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THE MEANING BEHIND ☹ AND 😊 EMOTICONS IN CHAT APPLICATIONS: A SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS

Noni Trisna Putri; Rani Nurhaliza; Lusiana Suciati Dewi

Universitas Subang

nonnitris@gmail.com; raninurhaliza004@gmail.com; lusianasuciatidewi11@gmail.com

Abstract: This study aims to understand the meaning of ☹ and 😊 emoticons among chat app users. The use of emoticons is very common nowadays, used by people of all ages, from young to old. Emoticons are typically used in various situations to express someone's state or feelings in digital conversations. However, not everyone has the same opinion about the use of emoticons. This research aims to explore the different opinions people have about emoticons. The method used in this research is qualitative, utilizing Google Forms as a tool to collect data from respondents. This Google Forms survey was distributed to students of Universitas Subang, with 37 respondents aged between 18 and 25 years. The results of the study showed that the opinions of certain groups regarding the meaning and effectiveness of emoticon when using online chat applications do not influence other groups. Everyone has their own opinions and beliefs regarding the use of emoticons. Communication is possible with or without emojis, and the meaning of emojis depends on the context and the perspective of the sender and receiver.

Keywords: emoticon, chat application emoji, communication, meaning, semantic

INTRODUCTION

Emojis have become an essential part of how individuals express emotions and nuances in conversations, particularly in text-based interactions. The importance of emojis in communication is consistent with linguistic and semantic research, which investigates how meaning is produced and expressed. Emojis help bridge the gap between written and spoken language by providing visual cues that convey tone and emotion, which can often be lost in text-based communication. Research by Derks et al., (2008) found that emojis can enhance the emotional tone of messages and improve the clarity of communication. Additionally, a study by Riordan (2017) suggests that emojis can reduce misunderstandings and foster a sense of social presence in digital interactions.

Most structuralists in language studies (Chaer, 2012) feel that semantics or meaning are peripheral (Hockett, 2015), as cited below. Language is a complex system of habits.

This language system is made up of several subsystems, including grammatical, phonological, morphophonemic, semantic, and phonetic. The placements of the five subsystems differ in varied degrees. Grammatical, phonological, and morphophonemic subsystems are core, meaning they make up the content of a language, whereas semantic and phonetic subsystems are peripheral, or branched.

Smartphones are internet-enabled phones that usually provide Personal Digital Assistant (PDA) functions, such as calendar functions, agenda books, address books, calculators and notes (Gary et al., 2007). Smartphone users must use the short message service (SMS) and phone features to communicate online or chat. Applications that can be used to communicate online or chat are WhatsApp, Twitter, Line, Instagram, and Telegram (Binarso, 2018). In exchanging messages through chat, most users add emojis to their conversations.

Emojis, despite their ubiquitous use, can be difficult to interpret. Not all users of online chat apps read emoticons in the same manner, which can lead to misinterpretation. For example, while most users use emojis to express their true feelings, some, particularly teenagers, may use emojis with opposing meanings on purpose. Teenager's text, and message each other using technology such as Instagram, Facebook Messenger and Snapchat almost reflexively Bruin (2018). This reversal of perception generates uncertainty and hampers communication, which is strongly reliant on a shared understanding of these digital signals. This variability in emoji interpretation can lead to significant communication challenges, especially in cross-cultural contexts where the same emoji might have different connotations. For instance, Miller et al., (2016) found that even within the same cultural group, people often disagree on the meaning of specific emojis, which can lead to confusion and miscommunication. Furthermore, a study by Kelly and Watts (2015) highlights that while emojis can enhance emotional expression, their ambiguous nature sometimes requires additional context to be fully understood. According to Saussure in Andrade et al., (2016), in the widespread of social media today, emotions are playing an important role in communication. Emojis represents a facial expression, which shows a person's feelings or mood. Because of the absence of body language in social media, emoticons are more popular than ever.

