroughly examine all potential consequences in order to fully understand and, ideally, prevent the potential adverse impacts caused by this generation's 'demand for speed.'

## 5. Discussion

What are the ways in which Facebook users employ the reaction-button and how does it impact their social interactions? This question served as the initial inquiry and served as the starting point for the study. Throughout the research process, other inquiries and objectives for further investigation have emerged within the discipline.

The study consistently highlights concerns over the possible harm to social relationships. The discourse predominantly aligns with Bayms' [9] critique of the digital era and its detrimental impact on social connections. This study can be considered as an extension of her prior work by further exploring a specific aspect of her research on the digital era. Furthermore, the study raises concerns about the excessive focus on the ever-increasing pace of social interactions, arguing that it may lead to a decline in the quality of communication and a lack of engagement among Facebook users. What is the future trajectory given the recent advancements, if the social acceleration described by Rosa [13] continues on the same trajectory, and if the rate of interpersonal interactions continues to increase? And if that is the case, it is intriguing to contemplate what Facebook's advancing technological update could entail.

This study has identified areas of research that require further investigation. To get insights into the similarities and differences among different groups, it would be intriguing to undertake further research on the usage of the reaction button among different age groups and genders. Furthermore, it would be suitable to focus on conducting further quantitative research by selecting a diverse set of samples, exploring other post subjects, and endeavoring to discover a prospective correlation between numerous topics and the utilization of reactions.

## 6. Conclusion

This study has specifically concentrated on Facebook and its reaction-button feature to investigate the heightened speed of social interactions. The objective has been to analyze the impact of Facebook's reaction-button on social interactions, with a specific focus on the aspects of speed and immediacy. What is the function of the reaction-button for Facebook users, and how is it utilized? How will the reaction button affect in-person and online interactions between individuals? What effect will the reaction button have on the tendency in society to have more social interactions?

The research's findings provide a highly significant viewpoint on the society's ongoing acceleration in communication velocity.

The study reveals that Facebook users employ the reaction-button, while the majority of them are primarily engaged in utilizing the 'like' button. Overall, the study indicates a significant utilization of the responses. Although the user voluntarily decides whether or not to take part in this modernization process, the reaction-button can be considered as a natural evolution in the acceleration of communications in society.

Furthermore, the study examines the influence of the reaction-button on interpersonal communications in both physical and virtual environments, as well as its impact on the acceleration of society. It does so by analyzing the reactions in terms of their immediacy, describing the virtual social realm in which they occur, and exploring the social implications of these reactions as a constructed phenomenon.

The concept of media richness questions the effectiveness of incorporating several reactions beyond the simple "like" button in terms of clarity. In theory, the addition of a feature should enhance the clarity of the medium. This study argues that the assumption may be incorrect, since the rapid exchanges of displaying affection through pressing a button may result in a decrease in comments and, hence, a reduction in personal interaction on Facebook. The loss of personal content during meetings can pose challenges due to the recipient's wide range of possible interpretations. Furthermore, it can be contended that by engaging with the reaction-button, the user actively takes part in telemediated existence. This engagement gives rise to apprehensions regarding the actual extent of customers' internet usage.

Furthermore, despite the apparent contradiction, the current era of digital technology may be promoting communal behaviors and shared experiences among users, while also creating a sense of omnipresence. The user's attention is being divided among multiple locations due to the fast-paced nature of social interactions. This lack of specific focus leads to delayed exchanges and a decrease in the effectiveness of communication.

Moreover, the pre-selection and creation of reactions by Facebook may result in misconceptions as they could be difficult to align with posts on different subjects. Given the possible influence of online misinformation on face-to-face interactions, the issue of impaired social interaction is being raised once again. If the users believe that they have already sent compassion online through a virtual reaction, it may also be argued that clicking the reaction-button leads to a distinct behavior in "real" life.

The reaction-button can be seen as a component of the virtual social world, as it is the result of an effort to condense human thoughts, feelings, and expression into a single virtual button.

This is evidently a problem as human interactions are inherently more intricate than this. In today's world, communication encompasses a broader scope beyond mere verbal and visual elements. In contemporary times, communication can be achieved by simply clicking buttons.

Perhaps society's accelerating pace is taking us in a positive direction, or perhaps it is not. It is essential to assess the genuine importance of the development and its potential consequences in order to suggest possible improvements that could lead to better communication in the future.

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