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### MEANING ANALYSIS OF 🙄 AND 💀 EMOJIS IN CHAT APPS: A SEMIOTIC-SEMANTIC STUDY

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**Abstract:** This research discusses the meaning of 🙄 and 💀 emojis in chat apps. The 🙄 emoji is often used to express sadness or frustration, while the 💀 emoji is often used for dark humor or to express that something is so funny it's "dead". This study aims to explore and reveal the meanings contained in these emojis according to the general views of chat app users. This research uses a qualitative approach with a focus on the description and interpretation of the phenomenon of emoji use. The main data source comes from direct observation of conversations in chat applications, as well as secondary data from related literature. Data collection techniques include participatory observation of emoji use in different contexts and analysis of conversation documentation. The results of this study are expected to provide a deeper understanding of how 🙄 and 💀 emojis are used and interpreted in daily interactions, as well as how their meaning can change depending on the context of the conversation.

**Keywords:** chat app emoji, meaning analysis, semantic, semiotic

## INTRODUCTION

As social creatures, humans are required to communicate with each other. When internet technology was first developed, humans communicated in a simple way by using words in everyday language, symbols, and signs that affect the meaning of the intended sentence. Whereas today, this method has evolved with the use of emojis

In the realm of modern communication, emojis are evolving as a way for us to express our emotions, feelings and ideas in a digital space. Emojis also serve as visual cues that convey meaning beyond traditional text. The origin of emojis stems from a symbol expert on semiotic theory, Ferdinand de Saussure, who played an important role in the development of Structuralism and introduced the concept of semiotics (sémiologie).

Semiotic theory is divided into two main components, namely the signifier and the signified (Dayu & Syadli, 2023). The signifier is considered a physical form that can be recognized through the appearance of the architectural work, while the signified is considered a meaning that is revealed through the concept, function, and values contained in the architectural work. Saussure's semiotics focuses on the relationship

between signifier and signified based on convention, which is often referred to as signification. The semiotics of signification is a system of signs that examines how the elements of signs in a system interact according to certain rules or conventions. In understanding this sign, a social agreement is needed to give meaning to the sign. According to Saussure, a sign consists of two aspects, namely sounds and images called the signifier, and concepts associated with sounds and images called the signified.

Another researcher named Roland Barthes also expressed his views on the concept of semiotics after reading Saussure's work: *Cours de linguistique générale*. Unlike Saussure, Barthes argues that semiotics does not always exist in the field of linguistics, but other fields as well. Roland Barthes' semiotic theory prioritizes three key ideas central to his analysis: Denotative, Connotative and Mythical meanings. The first system of meaning is called Denotative and the second system of meaning is called Connotative.

Denotative is a meaning that is clearly visible to the naked eye, meaning that denotative meaning is the real meaning or a first order where the meaning is closed, where denotation meaning produces explicit, direct and definite meaning. Meanwhile, connotative meaning reveals a meaning contained in certain signs, or a sign whose marker has an open meaning or can be said to be implicit meaning. Meaning that is not direct and uncertain, meaning that connotative meaning is open to the possibility of new interpretations. Denotation can be said to be a fixed objective, while connotation is a subjective and varied meaning (Vera, 2014: 26, in Oktaviani, 2019).

In addition to denotation and connotation, Roland Barthes' semiotic theory cannot be separated from myth. Myth is a sign or meaning that develops in society due to the influence of the customs and socio-culture of the community itself on something, by paying attention to the correlation of the obvious (Denotation) with the implied sign (Connotation). Myth according to Roland Barthes' Semiotic Theory is a communication system that becomes a message. Roland Barthes' semiotic theory reveals that myth in its specific sense is the development of connotation. However, as a unique system, myth is built by a pre-existing chain of meanings or in other words, myth is a second-level meaning system (Oktaviani, 2019).