Recent research has focused on how emoticons are utilized in communication via chat apps such as WhatsApp, Twitter, Instagram, and Telegram (Setyanavidita, 2023). These platforms include a wide range of emoticons, which users can quickly add to their communications without having to download them separately. Emojis are frequently used to express emotions or enhance text, compensating for the lack of nonverbal indicators in written communication. For example, a crying emoji could be used to express melancholy in a conversation where words alone may not properly convey the emotional tone. Miller et al. (2016) found that even within the same cultural group, people often disagree on the meaning of specific emojis, which can lead to confusion and miscommunication. Additionally, Kelly and Watts (2015) highlight that while emojis can enhance emotional expression, their ambiguous nature sometimes requires additional context to be fully understood. Research by Derks et al. (2008) also supports the idea that emojis can enhance the emotional tone of messages and improve the clarity of communication.

Amidst the fierce competition of mobile real-time social software, it is becoming more important to maintain the users' willingness to continue using the software (Zhang et al., 2017) in Liu et al., (2020). Mobile Instant Messengers (MIMs), such as Messenger, WhatsApp, LINE, and WeChat, are very popular, and sending emojis has become a very

common way of expressing one's emotions (Annamalai & Salam, 2017) in Liu et al., (2020). Researchers have found that while emojis are very popular, the wrong ones or even those with an opposite meaning are sometimes mistakenly sent by users, when one is not expecting.

While previous research has looked into the general use and interpretation of emojis in communication, there is still a lack of understanding about how specific cultural contexts influence emoji use. For example, the genesis of emojis in Japanese culture, where specific emojis mirror cultural behaviours, such as bowing in repentance or donning masks, has received little attention in worldwide emoji studies. Furthermore, it is important to explore how different demographic groups, such as teenagers, may utilize emojis in ways that diverge from the norm, perhaps leading to distinct patterns of interpretation.

This study is unique in that it focuses on cultural and demographic differences in emoji use, specifically how teenagers may utilize emojis with opposing meanings. The goal is to investigate the effects of these changes on digital communication, specifically answering the question, "How does the intentional reversal of emoji meanings by certain user groups affect the clarity and effectiveness of communication in online chat applications?" This study intends to contribute to a better understanding of the role of emojis in modern communication, specifically in bridging or expanding the gap between intended and interpreted meanings in digital interactions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Semantic

According to Ferdinand de Saussure (1966) in Pauhrizi, N. M. E. M. (2022)., every linguistic sign is made up of two main components: (1) the signifier (signifiant in French), which refers to the sound or form of the word, and (2) the signified (signifié in French), which refers to the notion or meaning that the sound represents. In this context, the "signified" is the idea or notion represented by the signifier, rather than any object.

Semantics, derived from the Greek word *sema* (meaning "sign"), is a subfield of linguistics that studies meaning in language, codes, and other forms of representation. Semantics is typically concerned with how signs relate to what they represent, and it is closely related to two other linguistic aspects: syntax, which involves the rules for combining symbols into complex forms, and pragmatics, which concerns the practical use of language in specific social contexts (Nafsika & Razan, 2021a; 2021b).

According to Atmaja (2021), de Saussure's position on semantics consists of two components: (1) the element that conveys meaning, which is the form of the language sound, and (2) the element that is interpreted, which is the meaning or concept linked with the first component. The second component serves as a sign or symbol, with the signified being something outside of the language itself, known as the referent or the object being indicated.

Semiotics

According Siah, F. T., & Firmonasari (2024) Semiotics, derived from the Greek word *semeion* meaning "sign", is a branch of science that studies signs and everything related to signs, including sign systems and the processes that apply to them (Tamm, 2017). The concept of *semeion* is most likely rooted in Hippocratic or Asclepiadic medicine, which focused on symptomatology and inferential diagnosis. At that time, signs were considered as something that indicated the presence of something else.

Terminologically, semiotics is a science that studies signs in various contexts, including in culture and social events. Teeuw (1984:6) defines semiotics as the study of signs in communication, and develops this concept into a literary model that explains various factors and aspects to understand literary phenomena as a means of communication in society. Although semiotics as a science is relatively new, the systematization of the use of signs and their study was only carried out in depth in the 20th century (Boyko, 2017).

In the semiotics of emoji (2016) in LING, S. (2017), the three basic characteristics of emoji as a code: representationality, interpretability, contextualization. Like other natural languages, Emoji is constantly being shaped by humans, and it changes not just about communication but also about meeting specific needs. Then these basic characteristics have great value to designers when they expand the emoji lexicon and optimize emoji's systems, and we can even use these as a primary design principle. In this section, we take Marcel's induction as a starting point and discuss how we can understand these three features of emoji from a designer's point of view.

