

EMOJI DYNAMICS IN INSTAGRAM COMMUNICATION: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE STUDY OF MILLENNIAL USERS

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Abstract

Research Objective: This study aims to investigate the strategic role of emojis in Instagram communication, particularly in comments written by millennial users. The research focuses on identifying emoji usage patterns and analyzing their social, ideological, and pragmatic functions in constructing meaning, negotiating identity, and reflecting power dynamics in digital communication practices.

This research applies a qualitative descriptive approach using Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework. Data were collected through documentation and non-participatory observation of public comments containing emojis from verified Instagram accounts with high engagement. The analysis involved textual, discursive, and social practice dimensions to interpret emoji usage in digital discourse.

The findings reveal that emojis function beyond emotional expression. They serve as meaningful semiotic resources used strategically to strengthen messages, build solidarity, convey indirect criticism, and express ideological positions. Emoji usage also reflects communication norms, identity construction, and power negotiation in online interaction among millennial users.

This research provides insights into the complexity of multimodal digital communication and can support digital literacy development. The findings are also useful for communication

practitioners, social media users, and marketers in designing effective and culturally sensitive online communication strategies.

This study contributes to Critical Discourse Analysis by examining emojis as discursive tools in millennial Instagram communication. Unlike previous studies focusing on emotional or linguistic functions, this research highlights the ideological and power-related dimensions of emoji usage within contemporary digital discourse.

Keywords: emoji, digital communication, social media, millennials, critical discourse analysis, Instagram

INTRODUCTION

The development of information and communication technology has fundamentally transformed human interaction, especially through social media as the main arena for exchanging messages and opinions. Instagram, as one of the most popular visual platforms, especially among millennials, uniquely facilitates the expression of views and emotions through the comment feature, where emojis now play a central role. In this context, emojis—which were initially just a complement to text—have evolved into highly expressive linguistic and semiotic devices capable of representing complex meanings in a concise manner (Novak et al., 2015). More than just icons, emojis are now an integral part of multimodal communication, where meaning is conveyed through a combination of text and visual elements (Bateman & Wildfeuer, 2014; Lim, 2021). This transformation marks a significant shift in how individuals construct and interpret messages in the digital space. The millennial generation, born between the early 1980s and mid-1990s, is known as the most active and dominant age group in social media usage, making them pioneers in the adaptation and innovation of digital communication. Their communication patterns are heavily influenced by a digital interaction style that prioritizes speed, efficiency, and visuality. In the context of Instagram communication, recent research shows that emojis are not just ornaments, but have become intrinsic features in the construction of meaning (Sampietro, 2019) and even function as markers of digital discourse (Danesi, 2016). The use of emojis by millennials not only reflects a distinctive communication style, but also becomes a means of forming digital identities (Alshenqeeti, 2016), building social relationships (Gee & Hayes, 2017), conveying attitudes towards online issues, as well as impression management tools (Jiang et al., 2021) and indicators of social affection (Baron, 2017) in online interactions. Emojis are often used to add emotional nuance and disambiguation in text messages, filling in the gaps of non-verbal cues missing in text-based communication (Cohn et al., 2017). However, the meaning of emojis is not always universal; it is often complex and multilayered. Studies have shown that the interpretation of emojis can vary significantly based on culture, context, and even the platform used (Miller et al., 2016; Lu et al., 2021). In digital communication that is full of power dynamics, ideologies, and social structures, the use of emojis can be interpreted differently depending on the context, the sender's intention, and the audience's perception. Therefore, this study argues that the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach, as advocated by Fairclough (2003) and Wodak (2008), offers a powerful framework for understanding how language—including visual elements such as emojis—is used to produce, reproduce, and even challenge power relations and ideologies in society. Through the lens of CDA, we can unpack the social and political dimensions of online texts, including the role of non-verbal symbols (Androutsopoulos, 2014) that are often overlooked in conventional

linguistic analysis. CDA uniquely allows researchers to explore how these seemingly simple symbols can become ideological battlegrounds or tools for asserting dominance (Machin & Mayr, 2012). Although many studies have examined the linguistic functions of emojis (Stark & Crawford, 2015) or their impact on emotional expression (Lo & Hsieh, 2022), there are still few studies that specifically apply CDA to explore how emojis by millennial users on Instagram are actively involved in the formation and negotiation of power and ideological discourses in the context of dynamic digital communication. This study seeks to fill this gap by providing a deeper and more critical analysis of this seemingly simple yet meaningful communicative practice, highlighting how emojis can be instruments for negotiating identity, solidarity, and even resistance in the digital landscape (Kaye et al., 2021).

