



The Role Of Emojis In Digital Communication: A Study Of The Student Community

¹ Andleeb , ²Prof. Malik Zahra Khalid,

¹ Doctoral Scholar, ² Professor

¹² Media Education Research Centre

¹²University of Kashmir, J&K, India

Abstract:

The emergence of the internet gave rise to a communication tool that we now know as emoticons, which later developed into emojis. Emojis have developed into the condensed form of nonverbal communication. People occasionally even make assumptions about other people's attitudes based on the emojis they use. This has emerged as a contemporary communication trend. Emojis are a way for people to express themselves on social media. Emojis are a type of pictograph. This Japanese term translates to "emotions" or "emotional symbols" in English. Emojis are a graphical representation and the next evolution of emoticons. Emojis have become commonplace, and for a variety of reasons, communication through social media and other online platforms is different from face-to-face communication. In the virtual environments where students engage, emojis are effective tools for fostering relationships, self-expression, and emotional connection. The student population is increasingly using emojis instead of text messages. This study explores the role of emojis in enhancing and altering communication within the student community. Drawing upon the theoretical framework of Uses and Gratification Theory, this research investigates how emojis function as visual symbols that convey emotions, tone, and meaning in online interactions.

Index Terms - Emojis, Communication, Student Community, Digital

I. INTRODUCTION

Communication is a key aspect of life, involving content that is both verbal and nonverbal (e.g., gestures or facial expressions). A hallmark of the post millennial society is the rise of digital communication (Koch & Frees, 2016) and since the advent of multi touch smart phones in 2007; texting has supplanted phone or face-to-face conversations as the most popular method of communication (Smith et al., 2015). The process of interacting with people by exchanging ideas, feelings, information, and thoughts is called communication. Information can be shared orally or in writing, as well as through gestures, signs, symbols, and facial expressions. Gestures and facial expressions make up the non-verbal form of communication, even though written or spoken words and symbols make up the verbal form. Since nonverbal communication can convey attitudes, feelings, and emotions, it is just as significant as verbal communication. Nonverbal cues are just as significant as spoken words when people are speaking to each other in person. A substantial amount of human nonverbal communication consists of facial expressions and gestures. These are non-vocabulary communication signals. Smiles, facial expressions, and other gestures, along with body language (such as how one stands or sits or moves their hands or legs), say a lot more than words, and can even be used to gauge the attitude and feelings of a speaker. The methods of communication

are evolving along with technology. Digital communication is becoming more prevalent than in-person interactions (Kannan, N Shreya, 2017).

The word "emoji" is derived from Japanese word where "e" stands for picture, "mo" for writing, and "ji" for character (Davis & Edberg, 2016). These days, the gadget continues to advance and gets smarter every ten years. As a result, emoticons are adapting their designs to work with a variety of devices. According to Extejt (1998), an emoticon is a combination of letters that depicts a human face and conveys emotion. Emotion and icon are two English words that were combined to create the emoticon terminology (Tomic et al., 2013). According to the Morse code, the number '73' signified "best regard," while the number '88' signified "love and kisses." Later, in 1881, Ambrose Bierce coined the laugh emoticon \ ___ /. This phrase was published in the US magazine Puck and only contains a few punctuation marks. Tomic et al. (2013) claim that that symbol also denotes a smile. A new smiley symbol was made in 1963 by an artist by the name of Harvey Ball. The symbol was yellow color button completed with two black dots as eye and black curve as a mouth. Here was the starting point of the smiley addict and later it was upgraded as emoticon (Tomic et al., 2013).

Professor Scott E. Fahlman created the first smiley emoticon in the digital age in 1982. He made a post on Carnegie Mellon University's general board for science computers (Churches, Baron-Cohen & Ring, 2009). As a result, three decades after Prof. Fahlman's invention, emoticon has become widely used. He used the symbols :-) and :-(to let readers know how he felt about the paragraph that followed. People at that time are unable to distinguish between a serious and sarcastic message in the absence of any symbol of expression (Ibrahim, 2014).

Prof. Fahlman never anticipated that the emoticons would become widely used a few months later. To make it easier to combine on a keyboard, the emoticons' design was improved by incorporating additional punctuation (Tomic et al., 2013). Emoticons became popular and the consequences of its demand, emoticons were modified to turn to be emoji (Davis & Edberg, 2016). The Japanese interface designer, Shigetaka Kurita was the responsible person inventing the old emoticons into the new emoji according to his company's request. Moreover, the emoji was developed for the purpose improving text communication that lacked emotions (Golden, 2015).

