

Exploring the Impact of Emojis on Paralanguage in Social Media Communication among University Students

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Abstract

This research investigated the evolving role of emojis in shaping paralanguage within social media communication, with a particular focus on how these visual symbols enhance linguistic and emotional expression. The study examined the nuanced ways in which emojis contribute to the overall tone, context, and meaning in written discourse, while also considering cultural and contextual variations in emoji usage among individuals from diverse linguistic backgrounds. Conducted with a sample of 55 Year-3 Bachelor of Education students at a university in Fiji, where English is a second language, the research employed a mixed methods approach to analyze data on the usage and perception of emojis in social media communication. This paper argues that emojis play a crucial role in conveying emotions, fostering engagement, and adding personality to messages, thereby augmenting textual communication with emotional nuance and clarity, leading to more empathetic and meaningful online interactions. The findings indicate that emojis are widely used across various communication channels, including text messages, comments, and direct messages, reflecting their versatility and widespread adoption. Respondents overwhelmingly perceive emojis as positive tools that enhance the effectiveness of digital communication by conveying emotions, fostering engagement, and adding personality to messages. The study also highlights the significant role emojis play in nonverbal communication, particularly in expressing emotions that may be difficult to articulate through text alone. By providing emotional nuance, clarity, and depth, emojis contribute to more empathetic and meaningful interactions in online spaces. Overall, this research provides valuable insights into the dynamic interplay between emojis and paralanguage in contemporary digital communication, signifying the importance of these symbols in enriching text-based exchanges and fostering more engaging and emotionally resonant social media interactions.

Keywords: emoji, paralanguage, social media, communication, digital conversations

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

The rise of emojis in digital communication is a fascinating evolution that has significantly impacted the way people express themselves online. Emojis originated in Japan in the late 1990s, created by Shigetaka Kurita, who was working for NTT Docomo, a Japanese telecommunications company (McCurry, 2016). The term "emoji" is a combination of two Japanese words: "e" (picture) and "moji" (character). The initial set of emojis was designed to convey information in a visually efficient way. Emojis gained popularity quickly in Japan and eventually spread globally as communication became increasingly digital and visual. Unicode, the international standard for text encoding, started incorporating emojis, ensuring cross-platform compatibility and standardization (McCurry, 2016). The Unicode Consortium began officially encoding emojis in Unicode, ensuring that emojis would be displayed consistently across different platforms and devices. This standardization was crucial for the widespread adoption of emojis in digital communication.

One of the most compelling pieces of evidence highlighting the rise of emojis is their sheer ubiquity across various digital platforms. According to a 2021 report by Emojipedia, over 10 billion emojis are sent daily, illustrating their pervasive presence in our digital lives (Emojipedia, 2021). The Unicode Consortium has added over 3,600 emojis to its list as of 2023, reflecting the growing demand for diverse and representative symbols in digital communication (Unicode Consortium, 2023).

Moreover, statistical data underscores the profound impact of emojis on user engagement and communication effectiveness. A study conducted by Adobe in 2021 found that 90% of global emoji users believe that emojis make it easier to express themselves, and 89% of respondents stated that emojis help them communicate across language barriers (Adobe, 2021). This aligns with findings from 2021 research by the University of Minnesota, which revealed that the use of emojis can increase the perceived friendliness and warmth of messages, thereby enhancing interpersonal connections in digital communication (University of Minnesota, 2021).

The rise of social media platforms, such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, played a significant role in popularizing emojis. Social media's character limit and the need for concise communication made emojis a convenient and expressive tool to convey emotions and add nuance to messages. The surge in popularity of mobile messaging apps, like WhatsApp, Messenger, and Viber, further fueled the use of emojis. These apps provided a convenient and user-friendly interface for incorporating emojis into conversations, making them an integral part of everyday communication.

Over the years, emojis have evolved to become more inclusive, with efforts to represent a diverse range of people, cultures, and identities (Kelly & Watts, 2015; Miller, 2016; University of Minnesota, 2021). The introduction of skin tone modifiers, gender-neutral emojis, and emojis depicting various professions reflects a commitment to diversity and representation (Miller, 2016). World renowned brands recognize the communicative power of emojis and have started to incorporate them into marketing campaigns and branding strategies making emojis a tool for creating relatable and engaging content, allowing brands to connect with their audience on a more emotional level (Khamis et al., 2017).

The integration of emojis into business and marketing strategies further attests to their significance. According to a report by Appboy (now Braze), marketing campaigns that included emojis in their push notifications saw a 9% increase in open rates and a 70% increase in conversion rates compared to campaigns without emojis (Braze, 2020). This highlights how emojis not only facilitate personal communication but also drive engagement and action in commercial contexts.

Emojis have also found their place in academic research, with scholars exploring their role in digital communication, emotional expression, and social interaction. A study published in the journal *Computers in Human Behavior* in 2015 demonstrated that emojis play a crucial role in enhancing message clarity and reducing ambiguity, especially in emotionally charged or complex interactions (Kelly & Watts, 2015).

Furthermore, emojis provide a nuanced way to convey emotions in text-based communication. They allow users to express feelings, tone, and intent more accurately, reducing the chances of misinterpretation in digital conversations. Emojis have also become a form of visual storytelling, allowing users to convey complex ideas, events, or narratives with a single character or a combination of characters (Danesi, 2017). This visual shorthand enhances the efficiency of communication in an era of information overload.

It is now apparent that emojis have become deeply embedded in digital culture. Memes, GIFs, and internet slang often incorporate emojis to convey humor, sarcasm, or cultural references. Emojis have become a recognizable and dynamic component of the digital lexicon. The continued evolution of emojis includes ongoing efforts to increase representation, introduce new symbols, and explore innovative ways to enhance digital expression. As technology advances, emojis are likely to remain an essential and evolving aspect of digital communication.

The rise of emojis can be attributed to their visual expressiveness, cross-platform standardization, and their seamless integration into various digital communication channels. From a niche concept in Japan to a global phenomenon, emojis have become an integral part of how people communicate in the digital age.

1.2 Rationale

The integration of digital literacy skills is essential in education for second language learners, aligning with the evolving nature of communication. Understanding and effectively using emojis in social media is a key aspect of digital literacy that can enhance language proficiency and communicative competence among second language learners. Research has shown that the use of emojis can improve the sarcasm detection ability of individuals (Novak et al., 2015) and can assist in the interpretation of emotional tone in written communication (Wang et al., 2017). The use of emojis has also been found to increase engagement and emotional connection in online communication (Abdul-Rahman et al., 2018). Emojis offer a visual form of communication that transcends linguistic barriers, making them particularly valuable for second language learners. Incorporating emojis into education fosters inclusivity by providing alternative means of expression and comprehension, catering to students with diverse language backgrounds. Social media communication, heavily influenced by emojis, serves as a reflection of contemporary culture and language usage. Students of English as a Second Language (ESL)

engaging in social media will benefit from learning to navigate this form of communication, gaining insights into cultural nuances and idiomatic expressions prevalent in digital spaces. Emojis contribute to paralanguage, the non-verbal aspects of communication, which is crucial for ESL students to grasp as it complements verbal communication. Understanding the emotional nuances conveyed by emojis enhances ESL students' paralinguistic skills, allowing them to convey and interpret emotions more effectively. Exploring the impact of emojis on paralanguage in social media communication is relevant for ESL students as it aligns with the goals of digital literacy, fosters inclusivity, enhances language proficiency, and prepares students for the dynamic communication landscape they will encounter in various aspects of their lives. The integration of emojis into ESL education is a forward-thinking approach that acknowledges the evolving nature of language and communication in the digital age. Paralanguage, which includes the non-verbal elements of communication such as tone, pitch, and body language, is essential for effective interaction. For ESL learners, understanding and using paralanguage can be particularly challenging, as it often involves cultural nuances and implicit social cues. Emojis serve as a bridge for these learners, providing visual and contextual cues that enhance the meaning of textual communication. By incorporating emojis into their learning, ESL students can better grasp the emotional and pragmatic aspects of language, leading to more nuanced and expressive communication.

2. Objectives

This research investigated the role of emojis in paralanguage development among ESL university students and assessed the impact of emojis on cultural and contextual understanding in social media communication.

3. Literature Review

In the digital age, social media platforms have become digital classrooms and significant communication channels for university students. Emojis, as visual and pictorial representations of emotions are being used increasingly and are now an integral component of online communication.

3.1 *The Linguistic and Cultural Dimensions of Emojis*

While emojis are globally recognized, their interpretation can vary across cultures (Tay et al., 2018). University students from different cultural backgrounds may have unique emoji preferences and interpretations, which can influence the effectiveness of emoji-based paralanguage in social media communication (Majid et al., 2020). Zappavigna and Logi (2024) also emphasize the importance of considering contextual factors, such as cultural norms, social dynamics, and platform affordances, in understanding emoji usage and interpretation. They highlight the variability in emoji conventions and meanings across different cultural and linguistic contexts, underscoring the need for nuanced analysis when studying emoji-mediated communication.