Another view according to Charles Sanders Peirce, explains that a sign is a concept that is used as a means or material for analysis where in a sign there are various meanings as a result of the interpretation of the message of a sign (Aryani & Yuwita, 2023). Peirce categorizes the analysis into three things, namely, Representamen (ground), Object, and Interpretant which is known as a trichotomous relationship in semiotics.

In the process, there is a relation called semiosis. Semiosis is the process of interpreting a sign that starts from a base called the representamen or ground which is then aimed at an object and ends with the process of interpretation (interpretant). To interpret a sign, three elements are needed, namely the sign, object, and interpreter. The interpreter is a human being who interprets the object and the sign that represents it. Each sign can have different meanings in different contexts (Mudjiyanto, 2013).

Semiotics breaks down the content of texts into parts, and relates them to wider discourses. A semiotic analysis provides a way of relating a particular text to the message system in which it operates. It gives intellectual context to the content: it examines the ways in which the various elements of the text work together and interact with cultural knowledge to produce meaning (Astuti, 2006 in Mudjiyanto, 2013).

When examined in the development of modern-day technology, the emoji we know today are a new form of emoticons. Emoji itself is a language adoption from Japanese which means "character image", so emoji is a feature provided by certain messaging

applications in the form of graphic symbols or ideograms that present facial expressions, emotions, ideas, feelings, concepts, and several objects such as vehicles, weather, buildings, stars, food, work, activities, plants, and certain symbols. With the emoji feature, it is hoped that users can be helped in facilitating communication through written text between individuals, if the user wants to send a message in the form of text, the user can include emoji buttons or characters that describe his current state. On the other hand, the recipient of the message will be able to easily receive a better description of the sender's condition so that the interaction between the two parties feels more alive and does not seem bland (Bakhtiar et al., 2022).

Unlike emoticons, emojis come in colored shapes like pictures. Both depict facial expressions, but emoticons are formed with symbols, while emojis depict expressions and feelings, activities that are being done, and even represent various other things such as food, fruits, seasons, and so on. Despite the differences, both are used in online communication via social media. One type of social media that is commonly found is the WhatsApp application.

In the WhatsApp chat application, emojis have many variations. There are several emojis that are often used by social media users such as emojis that show common expressions such as crying, laughing, smiling, and so on. This type of emoji is usually used to clarify what expression the other person is using when sending a message

All emojis that show expressions are increasingly being used by social media users because they easily describe the user's mood. Even without the written text, everyone who sees the emoji will know how the sender feels. The general opinion that is usually immediately understood if someone uses the 😭 emoji to comment is an expression of sadness and crying. However, as more and more content and trends emerge, now the 😭 emoji does not only show sad expressions. Now people are starting to interpret that the emoji means that the commenter is laughing out loud to the point of tears that look like crying.

This is not only the case with the 😭 emoji, the 🧠 emoji which is usually interpreted as 'skull' has been changed to laugh so hard that it feels like dying. Upon further research, it is possible that the 🧠 emoji started to be interpreted this way because of the phrase "I'm dying" in English slang which means laughing until you die. It is possible that the 🧠 emoji was used because it resonates with this slang.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Definition of Linguistic

Long before discussing semantic studies, there is a basis that must first be discussed. The basic thing that is meant is linguistics. According to Chaer (2007) in Cahyo (2011) states that the word linguistics (equivalent to linguistics in English, *linguistique* in French and *linguistiek* in Dutch) is derived from the Latin word *lingua* which means "language", in the "Romance" languages, namely languages derived from Latin, there are words similar or similar to the Latin word *lingua*. These include: *lingua* in Italian, *lengue* in Spanish, *langue* (and *langage*) in French. Likewise in English which adopts the word *language* from the French word *langage*.

Another opinion according to Matthews (1997) in Cahyo (2011), defines linguistics as the science of language or the scientific study of language. According to Cahyo (2011), language is not a number of elements that are collected randomly or irregularly. Language is systematic.

