

Encoding Digital Discourse: Exploring Gender-Specific Emoji Preferences and Their Interpretation in Digital Communication

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Abstract

The current study sought to figure out emoji preference and how females and males use emojis in messaging platforms. The study explores gender-specific emoji preferences and usage patterns, examining differences in emoji selection and substitution for words or letters between genders. The sample comprised 124 students (male=66; Female=58), with a mean age of 26 years, taken through google form by using convenience sampling technique. Due to the qualitative research design, Data was collected through an adaptive questionnaire by Jönköping University. A sampling methodology was used to gather data to analyze gender differences in emoji usage preferences. The survey findings revealed that males use more emojis than females. Participants' reasons for using emojis in instant messaging differed between genders; females used them to illustrate a state of emotion, while males used them for easy, fun, and quick. The study supports previous research suggesting that people prefer using emojis over words. The greater gender difference was found in emojis preference among respondents. This research is distinctive due to its large sample size, which enhances its generalizability compared to previous studies. Future research should consider including more developed items in questionnaires to influence participant responses and potentially lead to different outcomes.

Keywords: Digital Communication, Emojis Preferences, Emotional State, Gender differences

Introduction

In the vast range of digital communication, where words struggle to represent the complexity of human expression, emojis emerge as invisible heroes, playing a vital role in shaping the emotional insight of our digital experiences. In the modern era, when no one has enough time to communicate with each other effectively, people use emojis to exhibit their emotions in a short time with efficiency. There are several reasons why people use emojis on such a high level, but writers say that when words fail, emojis are succeeded. There is no doubt that emojis have already penetrated our lives, either personally or in professionally. But what does the term “emoji” mean? It's a combination of two Japanese terms. The Japanese words 'e' and 'moji' indicate picture and character, respectively. Emojis, first used in Japan in 1999, have since become widely used in communication (Mayer, 2020). Since then, emojis are frequently used in a variety of communication ways, including social media postings, text messages, emails, and even in online learning. The majority of the population connected with social media and communication use them a lot in their conversation. Marketers use emojis to make content attractive and unique.

Furthermore, gamers use them to enhance gaming experience and to facilitate conversation, indicating that they also use gaming platforms and use emojis to add frequent expressions (Graham, 2019).

Other than that, to create e-learning areas more engaging and interactive, emojis also help learners in the education world. It has also been observed that healthcare systems use them to make patient-professional relationships more effective in expressing their feelings and collaboration. In short, emojis have become a necessity in modern communication almost

in an extensive range of areas. Where emojis give easiness and make messages colorful and full of emotions, at the same time, their usage brings a lot of risks in digital communications in terms of misunderstanding, illustrating the exact state of emotions, and many more. Understanding the differences in emoji usage between genders is an essential area to highlight, as the same emoji can represent different things to men and women. Females understand the emoji 🌟 as gorgeous, whereas males interpret it as love, happiness, beauty, thankfulness, and enthusiasm. Similarly, the thumbs-up emoji 👍 is used by males for basic acknowledgment, while females use it for encouragement, approval, and enthusiasm, indicating agreement or approval. Therefore, it's become important to analyze the interpretation between genders to avoid misinterpretation etc.

Literature review

Studies show gender differences in emotional expression, with females being more emotionally expressive than males, as reported by various researchers (Brody & Hall, 2010; Kring & Gordon, 1998). Previous researchers have found differences between genders in emoji use and views toward them. Study findings revealed that female respondents used emoji at a higher rate (92%), compared to males (78%), and 'others' (79%).

In addition, study by Doiron (2018) revealed that emojis may be developed with an instructional design approach that would help students learning through shared visual features across current social and educational media contexts. This study also looks at how emojis are now used in business and education. Research results showed that emojis are used by customers for many purposes like communication with friends and family, selection of products, and service reviews.

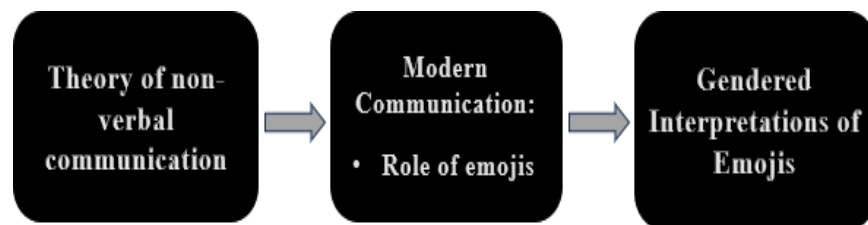
The choice of emoji can influence the way and intention of message. Users should consider and carefully select the emoji in their conversation as it could influence the way their message is received. Bai et al., in 2019

worked on emojis to discover their development, usage, and their functions in separate areas.