Various research has examined the linguistic functions of emojis, highlighting their role in supplementing and enriching written communication (Derks et al., 2008; Miller et al., 2016). Emojis convey various linguistic features, including emotions, attitudes, emphasis, and tone, contributing to the overall meaning and interpretation of text-based messages. Studies have also conducted semantic and pragmatic analyses of emojis to explore their meanings and usage patterns across different communicative contexts. Emojis often carry multiple layers of meaning and can be interpreted differently based on linguistic, cultural, and situational factors. Research has investigated the cultural connotations of emojis and their implications for cross-cultural communication (Thurlow & Brown, 2003). Emojis reflect cultural norms, values, and stereotypes, influencing how messages are interpreted and perceived by individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds (Miller et al., 2016).

Several studies have examined emojis as cultural symbols that encode shared meanings and representations within specific cultures (Park et al., 2014; Riordan, 2017). Emojis serve as visual shorthand for cultural concepts, practices, and identities, facilitating communication and identity expression in digital environments (Alshenqeeti, 2016; Stark & Crawford, 2015). Research has explored how emojis contribute to language variation and change, particularly in digital communication (Baron, 2015; Danesi, 2017). Emojis introduce new forms of expression and creativity, shaping linguistic norms and conventions in online discourse communities (Danesi, 2016). Studies have investigated the role of emojis in intercultural communication, highlighting their potential to bridge linguistic and cultural barriers (Kelly & Watts, 2015; Kaye, Malone, & Wall, 2017). Emojis facilitate cross-cultural understanding by providing visual cues and context clues that aid in interpretation and negotiation of meaning (Dresner & Herring, 2010; Park et al., 2014). While emojis offer various benefits for communication, challenges include ambiguity, cultural differences, and misinterpretation (Derks et al., 2008). Emojis can also be interpreted differently based on individual preferences, cultural backgrounds, and contextual factors, leading to communication breakdowns.

3.2 Previous Studies on the Use of Emojis in Language Learning

Miller et al. (2016) conducted a series of experiments to investigate the impact of emoticons on reading comprehension and affective interpretation. Participants were presented with text passages containing emoticons and were asked to complete comprehension and interpretation tasks. The study employed both quantitative and qualitative methods to analyse the data, providing a comprehensive understanding of the role of emoticons in written discourse. The study by Miller et al. (2016) yielded several important findings. They found that emoticons had a mixed effect on reading comprehension. While some participants reported that emoticons helped them understand the emotional tone of the text, others found them distracting and detrimental to comprehension. Emoticons were also found to enhance affective interpretation by providing additional emotional context to the text. The study also demonstrates that participants are more likely to accurately identify the intended emotions and attitudes when emoticons are present. Participants perceived text passages with emoticons as more positive and friendly compared to passages without emoticons.

Studies have also explored the use of emojis as visual aids to support vocabulary acquisition and retention among language learners. Emojis serve as pictorial representations of words or concepts, helping learners associate visual cues with linguistic meanings (Thurlow & Brown, 2003; Miller, 2016). Miller et al. (2016) also suggest that incorporating emojis into language learning activities enhances learners' communicative competence by providing additional means for expressing emotions, attitudes, and intentions. This demonstrates that emojis supplement linguistic communication with nonverbal cues, enriching learners' expressive abilities.

Other studies have also examined the cultural implications of emojis and their role in intercultural communication (Thurlow & Brown, 2003). Emojis carry cultural connotations and can vary in meaning across different cultural contexts, prompting discussions about cultural diversity and sensitivity in language learning. Research has explored the use of emojis in writing and composition tasks to enhance learners' creativity and expression (Derks et al., 2008). Emojis provide learners with alternative means of conveying emotions and nuances in written texts, promoting linguistic fluency and stylistic variation. Some studies have investigated the role of emojis in developing learners' pragmatic competence, particularly in understanding and interpreting social cues in digital communication (Dresner & Herring, 2010; Barr, 2016). Other studies have revealed how emojis help learners navigate the pragmatics of online discourse, including politeness strategies, humour, and sarcasm (Tagg, 2015; Barr & Gillon Dowens, 2019). Research also suggests that the use of emojis in language learning activities can enhance learners' motivation and engagement by making language learning more enjoyable and relevant to their digital lives (Lu, 2019; Derakhshan & Hamed, 2020). Emojis appeal to learners' interests and preferences, fostering a positive learning environment (Wang & Wen, 2017; Lopez-Rua & Romero-Trillo, 2020). While emojis offer various benefits for language learning, challenges include ambiguity, cultural differences, and overreliance on visual aids (Miller et al., 2016). Educators must address these challenges to ensure effective integration of emojis into language teaching practices. These studies also suggest that emojis have the potential to enrich language learning experiences by enhancing vocabulary acquisition, communicative competence, cultural awareness, and pragmatic skills. There is scope for more research to explore optimal strategies for incorporating emojis into language instruction and to understand their long-term impact on language learning outcomes.

3.3 The Role of Paralanguage in ESL Education

Emojis originated in Japan in the late 1990s and have since evolved into a global phenomenon (Nishimura, 1999). These pictorial symbols serve as non-verbal cues to convey emotions, attitudes, and intentions in digital communication (Tigwell & Flatla, 2016). Paralanguage refers to the non-verbal elements of communication, such as tone, pitch and volume, which complement spoken words (Argyle, 1988). In face-to-face interactions, paralanguage plays a crucial role in conveying emotions and attitudes (Mehrabian, 1972). In the context of social media, where verbal cues may be limited, emojis can serve as paralinguistic cues to compensate for the absence of face-to-face interaction (Walther et al., 2011). Zappavigna and Logi (2024) argue that emojis function as paralanguage in social media discourse, complementing and enhancing textual communication with non-verbal cues. They emphasize how emojis facilitate emotional expression, interactional alignment, and rapport building in online interactions. By analyzing specific examples of emoji usage across different social media platforms, they demonstrate the intricate ways in which emojis contribute to the construction of meaning and social identity in digital spaces. It is apparent that emojis have become an essential part of social media discourse, providing context, and enhancing the emotional tone of messages (Miller et al., 2016).

The significance of emojis as paralinguistic resources in social media discourses highlights their potential to enrich communication in digital platforms. Research has shown that emojis can enhance emotional expression in

online communication (Battestini et al., 2020). Emojis allow users to convey complex emotions that may be difficult to express in words alone (Wu et al., 2016). Among university students, emojis have been found to facilitate more authentic and emotionally expressive interactions on social media platforms (Tigwell & Flatla, 2016). Emojis also play a significant role in shaping social interactions on social media platforms. Studies have shown that emojis can influence the perceived warmth and friendliness of messages (Li et al., 2018). Moreover, the use of emojis has been associated with increased engagement and social connectedness among university students (Miller et al., 2016).

3.4 Challenges and Opportunities in Integrating Social Media Communication into Language Teaching

Despite the growing body of research on emojis and paralanguage, there are still limitations to consider. Most studies have focused on Western contexts and may not capture the full diversity of emoji use among university students worldwide (Battestini et al., 2020). Future research should explore the cultural nuances of emoji use and its impact on paralanguage in social media communication among university students from diverse backgrounds.

Several studies highlight the potential of social media platforms and emoticons to increase student engagement and motivation in language learning (Derakhshan & Hamed, 2020; Wang & Wen, 2017). Learners often find digital communication tools familiar and enjoyable, leading to increased participation in language activities (Derakhshan & Hamed, 2020; Lu, 2019). Research suggests that integrating social media into language teaching provides learners with opportunities for authentic language input, exposing them to real-world language use beyond the classroom (Derakhshan & Hamed, 2020; Lu, 2019). This exposure helps students develop their communicative competence and cultural awareness (Wang & Wen, 2017; Lopez-Rua & Romero-Trillo, 2020). Social media platforms offer interactive features such as commenting, messaging, and collaborative writing, which facilitate communicative language practice among learners (Wang & Wen, 2017; Lu, 2019). These interactive activities promote meaningful language use and peer interaction, enhancing language learning outcomes (Derakhshan & Hamed, 2020; Lopez-Rua & Romero-Trillo, 2020). Emoticons are often embedded in cultural contexts and can vary in meaning across different cultures (Dresner & Herring, 2010). Integrating emoticons into language teaching provides opportunities for exploring cultural nuances and promoting intercultural communication skills among learners.

