

The Role of Emoji in EFL Students' Communication: An Analytical Approach

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This study aims to assess the analysis of using emojis in EFL Students' communication. Specifically, the researchers seek to analyze the usefulness of utilizing emoji features offered by digital platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, or Telegram applications on EFL students. Ordinary users employ a blend of punctuation and emojis to generate it. This applies solely within a container for exchanging messages based on text. This study employs the uses and gratifications theory. This theory posits that media users possess an active agency in selecting and utilizing a media platform to facilitate disseminating their information requirements. The uses and gratification hypothesis posits that people have different options to fulfill their wants. Aside from employing a survey methodology that involved questionnaires as a means of data gathering, the researchers also conducted direct observations or firsthand observations of individuals' usage of emojis on social media platforms. The researchers also consulted many articles that examined the use of emoji in communication and the efficacy of emoji in conveying emotions to communicate messages. According to research, including emojis in a conversation or digital communication can substantially impact how a person is seen. This influence can enhance the efficacy of digital communication. While establishing a shared understanding between individuals might be challenging, employing this emoji can mitigate the likelihood of misinterpretation. This research demonstrates that the utilization of emoji can impact the communication process.

Keywords: communication efficacy , digital communication, efl students, emoji, uses and gratifications theory

INTRODUCTION

Effective communication is crucial for all social media users since it serves as the most rapid means of engagement across various media platforms and global social networks. Technology-mediated communication (TMC) refers to the interaction that occurs between individuals using multiple communication tools that have been developed and are increasingly utilized over time (Burholt et al., 2020; Hilbert & Lopez, 2011). Facial expressions allow us to communicate a message to someone without speaking. The predominant emoticons or expressions commonly utilized during interpersonal interactions, whether in person or through written communication on social media, encompass happiness, anger, amusement, sadness, and guilt. Expressive exchanges play a crucial function in establishing the ambiance of contact with the interlocutor.

The process of modernization and globalization has had a substantial impact on the evolution of languages and the expansion of communication. The rapid advancement in technology and the development of social media have been crucial factors in the emergence of new forms of communication tools. Consequently, emojis emerged as a form of communication similar to emoticons. GIFs and other graphical icons, known as 'graphicons' (Herring &

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Dainas, 2017), serve as valuable tools to explain the intended message or to add depth and significance to it. Emojis, formerly called ideograms or smileys, was initially presented as "picture" (e) + "characters" (emoji) in Japanese mobile phone electronic messaging and web pages during the transition to the 21st century (Luor et al., 2010). Emojis have become prevalent in social interactions, and these new modes of communication also have a presence in the realm of education, particularly in higher education (Veytia-Bucheli et al., 2020).

Over time, there have been several alternatives for communication, such as the utilization of digital technology platforms that offer advanced features and are more efficient than sending messages through SMS or traditional mail. When communicating, specific nonverbal cues like gestures or facial expressions cannot be effectively conveyed through specific forms of media. On September 19, 1982, computer scientist Scott Fahlman of Carnegie Mellon University introduced the first emoticon, a smile. During that period, Fahlman observed the utilization of electronic messaging as a means of communication among staff members in the early 1980s.

He found that several factors hindered the smooth flow of discourse, including jokes that were not understood, intentions that were misinterpreted, and excessive nagging that disrupted the debate. Fahlman, who was in his thirties then, devised a straightforward and iconic technique: to denote a humorous or sarcastic statement, one should use a smiling face composed of colons, minus signs, and brackets. The proliferation of the emoticon rapidly extended to other colleges, subsequently disseminating to email platforms and eventually permeating global communication.

Emojis, on the other hand, are considered to be beneficial instruments in computer-mediated communication. Derived from rudimentary representations like the 'smiley face' [; -)], Emoticons, such as the 'frowny face' [:-)], have evolved into emojis, which now feature more intricate expressions and are gaining popularity among social media users. The objective of this study is to investigate the function of emojis in digital communication (Riordan, 2017). Emojis possess semantic meanings and serve as contextualization cues, as seen by people's inclination to utilize emojis as an adjunct to written language (Al-Rashdi, Gibson et al., 2018). A study based on empirical evidence discovered that sarcasm shown through emojis is processed in a manner comparable to irony expressed through words. This suggests that emojis may have a similar role as words in conveying meaning in informative circumstances (Weissman & Tanner, 2018). Previous research has acknowledged that emojis have emotional implications and can impact the way we understand and interpret language.

