

**AN ANALYSIS OF THE USE OF EMOJI IN COMMUNICATION
AMONG STUDENTS OF ALVAN IKOKU FEDERAL UNIVERSITY
OF EDUCATION, OWERRI, NIGERIA**

Mercy Zainab NZEJIOGU

Department of Languages and Humanities
Alvan Ikoku Federal University of Education, Owerri
Phone: 0806 882 3116
e-mail: mercyzainab@yahoo.com

Florence Ebere UBAH

Department of Languages and Humanities
Alvan Ikoku Federal University of Education, Owerri
Phone: 07036272232
e-mail: ubahflorence101@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Communication, an essential aspect of human existence, has undergone a transformation with the advent of media, progressing from traditional to digital platforms in what is commonly referred to as the "Second Media Age." Within this context, computer-mediated communication (CMC) has introduced emojis as substitutes for nonverbal cues. However, the misuse of emojis may result in legal repercussions, as evidenced by documented cases. This study seeks to examine the understanding of specific emojis among the students at Alvan Ikoku Federal University of Education, Owerri, with the objective of contributing to the comprehension of this phenomenon and raising awareness of the potential legal implications. Utilizing the theoretical framework of Symbolic Interactionism, this study explores the diverse interpretations of emojis, while considering cultural nuances and discrepancies across platforms. The findings underscore the importance of being cognizant of the context in which emojis are employed in order to prevent misunderstandings. As emojis continue to shape the landscape of digital communication, it is crucial to consider their legal implications and strive for effective and responsible communication in the digital age.

Keywords: Emojis, Digital Communication, Symbolic Interactionism, Misinterpretation Legal Implications, Contextual Awareness

INTRODUCTION

According to LittleJohn and Foss, (2008) communication is a daily activity that form the basis for all human activities and existence. Human interaction is on daily basis with those close or distant for diverse purposes. Thus, communication is core to human lives and relationships. Consequently, no society or civilization can survive without some form of communication.

Media forms and communication approaches have continued to evolve over time with its growth spanning across several centuries. The First Media Age, for example, was traditional in its method. It included: the print media (newspaper, magazine etc., broadcast media, (television, radio etc.) regarded as an analogue mode of communication. (LittleJohn & Foss, 2008, p. 291; Smith, 2021, p. 45; Brown, 2022, p. 112). However, there are some criticisms against it (LittleJohn et al 2008, p. 88). The media landscape continued to evolve, especially with technological advancements, ushering in a new era (Johnson, 2023, p. 213). The "Second Media Age," credited to Mark Poster and his 90s publication, marked a significant shift, giving rise to the "New Media". This era embraced digital interactive technology and network communication, notably the internet, revolutionising media and altering media theory (Patel, 2022, p. 167). In addition, the new media, integrates the following, "websites, mobile apps, streaming services, podcasts, and social media" and so on to "create and share content" (Smith, 2023, p. 78).

Furthermore, an essential element of present-day media is computer-mediated communication (CMC), which involves communication that is simplified by digital technology The domain of CMC consists varied forms of digital interactions (Jahaz & Bradford, 2016). However, its set back is lack of nonverbal signals, such as facial expressions, intonation, and gestures. The "expression symbols for facial symbols" was developed to serve as substitutes for the lack of verbal cues in CMC. Consequently, emojis emerged as the outcome of these "expression symbols" (Tossell et al., 2012; Negishi, 2014).

Statement of Problem

Emojis have gained significant popularity across social media platforms worldwide as virtual symbols. These symbols possess an inherent appeal and creativity, owing to their simplicity, accessibility, and emotional

depth (Johnson, 2023). Nonetheless, it is imperative for users to recognize that the improper use of emojis can potentially lead to legal consequences in specific contexts. Instances have been documented where individuals have faced indictment, court charges, fines, and in severe cases, even imprisonment, for using certain emojis in certain regions of the globe (Kelly, 2019; Sharma, 2023). To provide an illustration, a Canadian farmer was subjected to a fine of sixty-one dollars (61 dollars) as a result of his failure to fulfill a contractual obligation, as determined by a judge in Saskatchewan. The farmer, in acknowledging a text message with a "thumbs up" emoji, intended to confirm the message rather than express agreement, yet the recipient interpreted it as an approval. The judge, considering the "thumbs up" to be a valid signature, emphasized the necessity for legal institutions to adapt to this evolving reality. Therefore, this form of electronic communication is accepted within the scope of 'electronic information acts' and the 'Sale of Good Act' (David Ijaseun in Business Day Newspaper, 19th July, 2023). The aforementioned serves as the foundation for the present study.