In general, linguistics is often used to express the science of language. The term linguistics is usually also expressed with various terms or names (Effendi, 2012). If language, which is a means of communication used by humans to exchange information, is built with a clear structure, then information can be received properly and correctly.

Strictly speaking, Kridalaksana (1983) in Effendi (2012) states that linguistics is the study, study or study of the nature and intricacies of language, namely language in general that humans have as a means of communication or linguistics is the science of language or the science that investigates language scientifically.

### **Semantics in Linguistics**

Semantic studies are part of linguistics. If linguistics investigates language scientifically, then semantics exists to study the meaning of the language. Ridwan (2002:61) in Ginting & Ginting (2019) states that semantics is a branch of linguistics that studies and analyses the meaning of vowel units that refer to the meaning relationship between these units. This means that semantics has a big role in exploring meaning in language systematics.

According to Chaer & Muliastuti (2016), in general, semantics implies the study of the meaning of language. If meaning is part of language, semantics is part of linguistics. The word semantics comes from the Greek, namely *sema* (noun) which means marking or symbol. The verb is *semaino* which means to mark or symbolize. Later, semantics was agreed as a term used in the field of linguistics to study the relationship between linguistic signs (intralingual) and something that is marked (extralingual).

This is discussed by other researchers in Ba'amran (2018), Charles Morrissette argues that semantics examines "the relationship between signs and objects that are the container for the application of these signs". Tarigan (1985: 7) Examines symbols or signs that express the relationship of meaning to one another, and their influence on humans and society.

### **Semiotics As a Sign**

In addition to studying meaning, there is also a semantic element called semiotics. Semiotics develops from signs and symbols which are elements in language. Semiotics has three aspects that are closely related to linguistics, namely syntactic aspects, semantic aspects, and pragmatic aspects (Ba'amran, 2018). In (Pradopo, n.d.), it is mentioned that semiotics studies the systems, rules and conventions that allow signs to have meaning (Preminger, et al., 1974: 980). Semiotics comes from the Greek word *semeion* which means sign.

The semiotic approach to research distinguishes two types of semiotics, namely the semiotics of communication and the semiotics of signification (Eco, 1978). Communication semiotics emphasizes on the theory of sign production, one of which assumes the existence of six factors in communication, namely the sender, receiver, code, message, communication channel, and reference (the thing being discussed) (Pradopo, n.d.).

### **Emoji in Chat Apps**

In today's modern era, messages are no longer written manually in the form of letters. There is a more effective and efficient way, namely through chat applications. In the media text messages are minimal with non-verbal messages, encouraging users to

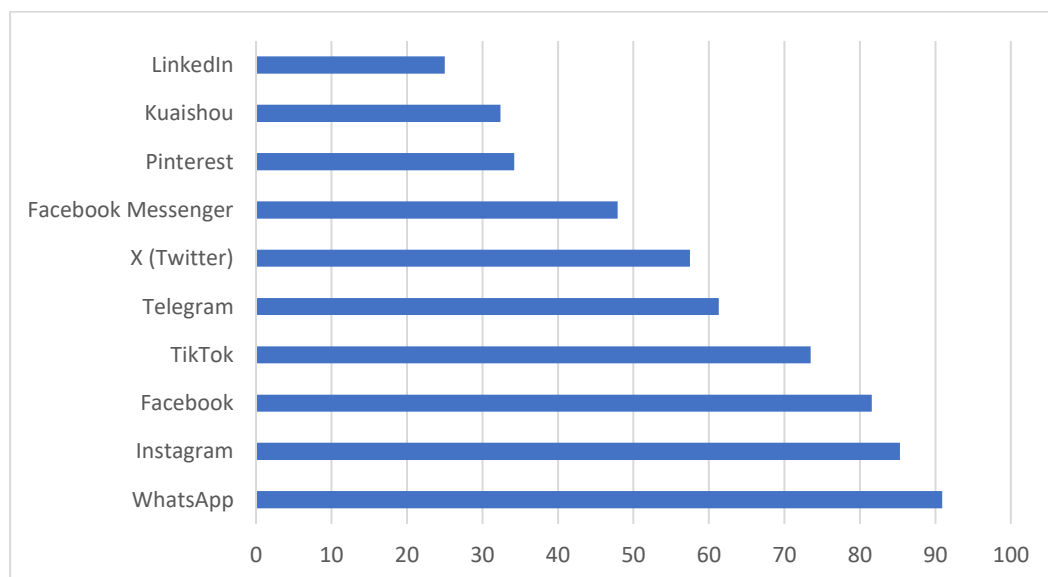
then develop representative forms known as emoji (Bai et al., 2019; Kerslake & Wegerif, 2017) in Bagaskara & Putri (2023).