Mokhtari and Mostefaoui (2021) investigated the distinctive usage of emojis among different genders. Their research indicated that emoji is frequently used and the pictorial representations are influencing online written language in terms of grammar and pragmatic functions. Indeed, males out performed females in terms of emoji expertise. The results showed that emojis share many similarities with natural language.

Erle and Schmid (2022) aimed to evaluate how effectively emojis carry emotionalism and explain dissertation in digital communication compared to facial expressions, using the Emotion as Social Information (EASI) prototypical.

Theoretical framework:



Nonverbal communication is a sum of evolution, and many generations of interpreting emotions through non-spoken means raised the concept of emojis in the 1980s in modern communication. Emoticons are necessary to grasp what is being communicated and based on gender; it provides rich data in understanding online non-verbal communication. Current research also based on the same purpose i.e. identifying out which emojis individuals like and how men and women utilize them on messaging platforms was the primary objective of the present study.

Research Questions

Emoji preferences can be extremely individualized due to personal characteristics such as personality and locality may influence how people

interpret and use emojis, regardless of gender, we will explore the following questions.

RQ1: What differences are there between men and women in using emojis to avoid miscommunication and to demonstrate a state of emotion by replacing words or letters?

RQ2: Are men more likely than women to use a greater number of emojis?

Objectives

- To explore gender-specific emoji preferences and usage patterns.
- To evaluate the differences in emoji choices for substitution of words or letters among males and females.

Methodology

Participants

The study was conducted by taking a sample of 124 individuals (Male=66, Female=58) from google form Karachi and some interior areas of Sindh. The age of participants ranged from 14 to 62 years (M=26). Participants were selected through a convenience sampling technique. A total of 127 questionnaires were filled out by participants but few were rejected. Demographics of participants included gender and age.

Measures

Jönköping University Questionnaire:

The Jönköping University questionnaire was created by Persson (2019) under the supervision of Annika Denke for the analysis of emoji usage. The current study used the same questionnaire to explore gender-specific emoji preferences and their interpretation of digital communication. There are four items on the questionnaire containing both open and close-ended questions. Participants had to give subjective responses because of a qualitative questionnaire/study. Two of the questions can only be answered

with yes or no. One was descriptive, and the last one was about selecting the emojis they use.

Procedure

A survey comprised of both closed and open-ended questions was administered by employing the social media network WhatsApp. There was no time limit to attempt questions. Participation was entirely optional, and participants had the choice to stop at any time. The participants knew basic English and their age ranged between the years of 14 to 62. The questionnaire was presented to 58 women and 66 men, with the purpose to figure out whether there are differences in the ways that men and women utilize emojis to express emotions and avert miscommunication by switching letters and words for emoticons (see appendix A).

In a form on Google, those who took part were asked two questions about their age and gender, as well as specifically about their socio-demographic information. Using two separate questions, individuals were asked if they use emoticons in their quick messaging—whether they're doing so generally or if you do so to substitute the usage of actual words or letters. Each of the thirty emojis that were available, the participants were prompted to choose at least one that they use the most consistently in instant messaging (see Appendix B). In regard to swapping real words or letters within text messages, it occurred in a different question overall. Lastly at the end of the google form, the participants were thanked for their participation.

Emojis from Appendix A were chosen upon global utmost popular emojis, as tracked by Twitter's live emoji tracker (Emoji Tracker, 2018). Keeping that table in concentration, the various emoticon shall now be mentioned by their respective identity.

Emoji preferences

To assess which emojis are favored by females and males, participants were prompted to decide on whichever among the 30 emojis supplied in

the questionnaire (see Appendix A) they most frequently utilize in instantaneous texting. Entirely applicants reported that they employed emojis into instantaneous conversations, and all of the respondents were incorporated in the evaluation. To analyze the data, a computation was made based on the total number of instances where every of the thirty emojis were highlighted among the 124 respondents. The participants' responses were classified by gender and rated according to how the emojis were presented in the questionnaire.

Emoji usage as a replacement:

To determine gender differences in emoji usage, respondents were required to replace words or letters whether they used emojis. Participants were additionally questioned about the reasons they utilized or did not use emoticons to substitute words and letters.

Themes of responses

The information provided in the participants' replies to word or letter replacement questions was used to group them into themes. Each theme was assigned a code to identify them and facilitate the investigation of the topics based on participant responses. The themes were:

Avoid risking negative misinterpretation;

Illustrate my state of emotion;

Don't use emojis;

Easy, fun, or quick.

Out of these themes, "to avoid miscommunication and "to demonstrate a state of emotion" were mainly two themes to check whether are there any differences between genders when they use emojis in terms of replacing words or letters.