Despite the benefits, educators must navigate the challenge of balancing the informal nature of social media communication with the need for formal language instruction. Overemphasis on informal language features such as abbreviations and emoticons may hinder learners' development of formal language proficiency. Emoticons, while useful for conveying emotions, can sometimes be ambiguous and open to misinterpretation (Derks et al., 2008). Language learners, particularly those with limited proficiency, may struggle to interpret emoticons accurately, leading to communication breakdowns. Access to technology and internet connectivity can pose barriers to integrating social media into language teaching, particularly in underserved communities (Warschauer, 2004). Educators must consider issues of digital equity and accessibility when implementing digital tools in language learning contexts. Overall, the research data signifies the potential benefits of integrating social media communication and emoticons into language teaching, including increased engagement, authentic language use, and cultural awareness. However, educators must address challenges related to informality, ambiguity, and digital equity to ensure effective implementation and maximize learning outcomes. More research is needed to explore best practices for integrating digital tools in language instruction and to understand their long-term impact on language learning and proficiency.

4. Theoretical Framework

The importance of theoretical frameworks in providing a comprehensive understanding of the impact of emojis on paralanguage in social media communication among university students cannot be overstated. Theoretical frameworks offer a structured approach to analyzing the phenomenon, ensuring that the research is systematic and coherent. By grounding the study in established theories, researchers can clearly define key concepts, hypotheses, and variables, enhancing the clarity and focus of the investigation (Creswell, 2014). For example, using the Socio-Semiotic Perspective helps clarify how emojis function as semiotic resources in digital communication (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). Frameworks also provide context by situating the research within a broader scholarly discourse. This contextual understanding is crucial for interpreting the significance and implications of findings (Silverman, 2013). For instance, the Multimodal Communication Theory contextualizes emojis as part of a broader set of communicative modes, helping to explain how they complement and enhance textual communication (Norris, 2004). Furthermore, the use of multiple theoretical frameworks allows for interdisciplinary insights, enriching the analysis by integrating perspectives from linguistics, psychology, sociology, and communication studies (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Social Identity Theory, for instance, can reveal

how emojis are used to express and negotiate identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), while Communication Accommodation Theory can explain how emojis facilitate social harmony and understanding in online interactions (Giles, Coupland, & Coupland, 1991). Frameworks also help translate research findings into practical implications and recommendations. By understanding the role of emojis through frameworks like the Socio-Semiotic Perspective or Digital Literacy Framework, educators and policymakers can develop targeted strategies to enhance digital communication skills among university students (Hobbs, 2010; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006).

To interpret the data on the impact of emojis on paralanguage in social media communication among university students, several theoretical frameworks can be utilized to provide a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. Here are some theoretical frameworks that can be employed:

Socio-Semiotic Perspective: This theoretical framework, as mentioned by Zappavigna and Logi (2024), focuses on the social and cultural dimensions of communication, emphasizing how meaning is constructed and negotiated through various semiotic resources, including language, images, and symbols. Emojis are viewed as multimodal resources that contribute to the construction of meaning in social media discourse, facilitating the expression of emotions, attitudes, and interpersonal relationships (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006).

The theoretical basis for this approach is Halliday's sociosemiotic theory of language in which he stresses the unity of the text (language), context (linguistic or nonlinguistic), social structure, and in which he sees language as a unique system of signs with a social function, capable of expressing the meanings which all other sign systems can make (Halliday & Matthiesen, 2014).

Multimodal Communication Theory: This theoretical framework examines communication as a multimodal phenomenon involving the integration of multiple semiotic modes, such as language, visuals, gestures, and paralanguage (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). Emojis are conceptualized as one of the modalities through which meaning is conveyed in digital communication, complementing and enhancing textual messages with non-verbal cues and emotional expressions (Norris, 2004).

Social Identity Theory: This theoretical framework focuses on how individuals' self-concepts and group affiliations shape their communication behaviors and interactions in social contexts (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Emojis can be seen as tools for identity performance and expression, allowing users to signal aspects of their identity, personality, and social affiliations in online interactions.

Communication Accommodation Theory: This theoretical framework examines how individuals adjust their communication styles and behaviors to accommodate or adapt to the linguistic and social norms of their interaction partners (Giles, Coupland & Coupland, 1991; Dragojevic, Gasiorek and Giles, 2016). Emojis may serve as adaptive strategies for enhancing interpersonal rapport, aligning with the communication preferences of others, and fostering mutual understanding and connection in social media interactions.

Digital Literacy Framework: This theoretical framework focuses on the skills, competencies, and critical awareness needed to navigate and effectively communicate in digital environments (Riel, Christian & Hinson, 2012). Emojis are situated within the broader context of digital literacy, highlighting the importance of understanding their socio-semiotic dimensions, cultural conventions, and communicative functions for competent and meaningful engagement in online discourse (Hobbs, 2010; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006).

By employing these theoretical frameworks, researchers can contextualize the data on emoji usage and its impact on paralanguage within broader theoretical perspectives, facilitating a deeper understanding of the dynamics of social media communication among university students. Additionally, integrating multiple theoretical lenses allows for a more nuanced and comprehensive interpretation of the data, uncovering the complex interplay between emojis, paralanguage, and social interaction in digital environments.

This research used the Socio-Semiotic Perspective theory. This is an appropriate theoretical framework for this study because it comprehensively addresses the social and cultural dimensions of communication, crucial for understanding how meaning is constructed and negotiated through various semiotic resources, including emojis. Given that emojis function as multimodal resources within social media discourse, this framework allows for an exploration of how they contribute to the expression of emotions, attitudes, and interpersonal relationships, which are central to the study's focus. Halliday's socio-semiotic theory of language, which underpins this approach, provides a robust foundation for analyzing the interplay between text, context, and social structure. By viewing language as a unique system of signs with a social function, Halliday's theory emphasizes the unity between linguistic and non-linguistic elements in communication. This is particularly relevant to the study of emojis, which, as visual symbols, operate within the same semiotic system as language but contribute

distinctively to the construction of meaning. Finally, this framework facilitates an examination of how emojis function within specific social contexts, aligning with the study's aim to explore cultural and contextual variations in emoji usage. By employing the Socio-Semiotic Perspective, the research can delve into the complex ways emojis augment textual communication, enhancing the understanding of how these symbols shape meaning and interaction in the digital landscape.

5. Limitations and Ethics Approval

The following limitations were encountered during this study. Firstly, the sample size was limited to a small group of undergraduate students in a Bachelor of Education Program. The total number of students enrolled in this program was 71, however, 55 students participated in this research. This may not accurately reflect the broader population of university students. Secondly, the participants may not be representative of all university students. Factors such as age, gender, cultural background, or academic discipline could influence emoji usage, leading to biased results if these factors are not accounted for. Ethical approval was taken from the Fiji National University Human Research Ethics Committee and participants gave their approval using FNU Human Research Ethics approved consent forms.

6. Results

6.1 Demographic Information

A total of 71 students enrolled in the course titled "Practical Language Teaching," a third-year course for Bachelor of Education students. A majority of the students were pre-service, while a smaller group comprised in-service teachers who are already working in the field.

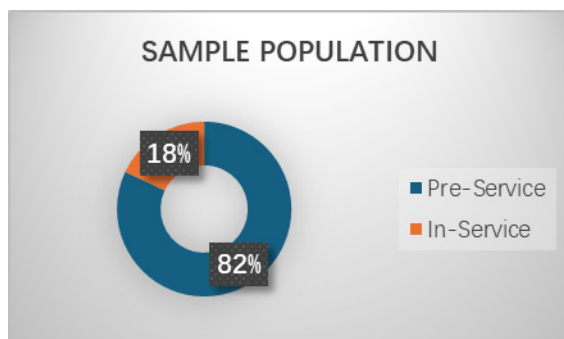


Figure 1. Sample population

Figure 1 above gives demographic information about the sample population. The sample population was 18% of the total.

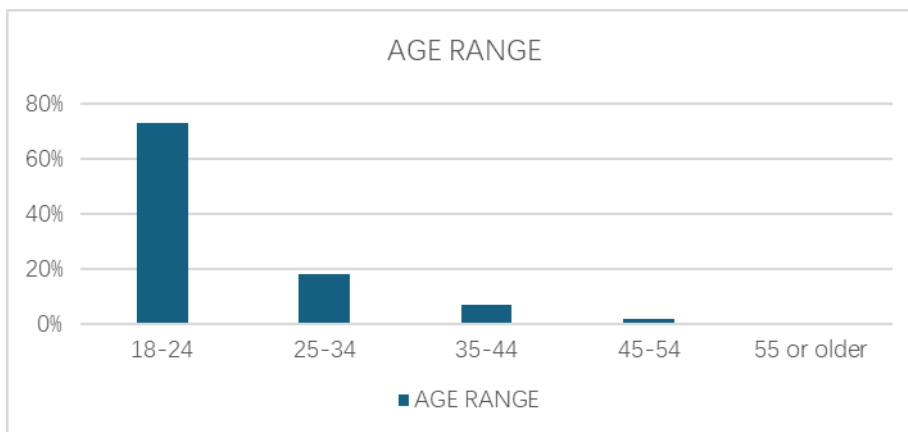


Figure 2. Age Range of the sample population

The sample population was divided into five age cohorts. The largest group, comprising 73%, included students aged 18-24, followed by 18% in the 25-34 age bracket. Seven percent were in the 35-44 age group, with one student belonging to the 45-54 bracket. Most of the pre-service Bachelor of Education students are young adults (18-24), while the majority of in-service students fall into the 25-34 and 35-54 age cohorts.