Texts messaging via the Internet, WhatsApp, and other such platforms have become one of the most popular forms of digital communication. Though text messaging has proved to be a beneficial way to communicate with others without any face-to-face contact, it suffers from the drawbacks of not communicating the non-verbal cues, particularly emotions and feelings. (Coyle, Maureen, Carmichael, Cheryl, 2019). Emojis have become a universal language, transcending linguistic and cultural barriers, and are widely used across personal, professional, and academic contexts.

Emojis are useful for textual communication because they help with emotional perception, improve comprehension, and provide emotional depth. It has been discovered that emojis stimulate the parts of the brain that process emotions. Additionally, they affect how messages are interpreted, softening directives or emphasizing meanings. Emojis are used to represent emotions such as happiness, sadness, sarcasm, or enthusiasm in text-based communication, which is lacking in vocal tone and facial expressions. Because emojis provide context for neutral or unclear statements, this emotional transparency aids in avoiding misunderstandings. A straightforward statement like "I'm fine" could be read in a variety of ways, but adding a smiling emoji makes it clear that it's meant in a good sense, whereas a sad face might convey frustration (J. Carroll, 2023).

The psychology of emojis shows that their use is not universal; it is deeply influenced by cultural norms and generational differences. Although they must be interpreted contextually, emojis contribute to more dynamic, emotionally impactful communication. Emojis are a flexible and changing method of communication since cultural influences can result in different interpretations and generational preferences influence how they are employed. Incorporating body language, gestures, and facial emotions in in-person interactions, emojis are a digital version of non-verbal communication. By serving as emblems and illustrators, emojis can replace or complement words, clarifying meaning and reducing ambiguity. However, like all non-verbal communication, they are subject to cultural differences and can be interpreted differently across various social and cultural contexts. As such, emojis are not only a tool for emotional expression but also a key element of effective communication in the digital age.

Emojis can be categorized as emblems, which are gestures or symbols that have a widely understood meaning. These emblems can function like physical non-verbal cues such as gestures or body language in face-to-face communication. Emblems have specific meanings attached to them and are recognized by many people in a particular culture. In addition to functioning as emblems, emojis can act as **illustrators**, which

are gestures that **enhance** or **emphasize** verbal communication. They don't have a standalone meaning but provide additional context or intensity to the words being said.

This study explores the role of emojis in digital communication, focusing on the student community. It aims to investigate how students use emojis in their daily digital interactions, the impact of emojis on message interpretation, and the potential implications for emotional expression in an increasingly digital world. Also this study provides a deeper understanding of how emojis function as tools for social bonding, self-expression, and connection among students, while also considering potential drawbacks and challenges.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK:

The study draws upon a theoretical framework from Uses and Gratification to provide a comprehensive understanding of the impact of emojis on students' digital interactions:-

Uses and Gratification Theory: The 1940s saw the inception of the Uses and Gratification Theory (De Oliveira et al., 2016). Katz et al. (1973) assert that the Uses and Gratification Theory explains why people use social networking sites and other media to satisfy their needs and is founded on the genesis of social and psychological needs. Television has previously been the main focus of the Uses and Gratification framework (Bantz, 1982; Eastman, 1979; Schramm, Lyle, and Amp; Parker, 1961), and traditional media (Armstrong and Rubin, 1989). Information, education, guidance, advice, diversion, relaxation, social contact, value reinforcement, cultural satisfaction, emotional release, identity formation, identity confirmation, lifestyle expression, security, sexual arousal, and filling time are among the 16 gratifications that users and audiences can obtain from the media, according to Denis McQuail (2010, p. 427).²⁵¹

The relationship between media choice and user satisfaction is attempted to be explained by Elihu Katz theory of Uses and Gratifications (Ozer, 2016, p. 136). The Uses and Gratifications approach states that in order to satisfy needs and offer satisfaction, attention must be paid to mass media content (McQuail and Amp; Windahl, 1997, pp. 153-154).

It is evident from applying the Uses and Gratification Theory to the function of emojis in digital communication that they meet a variety of user demands. They aid in identity construction, amusement, social connection, emotional expression, and misunderstanding reduction. Because they satisfy social and emotional demands in a fast-paced, text-based communication environment, emojis are more than just decorative symbols; they are essential to improving digital communication.