In these chat applications, the use of emojis in messages has developed. As mentioned in the background, the use of emojis allows message recipients to understand more deeply the meaning in text messages. Emoji are also not only in the form of facial expressions, they can also be fruits, animals, seasons, and so on. The use of emoji has also been supported by various types of social media. This is mentioned because emoji features are increasingly attractive and practical for use by various groups of people.

Social media is a medium for socializing with each other and is done online which allows people to interact with each other without being limited by space and time. Currently, social media models have developed into various types, such as WhatsApp, Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, and others. These social media have various features that make it easier for people to communicate in cyberspace. Social media allows interaction between users without time and space limitations. With just an internet connection and a smart gadget, everyone can use it freely. The types are also quite varied, there are WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and so on.

One of the widely used messaging applications is WhatsApp. WhatsApp is one of the most popular messaging applications among students whose presence has now replaced the method of sending messages via SMS or short messaging system (Annamalai & Abdul Salam, 2017). There are many features provided by the WhatsApp application such as sending text messages, images, videos, voice messages and even documents (Subakti, 2019).

In an online article called Databoks, it is mentioned that there are at least 10 social media that are most widely used in Indonesia in early 2024.



**Chart 1. The top 10 most-used social media in Indonesia by early 2024**

It is stated that the most widely used social media application is WhatsApp with 90.9, followed by Instagram with 85.3, and Facebook with 81.6. This data was obtained from 139 million social media user identities in January 2024 by We Are Social. Looking at this data, it can be concluded that WhatsApp is the biggest holder of the widespread use of emojis. The emojis used are also very varied, there are emojis that show sad expressions,

emojis that describe animals such as cat emojis, and even emojis that show seasons such as fall emojis.

As mentioned in the background, the 🙄 emoji shows a sad feeling, while the 🦴 emoji shows a skull emoji in general. However, in this study, the researcher further examines the meaning of the two emojis. The researcher wants to invite a poll through several respondents who will later answer questions about the two emojis mentioned earlier.

## **METHOD**

Based on the previous background, the researcher distributed questionnaires to respondents from different professional backgrounds. The purpose of this study is to get a broader and deeper view of the use of 🙄 and 🦴 emojis in the context of chat applications, as well as to explore the meaning behind the use of these emojis from the perspective of everyday users.

This research uses a qualitative method with a qualitative descriptive approach. According to Sugiyono (2020: 9) in Pandawangi (2021) qualitative research methods are research methods used to research on natural object conditions, where the researcher is the key instrument, data collection techniques are done in a natural way as a key instrument, data collection techniques are done in triangulation (combined), data analysis is inductive, and qualitative research results emphasize meaning over generalization.

Data were obtained from two main sources, namely primary data obtained directly from questionnaires filled out by respondents, and secondary data collected from related literature and previous studies on the use of emoji in online communication. Data collection techniques include observation of the use of emoji in daily conversations in chat applications, as well as documentation of questionnaire results and analysis of the answers given by respondents. By using this approach, it is hoped that the research results can provide deeper insights into how the meaning and use of 🙄 and 🦴 emojis evolve in digital communication interactions.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Emoji in Social Media**

In communicating online, it is natural to use text that is non-formal, brief, and pragmatic. This is because there is no face-to-face interaction between social media users. Therefore, emojis play a big role in conveying feelings in text messages. Not all emojis are non-formal, there are also some emojis that are used when communicating with teachers or people who are respected and older.