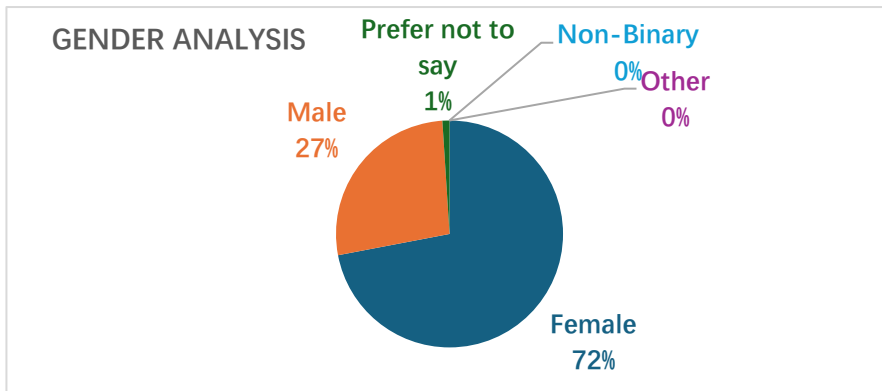


Figure 3. Gender breakdown of the sample population

Figure 3 presents a gender analysis of the sample population, encompassing pre-service and in-service educators at the Natabua and Nasinu campuses. Among the respondents, 27% were male, 72% were female, and one pre-service student chose "prefer not to say." This sample population has a higher proportion of females in both the pre-service and in-service groups. There is significant potential for an in-depth analysis of gendered behavior in relation to emoji use in social media dialogues within this sample.

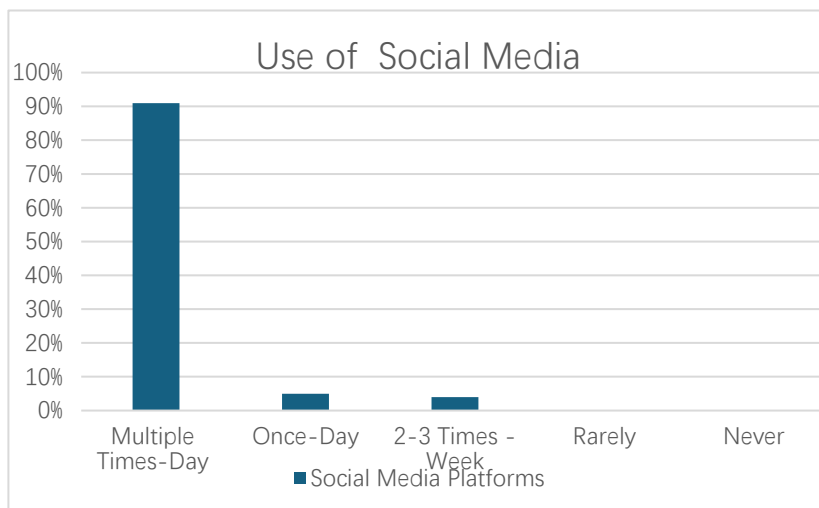


Figure 4. Social Media Usage

Figure 4 illustrates the frequency of social media usage among the sample population. An overwhelming 91% of students, both pre-service and in-service, use social media platforms multiple times a day. Approximately 5% use social media once a day, while 4% use it 2-3 times a day.

6.2 Emoji Usage Patterns

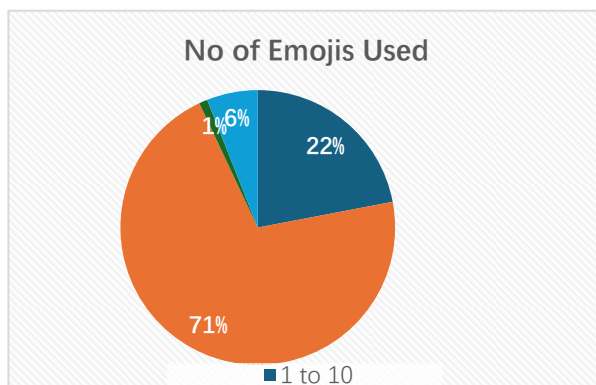


Figure 5. Use of Emojis

Figure 5 shows 71% of the respondents use more than 10 emojis per social media posts. 22% use between 1-10 emojis per post. Six % of the sample population inclusive of Pre-Service and In-Service use over 20 emojis in their social media communication. One % of the research participants use emojis more than 10 times in their posts. Overall, this means that on average a student used 13 emojis in a social media post.

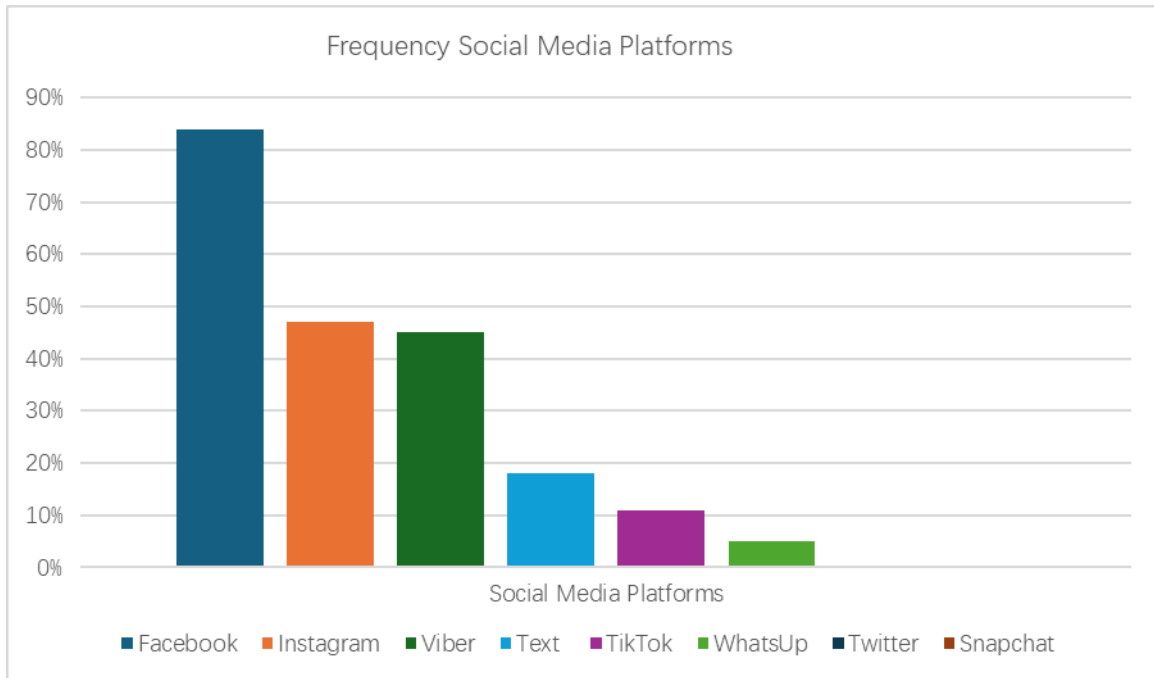


Figure 6. Use of social media platforms

From the data in Figure 6 above, it is evident that Facebook is the most frequently used social media platform for communication among the respondents, followed by Viber and Instagram. Twitter and Snapchat are not used by any of the respondents for communication purposes. 84% of the sample population use Facebook predominantly.

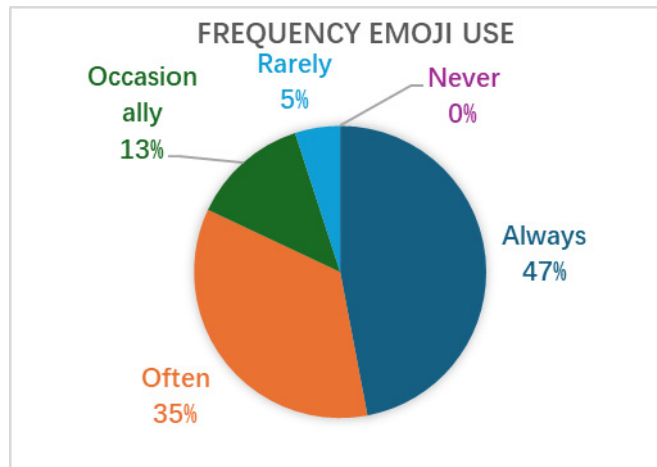


Figure 7. Use of Emojis

Figure 7 above shows the frequency of emoji usage on social media. Among the sample population, 47% always use emojis, 35% often use them, 13% occasionally use them, and 5% rarely use emojis.

