

**SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS OF EMOJIS IN SOCIAL MEDIA CONVERSATIONS
AMONG MASS COMMUNICATION STUDENTS IN CALEB UNIVERSITY**

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Abstract

The deliberate juxtaposition of extremely new technology and very old social patterns is the defining feature of our society. The growing popularity of social media and its integration into students' daily social interactions is a clear indication, one of such being the use of emojis to replace written texts in conversations. This study thus employed social semiotic analysis to examine how emojis are used in four (4) randomly selected group WhatsApp chats from the Department of Mass Communication, Caleb University. In addition to showing how these students have domesticated these emojis, the study looked at how students have always understood the representation of these symbols or signs in their own contexts, taking into account the idea that representation is a contested space because meanings are not only generated in the context of communication but also are capable of polysemic interpretations. The discussions span four student levels. In order to guarantee that there were more people participating in the discussion, the student forum chat or platform was chosen. A forum user was instructed to provide a screenshot of some of the chats in which the emojis manifested. The data used in this study consisted of seven (7) conversations. Using the Peircean elements of sign Text/substance, Denotation, and Connotation as the models of analysis, a qualitative approach was used to analyze the emojis. It was discovered that emojis have been shown to be instances of signs that fit the description of substances, making them compatible with Sanders Peirce's denotative and connotative elements. The study concludes that Emojis help students to communicate meaningfully and effectively because they foster internal connections. However, in the case where emojis are used improperly, they could send the wrong meanings, create issues, and lead to misunderstandings for both the addresser and the addressee.

Keywords: Conversations, Emojis, Mass Communication, Semiotic Analysis, Social Media and Students

Introduction

Since communication is the quickest way for people to interact in media and social networks worldwide, it is crucial for social media users as a whole. The process that results from communication and technical tools that have developed and been more widely used over time is known as technology-mediated communication (TMC) (Arafah & Hasyim, 2019). Language change and the expansion of communication are greatly influenced by modernization and globalization. The emergence of new types of communication tools has been largely influenced by the rapid advancement of social media and technology. Emojis and other "graphicons" were created as a result, and they are useful for enhancing or clarifying the content of words.

Around the twenty-first century, Japanese mobile phones, electronic messages, and Web pages began to use emojis, also known as ideograms or smileys, which were initially introduced as "picture" + "characters" (emoji) (Bamigbola, 2022). 2010 saw their addition to Unicode 6.0, which spread to all languages, countries, and cultures, altering the linguistic and social landscapes in the process. It's interesting to note that they are the sole form of communication that all users, regardless of language or social or cultural background, can understand, which may help individuals connect and communicate more effectively across demographic groupings (Danesi, 2019). Since emojis are so popular in social media, all of these innovative communication methods are present in education, particularly in higher

education (Veytia-Bucheli et al., 2020). The use of slang and emoticons in social media communication has a detrimental effect on the development of standard language writing and second language acquisition, even though digital communication aids English language learners in improving their language proficiency.

Text-based interactions are now the main method of communication in the digital age, which has drastically changed communication, particularly among students. Emojis are vital components of text-based communication in the modern digital age since they provide a nonverbal means of expressing feelings and emotions. This tendency is especially common among Caleb University's mass communication students, who connect extensively via text on a variety of online platforms. Emojis are expressive tools that add depth to communications and enhance conversations. However, depending too much on these visual cues could result in misunderstandings because interpretations differ, depending on personal perceptions and cultural circumstances. Today, students share information and communicate with each other in a variety of ways. One method involves face-to-face engagement and vocal conversation between the sender and the recipient, or the addresser and the addressee, when information is exchanged. Conversely, nonverbal communication is the exchange of information through facial expressions, gestures, and body language (Aondover et al., 2022a). People who engage online can become confused and misunderstand each other since body language and facial expressions are absent in electronic media.