This comprehension of emojis' function in communication highlights the value of visual clues in our online discussions and implies that emojis are an important instrument in the continuous development of digital communication, particularly among and outside of the student community. In the context of digital communication, the theory can be applied to examine why people use emojis in their online interactions. Emojis, as a form of visual communication, are employed by individuals to fulfill various social, emotional, and functional needs within digital spaces.

III. REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

Emojis, the small graphical symbols representing emotions, objects, and concepts, have become integral components of digital communication. In recent years, researchers have explored their role in facilitating communication, enhancing emotional expression, and shaping social interactions in digital spaces such as social media, messaging platforms, and online forums. This literature review provides an overview of the research concerning the role of emojis in digital communication, the psychology behind their use, their social and cultural implications, and the impact they have on users' experiences.

E.M. Thorsten, S. Karoline, G.H. Simon, M. D. Jared (2021) in their study on Emojis as Social Information in Digital Communication reveals how facial expressions of emotion are evoke affective, inferential, and social responses during face-to-face communication. Since face-to-face communication is increasingly shifting to digital environments, the current study examined the functional equivalency of emojis, their digital counterparts. The general efficacy of emojis in expressing emotion and separating discourse during digital communication, as well as hypotheses regarding their social-emotional characteristics derived from the Emotion as Social Information (EASI) model, were examined in eleven powerful studies. Emoji-containing communications were viewed as having more severe valence and being emotionally more intense than those without.

The study also explores how emojis are not just decorations in digital communication, but key tools for conveying social information, managing interpersonal relationships, and even shaping communication practices in the digital age.

G. Shaista, M. Saira, M. Rubina (2022) in their study on An Analysis of the Digital Communication and use of Emojis reveals how emojis serve as a vital tool for enhancing digital communication; their effectiveness relies on the sender's knowledge of their meaning and the appropriateness of their use. The research indicates that the interpretation of emojis can differ not only between genders but also within genders. This suggests that gender influences how individuals read and respond to emoji symbols in digital communication. This research highlights the dynamic nature of emoji interpretation and the challenges associated with their use in diverse digital environment.

Furthermore the study also emphasizes on the increasing use of mobile phones and messaging applications like WhatsApp, Instagram, and Facebook Messenger has significantly altered the landscape of communication, making it faster and more accessible. Among the tools that have emerged in digital communication, emojis have become an essential aspect of how users express emotions and ideas.

J. Meenakshi, W.Aastha, G. Saumya, G. Devange (2022) in their study on the Impact of Emojis on Message Conversation through Social Media reveals how various people interpret messages with and without emoji, and how the choice of emoji influences the text message's emotional content. Understanding how emoji usage can aid in bridging the gap between in-person and virtual communication makes the study important. Their study also examined the demographic factors influencing emoji use and how these digital symbols influence perceptions of messages in various social contexts. The study also raised concerns regarding the potential for over-reliance on emojis, suggesting that excessive use might lead to a loss of deeper, more nuanced communication, especially in professional or formal contexts.

R. Bushra, A. Tanzila, H.F. Razia (2024) in their study on Emojis Role in the Communication: Interesting and Amazing Expressions reveals how emojis serve to amplify emotionality in digital text, compensating for the absence of nonverbal cues. In cultures valuing collective and emotion-laden communication, women often use emoticons more frequently. They act as nonverbal indicators that affect the emotional reception of messages, the social assessment of senders, and the processing speed of information particularly useful for enhancing communication, successfully expressing emotions, and making a good impression in digital encounters are positive emoticons.

Furthermore, respondents' highlighted emojis are valuable tools in digital communication, contributing to both emotional expression and effective message transmission. They can be deliberately utilized to communicate friendliness and happiness in digital encounters, as positive emoticons tend to increase the sender's perceived warmth.

IV. OBJECTIVES:

- ❖ To study how emojis convey emotions, humour and other nuances in digital communication.
- ❖ To study the influence of student perceptions of emojis in digital spaces.

V. METHODOLOGY:

This paper seeks to explore and understand the role of emojis in digital communication within student community. The universe of study constituted of the student community belonging to different age groups.

A Google survey-based questionnaire was designed to collect the primary data, keeping into the consideration the objectives of the study. In this paper, data was collected sequentially to allow the researcher to obtain a clear insight into the issue under study. The survey consisted of the questions on the level of usage of social media platforms, emojis and their influence, perception and other factors associated with it. Both open and close-ended questions were incorporated. Questionnaires were distributed via google form and the field work took place over a period of 2 months (10 January 2024 - 10 March 2025).