Emojis on social media can function as a way to increase fluency on social media, emojis can also make messages easier to understand so that the content of the message can be trusted (believable) (Daniel & Camp, 2018) in Salsabila et al., (2023).

Emojis are often used to describe the feelings or mood of the message sender. However, it turns out that emojis are not just about describing feelings, they can also emphasize the content of the message being conveyed. According to Purnomo (2018), the emoticons inserted in the text of the messages sent are not only to represent feelings of pleasure, distress, sadness, and happiness. But the use of emoticons can also be used to strengthen or emphasize the text of the message sent.

Wagiati et al., (2023) states that Emojis are animated versions of emoticons that are more sophisticated and informative than simple combinations of keyboard characters and

are automatically provided in almost all computer software as part of a short messaging platform.

According to Bakhtiar et al., (2022) in Firmansyah et al., (2023), there are five empirical factors for frequent use of emojis in conversation. Firstly, using emojis make people more popular on social media. This was revealed by Simo Tchokni from Cambridge University. "Most influential people often use emojis in social media conversations, especially emojis that show positive emotions". This fact is stated in the conclusion of a study involving more than 30 million tweets on Twitter.

Secondly, emojis are used as a genuine human facial expression. Dr. Owen Churches from Flinders University found that when someone sees a "smile" emoji, a specific part of the brain will identify the emoji as when seeing a real human smile expression. Thirdly, the use of emoji breaks up formal communication We often think that using emojis is not appropriate in formal situations, such as talking to a boss or business partner.

Next, it softens criticism. The results of a research study found that when superiors criticize the work of their subordinates using emojis, subordinates tend to accept the criticism better and will try to change themselves. Lastly, emojis make more open. A study in 2008 states, emoji users will experience positive effects. Among them are more open in personal interactions, absorb more information, and become pleasant interlocutors.

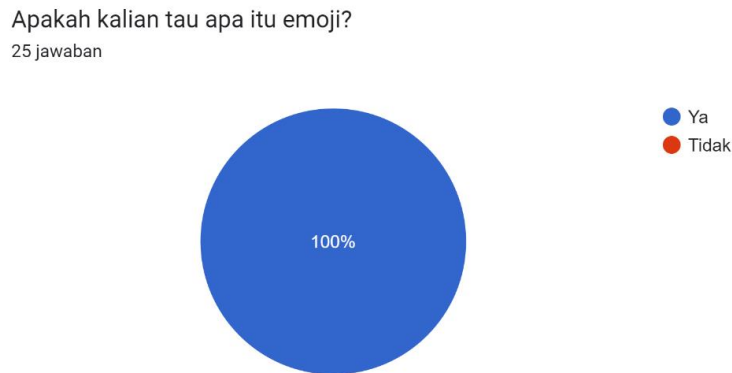
Conversations in social media (public or private) do not require one to use eloquent language. However, due to its pragmatic nature, online conversations are easily misunderstood. For example, when someone types in capslock when commenting on a topic. If the person is close to the other person (personally), it might seem normal. It is different if someone is a stranger who has just met or is implied to comment on a topic that is public. Some people will definitely have varying opinions on this. However, it can be inferred that the person is rude, besides whether he actually has other intentions that can only be understood by oneself.

Similarly, while emojis are varied and can represent the feelings of the sender of the message, one emoji cannot always be interpreted with just one meaning. Especially expression emojis. Basically, every human being must have a different point of view in interpreting a text. Therefore, it is normal for someone to misinterpret an emoji with another meaning.