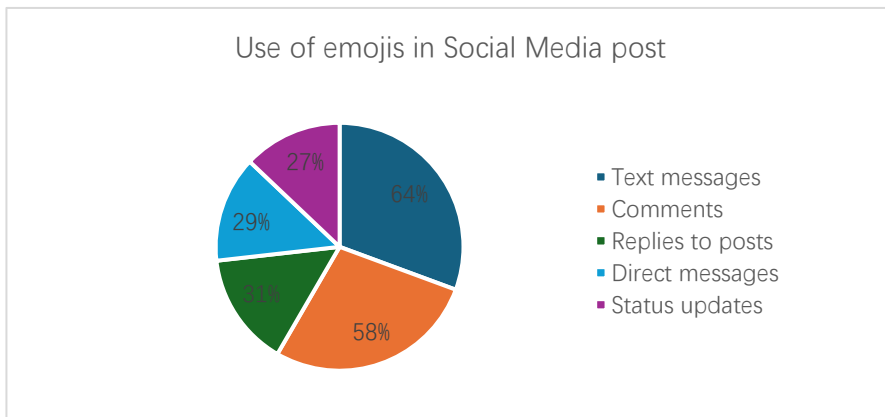


Figure 8. Types of emoji use in social media posts

Figure 8 above reveals that text messages and comments are the most common types of social media communication where respondents use emojis the most, with 64% and 58%, respectively. Direct messages, replies to posts, and status updates also see significant emoji usage, though to a lesser extent.

6.3 Emoji Preferences

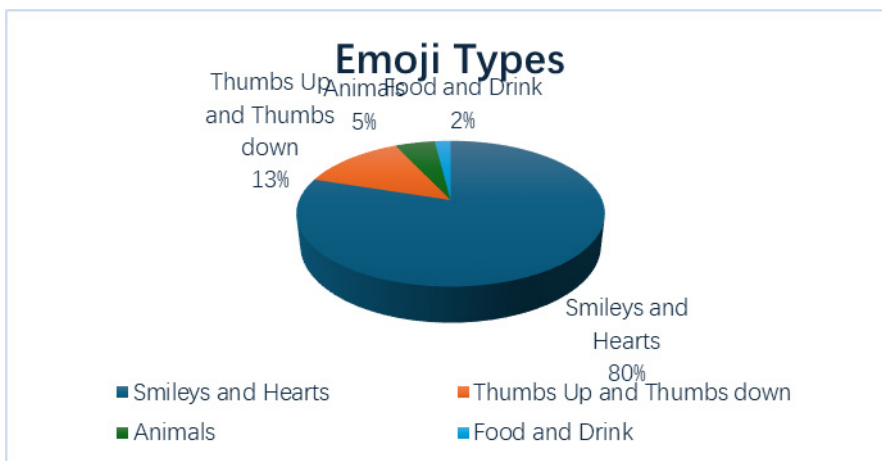


Figure 9. Preferred types of emojis

From Figure 9 above, it is evident that hearts are the most preferred type of emoji, with 80% of the respondents selecting heart emojis followed by smileys and thumbs up/thumbs down. Animals and food/drink emojis are less commonly preferred among the respondents.

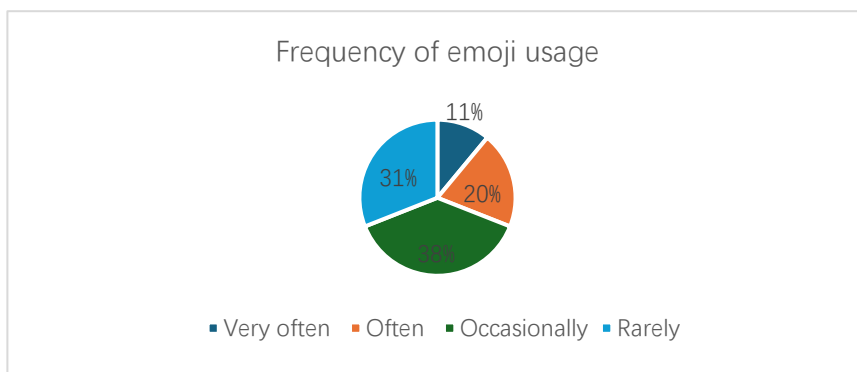


Figure 10. Frequency of emoji use

In Figure 10 above it appears that a significant portion of respondents, 38%, occasionally experiment with or use less common emojis in their communication. Smaller percentages of respondents often (20%) or rarely (31%) engage in such experimentation, while none reported never doing so.

6.4 Perceptions of Emoji Usage

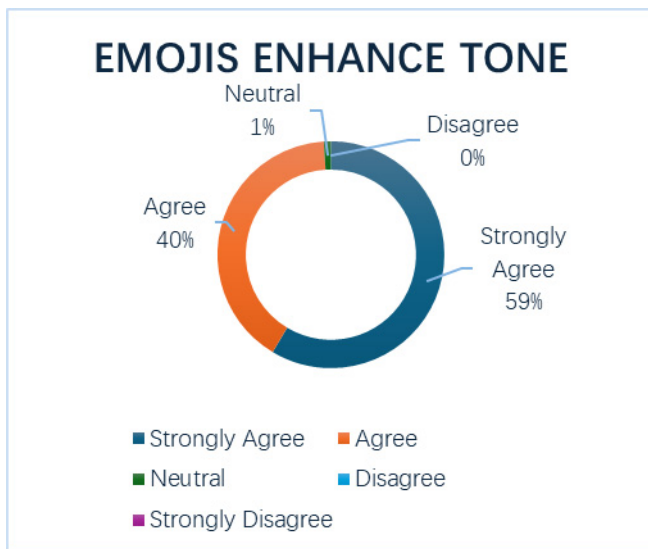


Figure 11. Perceived effects of emoji use

It's evident from Figure 11 above that a majority of respondents, 59%, strongly agree that using emojis enhances the tone of their messages, while 40% simply agree with this statement. Only a small percentage of respondents (1%) are neutral on this topic, and none disagree or strongly disagree.

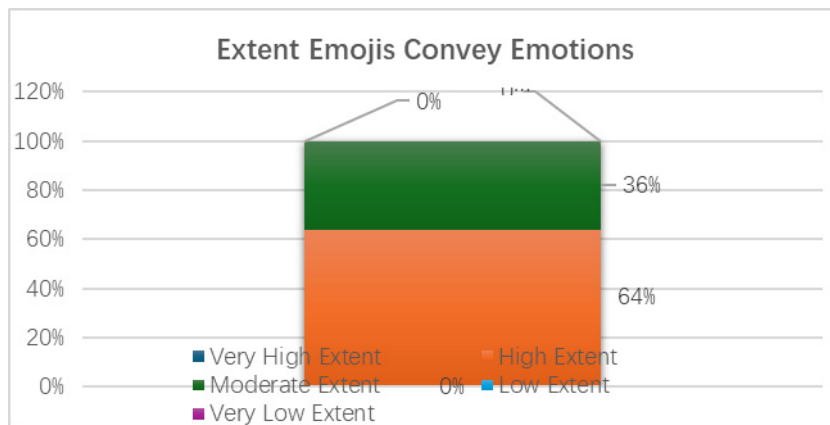


Figure 12. Extent Emojis Convey Emotions

From Figure 12 above it appears that a majority of respondents (64%) believe that emojis help to a high extent in conveying emotions that might be difficult to express in text alone. A significant minority (36%) also believes that emojis contribute to this purpose to a moderate extent. No respondents believe that emojis help to a very low or low extent in this regard.

