

# INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF MULTIDISCIPLINARY: APPLIED BUSINESS AND EDUCATION RESEARCH

2024, Vol. 5, No. 8, 3349 – 3356

<http://dx.doi.org/10.11594/ijmaber.05.08.30>

## Research Article

### Emojis as Communication Medium Among College Students in a State-Run Institution

Kylie Kate S. Aranas, Marifel B. Marte, Christian Jay S. Valentin, Ersyl T. Biray\*

College of Teacher Education, Banga, Aklan, 5601 Philippines

#### Article history:

Submission 24 July 2024

Revised 08 August 2024

Accepted 23 August 2024

#### \*Corresponding author:

E-mail:

[campdirect06262013@gmail.com](mailto:campdirect06262013@gmail.com)

#### ABSTRACT

Emojis are small images conveying meaning, emotions, and tone embedded in electronic text messages that allow people to express their feelings and emotions in nonverbal and informal conversations. This study aimed to find out the role of emojis as a communication medium among college students in a state-run institution. Specifically, it sought to identify the popularly-used emojis, the social media platforms where these are used, determine their frequency of use, and the instances where these are used. Sophomore college students enrolled in a teacher education degree program specializing in the English language at a state-run university supplied the data collected using a validated survey questionnaire transformed and sent through the Google messenger application. Results revealed that the topmost popular emojis used by college students in their nonverbal communication were the heart, face with tears of joy, and loudly crying face. Participants stated that they always use emojis in their informal communication with friends on popular social media platforms, such as Facebook and Messenger. It was also established that emojis were used when messaging friends or family members expressing their feelings, and having nothing else to reply to in a conversation. These findings attest that the use of technology-driven trends has evolved in the communication media, particularly among the younger generation.

**Keywords:** *Emojis, Communication medium, Nonverbal and informal communication, Social media, State-run institution*

#### Introduction

The surge of technological advancement has brought about a novel mode of communication that has become universal for today's generation, the Internet. Alshenqeeti (2016) stated that communication is continually adapting to

social trends, and lifestyles, and, more recently, technology and language are recognized as living organisms. The last decade has indicated this, introducing different computer-mediated communication (CMC) tools and platforms, such as email, chat rooms, and social networks.

#### How to cite:

Aranas, K. K. S., Marte, M. B., Valentin, C. J. S., & Biray, E. T. (2024). Emojis as Communication Medium Among College Students in a State-Run Institution. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary: Applied Business and Education Research*. 5(8), 3349 – 3356. doi: 10.11594/ijmaber.05.08.30

It is known that the Internet is one of the essential platforms for computer-mediated communication in the world today because it allows people to exchange messages and influence communication using computers connected by a network (Leleka, 2014). In addition, it has many advantages, including enhancing the continuity of personal communication (Juhasz & Bradford, 2016), improving the quality of relationships (Pettigrew, 2009; Perry & Werner-Wilson, 2011), and strengthening emotional communication (Derks et al., 2008). However, based on Archer and Akert's (1997) observation, the lack of non-verbal cues such as facial expressions, intonation, and gestures in CMC can affect the transmission of information. Thus, to address this complication, communicators have designed new non-verbal cues, such as capitalization as a substitute for shouting, multiple exclamation points for excitement, and similar symbols to express emotions (Harris & Paradice, 2007; Riordan & Kreuz, 2010). As a result, emoji, a set of expression symbols, came into being.

A recent survey by Kemp (2023) revealed that the Philippines has 85.16 million internet users as of January 2023, with an internet penetration of 73.1%. The Philippines is home to 84.45 million social media users or 72.5% of the country's total population, and an estimated 168.3 million cellular phones in use during this period. The absolute quantity of data available on the Internet gives people worldwide a voice in every field. One such device as a medium of this advancement is called emoji. An emoji is a form of non-verbal communication that can represent any action, feeling, or object. A famous example is the wink face. Emoji could be used as a way to have fun and express oneself with whoever is around. Emojis have become an essential part of texting and have gone viral on other social media platforms, popularly used as a communication medium.

A communication medium is defined as "the conduit through which ideas, thoughts, emotions, and information flow, connecting individuals, societies, and nations" (Rahman, 2023). The communication medium can be used both orally and non-verbally. Oral communication mediums include speech, hand gestures, signs, facial expressions, and other

vocalizations or body language. Non-verbal communication includes drawings, paintings, visual media such as television, film, and video; computers and computer networks; telephones; telegraphs; long-distance telephony; radios; music and musical instruments. Emoji is an example of the latter, a pictorial representation that has emerged as an independent communication medium. It has its own set of rules, codes, and conventions and can communicate without using language. Its use is widespread in web browsers, instant messaging services, email, blogs, and social networking sites like Facebook.