Purpose of the Study

The study was aimed at investigating how the students of Alvan Ikoku Federal University of Education, Owerri interpreted some selected emojis.

The specific objective is:

1. To determine the interpretations of selected emojis among students of Alvan Ikoku Federal University of Education, Owerri.

Research Question

The study was guided by the following research question:

1. To what extent do students of Alvan Ikoku Federal University of Education, Owerri interpreted correctly some selected emojis?

Scope of the Study

The study was set to analyse the interpretations of selected emojis among students of Alvan Ikoku Federal University of Education, Owerri and the implication of these interpretations.

Significance of the Study

In view of recent legal matters that have emerged as a result of the use of emojis across the globe owing to misinterpretations, the primary objective

of this investigation is to hopefully, make a valuable contribution towards the understanding of emojis, their interpretations, and possibly add to the consciousness of users regarding the legal consequences. Also, that it may serve as a basis for future inquiries in related matters.

Theoretical Framework

Emojis are computer-generated and symbolic form of communication which can be associated with many communication theories. This study however, was based on Symbolic Interactionism principles. The idea of symbolic interactionism began with an American sociologist, George Herbert M. In the early 20th Century, yet, Herbert Muller is given full credit for developing its core principles. Basically, the symbolic interaction theory “focuses on the ways in which people form meaning and structure in society through conversation”. (LittleJohn et al, 2008 p.159). It is a social communication theory that highlights on how individuals create and interpret symbols in interpersonal communication. In digital communication for example, individuals use emojis as visual symbols to communicate different things and to reflect all kinds of emotions vividly depending on the intended message by users (Jaeger & Ares, 2017, p. 45; Smith, 2021, p. 78).

Review of Related Literatures

According to studies, emojis are considered the advanced form of emoticons, categorized as “superior” in “content richness, input, speed, and expressiveness” (Aull, 2019; Barbieri et al., 2016). Shigetaka Kurita, a Japanese, is credited with the creation of the first set of 176 emojis in 1999. The word “emoji” is rooted in the Japanese language (Kalaba, 2023). The ‘e’ means picture, “mo” denotes write, while “ji” is translated as character or letter. Emojis are physical representations of emotions, ideas, people, gestures, animals, birds, foods, drinks, and nature. According to Obu (2023), the number of emojis as of September 2020 was three thousand, six hundred, and sixty-four (3,664) on Unicode Consortium.

According to studies, emojis are "expressive in themselves." In other words, emojis are capable of conveying messages visibly without text. Also, they improve written communication and provide clarity to expressions (Ge & Acm, 2019). For example, when different emojis are combined, they can express deeper emotions beyond words. For instance, the emojis “😊 and 🙌” sent alone without words convey emotions of

affection and approval clearly and strongly. Similarly, you will agree that a combination of “I love you” with the “❤️” emoji is emotionally richer, impactful, and infectious compared to an ordinary “I love you” text (Sampietro, 2019; Aull, 2019; Smith, 2022). Conversely, Kelly (2019) asserts that emojis can cause misinterpretations without accompanying text.

While emojis are said to have universal features in terms of basic shared expressions of joy, laughter, sorrows, pains, tears, frustrations and people from diverse background are able to identify with these feelings to achieve interpersonal and cross-cultural communication, nonetheless, emoji is not a universal language (Kelly, 2019). Thus, context should be taken into account when selecting and using emojis, because to a large extent, context determines what is considered acceptable or offensive by communicators (Njenga, 2018).

Lin and Chen (2008) posit that the use of emojis can be influenced by interpersonal associations. That is, the level of nearness or distance in a relationship could affect emoji interpretations and the degree of acceptance or offense. For example, the "gun emoji" sent from a friend to a close friend in response to a joke in a conversation may evoke laughter or be taken lightly. However, when the same emoji is sent to a colleague, a neighbor, or a distant associate, it may convey different meanings and elicit various reactions altogether. Thus, emojis are subjective (Smith & Jones, 2021; Wang et al., 2022).

Likewise, cultural context defines the way people interpret and understand emojis. In other words, a particular emoji could mean different things for different cultures due to differences in background (Park, Barrashi, Fink & Cha, 2013; Kalaba, 2023). The "folded hands" emoji is interpreted differently to mean many things: respect, greeting, prayer, gratitude and so on by varying cultures. Also, the "thumbs up" is considered "vulgar" in the Middle East but not so in Western culture. In Iraq, for example, the thumbs up is seen as an insult and must be avoided by all means. Equally, the "smiley face" emoji is understood as "sarcasm in China" (Sharma, 2023; Obu, 2023).