The use of visual symbols known as emojis, which indicate facial expression, emotion, surroundings, etc., on social media platforms in the twenty-first century, is a prime example of how non-verbal cues are used in textual systems. These are the contemporary equivalent of emoticons, which Scott Fahlman first invented in 1982. However, the Plato IV computer was the first to display them in 1972 (Bamigbola, 2022). The terms "emotion" and "icon" were coined to reflect the fact that users at this early stage of the technology utilize punctuation, numbers, and alphabets to represent feelings in emails. Technology is advancing at a rapid pace, and the emergence of

social networking sites like Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, and many more call for a well-described symbol that incorporates colors and a face image (Kurfi et al., 2021). But because it's such a useful tool on social media, a lot of users utilize it more to express themselves, support their statements, and avoid having to type lengthy comments. It indicates that the object is a sign, necessitating more semiotics research. Additionally, given that language usage is frequently influenced by its context, it is possible that an individual's socio-cultural setting influences how they use emojis. In this contestation, this study examines emojis in social media conversations among Mass Communication students of Caleb University.

Research Objectives

The specific objectives are to:

- 1) investigate the various interpretations applicable to the use of emojis by Mass Communication students in Caleb University on the WhatsApp social application.
- 2) identify the various factors that shape the interpretations of the emojis used by the students.
- 3) find out how emojis aid communication among the students in WhatsApp conversations.
- 4) examine the relationship that exists between their utterances and emojis used by the students while conversing on the social media.

The Role of Emojis in Text-Based Communication

According to Danesi (2021), emoji is a Japanese phrase that translates to "image" and "letter." Emoji functionality highlights the significance of the conversation and increases the message's efficacy. Emoji usage in digital communication has become a common and significant phenomena. Emojis are tiny visual symbols that are frequently used to represent feelings, things, or concepts. They have become an essential part of text-based communication since they can enhance cross language boundaries and provide our communications additional levels of meaning (Kurfi & Aondover, 2021). Our communication style has

changed as a result of the explosion of emojis, changing how we express emotions, tone, and context. Thus, the role of emojis in text-based communication can be categorized viz:

Expressive Nuances: Emojis are visual clues that amplify and supplement the subtle emotional overtones in written language. They give people a way to communicate emotions like happiness, despair, enthusiasm, or irritation, making it possible for them to express complicated emotions that could be difficult to describe with words alone.

Cultural Universality: Emojis' amazing ability to cut over linguistic and cultural divides is one of its best features. People with different language backgrounds can communicate effectively, which promotes an inclusive and global style of communication.

Contextual Clarification: Emojis are essential for giving messages context. They can change how a remark is interpreted, explain irony, or convey humor, all of which lessen the possibility of misinterpretations when there are no nonverbal clues present as in face-to-face interactions (Danesi, 2021).

Visual Storytelling: Within the confines of a text message, users can construct a more vivid and compelling tale by utilizing emojis, which add to a type of visual storytelling. Digital conversations become more vibrant and participatory when they have this visual dimension, which gives them more depth and personality.

Brand Communication: Emojis have become a staple in marketing communication, helping businesses engage with their audience on a deeper, more personal level. In an increasingly digital world, brands use emojis to show their personality, support their messaging, and create a personable online presence.

Evolution of Language: The widespread use of emojis has had an impact on how language has changed in the digital age. Emojis are no longer optional; rather, they have become essential components of communication, igniting debates over how visual symbols affect the ability to express oneself and understand language.

Emotional Intelligence in Technology: Emojis are being used in AI and chatbots,

among other forms of technology, to help create more emotionally aware systems. These signals promote a more organic and sympathetic contact by assisting robots in better comprehending and responding to human emotions. It is clear that these little, vibrant symbols have developed into something more than just decorations rather they are now an integral and dynamic part of our digital language. Navigating the ever-expanding environment of modern communication requires an understanding of the subtle ways that emojis alter and enhance our online talks (Bamigbola, 2022).

Limitations of Emojis in Conversations

Contextual Dependence: Emoji meanings can vary greatly depending on the context in which they are used. When an emoji is used without the appropriate context, the recipient would not get the intended meaning, which could cause confusion.