The data for this study were gathered from students across four educational institutions in Kashmir. These institutions include:

- ❖ University of Kashmir
- ❖ Central University of Kashmir
- ❖ Government College for Women, Srinagar
- ❖ Amar Singh College, Srinagar

The survey was administered to students from various disciplines to assess their usage of emojis in digital communication, their emotional impact, and the role they play in social interactions.

For this paper, respondents were selected, which included 80 respondents as sample. To further understand how emojis are incorporated into communication within student communities, an exploratory research approach was employed.

The sample of respondents was selected using purposive sampling, which allows for an in-depth exploration of how emojis are used in various digital spaces, their impact on communication, and the perceptions students have regarding their role in conveying emotions, tone, and social connections. The data were then analyzed, tabulated, and interpreted.

VI. FOCUS OF THE STUDY:

This study explores the role of emojis in digital communication within student community, focusing on how they are used across various digital platforms such as social media and messaging apps. It examines the impact of emojis on communication by looking at their role in conveying emotions, tone, and fostering social connections. Additionally, the study analyses students' perceptions of emojis, exploring how these symbols influence their digital interactions and understanding of messages.

VII. ANALYSIS/FINDINGS:

Data provided by the respondents are presented under the following headings:

❖ Demographic Distribution of the Respondents:

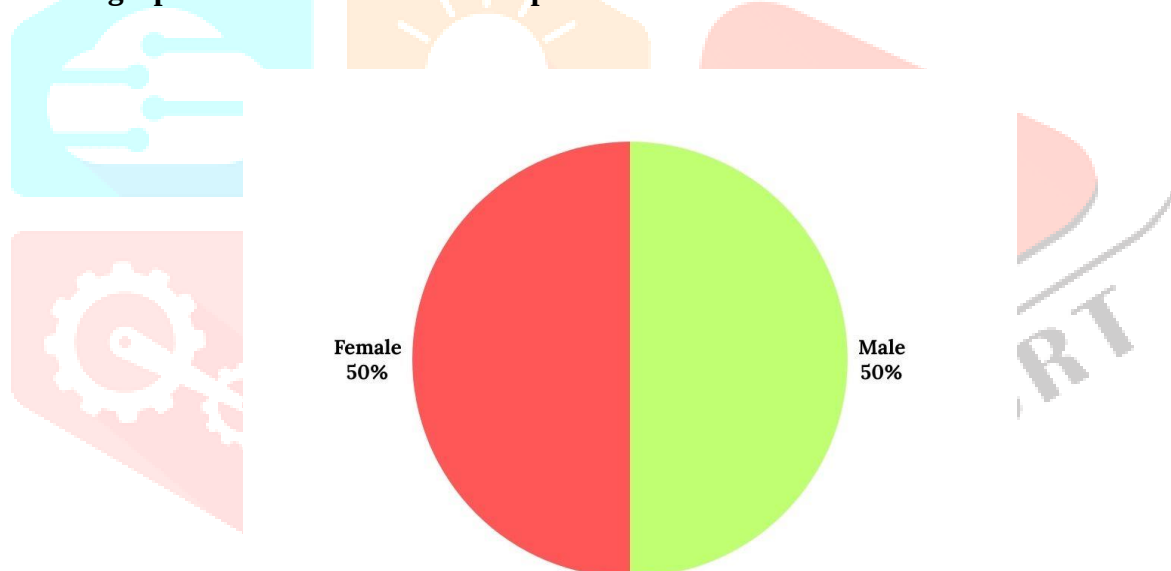


Figure 1
Gender Distribution of the Respondents
Table 1

Gender Distribution of the Respondents	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Male	40	50%
Female	40	50%
Total	80	100%

Out of the respondents who answered the survey, 40 (50%) were males and the remaining 40(50%) were females depicted in figure 1.

❖ Age Distribution of the Respondents:

Age is one of the most important inscriptive factors of stratification and differentiation found in all the societies. After infancy period, age grade become increasingly reflective of economic and cultural factors (Rao, 2001).