This study offers a novel contribution by examining emoji usage through the lens of Critical Discourse Analysis within Instagram communication among millennial users. While previous studies mainly focused on the emotional or linguistic functions of emojis, this research emphasizes their role as discursive tools that reflect ideological meanings, power relations, and identity negotiation in digital interaction. This perspective provides a deeper understanding of emojis as socio-cultural symbols rather than merely expressive elements in online communication.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research was conducted using a qualitative descriptive approach, which aims to understand the social, ideological, and symbolic meanings contained in the use of emojis by the millennial generation in comments on the Instagram platform. A qualitative approach was chosen because it allows researchers to explore and interpret communication phenomena in depth, contextually, and reflectively, especially in seeing how visual symbols such as emojis shape and reflect discursive practices in complex digital spaces. The main analytical method used is Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as developed by Norman Fairclough. This model is implemented through three interrelated dimensions of analysis: (1) text analysis, (2) discursive practices, and (3) social practices. This framework is used to understand how text and visual symbols (emojis) function in the process of producing and reproducing meaning, as well as how the relationship between language and power is manifested in communication practices on social media. The data source comes from public comments containing emojis on Instagram accounts with high engagement rates. The selected accounts include celebrity accounts (@raffinagita1717), news/information media accounts (@indozone.id), gossip/entertainment accounts (@lambe_turah), and commercial accounts (@wardahbeauty). These accounts were chosen because they represent various types of discourses that are popular among millennials—from public personalities that influence opinions, the spread of news and media narratives, to socio-cultural discussions through gossip, as well as discourses on consumption and brand identity. The selection of these accounts is important because they can specifically provide rich data to analyze the negotiation of power and the construction of ideology that are the focus of this study.

Data collection was conducted using documentation techniques and non-participatory observation of comments on posts that were considered popular (with a high number of likes and comments) during the period of May to June 2024. Data were collected comprehensively, covering all comments containing emojis and contextually relevant from selected posts. The number of posts to be analyzed from each account was a minimum of 5 of the most popular posts. Identification of users who were included in the millennial age range (20–35 years, according to the general consensus of media demographic literature) was carried out based on indications on public profiles (eg, date of birth if available) and analysis of language styles that were consistent with millennial generation digital communication patterns, such as the use of slang, acronyms, and millennial-specific pop culture references. Although it is recognized that there is potential subjectivity in this demographic inference, the criteria are considered valid enough for the purposes of this qualitative exploration, focusing on the dominant discursive practices among social media users who are estimated to be millennials. To support the understanding of the tendency of emoji usage, the researcher will present data on the frequency of emoji appearance in tabular form. However, it is important to emphasize that although there is a descriptive presentation of quantitative data, the analytical approach used remains qualitative. The presentation of the number of emoji appearances is solely intended to provide additional context regarding the dominant patterns or general trends of usage, not for statistical generalization or quantitative analysis. The main focus of this study remains on the interpretation of meaning, discourse function, and social context that underlies the use of emoji in current millennial communication practices.

Data analysis was carried out through an iterative process that included:

1. **Text Analysis (Micro-level):** At this stage, the researcher will examine the comments closely, identify the emojis used, and analyze the combination of emojis with the verbal text. Particular attention will be paid to the choice of emojis, their order, repetition, and how they contribute to the denotative and connotative meaning of the message. For example, how the smiley face emoji 😊 can indicate irony, or the fire emoji 🔥 can indicate strong agreement, beyond their literal meaning.
2. **Discursive Practices (Meso-level):** This stage involves analyzing how emoji-containing comments are produced, distributed, and consumed in the context of Instagram interactions. Researchers will look at patterns of responses to emoji-containing comments, how emojis are used to initiate or end conversations, and how they shape cohesion and coherence within comment threads. It also includes observing the unwritten “rules” of emoji use in certain communities or types of posts, for example, how the use of certain emojis in gossip accounts might signal support for a particular narrative or denigrate others.
3. **Social Practices (Macro-level):** In this dimension, findings from text analysis and discursive practices are connected to the broader social, cultural, and ideological context. Researchers will interpret how emoji use reflects or even challenges social norms, millennial cultural values, group identities, or certain ideologies (e.g., consumerism, feminism, or critique of authority). For example, the use of certain emojis that are collectively interpreted as a form of resistance, solidarity, or worship of certain figures, or how certain emojis can become symbols of resistance to narratives of authority or representations of marginalized groups.