Evolution of Emoji Meanings: Emojis can have meanings that change over time and deviate from their intended use. Users may misunderstand one another due to the frequent introduction of new emojis and the potential for their meanings to alter.

Misuse or Misinterpretation: Emoji misuse can occur accidentally or purposely, misinterpreting users. For example, not every recipient will see a sarcastic remark that is followed by a smiling emoji as sarcasm.

Accessibility Issues: specific emojis might not be supported by specific devices or platforms, and not all users have the same access to emojis. This can cause messages containing unsupported or unrecognized emojis to be unclear or confusing.

Professional Settings: Using emojis in formal or professional contexts could be viewed as unprofessional. Emoji misuse in the workplace might cause misconceptions or be interpreted as a lack of professionalism.

Cultural Differences: Depending on the culture, emojis can mean different things. In certain cultures, anything that is viewed as positive could be understood differently. An emoticon that represents a thumbs-up, for instance, may be considered favorable in

Semiotic Analy of Emojis in Soc Med Conversations among Mass Comm Stds in Caleb University

Western societies but offensive in various Middle Eastern and Asian ones.

Ambiguity: Emojis are confusing and subjective as people may interpret the same emoji to mean different things. This ambiguity can cause misunderstandings and confusion, particularly in circumstances where clarity is essential.

Limited Expressiveness: Emojis are not always able to convey subtle information or complicated emotions. Although they are capable of expressing simple emotions, they might not be able to effectively portray the tone of a message or more complex emotions (Tang et al., 2021).

The Future of Emoji in Social Media Communication

Emoji communication is going to play a big role in the future as long as it can keep up with the changing trends in conversations having surpassed linguistic and cultural boundaries to become an essential component of contemporary communication. Emoji usage has taken on a special significance in Nigeria, where a dynamic and diverse young culture is thriving, illustrating the fluidity of language and expression. Like their counterparts throughout the world, Nigerian millennials are continuously altering the digital communication landscape (Maikaba & Msughter, 2019). Emojis' expressive power enables them to communicate sentiments, emotions, and cultural quirks that can be difficult to explain in words alone. This flexibility is essential in a nation like Nigeria, where there is a great deal of linguistic diversity and regional variations in cultural backgrounds.

Students rely heavily on social media and instant messaging apps for their communication needs. Emoji use and meaning are always changing along with these platforms (Tang et al., 2021).

Emojis are not only useful for text embellishment by students' chats, but they also function as potent instruments for identity building and self-expression. Emojis offer a visual language that is beyond words, allowing users to converse in a genuine and relatable way. This is important in a culture where students are actively influencing cultural change and the narrative of their generation. Emojis not only make communication easier,

but they also play a part in the growth of language (Mojaye&Aondover, 2022). New emoji adoption frequently corresponds with evolving trends, cultural views, and societal developments. This implies that in the University setting, emojis represent the ideals, language, and changing expressions of the students' culture.

Emoji communication by students' talks appears to be an exciting new frontier that reflects the constantly shifting dynamics of language and culture. Emojis will probably continue to be crucial in influencing how students express themselves as technology develops and digital communication gets more sophisticated, helping to create a feeling of identity and community in the digital sphere (Aondover et al., 2022b). Emojis will continue to be a dynamic and essential component of student's rich communication fabric if students embrace and adjust to these changing trends.

Theoretical Foothold

This study is anchored on the Code-switching Theory and Diffusion of Innovations Theory. The Markedness Model was developed by Elaine Myers-Scotton and gained traction in the 1990s. This paradigm states that code-switching is the switching back and forth between an embedded language (non-dominant language) and a matrix language (dominant language). The approach clarified the reasons behind code-switching by introducing the idea of marked and unmarked language choices. In a single conversation or encounter, speakers may vary between using two or more languages or language varieties. This occurrence is known as "code switching." It is frequently impacted by elements including social dynamics, setting, and cultural identity. Examining how students might switch between written language and emojis while taking into account the linguistic and cultural factors that influence these decisions is part of applying code-switching theory to the setting of emojis in social media conversations among Mass Communication students at Caleb University. Code-switching theory has the following components:

Linguistic Code Switching: Examine the ways in which students use emojis to transition between formal written language, informal language, and even local languages. This illustrates how linguistic codes interact dynamically during text-based communication.