According to Wagiaty et al., (2023), there have been many studies on emoticons and emoji and they generally adopt a variety of perspectives and paradigms. Although it sounds trivial, the use of emoji and emoticons can provide a variety of views. Therefore, each individual must have a different view of an emoji. To dig deeper, a more in-depth observation of human perspectives on emoji is needed.

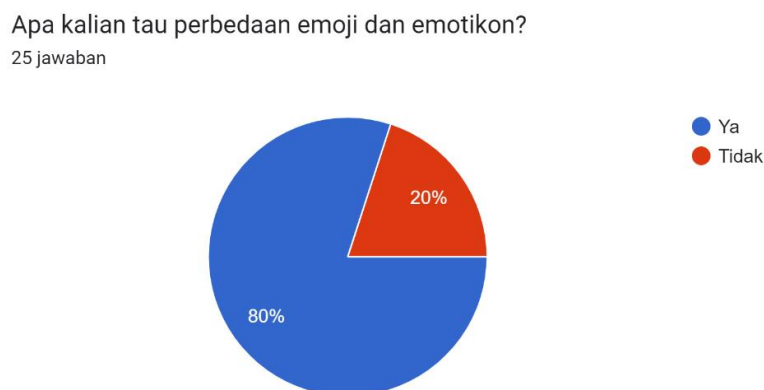
### **The Respondents' Understanding of 🤔 and 🧠 Emojis**

As mentioned earlier, the researcher distributed a questionnaire to 25 respondents to figure out their understanding of 🤔 and 🧠 emojis. It contains eight close-ended questions with various options including yes, no, frequently, sometimes, and never. The following diagram describes the results of the analysis of the meaning of 🤔 and 🧠 emojis.



**Figure 1. The Respondents' knowledge about emoji**

All respondents stated that they know emoji. In the diagram, it is written that 100% of respondents know what an emoji is. In this era of social media, where almost all people have social media to communicate, it is rare to find a social media user who does not know emojis. Furthermore, emoticons (and other similar paralinguistic forms) seem to have become the fastest growing and most significant language used by 92% of the online population and produced alongside 2.3 trillion mobile messages in 2016 ((Deubler et al., 2020) in (Wagiati et al., 2023). Indirectly, the quote states that emojis have grown rapidly in cyber communication. It is undeniable that many people know emoji.

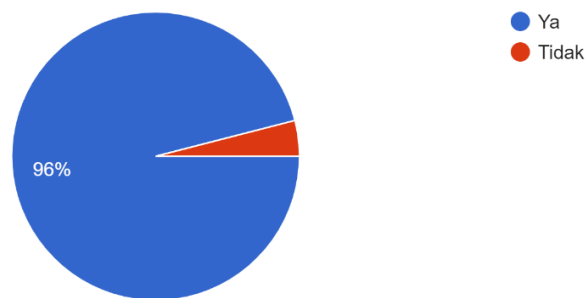


**Figure 2. The respondents' understanding about emoji-emoticon differences**

As many as 80% of respondents know the difference between emoji and emoticons. Meanwhile, 20% of respondents did not know the difference between the two. Actually, emoji and emoticons have the same meaning, which is to strengthen the form of expression of a chat statement on social media, but in terms of form they have differences.

Emoji itself is a form of image that represents various things in the form of facial expressions, certain symbols, images of fruit, animals, and objects. While emoticons are typographic writing or a combination of punctuation marks that become one presenting facial expressions such as happy, sad, angry, laughing and many more. Because emoticons are a set of punctuation combinations, it is rare to use emoticons nowadays (Firmansyah et al., 2023).