Also, the "waving hand" emoji which is largely seen as an "innocent gesture" for expressing greeting in most cultures, mean different things in China, South Korea, and Pakistan. For example: in China, it is employed to terminate friendship; in South Korea, it is disrespectful as only dogs and animals are waved at with palms facing outward, and for the Pakistanis, "it

is perceived as a string of imaginative curses hurled at someone..." (Kalaba, 2023). One can then imagine the confusion that a simple wave of hand can cause if used in these backgrounds. In addition, Sharma (2023) reported that the middle finger emoji is "illegal, obscene, invasive, and lewd." Therefore, it is highly offensive and unacceptable to Indians. Thus, for the intended meaning of an emoji to be effectively communicated, cross-cultural contexts must be taken into consideration (Chik & Vasquez, 2017; Kalaba, 2023).

Moreover, studies have shown that different platforms or systems exhibit differences in emoji forms and meanings. Thus, communicators are likely to misunderstand or misinterpret each other. For example, on Google phones, "smiling eyes" express happiness, while on Apple phones, it displays "a grimace face that is ready to fight" (Obu, 2023, quoting Miller et al., 2016). This can create a lot of confusion and possible offenses in cross-platform communication (Tigwell & Flatia, 2016; Obu, 2023). Similarly, Apple, Google, and Samsung show differences in the meanings of the "clapping hands" emoji: on Apple, it is pay attention; on Google, a polite applause; on Samsung, a hushed appreciation. In another example, Twitter/Apple and Google show differences in the form of the "dancer emoji": for Twitter and Apple, the form is "a female flamenco dancer, while on Google, it used to be a 'John Travolta lookalike dancing disco...' currently, it is 'a weird blobby thing.'" Yet, there are reports that over 25 percent of users are unaware of these differences (Obu, 2023, quoting Hillberg et al., 2018). According to Tauch and Kanjo (2016), Facebook users tend to use emojis more and more positively than Twitter users. However, Kaye and Malone (2016) disagree with the above assertion. They argue that emoji use is consistent across different platforms, except for emails.

Furthermore, research studies have indicated that there are variations in the forms and meanings of emojis across different platforms or systems. Consequently, there is a likelihood of miscommunication or misinterpretation among individuals engaging in communication. For instance, when using Google phones, the emoji representing "smiling eyes" conveys happiness, whereas on Apple phones, it depicts "a facial expression of grimace", indicating preparedness for a fight (Obu, 2023, as cited in Miller et al., 2016). This discrepancy can result in significant confusion and potential instances of offense in cross-platform communication (Obu, 2023). Similarly, Apple, Google, and Samsung

present variations in the interpretations of the "clapping hands" emoji: on Apple, it signifies pay attention; on Google, it denotes a polite applause; and on Samsung, it represents a subdued appreciation. In another example, Twitter/Apple and Google differ in the depiction of the "dancer emoji": for Twitter and Apple, it portrays a female flamenco dancer, whereas on Google, it used to depict a "John Travolta lookalike dancing disco..." and currently, it appears as "a weird blobby thing." However, there have been reports indicating that more than 25 percent of users are unaware of these disparities (Hillberg et al., 2018 as cited in Obu, 2023,). According to Tauch and Kanjo (2016), individuals who use Facebook tend to employ emojis with a more positive connotation compared to Twitter users. Nevertheless, Kaye and Malone (2016) challenge the aforementioned claim, arguing that the use of emojis remains consistent across different platforms.

Court Cases on Emoji Use

Though emojis can be employed in a creative manner on the internet to enhance communication and interactions, yet, it is essential to acknowledge the potential issues that may arise, particularly within legal contexts. As stated by Kelly (2019) and Sharma (2023), many countries have observed a notable increase in legal cases, thereby presenting challenges to judges in terms of interpretation (Ijaseun, 2023; Obu, 2023). As a result, there has been a rise in the number of legal cases, particularly related to issues such as sexual harassment, criminal activity, murder, discrimination, and others. Nevertheless, there is a lack of existing court guidelines or standardized procedures for effectively interpreting these cases. Moreover, there exists a prevailing notion that the legal system has yet to fully comprehend the implications of emoji usage (Sharma, 2023; Obu, 2023). Below, a selection of cases sourced from news reports and videos are presented:

In an article published in the New York Post on December 5th, 2017, it was stated that the act of sending emojis could potentially result in imprisonment. Within the context of a specific legal case between individuals identified as Dahan V. Shakaroff in 2016, a couple expressed their desire to lease an apartment. During their conversation with the landlord, they utilized various emojis, including a smiling face, a comet, a champagne bottle, and a dancing playboy, to convey their sentiments. However, the negotiation process was abruptly terminated and the couple

ultimately decided against renting the property. Subsequently, the judge presiding over the case ruled against the couple, asserting that emojis possess the capacity to depict one's legal intentions. (Kelly, 2019; Sharma, 2023; Obu, 2023).

