



Emojis As Digital Cues: Their Influence On Interpersonal Communication Satisfaction Among Adolescents

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Abstract

The rapid expansion of digital communication has significantly transformed interpersonal interactions, particularly among adolescents. In the absence of non-verbal cues such as facial expressions and tone of voice, emojis have emerged as important paralinguistic tools that enhance emotional expression and message clarity. The present study investigates the influence of emoji usage on interpersonal communication satisfaction among teenagers in the tricity of Chandigarh. A sample of 67 adolescents was selected, and data were collected using self-constructed Emoji Usage and Communication Satisfaction scales administered through Google Forms. Descriptive statistics and Pearson's coefficient of correlation were used for analysis. The findings reveal that emojis are widely used, especially in informal and close relationships, primarily to express emotions and clarify message tone. A strong positive correlation ($r = 0.874$, $p < 0.01$) was found between emoji usage and communication satisfaction, indicating that increased use of emojis is associated with higher levels of satisfaction in communication. The study concludes that emojis function as supportive communicative tools that enrich digital interactions, enhance emotional connectivity, and improve overall communication experiences among adolescents.

Keywords: *Emoji usage, Interpersonal communication, Communication satisfaction, Adolescents, Digital communication.*

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I. Introduction

The rapid growth of digital communication has transformed the way individuals interact and maintain interpersonal relationships (Kaye et al., 2021; Bai et al., 2020). With the widespread use of smartphones and social networking platforms, text-based communication has become a dominant mode of social interaction. However, unlike face-to-face communication, digital conversations often lack nonverbal cues such as facial expressions, tone of voice, and gestures that help convey emotions and intentions. To bridge this gap, emojis have emerged as a popular communicative tool that adds emotional nuance and contextual clarity to written messages.

Emojis are small digital icons used to represent emotions, ideas, and symbolic meanings. Over time, they have evolved from simple yellow smiley faces to a diverse visual language capable of expressing complex emotional states.

Their integration into everyday communication reflects a shift towards more expressive and efficient messaging styles, particularly among adolescents and young adults who rely heavily on instant messaging platforms such as WhatsApp, Instagram, and Snapchat (Prada et al., 2021).

The use of emojis plays a significant role in shaping interpersonal communication by enhancing message interpretation and emotional expression (Erle et al., 2022). Because of their rich emotional meanings, emoji are often used to express emotions in online communication (Kaye et al., 2021). Research indicates that users tend to include emojis more frequently in positive interactions and less in negative or conflict-based communication (Riordan, 2021).

Research suggests that emojis can increase communication satisfaction by making conversations more engaging, personal, and emotionally rich (Cavalheiro et al., 2024; Kim et al., 2022). They help clarify the tone

of messages, reduce ambiguity, and may prevent misunderstandings that commonly occur in text-only exchanges. Additionally, emojis allow individuals to express feelings that might otherwise be difficult to articulate through words alone (Jiang et al., 2022).

Emoji usage varies depending on contextual factors such as the nature of the relationship, the purpose of the conversation, and the level of formality of the platform. People tend to use emojis more frequently in informal interactions and when communicating with close friends and family members. This selective usage indicates that emojis are not merely decorative elements but strategic tools that support relational closeness and emotional bonding. Huh (2025) emoji as paralinguistic and nonverbal digital cue enrich communicative exchanges by conveying emotional nuances and increasing expressiveness.

Furthermore, emojis contribute to communication efficiency by enabling users to convey messages quickly while preserving emotional depth. Many individuals replace words or phrases with emojis or combine multiple emojis to communicate complex ideas. Such practices demonstrate how visual symbols are gradually becoming integrated into modern linguistic behavior.

Given their increasing relevance, it is important to understand how emoji usage influences interpersonal relationships, particularly in terms of communication satisfaction and emotional connection.

Therefore, the present study aims to explore the effect of emoji usage on interpersonal relations by examining patterns of emoji use and their relationship with communication satisfaction. Understanding this relationship will provide valuable insights into evolving communication practices and the role of visual language in strengthening social connections in the digital age.

Previous Literature

Bai et al. (2019) provided a comprehensive systematic review of emoji research, examining their development, usage patterns, functions, and applications across multiple academic fields. The researchers noted that emoji have become increasingly prominent visual symbols which help in compensating for the absence of nonverbal cues in digital interactions. Emoji are widely used because of their simplicity, convenience, and ability to facilitate emotional expression, reduce ambiguity, and enhance contextual understanding in online communication. The authors identify two primary functions of emoji: emotional and semantic. Emoji can intensify or clarify emotions while also conveying meaning as supportive nonverbal cues within text. The review also highlights that emoji usage and interpretation is shaped according to different factors like demographic and cultural characteristics, and also technological platforms.