Data validity is strengthened through triangulation of data sources (comparison of comments from different types of accounts), peer debriefing to gain external perspectives on

interpretations, and ongoing critical reflection by researchers to maintain objectivity in interpretation and minimize bias. In addition, an audit trail will be documented to ensure transparency and accountability for each step of the data analysis.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A. Research Results

4.1. Frequency Patterns and General Functions of Emoji

As a first step to gain an understanding of the general patterns of emoji usage, the researchers describe the frequency of emoji appearance based on emotional, expressive, and symbolic functions. Table 1 presents the 14 most frequently used emojis by millennial users in the analyzed data sample. This frequency data serves as an initial context for a more in-depth qualitative discourse analysis, which will explore the meaning and discursive functions of emoji in relation to power and ideology.

Table 1:14 Most Frequently Used Emojis by Millennial Users on Instagram

Emojis	General Functions	Number of Occurrences	General Context
❤️	Expression of love / affection	45 times	Expressions of affection, endorsement of celebrities or products, strengthening parasocial bonds or brand loyalty.
😂	Excessive laughter / familiarity	40 times	Responding to humorous content, forming social bonds, demonstrating a collective understanding of humor.
🥺	Dramatization / empathy	37 times	Extreme emotional reactions, support or compassion, showing empathy or emotional solidarity.
😏	Skepticism / cynicism	30 times	Implicit criticism of an account, caption, or story, indicating distrust or irritation.
✨	Aesthetics/style	25 times	Enhance visual effects, support positive or feminine image, show aesthetic appreciation.
😍	Admiration / really like	24 times	Comments on beauty, celebrity, or interesting content express intense admiration.
🙄	Doubt / sarcasm	19 times	Indirectly challenge statements in the caption, provoking critical thinking or irony.

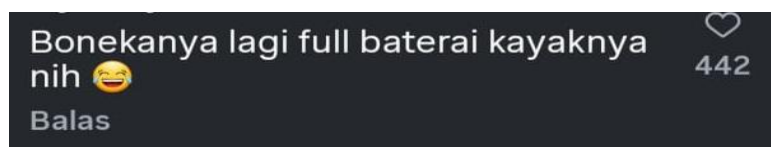
😭	Excessive emotion / soft sympathy	17 times	Comments on touching stories, sweet or sad events, expressing emotion or sympathy.
🔥	Cool / Hot / Great	17 times	Comments on appearance, lifestyle content, or transformations that are considered attractive
😞	Disappointed / Flat / Uninterested Expression	15 times	Comments on Posts Deemed Inappropriate, Responses to Behavior Deemed Cringe or Tacky, Satire for Captions That Are Too Showy or Over-the-Top
🥰	Adorable / Gentle affection	15 times	Shows sweetness and tender affection, usually towards babies, animals, or couples.
👏	Support / Celebration	13 times	Comments of praise for achievements, winning moments, or positive news.
😘	Kiss / Flirting	10 times	Flirtatious or intimate comments, often to celebrity partners, close friends, or gentle compliments
👏	Applause / Respect	10 times	To praise a person who performs a good act or achievement.

Data Source: Public comments from 10 posts on the accounts @raffinagita1717, @indozone.id, @lambe_turah, and @wardahbeauty posted during May–June 2024. Each comment analyzed contained at least one or two emojis written by users aged 20–35 based on their profile and language style. Although this table presents the frequency of emoji occurrence, it is important to remember that in qualitative analysis, the main focus is on interpreting the meaning, discursive function, and social context behind the use of emojis, rather than solely on statistical quantification. Even low-frequency emojis can have significant discursive functions in reproducing or challenging power structures and ideologies, which will be explored in further analysis.

4.2. Analysis of Comments and Discursive Functions of Emoji

This section presents an in-depth analysis of selected commentary excerpts, using three dimensions of Fairclough’s Critical Discourse Analysis: text analysis, discursive practices, and social practices. The analysis aims to uncover how emojis contribute to the construction of meaning, negotiation of identity, and reproduction/challenging of power dynamics in millennial digital communication.

Comment 1: (From account @raffinagita1717)



- **Text Analysis:** Use of the emoji 😄 (face with tears of joy) after a sentence that metaphorically describes the vitality or energy of the subject (possibly the child of a celebrity). This sentence indicates a humorous and light observation.