Historical Emoji

Emoticons, which use punctuation to represent facial expressions, have a fascinating history. They first appeared in the 17th century, although their widespread use in online communication began much later. Scott Fahlman, a computer scientist, is credited with popularizing emoticons in 1982 by suggesting the use :-) and :- (to represent happiness and sadness, respectively.

Emojis, on the other hand, are graphic symbols that extend beyond standard punctuation marks. Shigetaka Kurita produced the first emoji set for Japanese mobile phones in 1997. These early emoticons were monochromatic and pixelated, but they provided the groundwork for the colourful and diversified emojis we use today. The term "emoji" is derived from the Japanese terms "e" (絵), meaning picture, and "moji" (文字), which means character (Fajar, 2021).

Emoji

Emoticons are symbolic representations of moods or emotions in written communication, and their name comes from the combination of "emotion" and "icon." These visual aids are commonly used in online chats to make up for the lack of tone, gestures, and facial expressions in text-based communication. As a result, understanding the meaning of emoticon symbols is crucial in semiotic research on chat behaviour. By analysing these symbols, researchers can acquire significant insights into the underlying emotions and intents that drive communication exchange. This approach is especially noteworthy since it gives light on the emotional dynamics and communication aim of internet exchanges.

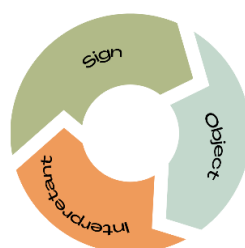


Figure 1. Peirce's semiotic triangle theory (1860)

According to Peirce's semiotic triangle theory, emoticons are signs that directly convey emotions, acting as a link between the sender's emotional state and the recipient's interpretation. Emoticons communicate emotions, which the recipient interprets as a depiction of the emotion, indicating that signals and objects can be interpreted by users. Furthermore, according to Peirce's theory, the meaning of emoticons is determined by both the sender's emotions and the context of the message. For example, smiling emoticons often communicate happiness, therefore the meaning is constant across users due to their shared knowledge of these indications in specific circumstances.

Furthermore, emoticons, as symbols in Peirce's triangle of meaning, enable emotional expression and understanding in chat chats, emphasizing how interpretation is influenced by both the sender's purpose and the recipient's comprehension. Finally, this interaction emphasizes the importance of emoticons in improving digital communication by allowing users to express and interpret emotions effectively.

Chat Application

The advent of emojis in digital communication has revolutionized the way individuals express emotions and ideas in online interactions. Originating in Japan in the 1990s, emojis have since become a ubiquitous element in digital discourse, transcending cultural and linguistic barriers (Miller et al., 2017) in Alzara, N., & Mellor, N. (2024).

People's demands, especially social connections, have become more convenient and effective in this age of technological technology. The community must be technologically literate and keep up with digital changes. One of the major changes is the chat app or instant messaging, which supports text, voice, and media chatting. WhatsApp, Telegram, LINE, WeChat, Discord, Facebook Messenger, and KakaoTalk are all popular apps right now in Connx. (2023).

According (Bruin, N. 2018) Instant messaging was first introduced in 1961 by CTSS at MIT. Then, in 1988, Jarkko Oikarinen created Internet Relay Chat (IRC). In 1982, Commodore International released Quantum Link (Q-Link), which later became AOL Instant Messenger (AIM) in 1997. Yahoo! Messenger and MSN Messenger (later Windows Live Messenger) first appeared in the late 1990s, offering instant messaging, voice calling, and file sharing. In 2005, Google Talk and Skype provided voice and video calling services. Then, in 2011, apps like Snapchat, LINE, WeChat, and KakaoTalk became popular. Telegram was released in 2013 with a number of unique features. Smartphones now include built-in messaging software such as iMessage and Android Messages. Even e-commerce software and transportation services enable user interaction.

Emoticons in the Language of Digital Communication

According to research, emoticons can help senders appear warmer and increase their mood offline. Message recipients can better grasp the sender's mood thanks to the inclusion of emoticons. Emojis, which are commonly used in text messages, emails, and social media, are regarded as a light method of communication, but they have a complicated socioeconomic history. Emoji have evolved from a typographic quirk and corporate strategy to become an integral aspect of digital communications, assisting in the smoothing of online interactions, beginning with the "smiley face" in the twentieth century.