Emojis are visual symbols used in digital communication to depict various facial expressions, objects, characters, and actions (Ai et al., 2017). They are frequently employed to enhance the emotional impact, interpretation, and connection of text communications (Miller et al., 2017). The widespread use of computer-mediated communication has led to the development of digital representations of both spoken and non-verbal expressions of emotions that occur during face-to-face conversations. Smartphone text messaging has become a widely used method of interpersonal communication in several sectors of daily life, including professional and social contacts.

Communication in a digital system relies on messages, which can lack expressive communication without emojis. This can pose challenges for both the sender and receiver, as it becomes difficult to convey emotions solely through words or sentences. Without emojis to represent expressions, it is challenging to accurately identify feelings. As a result, the receiver may struggle to interpret the atmosphere of the interaction, leading to misunderstandings and less effective communication.

Essentially, every individual has a proclivity to interpret things according to their wants, desires, attitudes, and several other psychological elements. This ultimately leads to divergent interpretations of a message among individuals. A communicator cannot always ensure that every text message he delivers will be accurately interpreted by the recipient. Therefore, numerous organizations utilizing messaging systems strive to minimize potential misunderstandings while speaking by text. Efforts have been made to incorporate aspects that visually depict a person's facial expressions or personality traits in order to convey the sender's emotions. This is achieved through the use of emoticons or emojis.

Emoji is a linguistic borrowing from Japanese, derived from the term "character image". It refers to graphic symbols or ideograms that convey facial expressions, emotions, ideas, feelings, concepts, and various objects like vehicles, weather, buildings, stars, food, work, activities, plants, and symbols. Messaging applications often offer this feature. The inclusion of the emoji function aims

to enhance communication by easing the exchange of written material among individuals. To transmit a textual message, the user has the option to incorporate a button or emoji character that conveys their present circumstances. Conversely, the recipient of the message will have a more comprehensive understanding of the sender's circumstances, resulting in a more vibrant and engaging engagement between both parties.

METHOD

The research methodology employed in this study is the survey research method. In this study, according to Creswell, quantitative research is a form of educational research wherein the researcher selects the subject of study, poses a precise and limited inquiry, gathers measurable data from participants, applies statistical analysis to these figures, and conducts the investigation impartially and objectively (Cresswell, 2009). He defines the survey method as a quantitative research approach that collects data on past or current beliefs, opinions, characteristics, behavior, and variable relationships. Using a sample, it is also used to test hypotheses related to sociological and psychological variables. Used as samples were 30 undergraduate students in Universitas Muhammadiyah Sumatera Utara.

Participants were instructed to complete a questionnaire titled "The Analysis of Using Emoji on EFL Students Communication", which was disseminated through WhatsApp broadcast messages and WhatsApp status updates. The questionnaire findings were further analyzed using quantitative methodologies. Quantitative research is synonymous with the philosophical perspective of positivism. The idea of positivism asserts that phenomena in the study may be categorized as relatively stable, tangible, observable, and quantifiable and that a causal relationship exists between symptoms.

This study employs the uses and gratifications theory. Jay Blumler and Elihu Katz proposed this hypothesis in 1974. This theory posits that media users actively choose and utilize media to fulfill their information delivery requirements. Media consumers must actively seek out the most pertinent media outlets to meet their needs. The uses and gratification hypothesis posits that people possess different options to satisfy their wants.

In addition to employing a survey methodology utilizing questionnaires as a means of data gathering, the researchers also conducted direct observations of individuals' patterns of using emojis on social media platforms. The researchers consulted multiple papers that examined the use of emojis in communication and the efficacy of emojis in conveying emotions to communicate messages.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

One hundred individuals voluntarily completed the G-Form questionnaire using our previous research methodology. Participants were presented with seven questions and instructed to respond using a linear scale (Scale 1 = Strongly Agree, Scale 2 = Agree, Scale 3 = Neutral, Scale 4 = Disagree, Scale 5 = Strongly Disagree).