- **Discursive Practice:** This emoji functions as a marker of laughter or humor, indicating that the comment is intended as a joke or a humorous observation. In the context of a celebrity account, this emoji helps to build a light and friendly atmosphere between the commentator and the other audience, as well as with the public figure itself. It is a form of affective display that reinforces the positive impression of the content and shows emotional affiliation with the narrative presented by the celebrity.

- **Social Practice:** The use of 😂 in this context reproduces the norms of digital communication that prioritize the visual and concise expression of emotions, especially in building parasocial bonds. This emoji contributes to the formation of a "community of laughter" or solidarity among fans who share an appreciation of the same content, strengthening the parasocial bond with the celebrity. This emoji confirms that the commentator understands and participates in the humor presented, indicating belonging to a group of fans who agree with the positive image of the celebrity.

Comment 2: (From @indozone.id account)

Pak, gak capek mulai jaman kampanye dulu sampek anda jadi skrang omon-omon terus gak capek pak ? Terus aksi & tindakannya mana ? Entar di katin omon-omon diang gak terima ? 🙄😐 hmmm

Balas

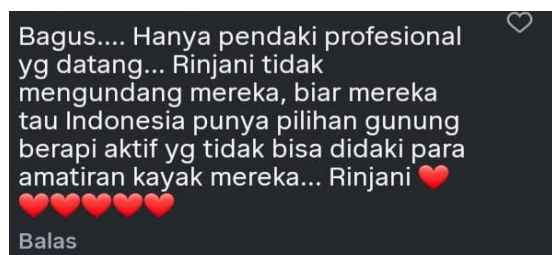
- **Text Analysis:** The use of emojis 🙄 (face with rolling eyes) and 😐 (expressionless face) at the end of rhetorical questions that are critical. Phrases such as "omon-omon terus" (continuous talking without action) and "gak capek" indicate irritation and skepticism towards the subject (public officials).

- **Discursive Practice:** The emoji 🙄 discursively functions as an expression of distrust, irritation, or subtle sarcasm towards the subject of the comment. The emoji 😐 reinforces the impression of passive-aggressiveness or deep disappointment. Together with the text, this emoji conveys veiled criticism that avoids direct confrontation but is still effective in voicing dissatisfaction. This is a strategy to convey criticism without the risk of too harsh a response, utilizing the semiotic ambiguity of emojis to challenge the dominant narrative.

- **Social Practice:** The use of this emoji explicitly reflects the dynamics of power in digital political discourse, where citizens use social media platforms to challenge the narrative or performance of officials. This emoji allows for the hidden expression of dissent, reproducing the practice of "nyinyir" or satire common in Indonesian internet culture as a form of passive resistance. It can also build solidarity among individuals

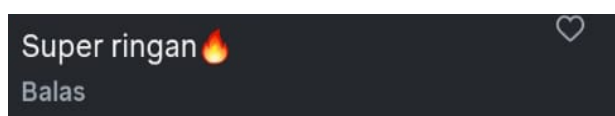
who share similar sentiments towards authority figures, forming a hidden but effective "community of criticism" in spreading ideologies of dissatisfaction or opposition.

Comment 3: (From the account @lambe_turah)



- **Text Analysis:** The repeated use of the ❤️ (red heart) emoji six times after a highly protective and exclusive statement about Mount Rinjani and professional climbers.
- **Discursive Practice:** The discursive repetition of ❤️ serves to emphasize the intensity of affection and support, but in this context, the affection is directed at “Rinjani” and “professional climbers” while excluding “amateurs.” This emoji not only expresses affection, but also reinforces sentiments of group exclusivity and superiority. It is a form of affective endorsement that supports a particular narrative and limits access.
- **Social Practice:** The use of ❤️ in this context reproduces social dynamics related to group identity and exclusion. It shows how the emoji can be used to build solidarity among the “professional” group and affirm their social position, while implicitly denigrating “amateurs.” It reflects how ideologies (e.g., elitism, purism) can be reinforced through seemingly positive expressions of emotion, shaping social boundaries in online discourse.