Cultural Code Switching: Analyse the ways in which emojis function as cultural icons in Nigerian culture. A type of cultural code swapping in digital communication is possible since some emojis have connotations unique to Nigerian culture.

Contextual Code Switching: Examine how people alter their use of emojis or formal versus casual language depending on the situation. For example, in professional or academic settings, formal language may be utilized; nevertheless, in informal chats among friends, informal language and emojis may predominate.

Social Identity and Code Switching: Investigate the ways in which Nigerian adolescents' adoption of particular emojis shapes their sense of collective identity. Emojis have the potential to become symbols of cultural connections and shared experiences, enabling a type of social identification code swapping.

Pragmatic Code Switching: Examine how emojis can be added to or subtracted from a text's meaning. Emojis and written language can be switched by participants to indicate nuances, emotions, or tones that can be difficult to portray with text alone.

Impact on Miscommunication: Examine situations when emojis used with text could cause misunderstandings. Emojis are emotive, but their meanings can differ from person to person and be interpreted subjectively, which could lead to misunderstandings.

Digital Literacy and Code Switching: Is about the way students use emoticons and written language to exhibit digital literacy. Understanding the subtleties of online discourse is reflected in the capacity to code-switch in digital communication.

Similarly, the Diffusion of Innovations Theory, according to Rogers (1962) is that new ideas must first be accepted, embraced, and then put into action by the tribes of people or communities to which they are communicated. Depending on the filters they use to influence, people who encounter a novel thought and consider it to be original are frequently willing to abandon their preferred methods of operation in favour of the inventive ones that have been brought to them. Particularly in this age of new

communication technologies, these presumptions weren't any different from students who made use of emojis via social media.

Diffusion of Innovations is used to describe the procedure for implementing fresh ideas. Researchers from a variety of fields, including education, public health, political science, communication, history, and others, have applied the Diffusion of Innovations theory. Investigating the use of technology to transfer innovation from an institution within a society to other sectors of that society has been an acceptable application of Rogers' (2003) approach on Diffusion of Innovations. According to Rogers (2003), "technology" and "innovation" essentially mean the same thing. The components of technology are hardware and software. While "software is the information base for the tool," "hardware is the tool that embodies the technology in the form of a material or physical object" (Siraj, 2020). As a result, studies have used the Diffusion of Innovations theory since 1995. Diffusion of Innovations may therefore be a suitable theoretical framework for this study. For instance, the new innovation of using emojis by students to communicate is on the increase as many students adopt new innovation like the use of emojis to interact with other students in their daily conversation.

Empirical Review

Cramer et al. (2016) examined the reasons behind the usage of emojis, as well as the purposes and meanings behind them in American mobile texting. They talked about how emojis serve linguistic and social purposes and how intricate they are. Emojis can enhance the emotional or social meaning of communication and make it more visually appealing. Gibson (2018) made the argument and provided evidence for Conversational Analysis's (CA) advantages over semiotic techniques. They investigated the communicative role of the "face-covering hand" emoji and its relationship to other textual acts in face-to-face communication that influence text talk creation using CA as opposed to semiotic techniques. Based on the investigation, the emoji served as a symbol for laughter. Adopting CA in the study has certain drawbacks, such as an unsuitable and unrealistic communication environment which

focus on one emoji while ignoring other emojis and other senses. Furthermore, in their data translations, they fail to take into account the subtle cultural differences between English and Chinese, resulting in an amalgamation of two distinct cultural presumptions and sequence features. The use and understanding of emojis are greatly influenced by cultural differences, and certain emoji applications are culturally specific.