The questionnaire encompassed the following inquiries:

1. I perceive emojis as a necessary feature on social media.
2. I consistently include emojis when engaging on social media platforms.
3. Emojis enliven the message content.
4. Emojis enable me to express myself more vividly when interacting with friends on social media.
5. Emojis enhance the emotional tone of messages.
6. I find it easier to comprehend the intended message when emojis are utilized.
7. Emojis facilitate message comprehension for me.

The data collected from participants covered responses from the first to fifth semesters. However, most respondents fell within the 18 to 20-year-old age range. Regarding gender distribution among participants, 80% were female, while the remaining 20% were male.

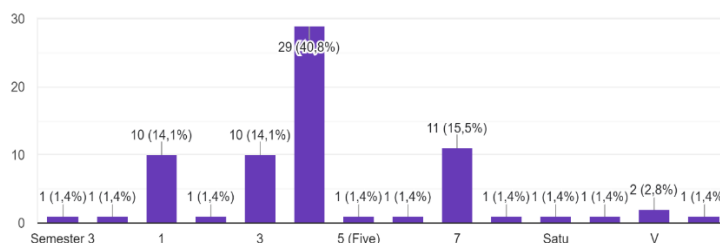


Figure 1 | The gender distribution among participant.

Discussion

The majority of participants in this study were students, comprising 57% in their third semester, 15% in their first semester, 7% in their fifth semester, and 19% in their seventh semester. Given that a student author distributed the questionnaire, it is noteworthy that the author's social circle predominantly comprises young individuals currently pursuing education. The data associated with the completed questionnaire revealed several significant trends. Most questionnaire participants concurred that emojis are a mandatory feature on social media. Conversely, many participants argued they need to consistently incorporate emojis when communicating on social media platforms. Interestingly, the majority of respondents agreed that the use of emojis enhances message interaction, making it more vivid and engaging.

Furthermore, participants expressed feeling more expressive when utilizing emojis in their interactions with friends on social media. This sentiment was echoed by many who believed that emojis effectively conveyed emotions in digital communication. Additionally, a consensus emerged among participants regarding the utility of emojis in enhancing message comprehension; many agreed that messages containing emojis were easier to understand.

I feel the emoji is a mandatory feature on social media (Saya merasa emoji merupakan fitur yang wajib di media sosial)
71 jawaban

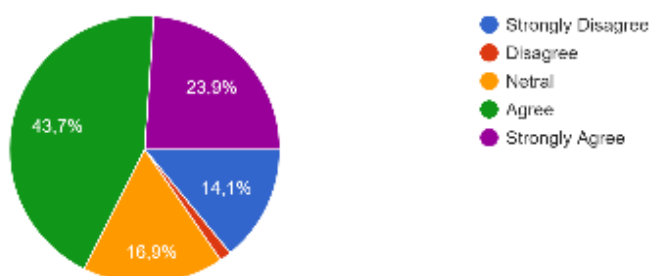


Figure 2 | First Question.

The data accompanying the completed questionnaire is as follows: 43.7% of respondents in the questionnaire expressed consensus that emojis are an essential feature that should be available on social media platforms, 23.9% in respondents strongly agreed, while the neutral received 16.9% respondents and 14.1% in the questionnaire indicated that the respondents strongly disagreed to incorporate emojis into their communication.

I always add emoji when communicating on social media (Saya selalu menambahkan emoji ketika berkomunikasi di media sosial)

71 jawaban

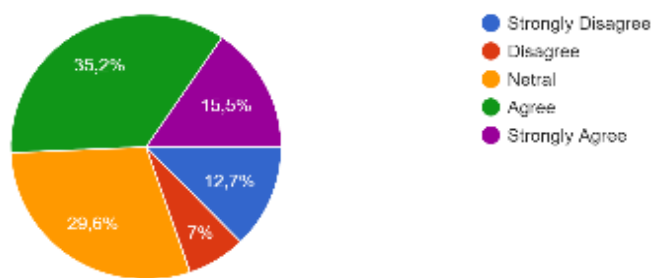


Figure 3 | Second Question.