The popularity of visual communication, particularly in the use of the Internet today, not only among the millennials but also among technology users is prevailing. Visual communication has become so widespread in the Internet age that we even supplement or replace written language. Language is an essential communication tool; thus, it is affected by feelings, lifestyle, and the culture of people using it (Soepardjo & Wasono, 2018). What is and how it is spoken depends upon the needs of its users and the tools or media utilized to deliver communication. To support the claim, Alshenqeeti (2016) mentioned that language could come in many forms, and one of these is the use of emoji as a communication medium. It is an important area of language and communication development, illustrated by the fact that the Oxford English Dictionary selected the emoji for tears of joy as its "Word of the Year" for 2015, showing how frequently it was utilized in communication (Fullwood et al., 2015).

Emoji, which evolved from emoticons to smiley. Smiley first appeared in the 1960s and is regarded as the first expression symbol. Smiley is a yellow face with two dots for eyes and a wide grin printed on buttons, brooches, and t-shirts. Since it became popular in the early 1980s, emojis have been part of the communicative culture in the West (Stark & Crawford, 2015). It is extensively used in CMC applications such as instant messaging, e-mail, social networking, and many more (Dresner & Herring, 2010).

These visual representations of words or constructs deliver enhanced meaning to the messages sent in a creative and highly

expressive format (Tauch & Kanjo, 2016). Emojis can convey feelings, emotions, and attitudes as substitutes for written language (Sadiq & Shanida, 2019). It transfers information without the use of morphemes and other grammatical structures, for it generates universal context and connotation among digital communities. It is supplementary in the absence of non-verbal communication, provides greater nuance and clarity to the internet-mediated conversation, and expresses creativity in language. Besides, emojis have nonverbal communication capabilities. They can assist recipients in perceiving the sender's mood, attitude accurately, and degree of attentiveness (Lo, 2008), offer delight (Chen & Siu, 2017) and encourage engagement, and community identification (Aldunate & Gonzálezibáez, 2016). Cramer et al. (2016) claims that emojis can add extra emotional or contextual meaning to communication and increase the message's attractiveness to receivers. Positive emojis were found to improve communication and leaves a positive impression in digital social interactions (Boutet et al., 2021). It also assists users in tone adjustment and conversation management and plays a role in different levels of communication. Emojis maintain interpersonal relationships because they have similar neural responses to face-to-face communication (Kelly & Watts, 2015; Chairunnisa & Benedictus, 2017; Albawardi, 2018; Gantiva et al., 2019). Emojis can help people express themselves, calm their mood, and develop their personality (Kaye et al., 2016; Ge & ACM, 2019). Emojis are employed in communication to enhance engagement (Gibson et al., 2018), including generating an emotional tone, decreasing discourse ambiguity, increasing context appropriateness (Kaye et al., 2016), and strengthening or weakening speech serves as contextualization cues (Al Rashdi, 2018; Sampietro, 2019).

Al-Zou'bi and Shamma (2021) found that college students in Jordan are motivated to learn if their instructors allow them to use emojis in expressing what is in their minds. Female instructors, too, use the thumbs-up emoji in their online classes. But Udoudom et al. (2024) advances that increased literacy and

awareness on the use of emojis is necessary to avert misinterpretation in digital social interaction.

Purposely, this study analyzed the role of emojis as a communication medium among second-year teacher education students specializing in the English language at a state-run institution in Western Visayas, Philippines, with the specific intent to:

1. Identify the popularly-used emojis as a communication medium among the students;
2. Determine how frequently are emojis used as a communication medium;
3. Identify in what social media platforms are emojis used as a communication medium; and,
4. Ascertain the instances where emojis are used as a communication medium.

Finally, this study is significant as it would help students, teachers, linguists, and scholars to understand further the intricacies of emojis, their effects on communication, and the future of digital language.

## Methods

This section describes the research design used, the respondents, the sampling process, the data gathering instrument, the data gathering procedure, and data analyses.

**Design and Sampling Method.** This study utilized the descriptive research design. Systematic sampling was used to determine the respondents of this study chosen from the population of enrolled second-year students under the teacher education program specializing in the English language. By definition, systematic sampling is a process by which each sample is selected from all of the population (Edgar & Manz, 2017). It is a type of probability sampling that uses a specific and regular interval in selecting the participants (Henry, 2023).

**Data Gathering Instrument.** A researcher-made survey questionnaire validated by experts was used to gather data. This was transformed to a Google format and administered online using the social medium Facebook Messenger. The questionnaire consisted of four

sections. The first part included a list of emojis that the respondents use in their casual communication; the second part was the frequency of their using emojis; the third part was the social media platforms where the respondents used emojis; and the last part was about the instances where the respondents use emojis as a communication medium.