Pavalanathan and Eisenstein (2015) investigated the ways in which emoticons and emojis convey paralinguistic meaning. They proposed the theory that people who utilize emojis typically use fewer emoticons. They tested their hypothesis by using the causal inference approach to determine whether emoticons, which are predetermined pictographic characters, may substitute emoticons in Twitter texts. The findings indicate that those who use emojis in their texts tend to use them less frequently than those who do not. Al-Rashdi (2018) also investigated the possible meanings and applications of 121 emojis in messages sent between Omani men and women on WhatsApp. Emoji adoption serves a variety of expressive purposes, independent of users' emotions, and women tend to use emojis more frequently than men. Emojis with stronger emotional connotations were clearly more frequently used by women, while men tended to utilize friendlier but lesser emotional connotations.

Dainas and Herring (2021) using the taxonomy of functions examined how different genders (352 females and 121 men) understood the pragmatic purposes of emojis in their local discourse contexts. Their research indicates that emoji function interpretation in Facebook platform messages was not significantly influenced by gender and that platform-to-platform transfer is not required. Riordan (2017) observed that emojis representing items convey positive emotions, particularly love and joy. Based on the implications of the study, utilizing stickers and emojis to communicate helps preserve and improve social relationships. Zhou et al. (2017) investigated the spread of emoji and sticker acceptance and appropriation in Southern China using mobile messaging (WeChat). Thirty participants were seen and interviewed for this qualitative study, which examined how Chinese people in rural

and urban areas use emojis, taking into account the cultural context.

Ochulor et al (2023) noted that, regardless of location, communication is a fundamental human right in all civilizations. There is a need to look into how social media images can be utilized to increase vocabulary for effective communication as the world becomes smaller and smaller and people communicate with each other using a common language through social media images. In order to accomplish this goal, they applied Grice's (1975) theory of cooperative principles, along with a qualitative study design, to a number of digital media images that were purposefully chosen from WhatsApp, Twitter, and Instagram. In order to find and explain how these images have been used for effective communication when there are no suitable words to explain or understand them, the study examined emojis using insights from cooperative principles and qualitative design. The results of the study indicate that gifs, stickers, and emojis are resources that can be used to build vocabulary for efficient communication.

Udoudom et al (2024) examine how emojis play a dynamic role in text-based communication among young people in Nigeria and the possible consequences of misinterpretation. The frequency and usage trends of emoji among young Nigerians on different digital platforms are investigated in the study. In the Nigerian context, it explored the cultural interpretations of emojis, taking into account socio-cultural influences, linguistic diversity, and geographical variations. The study also looked at situations in which emojis could lead to misunderstandings or misinterpretation, which could exacerbate disputes or make it more difficult to communicate effectively. The research attempted to provide light on the ways in which emojis affect how textual messages are interpreted and the possible obstacles they offer to precise and unambiguous communication through a thorough assessment of the body of literature, online discourse analysis, and case studies. The study concluded that since digital communication is still the main form of communication, users must be aware of the possibility of misunderstandings, which calls for a greater understanding of and awareness for emojis.

Emojis, which provide users with a visual way to express emotions, tone, and context within the confines of text-based interactions, have therefore become an essential part of modern digital communications, as noted by Ochulor et al. (2023) and Udoudom et al., (2024). Understanding the effect of emojis on interpersonal encounters becomes important in the setting of Nigeria, a nation with a diverse language environment and young population that heavily engages in online communication. Thus, the reviewed literature therefore addressed the theoretical presumptions and the knowledge gap in the literature.

Methodology

This study used Semiotic Analysis (SA) as a research method. This method is interested in examining how signs, natural or artificial, function in the text. The aim of SA is to understand, analyse and interpret signs as text. SA of media texts is an analysis of the language of signs and symbols in the media texts. This analysis is closely linked to the iconographic analysis. Semiotics is a discipline, in which culture, society and natural phenomena are explored as signs (Aondover, 2020). The topic of semiotics has witnessed the emergence of several approaches due to the diverse contributions of scientists from various disciplines. Notable approaches include structural semiotics, social semiotics, and cognitive semiotics. In this study, social semiotics was employed, which is the study of social meaning-making processes that can be sign, verbal, visual, or auditory. The study of semiotic resources traditionally referred to as “sign” in an evolving society which can be impacted by certain social variables.