This data shows that students who always add emojis when communicating on social media are high. The highest score in the data is 35.2%, the highest answer for the Agree section. This proves that students are always adding emojis when communicating on social media. Based on the data collected from the results of the questionnaire, 15.5% respondents strongly agreed and then 29.6% of respondents were neutral, while 7% of respondents disagreed and 12.72% of respondents strongly disagreed that they always add emojis when communicating on social media.

By using the emoji I feel the message becomes more alive (Dengan menggunakan emoji saya merasa pesan menjadi lebih hidup)

71 jawaban

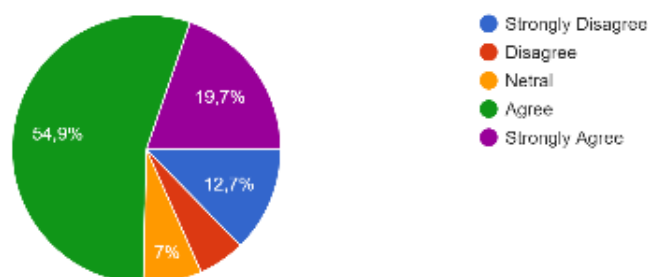


Figure 4 | Third Question.

Based on the data above, 54.9% of respondents agreed that by the utilization of emojis, participants feel the message becomes more alive. 19.7% of respondents strongly agreed, while 12.7% of respondents strongly disagreed on the statement that the message becomes more alive by using emojis, and then 7% of participants were neutral about the aforementioned statement.

I feel more expressive when using emoji when interacting with friends on social media (Saya merasa lebih ekspresif ketika menggunakan emoji pada saat berinteraksi dengan teman di media sosial)

71 jawaban

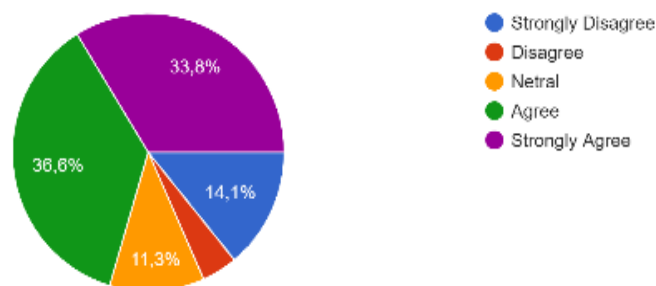


Figure 5 | Fourth Question

This data shows that students who feel more expressive when using emojis when interacting with friends on social media are high. The highest score in the data is 36.6%, the highest answer for the Agree section, and 33.8% for Strongly Agree. This proves that students are more expressive when using emojis on social media. Based on the data collected from the results of the questionnaire, 14.1% of respondents strongly disagreed, they did not feel more expressive when using emojis, and then 11.3% of respondents were neutral.

I feel the emotions I can convey by adding emoji (Saya merasa emosi saya bisa tersampaikan dengan menambahkan emoji)

71 jawaban

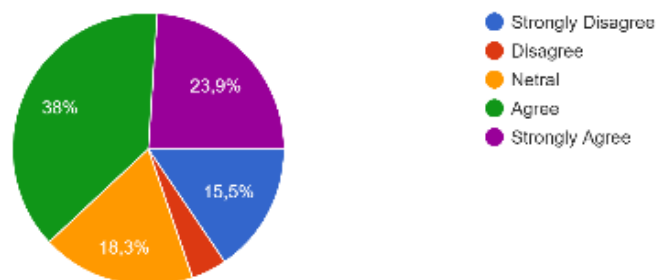


Figure 6 | Fifth Question.

The data accompanying the completed questionnaire is as follows: 38% of respondents in the questionnaire expressed that by adding emojis, they feel the emotions can be conveyed, 23.9% of respondents strongly agreed, while the neutral received 18.3% of respondents and 15.5% in the questionnaire indicated that the respondents strongly disagreed that emotions can be conveyed by adding emojis.