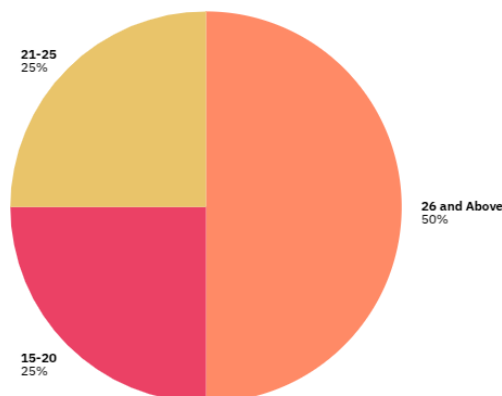


Figure 2
Age Distribution of the Respondents
Table 2

Age	No. Of Respondents	Percentage
15-20	20	25%
21-25	20	25%
26 and Above	40	50%
Total	80	100%

The distribution of data in Table 2 reveals that 40 respondents (50%) belong to the 26 and above age category, 20 respondents (25%) belong to the 21-25 age category, and 20 respondents (25%) belong to the 15-20 age category.

❖ Educational Qualification of the Respondents:

Education plays an important role in shaping ones personality and in becoming the responsible citizens of the society. Education is the development of all those capacities in the individual which will enable him to control his environment and fulfil his responsibilities (Dewey).

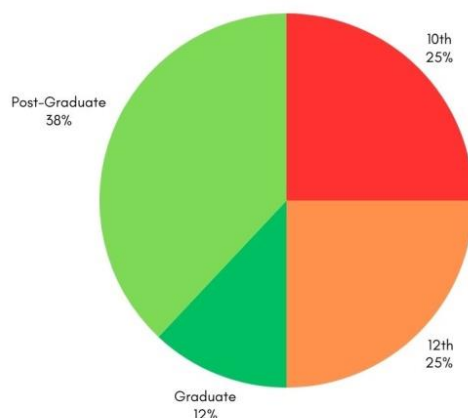


Figure 3

Educational Qualification of the Respondents

Table 3

Educational Qualification of the Respondents	No. of Respondents	Total
10 th	20	25%
12 th	20	25%
Graduate	10	12%
Post-Graduate	30	38%
Total	80	100%

The educational qualifications of the respondents, as shown in Figure 3, reveal that 30 respondents (38%) were postgraduates, 20 respondents (25%) were in 10th class, 20 respondents (25%) were in 12th class, and 10 respondents (12%) were graduates.

❖ Do you use any social media platform/s?

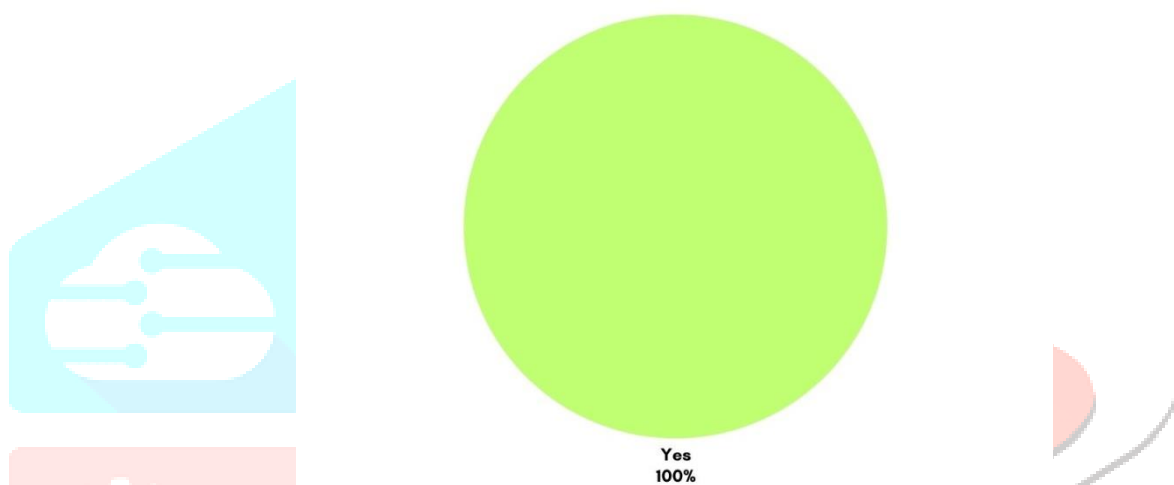


Figure 4
Distribution of the Respondents using Social Media Platform/s

Social Media Platform User	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Yes	80	100%
No	-	-
Total	80	100%

The distribution of the data in Table 4 reveals that 80 (100%) of the respondents use social media platforms.

❖ Do you use emojis in your digital communication?