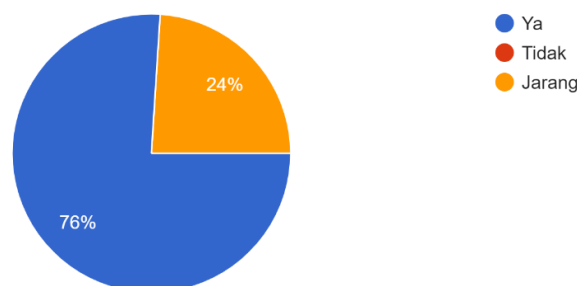
Apakah kalian sering menggunakan emoji (cont: 😊, 😭, 🧠, dsb )?  
25 jawaban



**Figure 3. The frequency of respondents using emojis**

As many as 96% of respondents often use emojis. While 4% of respondents stated that they do not or rarely use emojis. According to (Bagaskara & Putri, 2023), The use of social media as a means of communication is increasingly massive these days. It is undeniable that with so many interactions on social media, many people also use emoji. This is due to the availability of emoji in chat applications or social media.

Dalam berinteraksi di dunia maya (medsos: instagram, whatsapp, twitter, dsb), apakah kalian suka atau sering menggunakan emoji?  
25 jawaban



**Figure 4. The frequency of respondents using emojis on social media**

As many as 76% of respondents often use emojis when interacting online. While the other 24% stated that they rarely use emojis when surfing social media. In interacting in cyberspace that does not require a face-to-face process, emojis are present to complement the expressions that are usually depicted on the human face. In particular, in online communication, the use of emojis needs to be considered because by using emojis to describe facial expressions and gestures that are parallel to what will be conveyed in face-to-face or in-person communication. As a result, the use of emoji has become popular to clarify online communication (Yanuari et al., 2024).

Apakah kalian sering menggunakan emoji 🤔?  
25 jawaban

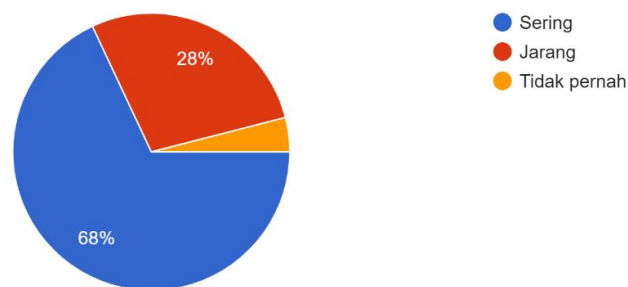


Figure 5. The frequency of respondents using 🤔 emoji

As many as 68% often use the 🤔 emoji. Then 28% of respondents stated that they rarely use the emoji, and the remaining 4% stated that they never use it. As mentioned earlier, the emoji feature is often found on social media platforms. Facebook, Twitter, Whatsapp, and various other social media platforms (Rakhman, 2020). And in all the media platforms mentioned above, there are many emoji features, including the 🤔 emoji.

In 2023, facemoji keyboard released the state of emoji, which is a report that shows the most favorite emoji from the beginning of the year until the list is released. The report shows that the most popular emoji is the crying emoji (Firmansyah et al., 2023). It is undeniable that the report is in accordance with the results of the questionnaire on 'apakah kalian sering menggunakan emoji 🤔?'. Most respondents rated that they use the 🤔 emoji frequently.

Apakah kalian sering menggunakan emoji 🧠?  
25 jawaban

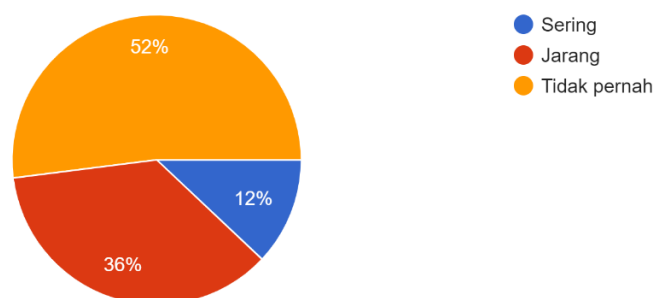


Figure 6. The frequency of respondents using 🧠 emoji

52% of respondents stated that they never use the 🧠 emoji. Then 36% of respondents stated that they rarely use the emoji, and 12% often use it. If examined more deeply, of the various types of emojis, emoji expressions are the most commonly used. The 🧠 emoji type does not appear to depict human expressions. And most people will think that the 🧠 emoji is just a skull symbol which not everyone knows where and when the emoji is used.