In the 1950s, psychologist Albert Mehrabian discovered that just 7% of communication is verbal, 38% is vocal, and 55% is nonverbal. This fact holds true for face-

to-face communication, but when we text or chat, 93 percent of these approaches are not used. Emoticons, with their simple design, allow for a wide range of interpretation and contextual adjustment, becoming part of users' vocabulary without the need for additional explanation. They improve digital communication by incorporating features that are frequently absent from text, such as expressing emotions that are difficult to describe with words alone and changing the tone of a message—for example, making it more light-hearted or removing sarcasm. This is significant since communication entails more than simply words: hand gestures, facial emotions, and tone of voice (Schnoebelen, 2011) in Jr et al., (2016).

METHOD

This research employed a qualitative approach using a descriptive-qualitative method. According to Sugiyono (2020: 9) in (Pandawangi.S, 2021), this approach and method are suitable to be used in research on natural object conditions, where the researcher is the key instrument and data collection techniques are done naturally. The respondents in this study were university 37 students from Subang University, aged between 18 to 25 years old. The respondents were randomly selected from different faculties and departments to ensure diversity in their academic and social backgrounds. This research focuses on the use and understanding of emoticons, to identify patterns of emoticon use in everyday communication, both in formal and informal contexts.

A questionnaire was used to collect data for this study. This method is done by collecting data through written questions given to respondents, then the questionnaire is distributed in the form of a form through Google Forms online platform and distributed through social media. In the questionnaire given, participants must answer several questions. Then the data documentation generated from this research is in the form of notes, chart reports, and graphs from the results in Google Forms, and then the researcher analyzes and describes the data in the document.

The data analysis procedure followed the steps outlined by Miles (2014): data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing/verification. In the data reduction stage, the researcher summarized the data collected by selecting, focusing, simplifying, and transforming the raw data from the questionnaires. This involved coding responses, identifying key themes, and eliminating irrelevant information. During the data presentation stage, the researcher organized the reduced data into visual formats such as graphs, tables, and diagrams for easy understanding and interpretation. This step helps in identifying patterns and relationships in the data. Finally, at the conclusion drawing/verification stage, the researcher interprets the displayed data to draw meaningful conclusions. This involves verifying the findings by re-examining the raw data and ensuring consistency and reliability.

To validate the data, researcher triangulation was used as suggested by Carter et al. (2014). In this triangulation, questionnaires were used to collect data in the study. This method is carried out by collecting data through written questions given to respondents, then the questionnaire is distributed in the form of a form through the Google Forms online platform and distributed through social media. In the questionnaire given, participants had to answer several questions. Then the data documentation generated from this research is in the form of notes, graph reports, and charts from the Google Forms results, and then the researcher analyses and describes the data in the documents. Researchers independently analysed the data to ensure objectivity and reduce bias. Each researcher reviewed the data and compared their findings, discussing any discrepancies

to reach consensus. This method increases the credibility and validity of the research findings.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

At this time, the use of emoticons in chat applications is often found. It can be said that the use of emoticons can be used as a non-verbal language that can show the expressions and feelings of the user. It can be said that, an Emoticon is a facial expression pictorially represented. Traditional emoticons make use of punctuations, letters and symbols to express certain kinds of moods and emotions (Kannan & N, 2017). Research that has been conducted regarding the views of emoticons according to certain groups is distributed through a group chat of students at the Universitas Subang with surveys collected through Google Forms with the number of results obtained is 37 respondents. From 37 respondents who have answered several existing questions, the first question shows the gender differences of respondents in the survey we have made.

The questionnaire that has been disseminated for data collection on the use of emoticons in chat applications, semantic studies obtained as many as 37 respondents, with the number of female respondents around 26 people (70.3%) and male respondents around 11 people (29.7%). From the results seen, the questionnaire distributed had more female respondents than male respondents, The different number of respondents did not stop the research being explored. Another purpose of the questions given was to see the different views and meanings of emoticons from the female side as well as the male side. The results show that more female respondents frequently use emoticons in their use of chat apps than male respondents. For example, female respondents use emoticons more frequently to communicate their feelings directly, whereas male respondents use them more in amusing or ironic circumstances. This discrepancy shows that gender influences emoticon interpretation and use, which is consistent with prior study on gender-based perception variations in digital communication (Bakhtiar et al., 2022).