Data Analysis

After getting answers from each participant, scores were summed up manually. Data was available in an Excel sheet but scoring of emoji preference out of 30 variables, separately for males and females conducted manually. Thematic analysis was used to identify, analyze, and report patterns within qualitative data which was conducted manually as well.

Results

Demographic Analysis (n=124)

<u>Description</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>
Gender		
Male	66	--
Female	58	--
Age		
16-31	88	69.8%
32-47	33	26.19%
48-62	05	3.96%

Age and gender were asked by the participants. There were 66 males and 58 females in all. The average age was discovered to be 26.4 years.

Results are shown in two orders: which emoji is most preferred by males and females (Table no 2), and whether there is a difference in order to swapping words or letters genders (Table no 3).

Participants' responses on replacing words/letters:

According to the themes, the opinions of the respondents about the substitution of emojis for phrases or letters were compiled and organized.

Avoid risking negative misinterpretation.

In this category, several females responded more as compared to males with a ratio of 33.4% and 22.7%. The ratio suggested that females use emojis more to avoid misunderstood in instant messaging compared to males. Females use emojis to avoid misunderstanding their meanings and assume others feel rude if they don't use them.

Emphasize emotion state:

Within this group, both males and females claimed they would utilize emoji to express their emotions. However, the female ratio as compared to males is higher in this category too i.e. 37% and 27%. This indicates that both genders especially females utilize emojis to emphasize their emotional state.

Easy, fun, or quick:

Participants use emojis for word replacement due to their ease, speed, and convenience, without requiring correct writing, providing language variation, and saving time. They stated that it brings fun to utilize them in instant messages. In this category, males have a higher ratio of 34% in contrast to females with a 20.7% ratio.

Avoid using emojis.:

Under this theme, respondents stated they avoid emojis in order to swap phrases or letters in texting as words have their own meaning, they can't clearly explain what we want to say. Those that fit within this group additionally provided opinions that using emojis are pictures and they don't allow in Islam, that's why they don't use emojis. The ratio in this category is higher in males in contrast to females which is 15% and 7%.

Preference of emojis by males and females:

Male and female replies were counted the number of times each of the thirty participants tagged all emojis presented. A quantitative study was performed; male and female replies were compared and categorized in accordance with the sequence presented on the questionnaire. There were

no emojis that were not utilized in 30 of the emojis. According to the findings, out of the thirty emojis accessible men used more than women. Overall, males cleared 374 among 30 emojis, while females marked. Findings for highlighted by both genders are displayed in frequency table 1 that follows.

Table 1:

Emojis	Number of female users (out of 58 females)	Number of male users (out of 66 males)
E-1 😭	45	45
E-2 ❤️	35	41
E-3 🥰	10	19
E-4 😭	16	13
E-5 😊	7	17
E-6 😏	6	8
E-7 💕	9	16
E-8 🥰	8	15
E-9 😏	4	5
E-10 🙌	8	17
E-11 😏	4	8

E-12 😄	8	9
E-13 😊	3	5
E-14 😊	3	11
E-15 👍	22	34
E-16 😊	11	14
E-17 😊	7	9
E-18 😂	10	10
E-19 🙏	7	17
E-20 😭	7	8
E-21 😎	7	8
E-22 🙌	5	5
E-23 💜	6	3
E-24 ✌️	1	5
E-25 🤔	2	2
E-26 😊	5	2
E-27 😐	3	4
E-28 😄	6	11

E-29 🍌	5	9
E-30 🙄	1	3

Table 1: Emojis selected by both genders are presented in a frequency table

According to findings, among the most popular emoji among both genders respondents is E-1, "face with tears of joy" (Appendix A). Emoji E-5, "Smiling face with smiling eyes" has a higher difference of 10 between males and females in total of 29 emojis. Furthermore, the majority of the 30 emojis provided to all participants showed minimal changes between genders.

Using Emojis to replace actual words or letters: Males and females:

Response to replacing	Females			Males		
	P	R	%	P	R	%
Easy, fun and quick	10	16	21.0%	23	29	33.33%
Avoid risking negative Misinterpretation	17	25	32.8%	11	20	22.9%
Illustrate my state of emotion	25	29	38.1%	20	24	27.58%
Don't use emojis	6	6	7.89%	14	14	16.09%

Total	58	76	100%	66	87	100%
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Table 2: Results from men and women about word and letter substitution.

Emojis became more popular than words or letters amongst men because their usage was simple, entertaining, and could be utilized to communicate a wide range of emotions. However, women favored using emojis in place of words or letters predominantly because it avoids risking negative misinterpretation, and to illustrate a state of emotions. Above table: represents the ratio % of Men's and women's remarks with regard to the particular groups stating whether or not they exchange actual words or letters with emojis. Results indicate that there are differences between males and females in order to substituting real words or letters by the emoji usage, by approving the hypothesis.