Erle et al. (2022) examined the role of emojis as social cues in digital communication by drawing on the Emotion as Social Information (EASI) model, which explains how emotional expressions influence interpersonal understanding and behavior. The researchers conducted eleven high-powered experiments to evaluate whether emojis function similarly to facial expressions in face-to-face interactions. Their findings revealed that messages containing emojis were perceived as more emotionally intense and carried more extreme positive or negative valence compared to messages without emojis. The study further demonstrated that emojis enhance emotional clarity in text-based conversations. In line with the EASI framework, emojis triggered affective processes such as emotion contagion and inferential processes that improved message understanding, which in turn fostered behavioral intentions like empathic concern.

Jindal et al. (2022) examined the impact of emojis on message-based conversations across social media platforms, emphasizing how subtle variations in emoji use can significantly alter communication outcomes. The study demonstrated that changing an emoji in the same text message led to notable differences in recipients' responses highlighting the role of visual cues in digital interaction. The findings suggest that emojis act as tools that enrich textual communication by conveying tone and intent. They can transform message meaning, guide interpersonal reactions, and enhance the effectiveness of social media conversations.

Kim et al. (2022) explored the role of emoji in improving online communication between professor and students in terms of learning motivation and sustained attention. The study tested whether including emojis in a professor's welcome email would affect students' perceptions of authenticity and intimacy with the professor. The study was conducted on a sample of 297 students from public universities in United States. The results found that emojis significantly increased students' perceived authenticity and intimacy toward the professor compared to messages without emojis. The students perceived the professor as friendly when he used emojis in welcome letter. Also students' attention and motivation improved during his online classes.

Caspi & Raz (2024) conducted three studies to test the usage and interpretation of messages in which text and emojis convey incongruent meaning. The first study used a sample of 723 individuals and aimed to describe usage of emoji and motivation to add them to text. It found that 84.2% add emoji in at least half of their text communication. More people use emoji to strength their message whereas very few use it to weaken the message. The second study used a sample of 309 individuals and found that participants use emojis spontaneously in their messages irrespective of close and distant relationships. The third study used a sample of 296 individuals. It found that the lack of congruence between the text and emojis obscure the meaning of

message and make it less comprehensible. In incongruent messages the emotional state of sender shifts towards the sentiment that the emoji conveys rather than the text.

Cavalheiro, Prada, and Rodrigues (2024) investigated how reciprocal emoji use influences interpersonal perceptions and communication outcomes in computer-mediated work interactions. The authors argue that emojis complement written messages by clarifying meaning and shaping how communicators are perceived, often increasing impressions of warmth and positivity. Using two experimental studies with a combined sample of 568 participants, the researchers analyzed whether using emojis—and matching an interlocutor’s emoji use—affected perceptions of colleagues and message quality. Study 1 found that emoji use led to higher perceptions of warmth, playfulness, and message positivity. Positive emojis were particularly effective in improving communication quality. However, Study 2 revealed that contextual factors such as conflict moderated these effects. In lower-conflict situations, interlocutors were perceived as warmer, more competent, and less confrontational regardless of reciprocity, suggesting that relational context can outweigh emoji effects. The findings also indicated that some emojis may have limited influence during tense interactions, highlighting that emoji effectiveness depends on situational context.

Objectives

1. To study the usage of emojis in interpersonal communication by the teenagers of tricity of Chandigarh.
2. To study the relationship between usage of emojis in interpersonal communication and communication satisfaction among teenagers of tricity of Chandigarh.

Hypothesis

- There is no significant correlation between usage of emojis in interpersonal communication and communication satisfaction among the teenagers of tricity of Chandigarh.

Sample

A Sample of 67 teenagers was taken from the population of teenagers studying in various schools of tricity of Chandigarh. A Google form was prepared and mailed to the sample students for collection of data.

Tools

Following tools were used to collect the data:

1. Emoji usage scale- constructed by the investigators.
2. Communication satisfaction scale constructed by the investigators.

Procedure

The research was conducted to study the relationship between usage of emojis in interpersonal communication and communication satisfaction by teenagers of Chandigarh tricity. A sample of 67 teenagers was taken to study the problem at hand. Emoji usage scale and Communication satisfaction scale constructed by the investigators were administered to collect the data. The data was collected through Google forms. The data were subjected to statistical analysis. The results and conclusions were drawn out from there.

Statistical tools

Descriptive statistics and Pearson’s coefficient of correlation technique was used to analyze the data.