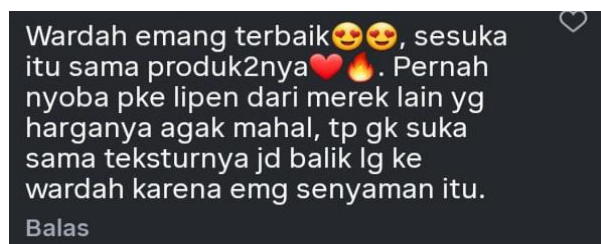
Comment 4: (From @wardahbeauty account)



- **Text Analysis:** Use of the emoji 🔥 (fire) after the product description “super light”.
- **Discursive Practice:** The emoji 🔥 discursively functions as a marker of praise, exceptional quality, or “hotness” (in the sense of popular/trending). In the context of beauty product reviews, this emoji reinforces positive claims about the product, suggesting that it is excellent or impressive. It is a concise and powerful form of visual endorsement.
- **Social Practice:** The use of 🔥 reproduces consumer communication practices on social media where users become micro-influencers” by providing short but impactful reviews. This emoji contributes to a culture of consumption driven by visuals and emotions, where products are judged based on instant impressions. It can also reinforce

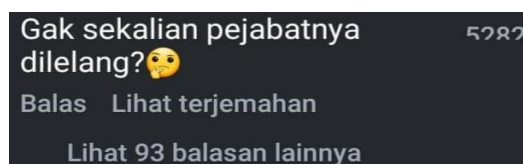
brand image and encourage purchases, demonstrating how emojis can be used in commercial discursive practices.

Comment 5: (From @wardahbeauty account)



- **Text Analysis:** A combination of emojis 😍😍 (smiling face with heart-eyes), ❤️ (red heart), and 🔥 (fire) in one comment praising Wardah products.
- **Discursive Practice:** This combination of emojis discursively creates a very intense expression of affection and praise. 😍😍 indicates deep admiration, ❤️ indicates love/affection, and 🔥 indicates exceptional quality. Together, they form a very strong multimodal endorsement, much more expressive than text alone. Personal narratives about returning to Wardah products after trying other brands reinforce this claim.
- **Social Practice:** The use of these emojis reproduces practices of brand loyalty and consumer advocacy on social media. Commenters not only praise the product but also actively promote it, building a positive brand image in the eyes of other audiences. This shows how millennial users participate in consumption discourse, where personal experiences and emotional expressions through emojis become powerful tools to influence purchasing decisions and shape consumer identity.

Comment 6: (From the account @lambe_turah)

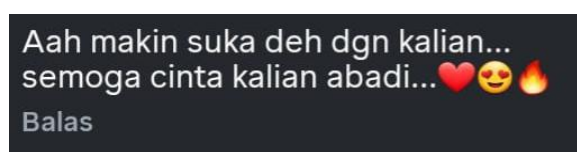


- **Text Analysis:** The use of the 🤔 emoji (thinking face) after the provocative rhetorical question "Don't the officials be auctioned off?".
- **Discursive Practice:** The 🤔 emoji discursively functions to add a layer of doubt, critical thinking, or even sarcasm to an already provocative question. It invites the audience to ponder the implications of the question, often with a tone of irony or

disbelief. This emoji allows the commentator to deliver a sharp critique without explicitly stating an accusation, using ambiguity to provoke thought.

- **Social Practice:** The use of 🙄 in this context reflects the practice of critical engagement with social or political issues on social media. It shows how individuals can use dark humor or sarcasm to challenge the status quo or criticize figures of power. This emoji facilitates the formation of counter-discourse, where unconventional questions are asked to challenge existing norms or practices, reproducing power dynamics in the digital public space.

Comment 7: (From account @raffinagita1717)



- **Text Analysis:** The combination of the emojis ❤️ (red heart), 😍 (smiling face with heart-eyes), and 🔥 (fire) at the end of a comment expressing support and hope for “eternal love”.
- **Discursive Practice:** This combination creates a very strong expression of affection and enthusiasm. ❤️ and 😍 indicate love and admiration, while 🔥 adds an overwhelming element of “passion” or “intensity”. This is an affective amplification that strengthens positive sentiments towards the subject (possibly a celebrity couple or public figure).
- **Social Practice:** The use of these emojis reproduces the practices of fan culture and parasocial relationships on social media. Commenters express deep emotional support for public figures, contributing to romantic or idealized narratives. This shows how emojis are used to build and maintain emotional bonds with idols, as well as participate in the construction of their public image, reflecting the power dynamics between fans and celebrities.