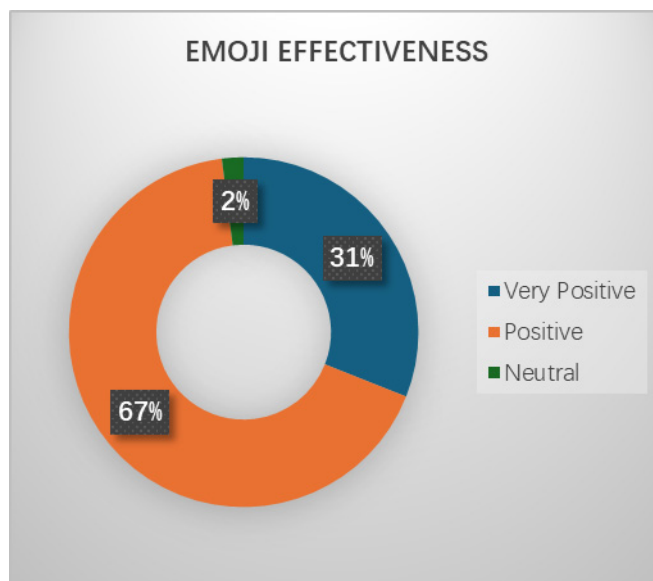


Figure 13. Effect of Emojis

Figure 13 above shows that a majority of respondents (67%) perceive the impact of emojis on the overall effectiveness of their social media communication as positive, while a significant portion (31%) perceives it as very positive. Only a small percentage of respondents (2%) are neutral on this topic, and none perceive the impact as negative or very negative.

7. Discussion

This study explores the prevalence and implications of emoji usage in social media communication, based on data from surveyed individuals. The analysis reveals an average use of approximately 13 emojis per social media post, emphasizing the integral role emojis play in enhancing digital communication. The findings suggest that emojis are not just supplementary elements but are central to conveying emotions, fostering engagement, and enriching the overall user experience on social media platforms. Recent research literature has highlighted that the use of emojis in digital communication has become a ubiquitous feature across various social media platforms. Emojis serve as visual representations of emotions, objects, and ideas, providing a layer of expressiveness to text-based communication that words alone often struggle to convey. This study investigates the extent of emoji usage in social media posts and examines the factors contributing to their prevalence.

The study surveyed individuals on their social media habits, including their use of emojis in posts. Question 5 of the survey (see Appendix) specifically addressed the frequency of emoji usage, while Question 6 explored the preferred social media platforms for communication. Several factors contribute to this observed usage:

Firstly, emojis enhance the level of expressiveness in a literary text. Emojis add layers of meaning and nuance to text-based communication, supplementing words with visual cues that convey emotions, tone, and context. This finding aligns with the work of Miller et al. (2016), who noted that emojis enhance the overall expressiveness of digital messages.

Additionally, the accessibility and the widespread availability of emojis through user-friendly interfaces on social media platforms encourages their frequent use. As Tigwell & Flatla (2016) observed, the ease of accessing emojis makes them an attractive option for users across different demographics.

Moreover, the cultural significance in modern digital communication. This research collaborates Danesi, 2016 findings that over time, emojis have become ingrained in online culture, evolving into a form of digital shorthand. Certain emojis carry specific connotations and meanings, enabling users to communicate complex emotions and ideas succinctly. Emojis also contribute to the visual appeal of social media posts, breaking up large blocks of text and making content more engaging for viewers. This observation is consistent with Derks et al. (2008), who found that visual elements in text-based communication enhance user engagement. These factors support the previous findings of Walther et al. (2011), who highlighted that emojis facilitate emotional connection and rapport in online interactions. By conveying non-verbal cues such as humor, empathy, or affection, emojis help bridge the gap between text-based communication and face-to-face interactions.

In addition to emoji usage, the study also examined the preferred social media platforms for communication among the surveyed individuals. The data reveals that Facebook (or Meta) is the most frequently used platform, consistent with its longstanding popularity and diverse communication features including messaging, status updates and group interactions. This finding aligns with Smith & Anderson's (2018) research, which identified Facebook as one of the most widely used social networking platforms globally. Furthermore, the preference for Facebook as the primary communication platform among respondents highlights its continued relevance in the social media landscape. Moreover, Viber is a strong contender, ranking second to Facebook (Meta). As also noted by Tigwell & Flatla (2016), Viber is recognized for its messaging and voice call features, offering users a convenient way to maintain global connections. This suggests that respondents value platforms with robust messaging, voice communication capabilities and group chats. Also, Instagram's visual appeal, though not as dominant as Facebook and Viber, holds a significant place among the respondents surveyed. This supports the previous findings of (Sheldon & Bryant, 2016). Its emphasis on visual content, stories, and direct messaging appeals to users seeking a more visually oriented and interactive experience. Interestingly, the data highlights the absence of Twitter and Snapchat for communication purposes among the respondents. This could reflect the demographics of the surveyed group or their communication preferences. As previously stated by Bayer et al., 2016; Pew Research Centre, 2021, Twitter's character limit and public nature may not align with their needs, while Snapchat's ephemeral content might not resonate with this audience.

The prominence of Facebook and Viber for communication suggests that respondents prioritize features such as messaging, group communication, and possibly voice calls in their social media usage. This information can be valuable for marketers, businesses, and social media platforms themselves, as it underscores the importance of providing diverse communication features that cater to users' preferences and needs. Overall, the data provides insights into the social media platform preferences for communication among the surveyed individuals, highlighting the dominance of Facebook, followed by Viber and Instagram, while indicating the lack of usage of Twitter and Snapchat for communication purposes.

Further on, this survey looked at emoji usage trends in questions 5 and 7-12 (see Appendix). The average of approximately 13 emojis per social media post underscores the significant role that emojis play in enhancing digital communication. Earlier research by Miller et al., 2016, their ability to convey emotions, tone, and context efficiently makes them an essential tool in online interactions. A substantial majority of respondents (47%) reported always using emojis to convey emotions in social media communication, while 35% use them often. This trend highlights the research by Ge & Herring, 2018 stating the integration of emojis as a standard feature in digital communication, aiding in emotional expression and enhancing message clarity. In the surveyed data for emoji usage across communication types, emojis are most frequently used in text messages (64%) and comments (58%), reflecting their importance in both private and public digital interactions. Although used less frequently in direct messages (29%) and replies to posts (31%), emojis still play a crucial role in these contexts, contributing to clearer communication and emotional engagement, aligning with findings from Riordan (2017).

The data generated from question 9 (See Appendix), Preferred Types of Emojis, aligns with the findings from Highfield & Leaver (2016) and Park et al. (2014). Hearts, smileys, and thumbs up/thumbs down emerge as the most preferred emojis among respondents. These symbols are versatile and universally recognized for expressing love, happiness, and agreement or disagreement, respectively. The preference for these types suggests that respondents prioritize emojis that convey emotions or feedback clearly and succinctly. This research collaborates with findings by Gesselman et al. (2019) on the impact of emojis on the message tone. A significant majority of respondents (in Question 10), i.e. 58%, strongly agree that using emojis enhances the tone of their messages, while 40% agree. This consensus underscores the perceived effectiveness of emojis in adding warmth, positivity, and emotional nuance to digital communication. The effectiveness of emojis in conveying emotions (see Appendix Question 11) is reiterated strongly in Prada et al. (2018). Most respondents in this survey (64%) believe that emojis help, to a high extent, in conveying emotions that might be difficult to express in text alone. This reflects the widespread recognition of emojis as powerful tools for enhancing emotional expression and understanding in online communication. For an overall perception of Emoji impact (Question 12, p.34), the data reveals that 67% of respondents perceive the impact of emojis on the overall effectiveness of their social media communication as positive, with 31% viewing it as very positive. This strong endorsement highlights the value of emojis in fostering engagement, clarifying intent, and enriching user experience in digital interactions as discussed also in Bai et al. (2019). Overall, the surveyed provides valuable insights into the communication preferences of social media users, particularly regarding platform choice and emoji usage. The dominance of Facebook and Viber suggests that respondents prioritize platforms with robust messaging and communication features, while the prevalent use of emojis underscores their importance in enhancing digital interactions.

Understanding these trends can also inform content creation, marketing strategies, and platform development, ensuring that communication tools align with user preferences and enhance the overall experience.

The data in question number 7 (see Appendix) reveals a significant trend in the usage of emojis for conveying emotions in social media communication among the surveyed individuals. Firstly, a substantial majority of respondents, comprising 47%, reported using emojis always to convey emotions in their social media communication. This finding underscores the widespread adoption and integration of emojis as a standard feature in digital communication. This data aligns with the findings from (Miller et al. (2016) and Tigwell & Flatla (2016). Emojis offer a quick and effective way to add emotional context to messages, enhancing clarity and facilitating more expressive interactions. Following closely behind, 35% of respondents reported using emojis often in their social media communication. This further emphasizes previous research by Ge & Herring (2018) about the prevalence of emoji usage in online interactions, indicating that a significant portion of users relies on emojis as a regular means of expressing emotions and adding personality to their messages.

While a smaller percentage of respondents reported using emojis occasionally (13%) or rarely (5%), their existence suggests that not all individuals rely heavily on emojis for communication. This variability in usage patterns reflects the diverse preferences and communication styles among users. Some individuals may prefer more traditional forms of expression, while others may reserve emojis for specific contexts or situations as found in the study by Tchokni et al. (2014).