Analysis of Data

Table 1: Usage of emojis in interpersonal communication by the teenagers

S.No.	Items	Components	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1.	I frequently use emojis while texting.	Frequency and form of usage	35.8	37.3	16.4	6	4.5
2.	I prefer using emojis than typing long text messages.		7.5	20.9	37.3	28.4	6
3.	Most of my texts contain at least one emoji.		20.9	25.4	26.9	19.4	7.5
4.	Using emojis is an important part of how I communicate online.		23.9	37.3	14.9	14.9	9
5.	I often combine		17.9	26.9	25.4	17.9	11.9

	multiple emojis to express complex ideas or emotions.						
6.	I generally use emotional emojis as well as symbolic emojis.		14.9	37.3	31.3	14.9	1.5
	Average		20.15	30.85	25.37	16.92	6.73
7.	I use emojis more when communicating with close friends and family than when communicating with others	Context of usage	35.8	35.8	11.9	14.9	1.5
8.	I use emojis on informal platforms like WhatsApp and Instagram) than on formal platforms like email.		61.2	32.8	1.5	3	1.5
9.	I use emojis differently depending on the purpose of the conversation, such as casual chatting, giving support etc		38.8	41.8	14.9	1.5	3
10.	I use emojis to enhance the tone of my message		32.8	37.3	16.4	7.5	6
	Average		42.15	36.925	11.175	6.725	3
11.	I use emojis to express my emotions		26.9	50.7	9	7.5	6
12.	I use emojis to save time by making my messages shorter	Reason for usage	7.5	34.3	29.9	23.9	4.5
13.	I sometimes replace entire words/phrase with emojis.		9	20.9	19.4	31.3	19.4
14.	I feel emojis help to avoid misunderstanding in text based communications		13.4	50.7	20.9	10.4	4.5
	Average		14.2	39.15	19.8	18.27	8.6

Table 1 shows the usage of emojis in the form of frequency of usage, context of usage and reason for usage. Frequency and form of usage

Interpreting the frequency of usage of emojis, a majority of respondents indicated regular emoji usage, with 73.1% agreed to it. Only 10.5% expressed disagreement. This suggests that emojis are a common feature of everyday digital conversations among respondents. Responses to the ‘use emojis than typing long text messages’, were more divided. While 28.4% agreed or strongly agreed, a substantial 34.4% disagreed and 37.3% remained neutral. This indicates that although emojis are used frequently, they are not necessarily preferred over detailed textual expression.

Nearly half of the respondents (46.3%) agreed that most of their messages include at least one emoji, whereas 26.9% were neutral and 26.9% disagreed. This reflects moderate integration of emojis into routine messaging.

A significant proportion (61.2%) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, ‘Using emojis is an important part of how I communicate online,’ suggesting that emojis are perceived as an essential communicative tool in online interaction. However, 23.9% expressed disagreement, indicating variability in perceived importance.

44.8% respondents agreed that they often combine multiple emojis to express complex ideas or emotions whereas 29.8% disagreed and 25.4% were neutral. This shows that while some respondents creatively use multiple emojis for nuanced expression, others rely more on text or single symbols. More than half of the respondents (52.2%) agreed with the statement that they generally use emotional emojis as well as symbolic emojis indicating versatility in emoji usage. The relatively low disagreement (16.4%) suggests that respondents employ emojis both for emotional expression and symbolic representation.

Overall, findings under this component indicate that emojis are frequently used and valued, but they function more as complementary elements rather than substitutes for text.

Context of Usage

Interpretation relating to context of usage shows that a strong majority (71.6%) agreed or strongly agreed to the statement that they use emojis more when communicating with close friends and family than when communicating with others, demonstrating that relational closeness significantly influences emoji usage. This implies that emojis are perceived as informal and emotionally expressive tools suited for intimate communication.

An overwhelming 94% agreement indicates that platform like WhatsApp and Instagram strongly determines emoji use. Emojis are clearly associated with informal digital spaces rather than professional or formal communication environments. A large majority (80.6%) agreed, showing that respondents adapt emoji usage according to communicative intent, such as casual chatting or providing support. This reflects strategic and context-sensitive emoji behavior. Approximately 70.1% agreed with this statement, suggesting that emojis play a significant role in clarifying tone and emotional nuance in text-based communication.

The findings under this component clearly demonstrate that emoji usage is highly context-dependent and socially adaptive.

Reason for Usage

Interpreting the reason for usage of emojis it was found that, 77.6% respondents showed a strong endorsement to the statement “I use emojis to express my emotions.” Emotional expression emerged as the primary motivation for emoji usage, highlighting their role in compensating for the lack of non-verbal cues in digital communication.

Mixed responses were seen for the statement, “I use emojis to save time by making my messages shorter.” 41.8% agreed, 29.9% were neutral, and 28.4% disagreed. This indicates that efficiency is not the dominant reason for emoji use; instead, respondents may prioritize expressiveness over brevity.