Comment 8: (From @indozone.id account)

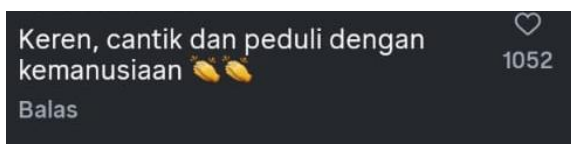


- **Text Analysis:** This comment uses the emojis 😭 (loudly crying face) and 🙏 (pleading face). The phrase "feels like I've been slapped" and the confession "it turns out I'm not grateful... I'm not grateful" indicate deep realization and regret.
- **Discursive Practice:** The combination of these emojis and self-confession creates a powerful expression of self-reflection and regret. The emoji 😭 depicts deep sadness or

disappointment over a new self-awareness, while the 🙄 expresses apology and humility. This is a form of public acknowledgement of one's shortcomings that is often seen in the context of social media, where users share their personal feelings to gain empathy or validation from online communities.

- **Social Practice:** This comment reflects the social practice of introspection and the expression of vulnerability in digital public spaces. Social media users often use these platforms as a place to share personal experiences, including moments of reflection or confession. This practice can serve as personal catharsis and also build connections with others who may be experiencing similar feelings. This shows how social media becomes a space for discussion about moral and spiritual values, such as gratitude, where users collectively reflect on and affirm certain social norms.

Comment 9: (From @indozone.id account)

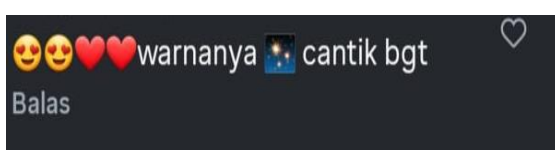


- **Text Analysis:** This comment uses the 🙌 (clapping hands) emoji repeated twice. The words “cool,” “beautiful,” and “care about humanity” are direct forms of praise.

- **Discursive Practice:** The use of the 🙌🙌 emoji after a series of compliments creates a strong expression of appreciation and approval. The repetition of the emoji intensifies the support and admiration directed at the subject of the comment. This is a form of positive validation that reinforces the positive image of the individual or action being discussed. This comment serves to praise not only physical appearance (“beautiful”) but also character and actions (“care about humanity”).

- **Social Practice:** This comment reproduces the social practice of public appreciation and recognition for commendable actions. On social media, users often give support and praise to individuals or groups who are considered to have positive values or perform acts of kindness. This contributes to the formation of positive narratives and the idealization of public figures or role models. The use of the 🙌 emoji also reflects the practice of digital “applause,” where users virtually “clap” to show collective support and admiration.

Comment 10: (From @wardahbeauty account)

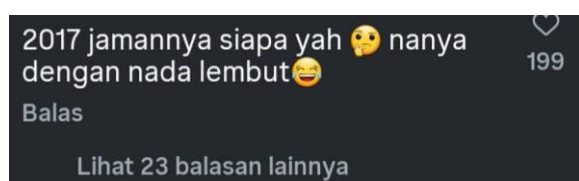


- **Text Analysis:** This comment begins with the repetition of the emojis 😊 (smiling face with heart-eyes) and ❤️ (red heart), followed by the emoji ✨ (sparkles) before the words "beautiful".

- **Discursive Practice:** The combination of the emojis 😊😊 and ❤️❤️ effectively creates an expression of intense admiration and interest. The repetition of the emojis reinforces the positive sentiment. The emoji ✨ is added to emphasize the aesthetic quality of the "color" which is considered "beautiful," as if giving a "sparkling" or "magical" effect to the object being praised. This is an affective and descriptive amplification that focuses on the visual appeal of the advertised product or object.

- **Social Practice:** This comment reflects the social practice of consumer expressions of admiration and participation in the beauty narrative. In the context of the brand account (Wardah Beauty), the use of these emojis shows how consumers use visual language to express satisfaction and appreciation for the product. This contributes to the creation of a positive brand image and a boost to sales. Additionally, these comments demonstrate how emojis are used to participate in aesthetic "worship," where users collectively admire and validate the beauty standards being promoted.

Comment 11: (From account @lambe_turah)

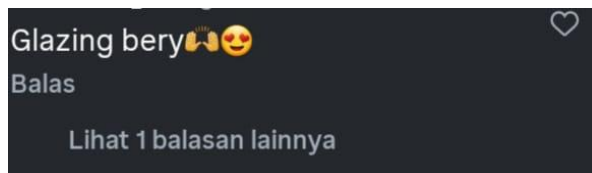


- **Text Analysis:** This comment uses the emojis 🤔 (thinking face) and 😊 (face with tears of joy). The text is in the form of a rhetorical question that tries to remind or insinuate about a past ("2017, whose era is it?"). The phrase "asking in a soft tone" could be ironic or to reduce the impression of sarcasm.