The Use of Emoticon

Chat applications are currently something that is often encountered and used by many people, both children and the elderly, especially teenagers. Not only is it often encountered, chat applications at this time are a thing that coexists with life like the primary needs of many people. Nowadays chat apps are needed almost every time and used anywhere, because in addition to chat applications chat or can be called instant messaging can send voice messages, stickers, gifs, and document. As the name suggests messages via internet get delivered instantly and a reply to the message too is instantaneous (Kannan & N, 2017). Messages can deliver at the same time without the need for a letter that takes a long time when sending or receiving a reply, through instant messaging a person can conduct discussions or interviews even though different distances. Now, instant messaging has become an essential part of everyday communication and for many essential social connection (Bruin, 2018) At this time there are many kinds of chat or instant messaging applications, in the 90s yahoo mail was used as instant messaging which provided a lot of help to its users. At present instant messaging has developed and also varies, one of the chat applications that are widely used today is WhatsApp, Telegram, Line and many more. Since they are believed to convey the sender's emotions or sentiments in the message, emojis are among the most widely used. Images or groups of images that convey various face expressions, such as laughing, crying, smirking, pitying, furious, and so forth, are known as emoticons.

Understanding emoticons' meanings is necessary in order to properly use them to communicate a message. An understanding of how to interpret an image's meaning is derived from the individual's perspective, which is influenced by the society in which it is used. The internet has grown quickly in the intervening years. In the second question given to respondents whether respondents use emoticons when chatting online through chat applications such as: WhatsApp, Telegram, Line, Instagram and others, there were 37 respondents.

Apakah kalian sering menggunakan emoticon saat melakukan obrolan secara daring melalui aplikasi chat ? *Cont; WhatsApp, Telegram, Line, Instagram dm dll [Salin](#)

37 jawaban

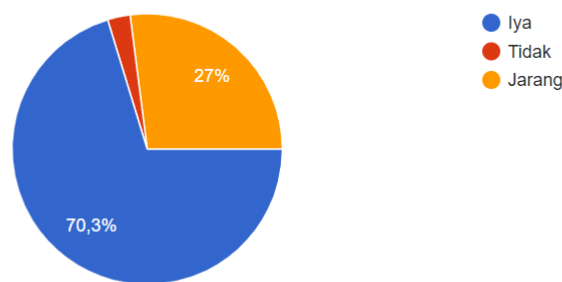


Figure 2. The use of emoticons by respondents

Of the 37 respondents, there are 3 different answers that can be seen from the pie chart below, there are 26 people (70.3%) who often use emoticons in the application marked in blue, then 10 people (27%) who rarely use emoticons in chat applications are marked in orange and the last 1 person (2.7%) who have never used emoticons in chat applications is marked in red. These findings imply that emoticons have become an essential aspect of everyday interactions, not only for expressing emotions but also for enriching the context of texts. The usage of emoticons helps lessen the likelihood of misunderstanding in written communication, which frequently lacks nonverbal indications such as tone of voice or facial expressions. Thus, emoticons provide as a link between written and spoken communication, allowing users to add emotional depth to their communications (Bakhtiar et al., 2022).

From the data received in the second question, the results show that more respondents often use emoticons when doing digital communication with chat applications, this shows that the use of emoticons can be said to be an important part for some people in communicating digitally through chat applications.

The importance of using emoticons

As previously said, a lot of people frequently use emoticons in chat programs during online interactions. When utilizing chat apps, emoticons can be seen as a crucial component of digital communication. It's crucial to remember that each user has their own opinion on how necessary it is to use emoticons.

This question was given with the aim of seeing how different thoughts and opinions from respondents regarding the importance or not of the use of emoticons in a digital communication using chat applications. The questions given to the respondents are questions in the form of essays, so the data received by the research results are certainly

very different from one another. In the data that has been received from this question, there are 37 respondents who answered, with different opinions.

Menurut anda apakah penggunaan emoticon penting, mengapa?