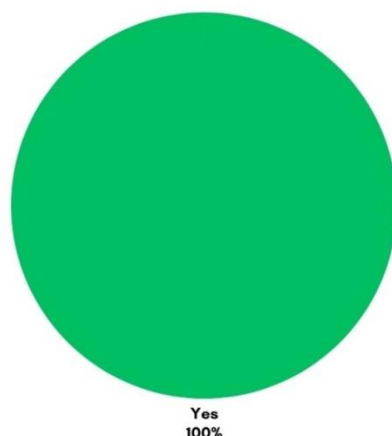


Figure 5
Distribution of the Respondents using Emojis in Digital Communication
Table 5

Respondents using Emojis in Digital Communication	No. of Respondents	Total
Yes	80	100%
No	-	-
Total	80	100%

The distribution of the data in Table 5 reveals that 80 (100%) of the respondents use emojis in digital communication

❖ How often do you use emojis in your digital communication?

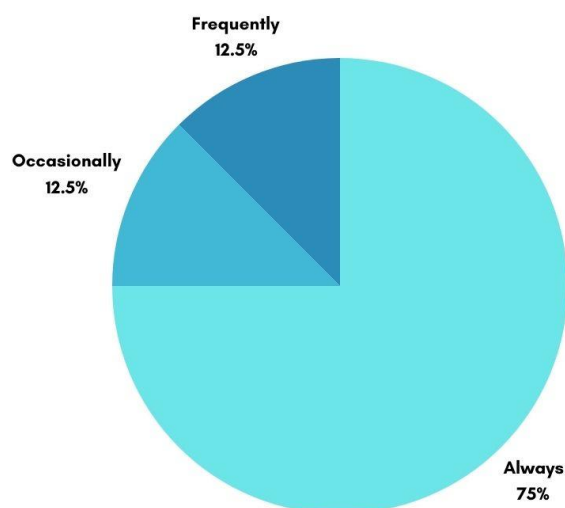


Figure 6
Distribution of the Respondents on their Emoji Usage Pattern
Table 6

Distribution of the Respondents on their Emoji Usage Pattern	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Always	60	75%
Frequently	10	12.5%

Occasionally	10	12.5%
Total	80	100%

The distribution of the data in Table 6 reveals that 60 (75%) of the respondents always use emojis in digital communication, 10 (12.5%) of the respondents use them frequently, and 10 (12.5%) of the respondents use them occasionally.

❖ Which social media platform do you use emojis the most?

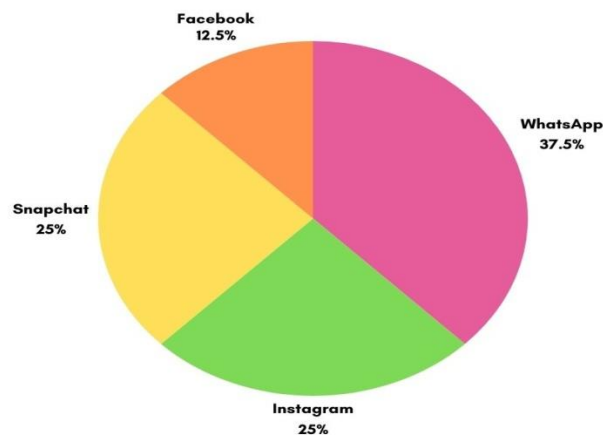


Figure 7

Distribution of the Respondents based on the Emojis most used on Social Media Platform

Table 7

Social Media Platform used for Emojis	No. of Respondents	Percentage
WhatsApp	30	37.5%
Instagram	20	25%
Snapchat	20	25%
Facebook	10	12.5%
Total	80	100%

The distribution of the data in Table 7 reveals that 30 (37.5%) of the respondents use WhatsApp the most for emojis, 20 (25%) respondents use Instagram for emojis, 20 (25%) respondents use Snapchat for emojis, and 10 (12.5%) respondents use Facebook for emojis.

❖ Do you believe emojis can replace words in digital communication?

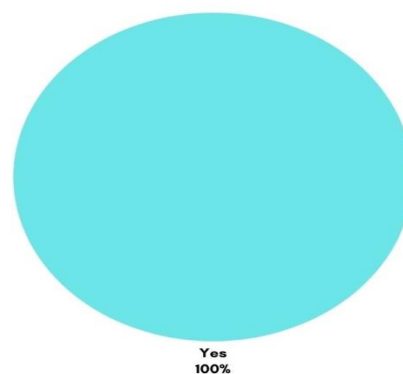


Figure 8

Distribution of the Respondents depending on whether Emojis can replace Words in Digital Communication

Table 8

Distribution of the Respondents based on Emoji Word Replacement	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Yes	80	100%
No	-	-
Sometimes	-	-
Total	80	100%

The distribution of the data in Table 8 reveals that 80 (100%) of the respondents believe emojis can replace words in digital communication.