In a local news report, a Frenchman was imprisoned for sending a firearm emoji to his former partner, an act that was deemed to be jilting. The offender received a duration of six months in confinement and was subjected to a monetary penalty amounting to twelve thousand dollars (\$12,000). Similarly, a teenager in the United States was apprehended for disseminating emojis representing firearms towards a law enforcement officer. This action was classified by the court as constituting acts of terrorism.

Furthermore, over the years, the United States has seen a notable increase in legal cases involving emojis. In 2016, there were 26 documented cases, rising to 33 in 2017 and further escalating to 53 in 2018. The first half of 2019 saw around 50 instances recorded (Sharma, 2023). England also reported a few cases, particularly related to family and employment matters. These examples highlight the emerging reality of legal cases linked to emoji usage in our digital era. This underscores the crucial need to approach the use of emojis cautiously, recognizing their potential legal implications (Sharma, 2023). The growing frequency of such cases emphasizes the importance of developing a nuanced understanding of the implications of emojis in diverse contexts. Moreover, on the 8th of April, 2018, the case of "people versus Osbourne" transpired in the state of California, revolving around a post on the social media platform Facebook. The defendant was arraigned for employing a "gun" emoji alongside textual content discussing the act of shooting. Consequently, the court indicted the defendant for engaging in activities that constituted criminal threats.

Furthermore, on the 9th of June, 2018, a group of forty-eight (48) individuals in India were charged with criminal offenses in connection with their use of an emoji as a response to an official communication from a female party.










Methodology

The study is a survey aimed at analysing the interpretation of some selected emojis in communication among students at Alvan Ikoku Federal University of Education, Owerri. The population consisted a cross-section of students, with a sample of one hundred and fifty (150) participants

chosen at random. The instrument for data collection was a questionnaire containing twenty items (20) displaying selected emojis under analysis. The data that was collected was displayed in table form and examined by means of simple percentages. Since the data generated was numerical, the approach to the study was quantitative.

Presentation of Data and Discussion of Findings

The total number of questionnaires given was one hundred and fifty (150), but only a hundred and thirty-five copies were returned. The data from respondents show each emoji under investigation with their suggested meanings and percentages presented in tabular form below, in line with the research question. This is followed by discussions of each emoji.

S/N	EMOJI	A(meaning)	B(meaning)	C(meaning)	D(meaning)	Void
1.	 middle finger	Sexual allusion 3.7%	fuck-you (abuse)- 87.4%	hurting finger 2.9%	a warning 5.9%	0%
2.	 eggplant	vegetable 54.8%	sexual suggestion 12.6%	Soup -2.9%	No idea 24.4%	5.2%
3	 gun	threat - 46.6%	Toy - 25.2%	signal violence 23.7%	offensive 2.2%	2.2%
4	 Knife	killing - 22.9%	threat - 34.1%	cutting vegies 35.5%	harassment 4.4%	2.9%
5	 crying Face	sadness 48.2%	disappointment 17.7%	signal pain - 12.6%	heart-brokenness 20.7%	0.7%
6	 hearty-eyes	affection (45.2%)	infatuation - 8.2%	admiration 31.1%	flirty- 11.8%	3.7%
7	 Poo	Poo - 40%	Ice cream - 40%	Silliness 8.8%	Offensive 5.9%	5.2%
8	 thumbs up	approval 39.3%	agreement - 22.9%	consent- 8.2%	impressive 3.7%	2.2%
9		disapproval	disagree -	boo - 11.1%	To kill -	1.2%

	thumbs down	142.2%	45%		0%	%
10	☺ upside down Face	playful-28.2%	jokey - 34.1%	taunt 8.2%	unserious 25.9%	3.7%
11	☠ skull Face	death - 11.1%	Danger sign - 75.5	spookiness- 7.4%	warning 3.7%	2.2%
12	💋 kiss mark	romance (10.4%)	kiss - 81.5%	greeting 4.4%	offensive 0.7%	2.9%
13	👊 Punch	Chop-knuckle 72.6%	Punch 14.1%	Determinati on 9.6%	Threat - 0%	3.7%
14	👋 wavin g hand	pay attention 20.7%	stop - 22.2%	high five- 46.6%	farewell 7.4%	2.9%
15	👄 Mouth	lips - 68.2%	a speech - 10.4%	expression 7.4%	kiss - 11.8%	2.2%
16	😈 smiling emoji with horns	mischievo us 34.1%	evil - 50.4%	playful- 5.9%	offensive 8.8%	0.7%
17	😏 unamuse d face	annoyed 42.9%	disapproval- 12.6%	displeasure 25.2%	offended 15.5%	3.7%
18	🕶 Sunglass es	cool - 40.7%	fashion - 24.4%	style - 18.5%	sun protection 11.8%	4.6%
19	💣 Bomb	offensive 4.4%	fruit - 39.3%	threat- 13.3%	war - 38.5%	4.4%
20	👻 Ghost	spooky - 20%	supernatural- 8.2%	spirit- 27.4%	Hallowee n 42%	2.2%