I feel better at understanding somebody's message using emoji (Saya merasa lebih memahami pesan seseorang jika menggunakan emoji)

71 jawaban

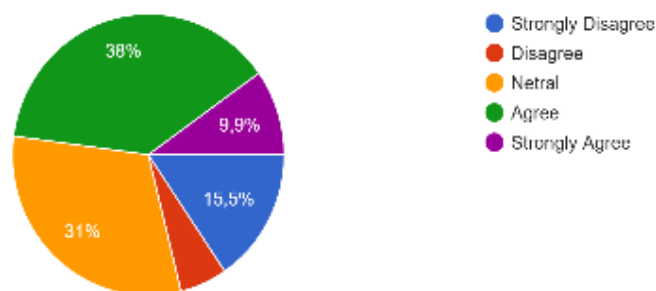


Figure 7 | Sixth Question.

Based on the data above, by using emojis, participants feel better at understanding somebody's message, 38% of respondents agreed, 31% of respondents were neutral, while 15.5% of respondents strongly disagreed that they feel better at understanding somebody's message by using emoji, and then 9.9% of participants strongly agreed on the topic.

I feel the emoji can make it easier for me to understand the message (Saya merasa emoji bisa memudahkan saya untuk memahami pesan)

71 jawaban

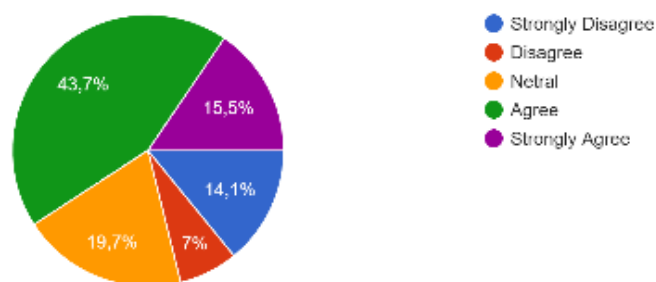


Figure 8 | Seventh Question.

This data shows students who feel that emojis can make it easier for them to understand the message is very high. The highest score in the data is 43.7%, the highest answer for the Agree section. Based on the data collected from the results of the questionnaire, 19.7% of respondents were neutral, and then 15.5% of respondents strongly agreed, 7% of respondents disagreed and 14.1% of respondents strongly disagreed. This proves that students feel that emojis can make it easier for them to understand the message.

Based on the calculation of the above data, it can be determined that the effectiveness of interaction of EFL students in text-based messaging without emojis significantly impacts the level of communication effectiveness on social media. This phenomenon can occur due to the insufficiency of a text message alone in creating a highly engaging atmosphere of participation in the media. Sarbaugh and Feldman argue that text communication hampers the sender's ability to convey emotions and the recipient's ability to interpret the message's meaning. Due to the limitations of text messaging, they are unable to give non-verbal cues such as facial expressions and body language.

Emoji Alters EFL Students Perception

Each individual possesses their unique perception. Upon receiving the information, individuals typically interpret it based on their perception. Under such situations, the understanding of a word or sentence may vary from that of others. The variations in interpretation give rise to misconceptions among persons, thereby reducing the effectiveness of communication.

The utilization of an emoji or a certain word in digital communication can have a substantial impact on an individual's impression. This influence can enhance the efficacy of digital communication. While it may be challenging to align perceptions between individuals, employing these emojis helps mitigate the probability of misinterpretations. This research has shown that the utilization of emojis can impact the process of communication.

CONCLUSION

The utilization of emojis during a discussion or the inclusion of a specific word in digital communication can have a substantial impact on an individual's impression. This influence can enhance the efficacy of digital communication. While it might be challenging to align perceptions between individuals, employing these emojis can mitigate the probability of misinterpretations. This research has conclusively demonstrated that the utilization of emojis can exert an influence on the process of communication.

Our facial expressions enable us to communicate something distinct to our conversation partners without the need for verbal communication. When engaging in interpersonal interactions, whether in person or through written communication on social media, the prevailing emojis or emotions employed are typically those denoting happiness, anger, amusement, sadness, and guilt. The inclusion of emoji elements in digital communication is crucial for facilitating expressive connection and managing the environment of conversation. Employing emoji necessitates careful consideration of the circumstances and context. Prior to utilizing emojis, it is imperative to have a clear comprehension of their intended meanings in order to avoid any potential misinterpretations. Incorrect usage of emojis can lead to varying interpretations, whereas correct and targeted use of emojis can enhance communication by facilitating comprehension and minimizing misunderstandings.

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