37 jawaban

Sangat penting, menggambar ekspresi penulis
Lumayan, untuk lebih mengekspresikan diri dalam chat/ketikan
Penting sebagai cara mengekspresikan maksud dari chat kita
bentuk ekspresi dari pesan yg disampaikan
Penting karena untuk mengekspresikan diri kita sendiri saat melakukan chat
Tidak
Untuk memperjelas percakapan
Penting karena bisa mengetahui expresi orang yang sedang berbicara dengan kita walaupun sering kali emot itu tidak seperti realita

Figure 3. The importance of using emoticons

In the data that can be seen in figure 3, the question is whether or not the use of emoticons is important. Most respondents said that the use of emoticons is important in digital communication through chat applications, respondents who answered the importance of using emoticons said that emoticons are used to express their feelings and understand the meaning of the message conveyed by the communicator so that they were not misperceived and deviated from the original intention of the communicator. In addition, the impression is more expressive so that the meaning of the message is clearer and easier to understand. However, many respondents argued that emoticons were used in non-formal situations only. Emoji have been an efficient communicative method, and it's likely that linguists will begin to recognize their functions fulfilled in internet-based communication. In addition to the opinion above, there are 3 respondents who revealed that the use of emoticons is not very important in communication through chat applications, one respondent said that emoticons are a complement in communicating through chat applications and the other 2 respondents did not have a clear reason for their opinion which said that the use of emoticons is not important. Verma and Uikey (2019) discovered that consumers have varying opinions about the effectiveness of emoticons and emojis in digital communication. Some users believe that these symbols are particularly useful for conveying emotions, while others believe that they are better suited for use in informal settings. These findings indicate that users judgments of emojis and emoticons are very contextual and dependent on personal preferences.

Emoticons Representing Feelings

Whether The Use of Emoticons can Convey Feelings or A Situation Quite Clearly

Emoticons are useful while utilizing chat tools for digital communication or instant messaging. Emoticons give us a succinct way to communicate feelings, thoughts, and actions. Emojis can enhance communication and lower the possibility of

misunderstanding by providing emotional meaning to text-based messages. Emojis make texts seem friendlier and more upbeat, according to studies.

Emojis and emoticons are universal. They cut across cultural divides. As they have adapted to many situations and cultures, they have become a universal language. Certain emojis have even found special applications in the hands of diverse societies. For instance, depending on the cultural context, the folded hands emoji (🙏) might represent prayer, thankfulness, or a high five.

In our digital connections, small visual elements are crucial because they fill in gaps and give our words more substance.

Apakah kalian setuju penggunaan emoticon dapat menyampaikan perasaan atau menjelaskan suatu keadaan dengan cukup jelas ?

37 jawaban



Setuju
setuju
ya
iya
Tidak
jelas
Yupp setujuu
Yes

Figure 4. Respondents' responses regarding the capability of emoticons in conveying feeling and situations

In the fourth question regarding the statement whether the use of emoticons can convey feelings or a situation is quite clear or not get 37 respondents with various answers, there are those who agree or disagree. Of the 37 respondents, 30 respondents agreed with the statement and then 6 respondents disagreed with the statement, and one respondent said it depended on the thinking of the person.

Questions are given in the form of essays; respondents can give their opinions on whether emoticons can convey the feelings of the communicator clearly. Of the 30 respondents who agreed with the statement given, they argued that the use of emoticons can strengthen the expression of feelings from the text or chat conveyed. 6 respondents who disagreed with the statement given argued that the use of emoticons could not convey feelings clearly enough, this is because emoticons can be chosen easily and for some people choose emoticons as opposed to actual feelings it is done to hide real feelings, and sometimes the use of emoticons is only used to build the atmosphere of the chat to seem lively and informal. One respondent who argued that the use of emoticons can convey feelings that are actually up to each individual did not provide a clearer opinion.

Researchers have discovered that although emojis are widely used, people occasionally send the incorrect ones – or even ones with the opposite meaning – when

they don't intend to, which can lead to awkward feelings. Like the importance of the use of emoticons, the statement that emoticons can convey feelings clearly cannot be concluded only from one source because everyone's opinion is different, from the data that has been obtained above indeed many respondents have the same opinion as the existing statement but not 100% of the respondents agree with the existing statement. Hasbullah (2020) stressed that while emoticons make it simpler to transmit messages, they can also lead to misunderstandings if not used correctly. The use of emoticons can express the sender's feelings, but how the recipient interprets them varies depending on the situation and culture. This lends credence to the notion that emoticons have diverse meanings that vary from person to person.