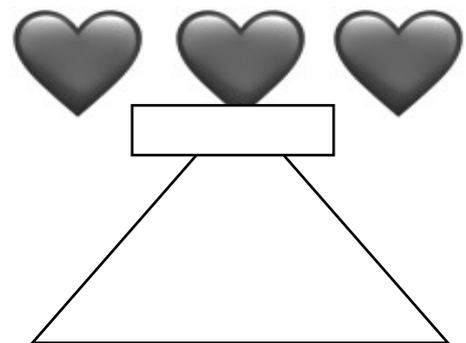
Within this context, denotative meaning is the first or primary meaning that is sends to the receiver or decoder. It is the first common interpretation given in dictionaries, unaffected by the situation or the sentiments involved in the conversation. Connotation on the other hand refers to the additional meaning that a material carries. It alludes to arbitrary and open-ended cultural or personal meaning. In this study, “denotation” and “connotation” are understood to represent the various orders of signification (process of the interpretation of sign), where “connotation” maintains the second order of signification, which is serving as a signified for the denotative meaning of a

substance, while “denotation” connotes the first order of signification, which is considered to be signified.

This study employed social semiotic analysis to examine how emojis are used in four (4) randomly selected group WhatsApp chats from the Department of Mass Communication, Caleb University. The discussions span from four student levels. In order to guarantee that there were more people participating in the discussion, the student forum/platform chat was chosen. A forum user was instructed to provide a screenshot of some of the chats in which the emojis manifested. The data used in this study consisted of seven (7) conversations. Using the Peircean elements of sign Text/substance, Denotation, and Connotation as the models of analysis, a qualitative approach was used to analyze the emojis. Any sign with meaning that can be either denotative or connotative is considered a substance. Since emojis have both denotative and connotative meaning in the data, they are examples of substance. Based on their visual elements, emojis can be used to express users' feelings as well as highlight a specific user's message.

Findings and Discussion

In this study, it was observed that the randomly selected emojis carry a denotative and connotative meaning in the text as presented below:

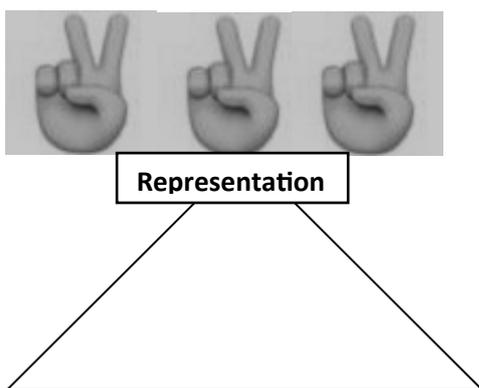


Object Interpretation

Red heart “I love this message”

Figure 1: represent the “Red Heart” emoji. This emoji serves as a visual depiction of an item that symbolizes “love and romance.” The emoji that is displayed can be read as “Love is the message.” This is used to imply love among close friends. “Happy Birthday!”

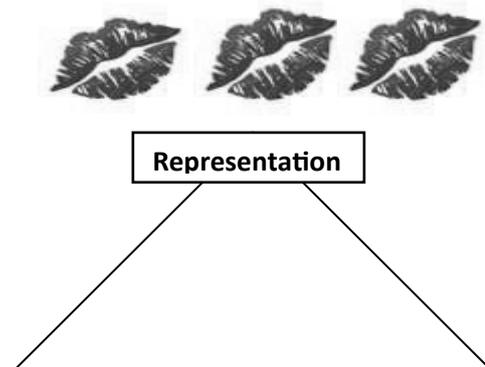
This statement comes from the forum of level 100. The emoji in this statement has a pattern that is both denotative and connotative. Denotatively, the color of the chosen emoji is used to represent a lexical unit in the sentence; in this case, it represents the sign “red” as it appears in the sentence “Happy Birthday.” This is accomplished by using the emoji’s (red) color, which has a symbolic significance in general. However, since the user only chooses the color to represent the word “red” in the utterance, the general interpretation was ignored. Udoudom et al (2024) observed that emojis could lead to misunderstandings or misinterpretation, which could exacerbate disputes or make it more difficult to communicate effectively. Emojis, which provide users with a visual way to express emotions, tone, and context within the confines of text-based interactions, have therefore become an essential part of modern digital communications.