A majority (50.7%) disagreed with the statement, “I sometimes replace entire words/phrases with emojis,” suggesting that respondents generally do not substitute text entirely with emojis. Emojis appear to supplement rather than replace verbal communication. A substantial 64.1% agreed that emojis reduce misunderstanding/ misinterpretation. This indicates that respondents perceive emojis as tools that enhance clarity and reduce ambiguity in digital messaging.

Overall, the primary reasons for emoji usage are emotional expression and tone clarification rather than time-saving or linguistic replacement. Thus, emojis function as supportive communicative aids that enrich digital interaction by adding emotional and contextual depth.

Table 2: showing coefficient of correlation value between Emoji Usage and Communication satisfaction

S.No.	Variable	N	M	SD	R	p-value
1	Emoji Usage	67	49.99	10.688	.874	.000
2	Communication satisfaction	67	36.46	8.416		

Table 2 presents the results of the correlation analysis conducted to examine the relationship between Emoji Usage and Communication Satisfaction among the respondents.

The sample consisted of 67 respondents (N = 67) for both variables, ensuring consistency in comparison. The mean score for Emoji Usage was 49.99 with a standard deviation of 10.688, indicating a moderately high level of emoji usage among participants, with some variability in responses. In comparison, the mean score for Communication Satisfaction was 36.46 with a standard deviation of 8.416, suggesting a moderate level of satisfaction in communication, again with reasonable dispersion.

The Pearson correlation coefficient (r) between Emoji Usage and Communication Satisfaction was found to be 0.874, which indicates a very strong positive correlation. This means that higher levels of emoji usage are strongly associated with higher levels of communication satisfaction among respondents. In other

words, participants who reported greater use of emojis also tended to report greater satisfaction in their communication experiences.

The p-value (.000) is statistically significant at the 0.01 level ($p < 0.01$), indicating that the relationship between the two variables is not due to chance. Since the obtained p-value is less than the conventional significance threshold of 0.05, the null hypothesis (that there is no significant relationship between emoji usage and communication satisfaction) is rejected.

The strength of the correlation ($r = .874$) suggests that emoji usage plays a substantial role in enhancing communication satisfaction. This may be attributed to emojis' ability to convey emotions, clarify tone, reduce misunderstandings, and add expressiveness to digital communication. The high positive correlation implies that as emoji usage increases, communication satisfaction also increases in a nearly proportional manner.

Overall, the findings demonstrate a statistically significant and strong positive relationship between Emoji Usage and Communication Satisfaction among the respondents, highlighting the important role emojis play in improving the quality and satisfaction of digital communication.

II. Discussion

The analysis of the data in the present study reveals the growing significance of emojis in adolescents' digital communication practices. In online environments where non-verbal cues such as facial expressions, tone of voice, and gestures are absent, emojis function as important paralinguistic tools that help convey emotions and clarify the intended tone of a message. Though emotional expression emerges as the primary motivation of emoji usage but it seems to supplement the text rather than replacing it.

The findings further reveal variations in emoji usage patterns among adolescents. While some respondents creatively combine multiple emojis to communicate nuanced emotions or complex meanings, others prefer relying primarily on textual messages. This variation indicates that emoji use is shaped by individual communication preferences. Moreover, emojis appear to serve dual purposes in online interaction: they facilitate emotional expression and also act as symbolic representations of ideas, objects, or shared cultural meanings among peer groups. But the analysis also reveals that emojis are used in personal and informal settings rather than professional or formal. This may be due to the fact that emojis are perceived as informal and expressive tools for intimate communication.

Overall, the results suggest that although emojis are widely used and valued by adolescents, they do not replace written language. Instead, they function as complementary elements that enhance text-based communication by adding emotional context, emphasis, and creativity to digital interactions.

The study further shows a strong positive correlation (significant at .01 level) between emoji usage and communication satisfaction. It suggests that emoji usage plays a substantial role in enhancing communication satisfaction. It may be due to the fact that emojis are able to convey complex emotions which are difficult to express through text alone. It also helps to reduce ambiguity and help the receiver interpret the sender's feelings more accurately so there is reduced risk of misunderstanding. Also, it makes the conversations more engaging, visually enriching and enjoyable. When the adolescents feel better understood, emotionally connected, their level of communication increases.

III. Conclusion

The present study highlights the significant role of emojis in enhancing interpersonal communication satisfaction among adolescents. The findings indicate that emojis are not merely decorative elements but meaningful communicative tools that enrich digital interactions. They play a complementary role in supporting and enhancing verbal communication rather than substituting for text.

Future research may explore larger and more diverse samples, as well as examine the role of cultural differences and evolving digital trends in shaping emoji usage and its impact on communication outcomes.

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