There are those who argue that emoticons can be used to describe feelings that are not real or hide real feelings, with which emoticons can be said to be a digital language word so that it has different meanings between individuals.

The Most Frequently Used Emoticons

Emoticons are used by various groups, the use of emoticons is certainly different for each individual, some often use smiling, crying or laughing emoticons. In this question respondents were asked to show the emoticons they often use, there were 37 respondents who answered the question, there were various types of emoticons that were often used by respondents. From the data that has been generated, there are many respondents who often use the 😊 emoticon to express feelings but with different circumstances, out of 37 respondents there are 18 respondents who use the emoticon.

Tagliamonte and Denis (2008) discuss how teenagers use emoticons to intensify and communicate their emotions in instant messaging. Teenagers commonly use emoticons such as 😊 to communicate sentiments beyond words. According to their findings, emoticons have become a fundamental element of teens' digital language, allowing them to more effectively transmit emotional nuances and enhance social relationships. Several reasons were highlighted in the study, including the need to convey emotions or feelings to others and increasing interaction on online platforms.

Jika kalian sering menggunakan emoticon dalam aplikasi chat, emoticon apa yang paling sering kalian gunakan?

37 jawaban



Figure 5. The most frequently used emoticons by respondents

This research question focuses on identifying the most frequently used emoticons by respondents in online communication. In response to the question about their most frequently used emoticons, 37 respondents provided answers, revealing a diverse range of emoticons commonly employed. Notably, the data indicate that the emoticon ☹️ is frequently used, with 18 out of 37 respondents selecting it to express their emotions in various contexts.

This finding aligns with existing research, which suggests that emoticons like ☹️ are often employed to convey strong emotional responses, particularly sadness or frustration. Studies by Liu et al. (2020) and Erle et al. (2022) highlight that the usage of specific emoticons is context-dependent, with users selecting emoticons that best match the emotional tone of their message. Furthermore, the frequent use of emoticons is not only about expressing emotions but also about enhancing social interactions and creating a sense of connection in online platforms, as indicated by Li and Yang (2018).

The study underscores those respondents use emoticons and emojis in online communication for various reasons, including the need to convey emotions more effectively and to foster greater interaction in digital spaces. This aligns with broader research findings, which emphasize the role of emoticons in facilitating more nuanced and emotionally expressive communication online.

The Meaning Behind The Emoticons Used

Emoticons evolved as a means to express emotions on the two-dimensional, virtual, online, written world of communication (Kannan & N, 2017). Every emoticon has a different meaning in context and use. According to (Park, J., Barash, V., Fink, C., & Cha, M. (2013). explain how emoticons are understood differently across cultures. This implies that respondents' familiarity with emoticons like ☹️ and 🤔 may differ depending on their cultural context and exposure to different emoticon styles. For example, the "face holding back tears" emoticon ☹️ may be more widely recognized in some cultures than in others, this emoticon is usually used to communicate emotion or even sincere gratitude; however, it can also signify pent-up melancholy or strong emotions that cannot be articulated well. Emoticons 🤔 or pregnant men, may have variable levels of recognition depending on societal beliefs toward gender and representation, this emoticon represents pregnant trans and non-binary individual, but it can also describe a man who has eaten too much food. But emoticons have different interpretations or meanings for each person, this is due to everyone's thoughts and imagination, so the meaning and meaning of emoticons is not just one but diverse depending on the user's imagination.