❖ How do emojis help you express emotions in digital communication?

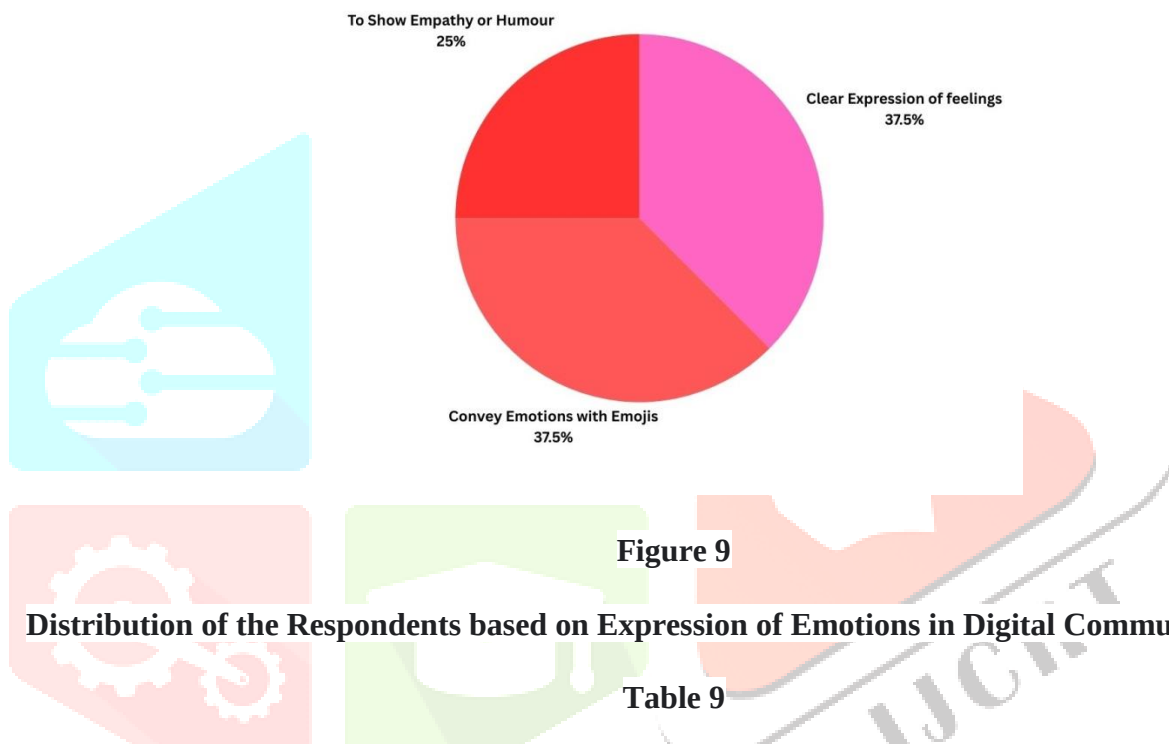


Figure 9

Distribution of the Respondents based on Expression of Emotions in Digital Communication

Table 9

Distribution of the Respondents based on Expression of Emotions	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Clear Expression of feelings	30	37.5%
Convey Emotions with Emojis	30	37.5%
To Show Empathy or Humour	20	25%
Total	80	100%

The distribution of the data in Table 9 reveals that 30 (37.5%) of the respondents use emojis to express feelings clearly, 30 (37.5%) use them to convey emotions, and 20(25%) respondents use them to show empathy or humour.

❖ Which emoji do you use the most?

Distribution of Respondents based on the most used Emoji
Table 10

Distribution of the Respondents based on the most used Emoji	No. of Respondents	Percentage
	10	12.5%
	5	6.25%
	5	6.25%
	2	2.5%
	5	6.25%
	6	7.5%
	5	6.25%
	5	6.25%
	2	2.5%
	4	5%
	4	5%
	10	12.5%
	7	8.75%
	5	6.25%
	5	6.25%
Total	80	100%