- **Discursive Practice:** The emoji 🤔 here functions to invite critical thinking or veiled doubt about an event or figure in the past, often with negative implications. This is a form of sarcasm or subtle allusion that invites readers to draw their own conclusions. Meanwhile, the emoji 😊 after it could indicate that the statement is a joke or comment that the sender finds funny, even though it contains criticism. This functions as a marker of humor or irony that softens the tone of criticism.

- **Social Practices:** The use of this emoji combination reflects the practice of "political commentary" or "social gossip" on social media, where users try to dig up or indirectly re-touch sensitive issues from the past. This shows how millennials use emojis to avoid direct confrontation but still effectively voice opinions or criticisms. These emojis also contribute to the formation of public opinion or a broader discussion about a particular history or event, while building solidarity among those who share similar understandings or sentiments.

comment 12: (From account @wardahbeauty)



• **Text Analysis:** This short comment uses the word “Glazing bary” which is likely a slang or typo of “Glazing baru” or “Glazing banget,” referring to a cosmetic product. The emojis used are 🙌 (raising hands) and 😍 (smiling face with heart-eyes).

• **Discursive Practice:** The combination of the emojis 🙌 and 😍 discursively creates a very strong expression of enthusiasm, approval, and admiration for the product. 🙌 is often used to show support, celebration, or praise, while 😍 expresses deep interest and admiration. Together, they form a very expressive visual endorsement, signaling satisfaction and strong recommendation from consumers.

• **Social Practice:** The use of these emojis reproduces the practice of “consumer advocacy” or “brand enthusiasm” on social media. Millennial users actively share their positive experiences with the product, acting as micro-influencers who organically promote the brand. It shows how emojis are used to build positive brand images and influence the purchasing decisions of others in online communities, reflecting the dynamics of consumption and social validation in the digital space.

comment 13: (From account @lambe_turah)



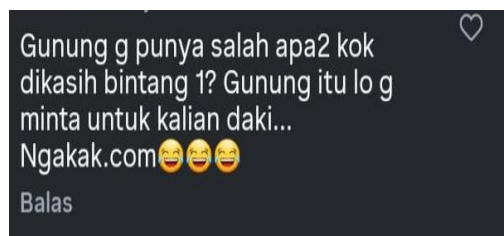
• **Text Analysis:** This comment expresses the steadfastness of the view on the beauty of Mount Rinjani, regardless of external assessments (“diberi bintang ga di kasi bintang”). The emoji used is 🙌 (clapping hands) repeated three times.

• **Discursive Practice:** The repetition of the emoji 🙌 discursively functions as a strong emphasis on agreement and appreciation. It shows deep praise and unwavering support for previous statements about Rinjani. This emoji functions as affective validation that reinforces positive sentiments and admiration.

• **Social Practice:** The use of this emoji reproduces the practice of “local patriotism” or strong “identity affiliation” towards a place or symbol. The commentator shows loyalty and pride towards Rinjani, which can be a representation of regional or national identity.

It also reflects the practice of "collective opinion" where individuals virtually "clap" to support a narrative that is in line with the majority view or a particular idealization, building group solidarity among those who share the same love for the object being praised.

comment 14: (From account @lambe_turah)



• **Text Analysis:** This comment is defensive of the mountain that was “given a 1-star,” implying criticism of the people who gave the rating. The phrase “<https://www.google.com/search?q=ngakak.com>” is an expression of internet humor, and is followed by the repetition of the emoji 😂 (face with tears of joy) three times.

• **Discursive Practice:** The emoji 😂 discursively functions to emphasize the intensity of laughter that comes from a sense of irony, amazement, or even strong satire of behavior that is considered unreasonable (giving a mountain a 1-star). This is a form of aggressive or sarcastic humor that is used to ridicule or belittle the views of others. “<https://www.google.com/search?q=Ngakak.com>” reinforces this humorous function.

• **Social Practice:** The repeated use of 😂 in this context reflects the practice of “social criticism through humor” or “cyber-sarcasm.” Millennial users use humor as a mechanism to convey disapproval or anger at actions or opinions they deem stupid or unfair. This can build solidarity among those who share a common frustration or disgust with the target of criticism, as well as contribute to the formation of discourse that challenges popular norms or views on social media. It also shows how emojis can be used to indirectly degrade or belittle others.