👉 Middle Finger

Sexual allusion: 3.7% Abusive meaning ("fuck-you"): 87.4% Hurting finger: 2.9% A warning: 5.9% No idea: Implication: The majority interpreted this emoji as an abusive gesture, indicating potential challenges or conflicts in communication. The sexual allusion and other negative meanings may lead to misunderstandings and strained relationships.

Eggplant

Vegetable: 54.8%; Sexual suggestion: 12.6%; Soup: 2.9%; No idea: 24.4%; Void: 5.2%. A significant proportion of the participants accurately recognised the eggplant emoji as symbolising a vegetable. A certain number of respondents correctly linked the eggplant emoji to a sexual connotation, which aligns with its commonly accepted connotation in some contexts. There appears to be a potential misinterpretation regarding the association of the eggplant with soup. A portion of the participants indicated that they lacked comprehension regarding the meaning of the emoji. This indicates a lack of clear interpretation. The category labeled "void" lacks exact definition. It implies that a small percentage of the respondents might have encountered difficulty in assigning the emoji to the provided options. In conclusion, although the majority of participants correctly associated the eggplant emoji with its primary meaning as a vegetable, there were diverse interpretations, including instances of misinterpretation or uncertainty.

Gun

Threat: 46.6%; Toy: 25.2%; Signal violence: 23.7%; Offensive: 2.2%; Void: 2.2%. Implication: Divergent interpretations of the gun emoji highlight the potential for misunderstandings in conveying messages related to threat or violence. Context becomes crucial to avoid miscommunication or perceived aggression.


Knife

Killing: 22.9%; Threat: 34.1%; Cutting veggies: 35.5%; Harassment: 4.4%; Void: 2.9%. Similar to the gun emoji, the knife emoji has varied interpretations. The potential for confusion arises, especially when the intention behind using the emoji is not clearly communicated.


Crying face

Sadness: 48.2%; Disappointment: 17.7%; Signal pain: 12.6%; Heartbrokenness: 20.7%; Void: 0.7%. The crying face emoji, generally conveys negative emotions, but the specific interpretation varies. Understanding the context and the intended emotional expression is crucial to avoid misinterpreting the sender's feelings.

Hearty eyes

The percentages of affection, infatuation, admiration, and flirtatiousness associated with the hearty eyes emoji are 45.2%; 8.2%; 31.1% and 11.8% respectively. A substantial proportion of participants accurately associated the heart eyes emoji with the expression of affection. This corresponds to the widely accepted understanding of the emoji. Some correctly interpreted the emoji as representing infatuation, capturing a sense of intense admiration or fondness. Others linked the emoji to admiration, which is in line with its usage to convey a feeling of being impressed with something. A certain percentage of the respondents accurately recognized the flirty connotation of the emoji, indicating a playful or romantic context. However, a small proportion may have encountered difficulty in tagging the emoji within the provided options, suggesting some level of ambiguity. In summary, the majority of participants correctly identified the  (Heart Eyes) emoji as conveying affection, with varying interpretations including infatuation, admiration, and a flirty context. The overall accuracy rate is high, indicating a shared understanding of the primary meaning of the emoji.

Poo

A considerable number (40%) of participants correctly linked the  emoji with its designated connotation, which is representative of feces or excrement. A notable proportion (40%) of respondents misinterpreted the poo emoji as ice cream. This suggests a misinterpretation, potentially due to the visual resemblance of the emoji to a soft-serve ice cream cone. Some respondents (8.8%) accurately recognized the poo emoji as a symbol of silliness, capturing the playful and humorous essence often associated with this particular emoji. A smaller portion (5.9%) correctly associated the poo emoji with an offensive or vulgar connotation. Yet, a small proportion (5.2%) of respondents may have encountered difficulty categorizing the emoji within the provided options, indicating a certain level of ambiguity or uncertainty. Thus, while a significant portion of participants correctly identified the intended meaning of the Poo emoji, a noteworthy number incorrectly associated it with ice cream.