The distribution of the data in Table 10 reveals that 10 (12.50%) of the respondents use heart emoji to show love and deep passion, 10 (12.5%) respondents use kissing face with closed eyes to show feelings in charming and heartfelt way, 7 (8.75%) respondents use thinking face emoji to show the person's intelligence or to put idea into question, 6 (7.5%) use kiss mark print to show affectionate or a friendly kiss, love and romance, 5 (6.25%) use smiling face with heart eyes to convey intense love for a place, person or even an object, 5 (6.25%) use revolving hearts emoji which represents the love between two people, 5 (6.25%) use thumbs up emoji to show agreement or commitment, 5 (6.25%) respondents use rolling on the floor laughing emoji to express the moment of joy or amusement, 5 (6.25%) use heartbroken emoji to express sadness and suffering, 5 (6.25%) use hugging face emoji to express warmth and friendliness, 5 (6.25%) use face with look of triumph emoji to show pride, anger, contempt and self confidence, 4 (5%) use sparkling pink heart to show excitement, butterflies in the stomach and admiration, 4 (5%) use green heart

to show friendliness or reconciliation, 2 (2.5%) use face holding tears back emoji to show empathy and compassion, 4 (2.5%) respondents use maple leaf emoji to show arrival of autumn season or feelings of warmth or nostalgia.

VIII. CONCLUSION

The present study provides important insights into the larger subject of digital communication and its effects on student life by revealing the various ways that emojis influence communication. In student communities, emojis play a significant role in building group identity, establishing in-group bonds, and enhancing social cohesion. The study found that emojis are widely employed to convey feelings that are hard to put into words and by incorporating emojis, stuEmojis have been investigated as a pedagogical tool to improve comprehension and engagement in language teaching and learning. Emojis can act as a link between visual and textual literacy, facilitating and enhancing language learning, claims Danesi (2016). They can promote language learners' growth in emotional intelligence and cultural awareness, help explain linguistic concepts, and provide vocabulary context. Furthermore, according to Kelly (2019), emojis can be utilized to support pragmatics and sociolinguistics instruction, assisting students in comprehending the subtleties of communication context, tone, and formality.

dents can create a more nuanced emotional narrative in their conversations.

The study also emphasizes how emojis have become indispensable tools for expressing context, tone, and emotions in digital communication. Respondents also revealed that emojis can facilitate faster and easier communication, but they also run the risk of oversimplifying the complex spectrum of human emotions. A single symbol frequently falls short of capturing the complexity of human emotions. A happy face, for instance, may represent happiness in general, but it is unable to capture the complexity of feelings such as apprehensive excitement, bittersweet joy, or the quiet, introspective joy that may result from a personal accomplishment.

Emojis are a powerful psychological tool for student community that improves their capacity for emotional expression, interpersonal communication, and social space navigation. Emojis make communication more dynamic and emotionally rich, whether it's for self-expression, humor, advocacy, or flirting. They are essential to the emotional and social dynamics of contemporary digital communication because they allow people to express private emotions, social connections, and individual identities in a way that goes beyond conventional words.

By integrating context, color, and a personal touch, the emoji enhance text-based communication by bringing emotional nuances that help express exactly how someone feels. By bridging the gap between digital communications and emotional expression, these little graphics give interactions an increased sense of authenticity. With a variety of connotation associated with each sign, emojis have developed into their own language. These simple illustrations convey deep emotional depth in a brief, visually appealing manner, whether it's the tender compassion of a hug emoji or the overwhelming victory represented by a flexing arm. Everyone agrees that emojis improve digital communication by bringing emotional depth that language alone could find difficult to express. They make interactions more expressive and engaging by emphasizing the tone and intent of messages in addition to providing a clear means of expressing emotions. According to Jones et al. (2021), this is consistent with recent studies that highlight the function of emojis in digital discourse, where they act as visual indicators that improve emotional transparency and lessen ambiguity in online communication. In conclusion, emojis are essential tools in digital areas that act as a link between text and the nuanced aspects of human expression. They are important for enhancing emotional clarity, speeding up communication, and assisting individuals in forming relationships in digital spaces. The meaning of a communication can be reinforced and supported by emoticons and emojis, allowing the recipient to immediately understand the sender's feelings. According to the study's findings, adding emoticons and emoji to text messages enhances their significance and adds depth to the content, making the recipient feel the impact of the message. The purpose of emoticons in interpersonal communication is to strengthen bonds with others through chat, express emotions, and serve as a means of demonstrating current circumstances.

IX. LIMITATIONS:

- Since the study's focus was on student community, equivalent studies could be done on other communities.
- The sample size was restricted to 80 respondents. Sample size can also be increased to ensure more representation of the population under study.

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