Object Interpretation
Two fingers up “One Love”

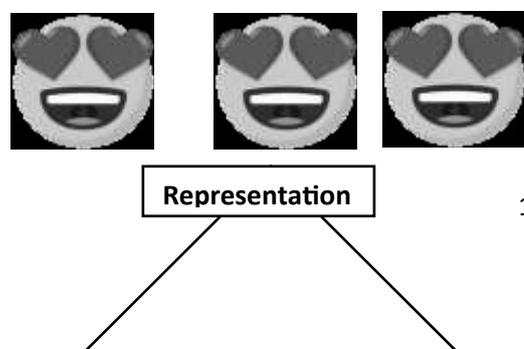
Figure 2: The emoji that were used in this exchange have multiple historical connotations, including victory and peace. This message was chosen from the level 200 group forum. The chopped word “luv” is explained by the emoji’s meaning in the communication context based on its usage. As a result, the symbol implies the peace sign, in which the user displays the outcome of having “one love,” which is peace. It is assumed from the usage of the emoji that one love implies a tranquil setting, which the user expressed by selecting that particular emoji. Riordan (2017) affirms that emojis representing items convey positive emotions,

particularly love and joy. Based on the implications of the study, utilizing emojis to communicate helps preserve and improve social relationships.



Object Interpretation
Red heart and kiss “Lovelies”

Figure 3: Happy Easter. In a conversation from the chat forum of level 300, this emoji was utilized to strengthen the user’s statement by conveying a connotative pattern. The way the emoji is used suggests that students used such signs to celebrate Easter. Thus, this emoji gives users a means to demonstrate to their recipients as stated in the utterance, they are certified Easter’s “lovelies.” Additionally, using this emoji to convey love between lovers can be understood from the perspective of the common concept about kisses, which enhances the text’s use of the word “Lovelies.”Pavalanathan and Eisenstein (2015) observed that those who use emojis in their texts tend to use them less frequently than those who do not. Al-Rashdi (2018) maintains that emoji serves a variety of expressive purposes, independent of users' emotions, and women tend to use emojis more frequently than men. Emojis with stronger emotional connotations were clearly more frequently used by women, while men utilize friendlier but lesser emotional connotations.

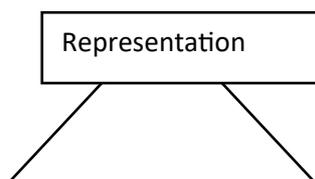


Object Interpretation

Red heart with mouth wide open “Yes ooo”

Figure 4: This message was extracted from a forum group at level 400. The message is a reply to anything that was said before. As the emoji above shows, the smiling face connotes happiness (traditionally, it is believed that satisfaction and contentment may lead to a smile), while the two hearts shapes symbolizing love and their position in place of the eyeballs connote the love for what the person sees. The emoji used in this utterance is a connotative pattern that reinforces the word “yes” in the user’s utterance. As seen in the data, the message is an affirmative reaction to a previous message which states:

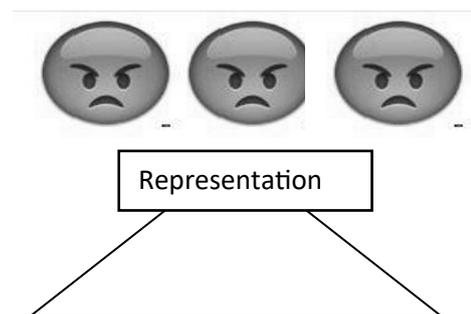
Speaker A: “Happy New Month, everyone... this is our month of resumption.” The emoji is a response to the statement “our month of resumption” and is used to enhance the word “yes.” The use of emojis suggests that the recipient of the communication is infatuated with what they saw. Cramer et al. (2016) corroborates that emojis can enhance the emotional or social meaning of communication and make it more visually appealing. Gibson (2018) supports that emoji served as a symbol for laughter.