Notably, none of the respondents reported never using emojis in their social media communication. This absence suggests the near-universal acceptance and integration of emojis as a fundamental element of digital communication. As also suggested by Cramer et al. (2016), even individuals who use emojis less frequently still incorporate them into their messaging to some extent, highlighting the ubiquity of emojis in online interactions.

Overall, the data highlights the pervasive use of emojis as a tool for conveying emotions in social media communication. Whether used always, often, occasionally, or rarely, emojis serve as a versatile means of adding nuance, tone, and personality to digital interactions, contributing to more engaging and expressive online conversations.

In question number 8 (see Appendix), the data sheds light on the prevalence of emoji usage across various types of social media communication among the surveyed individuals. The data indicates that text messages and comments are the primary forms of social media communication where respondents use emojis the most, with 64% and 58% respectively. This finding signifies the important role of emojis in enhancing the expressiveness and emotional tone of textual interactions in both private (text messages) and public (comments) contexts. Emojis in these types of communication likely serve to convey emotions, reactions, and sentiments effectively, enriching the overall communication experience (Miller et al., 2016; Riordan, 2017).

While less prevalent compared to text messages and comments, direct messages and replies to posts still witness substantial emoji usage among the respondents. Direct messages, with 29%, and replies to posts, with 31%, indicate that emojis are commonly utilized in one-on-one conversations and engagements with other users' content. Emojis in these contexts may serve similar purposes as in text messages and comments, facilitating clearer communication and fostering emotional connection and engagement (Ge & Herring, 2018; Cramer et al., 2016).

Furthermore, the data suggests that status updates receive relatively lower emoji usage compared to text messages, comments, direct messages, and replies to posts, with 27% of respondents indicating emoji usage in this type of communication. While status updates offer users a platform to share their thoughts, experiences, and updates with their network, the lower prevalence of emojis in this context may suggest that users prioritize more straightforward textual expression when broadcasting information to a wider audience, aligning with findings from Alshenqeeti (2016) and Dresner & Herring (2010).

The data demonstrates the versatility of emojis as a communication tool across various social media contexts. From private conversations to public interactions, emojis play a crucial role in adding emotional nuance, enhancing clarity, and fostering engagement in digital communication. Understanding the types of communication where emojis are most commonly used can inform content creators, marketers, and platform developers in tailoring their strategies to leverage emojis effectively and enhance user engagement and satisfaction (Kaye et al., 2016; Chen et al., 2017).

In question number 9 (see Appendix), the data highlights distinct preferences among respondents regarding the types of emojis they prefer to use in their social media communication. Hearts emerge as the most preferred type of emoji among the surveyed individuals. The symbol of a heart is commonly associated with love, affection,

and positivity, making it a versatile and universally understood expression of emotion. The widespread preference for hearts suggests that respondents value emojis that convey sentiments of love, appreciation, and connection in their digital interactions (Highfield & Leaver, 2016; Alshenqeti, 2016).

Following closely behind hearts, smileys are the second most preferred type of emoji among respondents. Smileys, such as 😊, 😄, and 😁, are iconic symbols of happiness, joy, and friendliness, often used to convey positive emotions and lighten the tone of messages. The popularity of smileys reflects their effectiveness in adding warmth, humor, and expressiveness to digital communication aligning with findings from Park et al. (2014) and Dresner & Herring, (2010).

Thumbs up/thumbs down emojis rank third in preference among respondents. These emojis, represented by 👍 and 👎, are commonly used to indicate approval or disapproval, agreement or disagreement, and encouragement or discouragement in online interactions. Their popularity suggests that respondents value emojis that provide clear feedback and express their opinions succinctly in social media communication (Cramer et al., 2016; Ge & Herring, 2018).

The data indicates that animals and food/drink emojis are less commonly preferred among respondents compared to hearts, smileys, and thumbs up/thumbs down emojis. While animals and food/drink emojis offer a diverse range of playful and expressive symbols, their lower preference suggests that respondents may prioritize using emojis that directly convey emotions or reactions over more specific or contextual symbols similar to findings by Riordan (2017) and Chen et al. (2017).

As discussed earlier, understanding the preferences for specific types of emojis can inform content creation, marketing strategies, and platform design in social media contexts. Content creators and marketers can leverage the popularity of hearts, smileys, and thumbs up/thumbs down emojis to enhance engagement, evoke positive emotions, and encourage interaction with their content. Platform developers can also consider these preferences when designing emoji libraries and features to optimize user experience and satisfaction in digital communication. (Miller et al., 2016; Kaye et al., 2016).

In question number 10 (see Appendix), the data provides clear insights into the perception of respondents regarding the impact of emojis on the tone of their messages in social media communication. A significant majority of respondents, comprising 58%, strongly agree that using emojis enhances the tone of their messages. This finding indicates a robust consensus among individuals regarding the positive impact of emojis on the overall tone and emotional expression of their communication. Emojis are perceived as effective tools for imbuing messages with warmth, positivity, and emotional nuance, thereby enriching the user experience and fostering more engaging interactions (Gesselman et al., 2019; Prada et al., 2018).

Additionally, 40% of respondents simply agree with the statement that using emojis enhances the tone of their messages. This demonstrates a considerable level of consensus among individuals who recognize the value of emojis in contributing to the tone and emotional resonance of their communication, albeit to a slightly lesser extent compared to those who strongly agree. The substantial agreement underscores the widespread acceptance and integration of emojis as a standard feature in digital communication (Derks et al., 2008; Bai et al., 2019).

Only a small percentage of respondents (1%) reported a neutral stance on the topic, indicating that the vast majority of individuals hold clear opinions regarding the impact of emojis on message tone. The negligible neutral response suggests that most individuals have formed distinct perceptions or experiences regarding the role of emojis in shaping the emotional tone and conveyance of messages in social media communication (Glikson et al., 2017).

Notably, none of the respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement that using emojis enhances the tone of their messages. This absence suggests a widespread consensus or at least a lack of dissent among individuals regarding the positive influence of emojis on message tone. It reflects a prevailing sentiment that emojis contribute positively to the clarity, expressiveness, and emotional resonance of digital communication (Dresner & Herring, 2010).

Overall, the data signifies the important role of emojis as facilitators of emotional expression and tone modulation in social media communication. Content creators, marketers, and platform developers can leverage this understanding to optimize user engagement, enhance user experience, and cultivate more authentic and emotionally resonant interactions across various digital platforms. Moreover, the widespread agreement on the positive impact of emojis suggests a continued reliance on and evolution of emojis as essential elements of contemporary digital communication (Ge & Herring, 2018; Miller et al., 2016).

In question number 11 (see Appendix), the data provides valuable insights into the perceived effectiveness of emojis in conveying emotions that might be challenging to express in text alone. A substantial majority of respondents, accounting for 64%, believe that emojis help to a high extent in conveying emotions that might be difficult to express in text alone. This finding demonstrates the widespread recognition and acceptance of emojis as powerful tools for augmenting textual communication with emotional nuance, subtlety, and depth. Emojis are perceived as invaluable aids in bridging the gap between digital communication and face-to-face interaction, enabling individuals to convey complex emotions more effectively and authentically in online interactions (Prada et al., 2018).

Furthermore, a considerable proportion of respondents, comprising 36%, still acknowledge that emojis contribute to this purpose to a moderate extent. This suggests that while not all individuals attribute the same level of effectiveness to emojis in conveying emotions, a considerable proportion still acknowledges their value in enhancing emotional expression and understanding in text-based communication. The perception of moderate effectiveness indicates a nuanced understanding among respondents regarding the varying degrees of impact that emojis may have on emotional conveyance in different contexts or situations (Ge & Herring, 2018).

Notably, no respondents believe that emojis help to a very low or low extent in conveying emotions that might be difficult to express in text alone. This absence suggests a prevailing consensus or at least a lack of dissent among individuals regarding the inherent efficacy of emojis in supplementing textual communication with emotional cues and nuances. It reflects a general recognition of emojis as indispensable tools for enriching digital communication and fostering more authentic and empathetic interactions in online settings (Glikson et al., 2017).

Overall, the data reveals the widespread acceptance and perceived effectiveness of emojis as facilitators of emotional expression and understanding in digital communication. Content creators, marketers, and platform developers can leverage this understanding to optimize user engagement, enhance user experience, and cultivate more emotionally resonant and authentic interactions across various digital platforms. Moreover, the absence of a low perception of emojis' effectiveness suggests a broad consensus on their value and utility in augmenting textual communication with emotional depth and nuance, indicating a continued reliance on and evolution of emojis as essential elements of contemporary digital communication (Derks et al., 2008; Miller et al., 2016).