👍 Thumbs up

The thumbs-up emoji predominantly signifies approval, as indicated by 39.3% of its interpretations. Agreement follows closely at 22.9%, while consent is associated with 8.2%. Impressiveness is conveyed by 3.7% of its users, and a sense of void is felt by 2.2%. The implication of this emoji highlights the importance of considering contextual factors in order to accurately convey the intended message.

👎 Thumbs down

Disapproval is indicated by a percentage of 42.2%. A disagreement is expressed by 45% of individuals. The act of booing is observed in 11.1% of cases. The desire to cause harm is absent at 0%. A void sentiment is present at 1.2%. It is worth noting that this particular emoji primarily conveys negative sentiments. The inclusion of interpretations such as "to kill" raises concerns and underscores the significance of considering potential misrepresentations when employing thumbs-down emojis.

🙄 Upside down face

A playful connotation is associated with the upside-down face emoji at a rate of 28.2%. Additionally, a sense of jest is felt in 34.1% of cases. While tendency to taunt is observed in 8.2%. An unserious tone is predominant in 25.9% of the respondents and a void instance is noticed at 3.7%. It is important to understand that the upside-down face emoji is commonly interpreted in playful and joking contexts. However, the presence of interpretations such as "taunt" implies the possibility of misunderstandings, thereby emphasizing the need for clear and unambiguous communication.

💀 Skull face

Interpretations: Death: 11.1%, Danger sign: 75.5%, Spookiness: 7.4%, Warning: 3.7, Void: 2.2%: The skull face emoji, can be interpreted in various ways, including as a warning or indicating danger. The high percentage associated with "danger sign" suggests that it might be perceived more as a warning symbol, potentially influencing a sense of caution.

Kiss Mark

Romance: 10.4% Kiss: 81.5% Greeting: 4.4% Offensive: 0.7% Void: 2.9%. The high percentage associated with "kiss" indicates that this emoji is widely recognized as a symbol of affection. However, the presence of some percentages in "offensive" and "void" categories suggests potential misinterpretations or cases where the emoji might not convey the intended meaning.

Punch

Chop-knuckle:72.6%; Punch:14.1%; Determination: 9.6%; Threat: 0%; Void: 3.7%. Implications: The dominant interpretation as "chop-knuckle" suggests a positive and friendly gesture. However, the presence of "punch" and "determination" interpretations indicates potential variations in understanding. The absence of a threat interpretation aligns with a positive context.



Waving Hand

Pay attention: 20.7% Stop: 22.2% High five: 46.6% Farewell: 7.4% Void: 2.9% Implications: The emoji has diverse interpretations, including attention, stopping, high-fiving, and farewells. The percentages suggest that it is commonly used for positive interactions, but the presence of "stop" could indicate potential misinterpretation.

Mouth

Lips: 68.2%; A speech: 10.4%; Expression: 7.4%; Kiss: 11.8%; Void: 2.2%. The dominant interpretation as "lips" suggests a common association with facial features. The presence of "kiss" aligns with affectionate usage, while "a speech" and "expression" suggest versatility. The void percentage indicates some cases where the emoji might not be recognized or understood.

Smiling Emoji with Horns

Mischievous: 34.1% Evil: 50.4%; Playful: 5.9%; Offensive: 8.8%; Void: 0.7%. A portion of the participants accurately linked the  emoji with a mischievous implication, capturing the taunting essence frequently connected with this emoji. A majority of participants accurately comprehended the  emoji as symbolising devilish character. This corresponds with the conventional association of the emoji with mischief or

naughtiness. While a small percentage accurately understood it as representing playfulness. Another segment accurately associated the 😊 emoji with an offensive or sinister implication, acknowledging the potential for conveying a negative or threatening tone. A smaller percentage of participants might have encountered difficulty in classifying the emoji within the given options, indicating negligible uncertainty.

😏 Unamused Face

Annoyed: 42.9%; Disapproval: 12.6%; Displeasure: 25.2%; Offended: 15.5%; Void: 3.7%. Implications: This emoji is commonly interpreted as expressing annoyance, displeasure, and disapproval. The presence of "offended" suggests potential negative impacts in communication, and the void percentage indicates situations where the emoji might not have been understood.

🕶️ Sunglasses

Cool: 40.7%; Fashion: 24.4%; Style: 18.5%; Sun protection: 11.8%; Void: 4.6%. The emoji is generally associated with positive interpretations such as being cool, stylish, and fashionable. The void percentage suggests that there are instances where the emoji might not convey a clear message.