Object Interpretation

Hushed Face “I am surprised”

Figure 5: This is one of the statements from the level 300 group conversation that was chosen at random. The emoji that was employed signify the encoder’s feeling to the audience, which has a denotative pattern, as it is clear in the utterance. It displays the “Hushed Face” emoji. This emoji is used to symbolize an object that is “being surprised or hushed by concern.” The emoji that is displayed could be read as “I am surprised.” This emoji can be used by the addressee to show astonishment at the message from the addresser. Therefore, Cramer et al. (2016) established that the use and understanding of emojis are greatly influenced by cultural differences, and certain emoji applications are culturally specific.



Object Interpretation

Enraged Face “The person is angry”

Figure 6: The text was extracted from a forum conversation of level 400. There is a denotative meaning associated with the emoji in this statement. This figure displays the “Enraged Face” emoji. This emoji serves as a representation of the item “High level of rage.” “The person is angry” is how the displayed emoji would be understood. The recipient's use of this indicates their ire at the message's content from the sender. Contrary to denotation, emojis convey connotation meanings in discourse. According to Arafah and Muhammad (2019), integrating one's inner feelings into online writing might be challenging for some people at times.

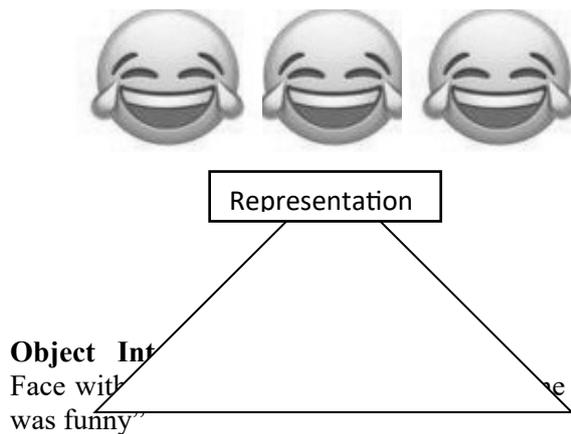


Figure 7: The emoji depicted in this figure is called “Face with Tears of Joy.” This emoji can be used to symbolize someone who is laughing so hard that tears are flowing down their cheeks. The emoji that is displayed would be read as “what is said or done was funny.” Students typically utilize this when they come in contact with a humorous post, text, picture, or video. The level 100 students' forum conversations provided the datum. The user uses this connotative pattern to indicate that the word “congratulations” that comes before it is positive. This emoji is used to convey the user's paralinguistic. As a result, it can be assumed that the user is implying the following: “I am happy for this.” The usage of the emoji suggests the meaning of the statement that is underlined. As noted by Ochulor et al. (2023) the effect of emojis on interpersonal encounters becomes important in the setting of Nigeria, a nation with a diverse language environment and young population that heavily engages in online communication.

Conclusion

This study is an x-ray of semiotic analysis of emojis in social media conversations among Mass Communication students in Caleb University. It was discovered that emojis have been shown to be instances of signs that fit the description of substances, making them compatible with Sanders Peirce's denotative and connotative elements. Emojis were created in order to improve internet communication and facilitate emotional expression. Emojis are a good substitute for gestures, facial expressions, and body language. Emojis help students to communicate meaningfully and effectively because they

foster internal connections. However, in the case where emojis are used improperly, they could send the wrong meanings, create issues, and lead to misunderstandings for both the addresser and the addressee.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study recommends the following:

- 1) The development of culturally relevant emojis that are appropriate for the Nigerian setting can improve communication even further by enabling more complex expressions of identity, feelings, and cultural allusions.
- 2) The study recommends the replication of the study in different parts of Nigeria and using different methodological and theoretical approaches as to enrich the available literature in the area.

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