Apakah pendapat kalian tentang emoji 🤔?  
25 jawaban

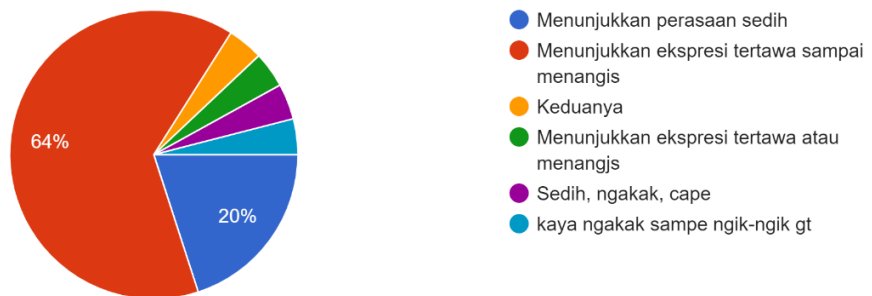


Figure 7. The opinion of respondents about 🤔 emoji

A total of 64% of respondents agreed on the meaning of the 🤔 emoji as 'showing an expression of laughter to tears', 20% interpreted it as 'showing sadness', and there were also those who gave their personal opinions with 16% of respondents. Some of their opinions: 'both' (both major opinions agreed), 'shows an expression of laughing or crying', 'sad, laughing, tired', or 'like laughing until giggling like that'.

Apakah pendapat kalian tentang emoji 🧠?  
25 jawaban

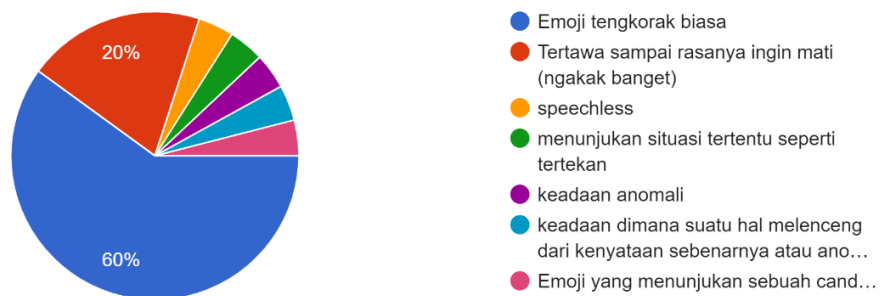


Figure 8. The opinions of respondents about 🧠 emoji

A total of 60% of respondents thought that the 🧠 emoji was just a 'regular skull emoji'. Another 20% of respondents interpreted it as 'laughing until you want to die (really laughing)'. There were also 20% of respondents who gave their personal opinions. Some of their opinions: 'speechless', 'indicating a certain situation such as being depressed', 'anomalous situation', 'out of touch with reality', and 'serious joke'.

It can be concluded that the respondents' opinions on analyzing the meaning of the 🤔 emoji are mostly similar. On the other hand, when polled about the 🧠 emoji, most respondents considered the 🧠 emoji to be a regular skull emoji. Only a few respondents thought that the 🧠 emoji also meant things like laughing until you want to die or situations that are beyond reason.

## CONCLUSION

Overall, most respondents frequently use emojis on social media. Some of them often use 🤔 and 🧠 emojis. Respondents' understanding varies quite a bit. Some respondents agreed with the meaning of the 🤔 and 🧠 emojis mentioned earlier. However, there are also those who have other views on the meaning of these emojis. After

looking at the questionnaire results, the researcher feels that human views are unique, and everyone has their own views. The researcher also hopes that someone will add suggestions for this research to make it better in the future, or that someone will continue research on a similar topic.

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