**Data Analysis.** Data collected were analyzed through the use of summary statistics. After administering the interview, the results will be tallied in an Excel Spreadsheet. The percentage will be determined to describe the data that specifies the rate of observations for each data point. It will show the partitions of chosen choices of respondents per each survey question presented through a bar chart and pie chart.

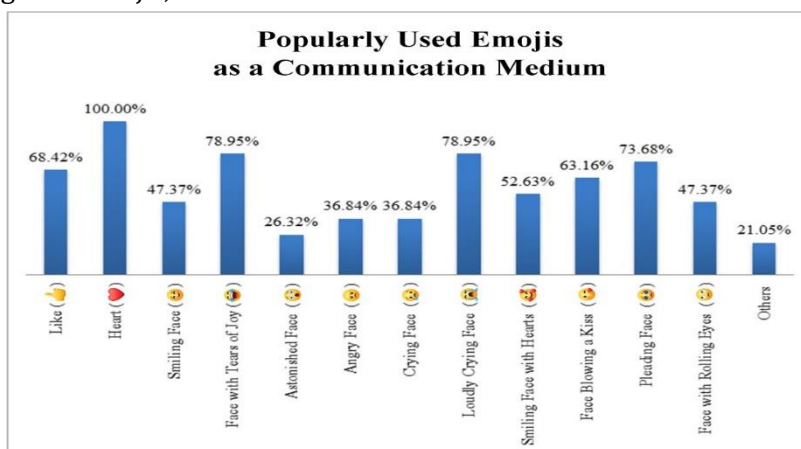
### Results and Discussion

This part presents the results of the survey conducted and analysis of gathered data which illustrates the most popular emojis, the frequency of usage of emojis, the social media

platforms where emojis are commonly used, and the instances where emojis are used.

**Popularly Used Emojis.** Figure 1 shows the results showing the most common emojis used by the college student respondents as a communication medium. 100% (19 out of 19) of the respondents revealed that they usually use a heart emoji in their conversation with the receivers. The face with tears of joy and the loudly crying face emojis are both used by 78.95% or 15 out of 19 students. Completing the top 5 popularly used emojis were the pleading face and the like emojis, with 73.68% and 68.42% respondent users, respectively.

This implies that college students are, indeed, familiar with and use emojis as substitutes to express their feelings and emotions. This result confirms the information published in *The Standard* which listed the top 10 most used emojis in 2023 including crying with laughter, rolling on the floor laughing, red heart, folded hands, and loudly crying as the first 5 (Williams, 2024).



\*Multiple response

Figure 1. Popularly Used Emojis as a Communication Medium

**Frequency of Using Emojis.** Figure 2 reveals that 58.0% (11 out of 19) students answered “always” as regards the query on how often they use emoji as a communication medium. 42.0% or 8 out of 19 students said that they “sometimes” use the symbol. Not one said that they seldom use emojis.

These results suggest that every college student is familiar with emojis and uses these in their daily conversations. This finding supports

the study by Bosch and Revilla (2018) which established that millennials use emojis more frequently in instant messages to communicate emotions. Usually, the young frequently use emojis in their personal contacts with their family and friends while the older individuals use them infrequently in their interaction with supervisors and doctors (Cavalheiro et al., 2023).

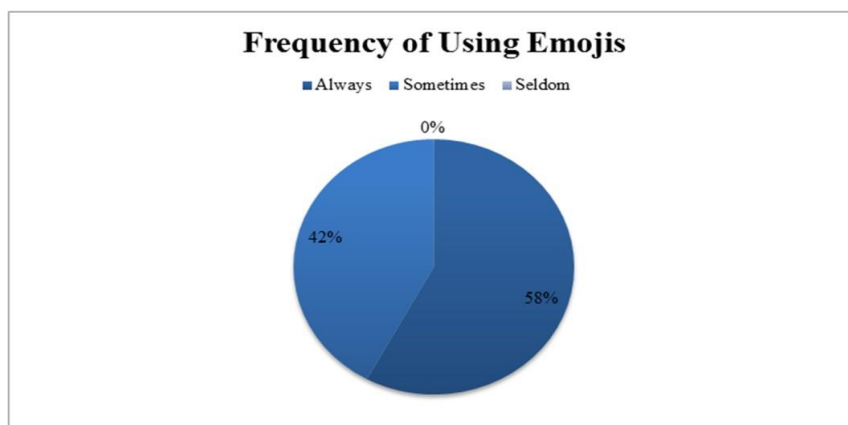
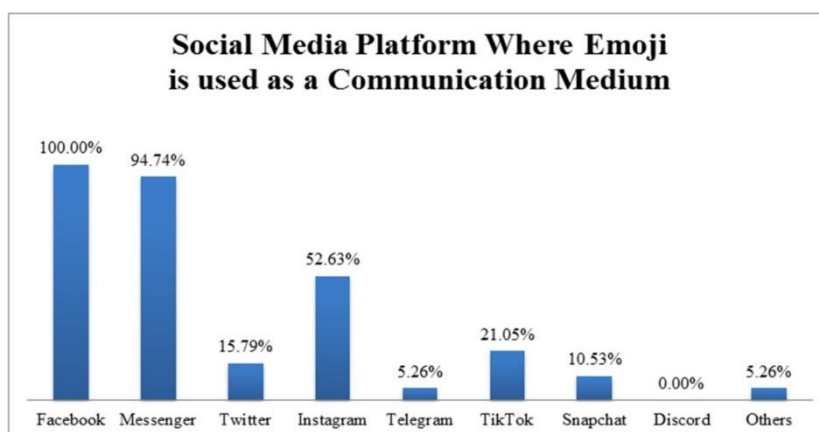