Comment 15: (From account @raffinagita1717)



• **Text Analysis:** This comment uses the emojis 😘 (face blowing a kiss) and 😊 (smiling face with hearts) repeated twice. The text contains compliments (“so cool”) and positive wishes (“always be happy and long-lasting”) directed at the subject (possibly the celebrity couple).

• **Discursive Practice:** The combination of the emojis 😘 and 😊 discursively creates a soft yet powerful expression of affection, support, and intimacy. 😘 indicates a kiss

or affectionate gesture, while 🥰 indicates warm feelings of love or care. The repetition of both serves to intensify this positive sentiment, emphasizing the commenter's deep emotional support. This is a form of affective bonding that strengthens the parasocial relationship.

• **Social Practice:** The use of these emojis reflects fans' practices of expressing personal and emotional support for their idols. In the context of celebrity accounts, these emojis help build and maintain emotional bonds between fans and public figures, and reinforce the romantic or idealized narratives that are often built around celebrities' lives. This shows how emojis are used to participate in fan culture, where emotional expression becomes an important means of demonstrating loyalty and engagement.

B. Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that emoji usage among millennial Instagram users represents a complex discursive practice that extends beyond simple emotional expression. The analysis reveals that emojis function as multimodal communication tools that help users construct meanings, negotiate identities, and express ideological positions within digital interactions.

The frequency analysis indicates that affection-related emojis such as ❤️, 🥰, and 🥰 dominate communication in celebrity-related contexts. This finding supports previous research suggesting that emojis play an important role in building parasocial relationships between audiences and public figures. The use of these emojis allows users to express emotional closeness and reinforces fan culture dynamics in digital environments.

In contrast, emojis such as 😬, 😬, and 😬 appear more frequently in news and gossip accounts, reflecting practices of indirect criticism and sarcasm. These emojis function as discursive strategies that enable users to express disagreement or dissatisfaction without engaging in direct confrontation. This phenomenon highlights how emojis operate as tools of subtle resistance and ideological negotiation in online political and social discourse.

Furthermore, the findings also show that emojis play a significant role in digital consumer culture. The frequent use of emojis such as 🔥, ✨, and 🥰 in commercial accounts demonstrates how visual symbols are used to strengthen product endorsement and brand loyalty. This reflects how millennials actively participate in consumption discourse by expressing emotional and aesthetic appreciation through emoji usage.

Overall, the results confirm that emojis function as semiotic resources that reflect broader socio-cultural values and communication norms. Millennials strategically utilize emojis to navigate social relationships, reinforce group solidarity, and participate in ideological discourse in digital spaces. These findings support Fairclough's perspective that language and symbolic elements are closely connected to power and social structures in communication practices.

CONCLUSION

This study successfully shows that emojis are not just visual complements in digital communication, but also significant and strategic semiotic tools in interactions on Instagram, especially among the millennial generation. Through Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach, this study uncovers hidden dimensions of emoji use that go beyond the function of simple emotional expression. First, it was found that emoji usage patterns are very varied and multifunctional, ranging from expressions of affection (❤️, 😍, 😊), humor and laughter (😂), to dramatization and empathy (😭, 😔). However, behind these general functions, in-depth analysis at the level of discursive and social practices reveals a deeper complexity of meaning. Second, emojis have crucial social, ideological, and pragmatic functions in the construction and negotiation of meaning. Pragmatically, emojis are often used to reinforce verbal messages, provide emotional nuances that are absent from text, or even replace words. From a discursive perspective, emojis play a role in building group solidarity (e.g., among celebrity fans or fellow critics), conveying veiled criticism (😏, 😐, 😬), and asserting social positions (such as the exclusivity of professional groups). Ideologically, emojis reflect and even shape cultural values and social norms. For example, the use of certain emojis can reinforce consumerism (🔥, 🍷 for products), parasocial relationships with celebrities (❤️, 😍), or even become a means of passive resistance and satire towards authority figures. Overall, the findings of this study confirm that emojis are dynamic discursive practices that reflect and shape the social and ideological dynamics of contemporary digital communication. They serve as important markers in the negotiation of identity, power, and affiliation in the online realm, demonstrating how simple visual symbols can become ideological battlegrounds and tools for asserting dominance or voicing dissent.

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