In question number 12 (see Appendix), the data provides compelling insights into how respondents perceive the impact of emojis on the overall effectiveness of their social media communication. A substantial majority of respondents, comprising 67%, perceive the impact of emojis on the overall effectiveness of their social media communication as positive. This finding underscores the widespread recognition and acceptance of emojis as valuable tools for enhancing communication, fostering engagement, and enriching user experience in digital interactions (Gesselman et al., 2019; Bai et al., 2019). Emojis are perceived as effective aids in conveying emotions, clarifying intent, and adding personality and warmth to messages, thereby contributing to more engaging, expressive, and memorable communication experiences (Prada et al., 2018).

Furthermore, a significant portion of respondents, accounting for 31%, perceives the impact of emojis on the overall effectiveness of their social media communication as very positive. This suggests an even stronger endorsement of emojis as indispensable elements of effective digital communication (Ge & Herring, 2018). The perception of emojis' impact as very positive reflects a deep appreciation among respondents for the unique role that emojis play in facilitating emotional expression, fostering connection, and enhancing the clarity and impact of messages in online interactions (Miller et al., 2016).

Only a small percentage of respondents (1%) reported a neutral stance on the topic, indicating that the vast majority of individuals hold clear and positive opinions regarding the impact of emojis on the overall effectiveness of their social media communication. The negligible neutral response suggests that most individuals perceive emojis as valuable assets that contribute positively to the quality, engagement, and efficacy of their communication efforts on social media platforms (Glikson et al., 2017).

Notably, none of the respondents perceive the impact of emojis on the overall effectiveness of their social media communication as negative or very negative. This absence underscores a prevailing consensus or at least a lack of dissent among individuals regarding the beneficial influence of emojis on digital communication. It reflects a general recognition of emojis as versatile and effective tools for enhancing user engagement, fostering emotional connection, and enriching the overall communication experience in social media settings (Derks et al., 2008).

The data underscores the overwhelmingly positive perception of emojis as valuable assets for enhancing the effectiveness of social media communication. Content creators, marketers, and platform developers can leverage this understanding to optimize user engagement, enhance user experience, and cultivate more engaging,

expressive, and emotionally resonant interactions across various digital platforms. Moreover, the absence of a negative perception of emojis' impact suggests a broad consensus on their value and utility in augmenting the effectiveness and impact of digital communication efforts, indicating a continued reliance on and evolution of emojis as essential elements of contemporary social media communication (Miller et al., 2016; Bai et al., 2019).

8. Recommendations

Content creators, marketers, and platform developers should recognize the significance of emojis in modern communication and incorporate them strategically into their social media content and messaging strategies. Emojis can enhance engagement, foster emotional connection, and make content more relatable and accessible to diverse audiences.

Platforms should ensure access to a wide range of emojis, including less common or niche symbols, to empower users to express themselves authentically and creatively. Offering diverse emoji libraries can cater to the diverse preferences and communication styles of users, fostering inclusivity and personalization in digital interactions.

Educating users on the appropriate and effective use of emojis can help enhance their communication skills and prevent misinterpretations or misunderstandings. Platforms can provide guidelines, tutorials, or educational resources on emoji usage to empower users to leverage emojis effectively and responsibly in their digital interactions.

9. Conclusion

Based on a comprehensive analysis of the data, several key findings and insights emerge regarding the usage and perception of emojis in social media communication. The data reveals that emojis are extensively used in social media communication by university students, with a majority of respondents incorporating them into their messages frequently. Across different types of communication channels, including text messages, comments, and direct messages, emojis are prevalent, indicating their versatility and widespread adoption as tools for enhancing expression and engagement.

The overwhelming majority of respondents perceive emojis positively, believing that they enhance the overall effectiveness of their social media communication. Emojis are seen as valuable aids for conveying emotions, fostering engagement, and adding personality to messages, contributing to more engaging, expressive, and authentic interactions online.

Respondents overwhelmingly agree that emojis are highly effective in conveying emotions that might be challenging to express in text alone. Emojis are recognized as powerful tools for augmenting textual communication with emotional nuance, clarity, and depth, facilitating more empathetic, relatable, and meaningful interactions in digital spaces.

The research has shown that emojis play a vital role in contemporary social media communication, offering a versatile and expressive means of conveying emotions, enhancing engagement, and fostering connection in digital spaces. The widespread adoption and positive perception of emojis underscore their importance as essential elements of effective and impactful digital communication in the modern age.

Finally, embracing emojis strategically, providing diverse emoji options, educating users on emoji usage, and recognizing the significance of emojis in enhancing digital communication can empower individuals and organizations to leverage emojis effectively and foster more engaging, expressive, and authentic interactions in social media environments. The widespread adoption of emojis in social media communication has transformed the way users' express emotions, conveyed meaning, and engaged with content. Emojis serve as powerful tools that enhance the richness of online interactions, making communication more nuanced, inclusive, and enjoyable.

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Appendix A

Survey Questions

Part A. Demographic Information

1. What is your current educational status?

- (i) Pre-service student
- (ii) In-service student

2. What is your age range?

- (i) 18-24
- (ii) 25-34
- (iii) 35-44
- (iv) 45-54
- (v) 55 or older

3. What is your gender identity?

- (i) Male
- (ii) Female
- (iii) Non-binary
- (iv) Prefer not to say
- (v) Other (please specify)

4. How often do you use social media platforms?

- (i) Multiple times a day
- (ii) Once a day
- (iii) 2-3 times a week
- (iv) Rarely
- (v) Never

Part B. Emoji Usage Patterns

5. On average, how many emojis do you include in a typical social media post?

6. Which social media platforms do you use most frequently for communication?

- (i) Facebook
- (ii) Instagram
- (iii) Twitter
- (iv) Snapchat
- (v) WhatsApp
- (vi) Other (please specify)

7. How frequently do you use emojis to convey emotions in your social media communication?

- (i) Always
- (ii) Often
- (iii) Occasionally
- (iv) Rarely
- (v) Never

8. In which types of social media communication do you use emojis the most? (Select all that apply)

- (i) Text messages
- (ii) Status updates
- (iii) Comments
- (iv) Direct messages
- (v) Replies to posts

Part C. Emoji Preferences

9. What types of emojis do you prefer using? (Select all that apply)

- (i) Smileys 😊
- (ii) Hearts ❤️
- (iii) Thumbs up/thumbs down 👍👎
- (iv) Animals 🐱🐶
- (v) Food and drink 🍕🍔
- (vi) Other (please specify)

10. How often do you experiment with or use less common emojis (e.g., 🧑🎒🌈) in your communication?

- (i) Very often
- (ii) Often
- (iii) Occasionally
- (iv) Rarely
- (v) Never

Part D. Perceptions of Emoji Usage

11. Do you believe that using emojis enhances the tone of your messages?

- (i) Strongly agree
- (ii) Agree
- (iii) Neutral
- (iv) Disagree
- (v) Strongly disagree

12. To what extent do you think emojis help in conveying emotions that might be difficult to express in text alone?

- (i) To a very high extent
- (ii) To a high extent
- (iii) To a moderate extent
- (iv) To a low extent
- (v) To a very low extent

13. How do you perceive the impact of emojis on the overall effectiveness of your social media communication?

- (i) Very positive
- (ii) Positive
- (iii) Neutral
- (iv) Negative
- (v) Very negative

Appendix B

Interview Questions

Perceptions of Emoji Use:

1. How do you feel about using emojis in your English communication, considering that it's not your first language?
2. Can you share an experience when you found emojis helpful in expressing emotions or intentions that were challenging to convey in English text?
3. In your opinion, do emojis make it easier or more challenging for ESL students to communicate in English? Why?
4. Are there specific emojis that you find more useful or expressive in an ESL context? Can you give examples and explain?

Cultural Influences

5. How do cultural differences influence the way you interpret or use emojis in your English communication compared to your native language?
6. Are there cultural nuances or gestures in your home culture that are not easily represented by emojis? How do you navigate these differences in your English communication?
7. Have you ever experienced misunderstandings related to cultural differences when using emojis in English conversations? Can you provide an example?
8. Are there emojis commonly used in your home country that you rarely see being used in English communication? How does this influence your emoji choices?

Role of Emojis in Expressing Paralanguage:

9. In what ways do you believe emojis contribute to expressing paralanguage (non-verbal cues such as tone, mood, or emphasis) in your English messages?
10. How do you decide which emojis to use when you want to convey a specific tone or emotion in English text?
11. Do you think that using emojis in English helps you bridge any language gaps in expressing paralanguage that may exist due to differences in language proficiency?
12. Have you observed variations in how native English speakers and ESL students use emojis to express paralanguage? If so, what differences have you noticed?

General Reflections on Emoji Use

13. How has your perception and use of emojis in English evolved since you started learning the language?
14. Do you feel that emojis have become an integral part of your English communication? Why or why not?
15. In your opinion, how important is it for ESL students to become proficient in using emojis when communicating in English?

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