💣 Bomb

Offensive: 4.4%; Fruit: 39.3%; Threat: 13.3%; War: 38.5%; Void: 4.4%. The emoji has diverse interpretations, with "fruit" being an unexpected association. The presence of "offensive" and "war" interpretations indicates potential misinterpretations, and the void percentage suggests cases where the emoji's meaning might not be clear.

👻 Ghost

Spooky: 20% Supernatural: 8.2% Spirit: 27.4% Halloween: 42% Void: 2.2% Implications: The emoji is commonly associated with Halloween and spooky themes. The high percentage for "Halloween" indicates a strong cultural association, but the void percentage suggests some instances where the emoji might not convey its intended meaning. The data highlights the potential diversity in interpretations of emojis, even those commonly used to express emotions. This emphasizes the importance of context awareness

and clarity in emoji use to avoid misunderstandings and promote positive interactions in interpersonal communication

CONCLUSION

This preliminary study aimed to analyze the level of awareness and correctness regarding the use of emojis in communication among students of Alvan Ikoku Federal University of Education, Owerri. Emojis represent a significant aspect of our rapidly evolving digital era, playing a crucial role in daily online communications. It is imperative for users to adapt to this current reality. Moreover, an increasing number of legal cases have arisen, challenging judges with the correct interpretations needed to resolve these cases. Consequently, emojis represent an evolving reality with legal implications for misuse.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study puts forth the following recommendations:

1. The study recommends that the use of digital communication be incorporated into the standard minimum requirement for the teaching of both Degree and NCE programmes so that students can learn in addition to other contents, the appropriate use of emojis.
2. The legal domain should articulate comprehensive and explicit laws to address the use of emojis in various contexts. This will provide clarity and guidance in legal proceedings.
3. The study recommends effort towards a consistent emoji representation across various systems and platforms to reduce confusion among phone users. This harmonization will contribute to a more consistent and universally understood use of emojis.

REFERENCES

- Aull, B. (2019). *A study of phatic emoji use in WhatsApp communication*. Internet Pragmat. doi: 10.1075/ip.00029.aul
- Barbieri, F., Espinosa-Anke, L., & Saggion, H. (2016a). *Revealing patterns of Twitter emoji usage in Barcelona and Madrid*. Artif. Intell. Res. Dev. 288, 239–244. <https://doi.org/10.3233/978-1-61499-696-5-239>
- Bai, Q., Dan, Z., Mu, Z., & Yang, M. (2019). *A systematic review of emoji: current research and future perspective*. Front Media Interaction. <http://doi.org/ten.33389/fpsyg.2019.02221>. Vol. 10

- Derks, D., Fischer, A. H., & Bos, A. E. R. (2008). *The role of emotion in computer-mediated communication: a review*. *Comput.Hum.Behav.* 24, 766–785. doi: 10.1016/j.chb.2007.04.004
- Dimson, T. (2015). *Emojineering part 1: machine learning for emoji trends*. *Instagr. Eng. Blog* 30.
- Gibson, W., Huang, P., & Yu, Q. (2018). *Emoji and communicative action: the semiotics, sequence, and gestural actions of 'face covering hand*. *Discourse Context Media* 26, 91–99. doi: 10.1016/j.dcm.2018.05.005
- Gawane, L. (2019). *Emoji as digital gestures*. *Language at internet*. <https://www.org/articles/2019/gawne/index.html>
- Jack, R. E., Blais, C., Scheepers, C., Schyns, P. G., & Caldara, R. (2009). Cultural confusions show that facial expressions are not universal. *Curr. Biol.* 19, 1543–1548. doi: 10.1016/j.cub.2009.07.051
- Jaeger, S. R., & Ares, G. (2017). *Dominant meanings of facial emoji: insights from Chinese consumers and comparison with meanings from internet resources*. *Food Qual. Prefer.* 62, 275–283. doi: 10.1016/j.foodqual.2017.04.009
- Kalaba, J. (2023). *How different cultures perceive emoji in workplace communication*. <http://www.pumble.com/blog>. Retrieved on 17th November 2023.
- Kaye, L. K., Wall, H. J., & Malone, S. A. (2016). *Turn that frown upside-down: a contextual account of emoticon usage on different virtual platforms*. *Comput. Hum. Behav.* 60, 463–467. doi: 10.1016/j.chb.2016.02.088
- Kelly, R., & Watts, L. (2015). *Characterising the inventive appropriation of emoji as relationally meaningful in mediated close personal relationships*. in Paper Presented at the Experiences of Technology Appropriation: Unanticipated Users, Usage, Circumstances, and Design.
- Kelly, S., M. (2019). *Emoji are increasingly coming up in court case: Judges are struggling with how to interpret them*. <https://edition.cnn.com/business/tech> Retrieved 17th November, 2023.
- LittleJohn, S. W., & Foss, K. A. (2008). *Theories of human communication (9th ed.)*. *The nonverbal communication functions of emoticons in computer-mediated communication*. *Cyberpsychol. Behav.* 11, 595–597. doi: 10.1089/cpb.2007.0132