Figure 2. Frequency of Using Emojis

**Social Media Platform where Emoji is Used as Communication Medium.** Figure 3 displays the varied social media platforms where student respondents use emojis. It revealed that 100% of the respondents use emojis as a communication medium on Facebook. This makes Facebook the most common and accessible platform among the social media available on the Internet. It is followed by Messenger with 94% (18 out of 19) while 53.0% of the students use it on Instagram. The least

used platforms were Telegram (with 5.26%) and Discord (0%) which occupied the bottom line.

These figures infer that students are familiar with the various online social channels and mediums where can communicate and reach out to their family and friends. Parallel to this finding, it was established in a survey conducted by Dixon (2024) that said platforms are the most popular for Internet users worldwide.

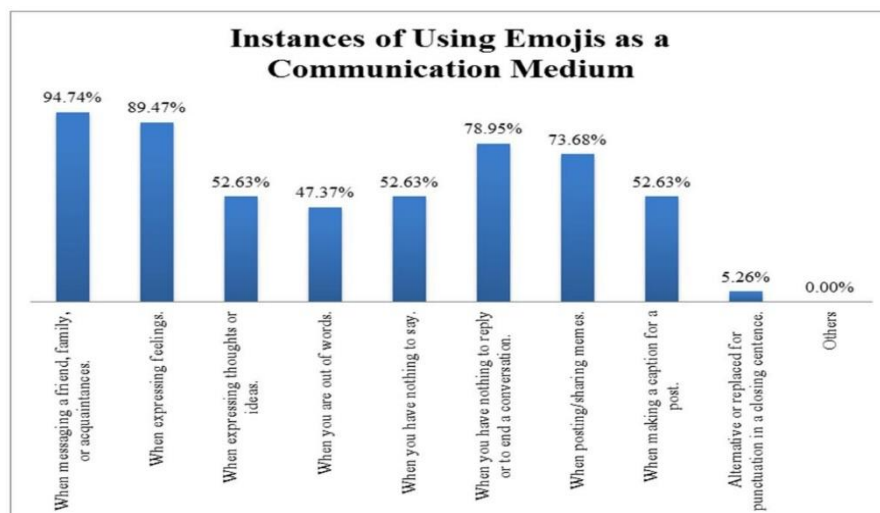


\*Multiple response

Figure 3. Social Media Platforms Where Emoji is Used as Communication Medium

**Instances where Emoji is Used as Communication Medium.** Figure 4 shows the instances where emojis are used as a communication medium. 93.73% (18 out of 19) of students stated that they often use emojis when sending messages to friends, family members, or acquaintances. In comparison, 5.56% (10 out of 19) of them use emoji as an alternative or substitute for punctuation marks in sending a message.

In a previously published study by Kelly and Watts (2015), it was established that most respondents used emojis to make the text easier to understand with the principal objective of conveying emotions. Similarly, Kaye et al. (2016) found that emojis function primarily to clarify a message's true communicative intent, helping convey its emotional meaning



\*Multiple response

Figure 4. Instances where Emoji is Used as a Communication Medium

## Conclusion

It is evident that now popular emojis enhance communication, particularly among college students, but the reasons for their use, the meanings each suggests, and the contexts where they are usually taken vary. Thus, the practice demonstrates the need for a better understanding of emoji usage in various situations. The factors influencing how emojis are interpreted also provide more insights into their usage and impact on communication are explored. Further studies on these aspects would help confirm, validate, and establish how best to communicate with emojis, enhance academic support for this growing technology, and likely add to the current volume of literature. Finally, this research offers insights into the comprehensive nature of emoji as a communication medium that would serve as a basis for further research.

## Acknowledgment

The process of writing a research paper requires a lot of time and effort. We are fortunate to have kind-hearted individuals who became our support system to complete this undertaking. Sincerest gratitude and acknowledgment to the participants who shared with us their time and data to realize our objectives; to the Aklan State University College of Teacher Education for allowing us to pursue and accomplish

our task; to our families and friends who inspired us to move forward; and to our source of life and light – the Almighty Father for all this glory.

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