Discussion

This study explored the differences between men and women preferences when they replace words or letters with emojis in instant messages.

The outcomes of the research revealed that males used more emojis in instant messages than females. This could lead to males requiring a wider choice of emojis to illustrate them in texting, although women might not feel the same desire to convey her-self via emoticons in instant messaging. Inequalities among genders may imply that males are more expressive in digital communication than females.

In contrast, women demonstrate stronger expression during discussions in person. These are suggested by previous studies as well. A study of Brody and Hall, (2010) and Kring and Gordon (1998) showed the same results in which they proved that women are more expressive than men stereotypically. It showed that there are gender differences between men and women in terms of replacing words with emojis in messages. The study reveals those men preferred emojis more than females; this information is not enough to provide significance of emoji usage

indicating that there is not a significant difference in their usage across gender groups.

Another thing is that gender difference also exist among utilizing emojis, was also considered in this study. Wirza in 2020, researched on it and showed that in online communication, differences exist while using emojis between genders particularly while selecting emoticons kinds.

To explain the differences in emoji usage and choice, there has always been a motivation behind it. In instant messages, in both categories, a great deal of respondents selected the same emojis. Results also similar with (Kelly & Hutson-Comeaux, 1999) found that over reactions to happy and sad events were more common in women's interpersonal context, while they were more common in men's achievement context. Furthermore, men made an even bigger total and difference-wise impact on this study than did women.

At the same time, previous research by Wolf,(2000), similar to some extent where same-gender groups of females utilized emojis that concentrated on pleasant feelings, much like the females did in the current study. His study also showed that female respondents' reasons to include emojis during instant chats were to represent a certain state of mind, as indicated by the findings of this study with female participants. Research respondents claimed that they utilized emojis instead of letters as it is quick and protects time.

Conclusion

Based on the above findings, it can be concluded that males are more prone to use emojis, as well as both men and women gave interesting comments about which types of emoji they like. The males were interested in using emojis having aim to be easy, amusing, or faster. The women believed that the primary role of emojis was to illustrate a state of emotion. It appears that men rely on emojis to convey their messages while interacting through digital communications.

Limitations and Recommendations

Due to unavailability of specific scales and perfect questionnaires for emoji analysis, this questionnaire had to be used. Perhaps could be additional and better-crafted questions to impact participants and researchers to give and extract more effective results. Furthermore, emoji preferences can vary greatly from person to person. Personal factors such as age, personality, and area may influence how people interpret and use emojis, regardless of gender.

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Appendix (A)

The main variable Emoji:

Each emoji has been given a designation, such as E1 – E30 in the table 1 below.

	Face with tears of joy	E-1
	Red heart	E-2
	Smiling face with heart-shaped eyes	E-3
	Loudly Crying face	E-4
	Smiling face with smiling Eyes	E-5
	Unamused face	E-6
	Two hearts	E-7
	Face throwing a kiss	E-8
	Weary face	E-9
	OK hand sign	E-10
	Pensive face	E-11

	Grinning face with smiling	E-12
	Eyes	
	Smirking face	E-13
	Winking face	E-14
	Thumbs up sign	E-15
	White smiling face	E-16
	Relieved face	E-17
	Smiling face with open mouth and cold sweat	E-18
	Person with folded hands	E-19
	Crying face	E-20
	Smiling face with sunglasses	E-21
	Person raising both hands in Celebration	E-22
	Purple heart	E-23
	Victory hand	E-24
	Sleeping face	E-25
	Smiling face with open mouth	E-26





	Expressionless face	E-27
	Face with stuck out tongue and winking eye	E-28
	Clapping hands sign	E-29
	Disappointed face	E-30

Table 1: emojis description

Appendix B

Kindly read the statement below before providing demographics, as your consent is required for participation in the research

“By filling this form I’m giving my full consent to participate in the research. I’ve been informed about the nature and purpose of the research and I’m fully aware that my participation is voluntary and have the right to withdraw from the research at any time without providing any reason. I also understand that any data that I may provide during the research, will be kept entirely confidential and that it could also be used in any future reports or presentations by the research team”.

Gender: Male [] Female [] Other [] Age: .

Do you use emojis in instant messages?

- If yes: which of the following emojis, do you most often use in instant messages? Mark one or more emojis which you most probably would use.



- Do you use emojis in instant messages in order to replace your use of actual words/letters?

Yes [] No []

Please explain why you use or don't use emojis in order to replace your actual words/letters within instant messages.