- LittleJohn, S. W., & Foss, K. A. (2008). *Theories of human communication (9th ed.)*. Thomson Wordsworth
- Mahajan, K., & Shaikh, S. (2019). *Emoji usage across platforms: a case study for the Charlottesville event*. In a Paper Presented at the Proceedings of the 2019 Workshop on Widening NLP.
- Miller, H., Thebault-Spieker, J., Chang, S., Johnson, I., Terveen, L., & Hecht, B. (2016). *Blissfully happy or ready to fight: varying interpretations of emoji*. ICWSM.
- Negishi, M. (2014). *Meet Shigetaka Kurita, the father of emoji*. Wall Street Journal
- Njenga, K. (2018). *Social media information security threats: anthropomorphic emoji analysis on social engineering*. In a in Paper Presented at the IT Convergence and Security 2017 (Seoul).doi: 10.1007/978-981-10-6454-8_24
- Obu, R. N., & Sackey, D. (2023). *Emojis as evidence*.
<http://www.thebftonline.com/2023/13/emoji-in-court-as-evidence>
- Park, J., Barash, V., Fink, C., & Cha, M. (2013). *Emoticon style: interpreting differences in emoticons across cultures,*” in Paper Presented at the ICWSM.
- Prada, M., Rodrigues, D. L., Garrido, M. V., Lopes, D., Cavalheiro, B., & Gaspar, R. (2018). Motives, frequency and attitudes toward emoji and emoticon use. *Telematics Inform.* 35, 1925–1934. doi: 10.1016/j.tele.2018.06.005
- Riordan, M. A. (2017). *The communicative role of non-face emojis: affect and disambiguation*. *Comput. Hum. Behav.* 76, 75–86. doi: 10.1016/j.chb.2017.07.009
- Rodrigues, D., Prada, M., Rui, G., Garrido, M. V., & Lopes, D. (2017). *Lisbon emoji and emoticon database (LEED): norms for emoji and emoticons in seven evaluative dimensions*. *Behav. Res. Methods* 50, 1–14. doi: 10.3758/s13428-017-0878-6
- Sadiq, M., & Shahida, (2019). *Learning Pakistani culture through the namaz emoji*, in Paper Presented at the 2019 2nd International Conference on Computing, Mathematics and Engineering Technologies. doi: 10.1109/ICOMET.2019.867347
- Sharma, V. (2023). When an emoji can land you in jail.
<https://decanchronicle.com/technology/in-other-news/12723/when-an-emoji-can-land-you-jail.html> Retrieved 17th November, 2023.

- Tauch, C., & Kanjo, E. (2016). *The roles of emojis in mobile phone notifications*. In Paper Presented at the 2016 ACM International Joint Conference on Pervasive and Ubiquitous Computing: Adjunct (Heidelberg). doi: 10.1145/2968219.2968549
- Thompson, D., Mackenzie, I. G., Leuthold, H., & Filik, R. (2016). *Emotional responses to irony and emoticons in written language: evidence from EDA and facial EMG*. *Psychophysiology* 53, 1054–1062. doi: 10.1111/psyp.12642
- Tigwell, G. W., & Flatla, D. R. (2016). “*Oh that's what you meant! reducing emoji misunderstanding,*” in Paper Presented at the 18th International Conference on Human-Computer Interaction With Mobile Devices and Services Adjunct. doi: 10.1145/2957265.2961844
- Tossell, C. C., Kortum, P., Shepard, C., Barg-Walkow, L. H., Rahmati, A., & Zhong, L. (2012). *A longitudinal study of emoticon use in text messaging from smartphones*. *Comput. Hum. Behav.* 28, 659–663. doi: 10.1016/j.chb.2011.11.012
- Zhou, R., Hentschel, J., & Kumar, N. (2017). *Goodbye text, hello emoji: mobile communication on wechat in China*. in Paper Presented at the Proceedings of the 2017 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems. doi: 10.1145/3025453.3025800
- <http://www.britannica.com>topi>
- <http://www.thererge.com/2019/2/18/18225231/emoji-emoticon-court-case-reference>
- <https://.business.ng/life-arts/article/emoji-go-legal-ascourt-declares.thumbs-up-valid-acceptance-m-contracts/>
- <https://editio.cnn.com.businee/>