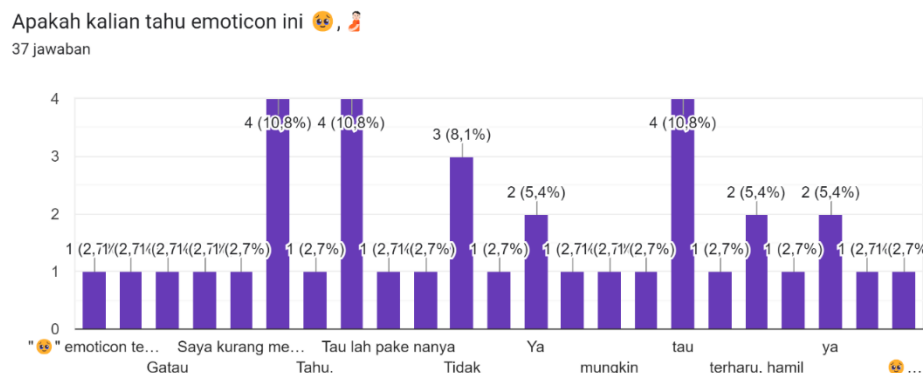


Figure 6. Respondents' awareness of ☹️ and 🤔 emoticon

In the 6th question regarding the opinion of the respondents whether they knew about the 2 emoticons shown, namely "face holding back tears" and "pregnant men", there were 37 respondents on the data that had been received with 28 respondents answering that they knew, 7 answered not knowing, 1 respondent answered possibly and 1 respondent answered with an answer that did not match the question. From the answers received by the respondents, there was no more detailed reason regarding whether or not the respondents knew about the emoticons "face holding back tears" and "pregnant men".

Furthermore, emojis have been shown to play an important function in promoting communication across cultural lines. Emojis' use in cross-cultural encounters shows that they can function as a universal language, bridging cultural gaps and facilitating emotional communication.

The Impression and Intention When Using Emoticons

The purpose of this question is to examine the perceptions and intentions of individuals who use emoticons in digital communication. Emoticons, such as ☹️ (also known as "Face Holding Back Tears"), are a powerful tool for expressing intricate feelings that could be challenging to express with words alone. This emoticon is frequently used to convey emotions of intense thankfulness, strong emotional resonance, or the experience of fighting back tears after an intense emotional outburst. It may, nevertheless, also be a reflection of suppressed dark or intense feelings that are hard to communicate verbally.

The subjective nature of emoticon usage is illustrated by the different meanings of emoticons, such as ☹️ and 🤰 (which indicate a pregnant man). Li and Yang (2018) discovered that people's interpretations of emoticons vary greatly and are influenced by their thoughts, their imaginations, and the context in which they are used. Due to its subjectivity, an emoticon can be interpreted in a variety of ways based on the user's intent and the recipient's viewpoint.

The 🤰 emoji can be used to express profound thankfulness, giving a sense of emotional connection and vulnerability. Alternatively, it could convey a bittersweet mood in which the sender tries to hold back tears while expressing joy or despair. The purpose of utilizing such an emoticon is to convey a specific emotional tone that may not be entirely represented by text alone, making communication more complex and emotionally rich.



Figure 7. Respondents' impression and intention to use emoticons

The last question in the research, which was shared with 37 respondents, asked about their opinions and impressions of the emoticons "face holding back tears" and "pregnant men". The results showed a wide range of responses, as depicted in the figure above. Some respondents interpreted the "face holding back tears" emoticon as sad, tearful, or unhappy, while others saw it as joyful or mixed emotions. Similarly, the "pregnant men" emoticon was interpreted as pregnant, full, or unhealthy by some respondents. Notably, some respondents were confused and unsure of the meaning conveyed by the emoticon.

Okude et al. (2019) found that expressing emoticons as numeric vectors increased emotional understanding. According to the findings of this study, an analytical technique that analyses emotions using numerical representation can lead to a better comprehension of the meaning of emotional emoticons. Although some respondents may perceive emoticons such as ☹ and 🤢 differently, a numeric vector-based approach can help explain and increase awareness of the intended emotional meaning. This approach enables a more precise assessment of how emoticons might represent more sophisticated emotional nuances in digital communication, minimizing ambiguity and boosting user comprehension.

CONCLUSION

The semiotic analysis of emoji in chat applications highlights its importance in digital communication, showing that its use varies by cultural background and context. Some people find emoji essential for expressing emotions, while others find it only appropriate for informal contexts. This diversity is a tension of the complexity of emoji interpretation, which is influenced by individual experiences and cultural factors. The small sample size of 37 respondents on self-reported data limits the generalizability of this study. Future research should involve larger, more diverse samples and explore the psychological and cognitive aspects of emoji interpretation to improve digital communication tools.

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