

MISUNDERSTANDING IN EMOJI USE “🙏”: A CROSS CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE ON COLLEGE IN STUDENTS SOCIAL MEDIA

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Abstract: Emoji is “🙏” (begging hand) often used by students in using social media as a form of politeness, gratitude, or request. However, the meaning of this emoji is not always universal and can trigger misunderstandings, especially in cross-cultural communication. This study aims to explore students' perceptions of emoji and identify potential miscommunication in its use. The method used in this study was qualitative with a purposive sampling technique, involving 16 Indonesian students aged 18–25 years who are active on social media. Data were collected through an open-ended essay questionnaire via Google Form, then analyzed using thematic analysis. The theories used include Intercultural Pragmatics, Politeness Strategy, and the concept of digital nonverbal communication. The results of the study showed that most students understand emoji as a symbol of politeness, but avoid using it in formal situations for fear of being misinterpreted. Cultural differences, social contexts, and duration of social media use influence the interpretation of this emoji. This study emphasizes the importance of cross-cultural digital communication literacy, as well as the need for visual pragmatics education in higher education. Further research is recommended to explore other multi-interpretable emojis in the context of countries.

Keywords: *Digital Communication, Students, Cross-Cultural, Miscommunication, College*

INTRODUCTION

In today's digital communication era, emojis have become a part of communication to convey emotions, states, and implicit meanings in a text message. One of the most frequently used emojis by students but often misunderstood is “🙏” (begging hand), which when viewed visually resembles hands praying or saluting. However, on various social media platforms, this emoji is used for various contexts: such as expressing gratitude, apologies, prayers, and even requests for help. However, this emoji has a meaning “🙏” is not always universal, but rather highly dependent on the cultural, social and relational context between users.

According to (DANESI, 2020), emoji is a form of visual communication that is semiotic, where one symbol can have many meanings, depending on the culture and experience of the emoji user. Meanwhile, according to (Darmayanti et al., n.d.) argues that computer communication that does not have sound and gestures tends to rely on nonverbal symbols such as emoji to enrich the meaning of the emoji. However, dependence on emoji also opens up the possibility of ambiguity or misunderstanding, especially in cross-cultural communication. For example, in emoji “🙏” where Western countries often interpret the emoji as meaning “thank you” or “please,” However, in some Asian countries it is more often associated with religious or spiritual meanings (Arviv & Tsur, 2022)

Several previous studies have explored the role of emojis in online communication (Ingman, 2019) argues that emojis can emotionally strengthen messages, but do not always eliminate the potential for perceptual bias or assumptions in each individual. The study that done before also revealed that the use of emojis in sending messages can have different perceptions between users from individualistic and collectivistic cultures. However, most studies still focus on the role of emojis in general, and there has been no specific research that examines how one emoji such as “🙏” can lead to misunderstandings of the meaning of intercultural interactions, especially among students who actively communicate digitally and come from diverse cultural backgrounds. (Wulandari et al., 2022)

This study suggests that a more in-depth research study is needed into the meaning and potential for miscommunication of certain emojis such as “🙏”, especially in the context of cross-cultural student social interactions on social media. Students, as a digital native generation, often use this emoji in everyday conversations, both in personal, academic, and organizational contexts. However, the understanding of this emoji is not always uniform, which can lead to misinterpretation or even social tension.

This study uses a cross-cultural perspective approach with pragmatic theory, focusing on the theory of Intercultural Pragmatics and Relevance Theory, where the two theories explain that meaning does not only come from the form of the symbol, but also from the social and cultural context where the symbol is used. By using a hypothesis that aims to:

- (1) Identify how students from different cultures interpret emojis “🙏”
- (2) Reveal the forms of misunderstanding that occur in its use
- (3) Analyze the contextual and cultural factors that influence the interpretation of these emojis.

This research is expected to provide theoretical contributions in the study of digital communication and intercultural pragmatics, as well as provide practical input for the world of multicultural higher education in understanding the meaning of potential conflicts that seem simple but have an impact on communication between students.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach that aims to explore students' understanding, perceptions, and experiences regarding the use of emojis. “🙏” (begging hand) in digital communication, especially in the cross-cultural context of social media. The qualitative approach was chosen because it focuses on subjective meaning and social experiences that cannot be measured numerically. According to (Creswell, 2018), qualitative research aims to

understand the meaning produced by individuals towards a social phenomenon based on their perceptions in different contexts.

Data collection in this study was collected via an open questionnaire distributed online using Google Form. The research instrument was a series of essay questions containing 5 questions to explore respondent information on emojis. “🙏”, and the possibility of misunderstanding of meaning in interactions between students from different cultural backgrounds. This sampling technique was carried out purposively, with a total of ten students aged between 18 and 25 years from various majors and regions who actively use social media and are accustomed to using this emoji in everyday communication.

This study is based on the theory of intercultural pragmatics which states that misunderstandings in communication are not only caused by language differences, but also by differences in norms and cultures about how language is used in everyday life. The use of emoji as a visual element in digital communication is influenced by cultural context, and its meaning can vary among users from different cultural backgrounds. Therefore, emoji can be understood with various meanings such as expressions of gratitude, apologies, prayers, or even "high five", depending on local cultural perceptions.

To analyze the data in this study using the thematic analysis method which aims to identify, analyze, and report a pattern that emerges from the respondents' essay answers. This study was conducted through an open coding process and data grouping based on similarity of meaning. Through this thematic analysis, researchers gain a deeper understanding of the dynamics of emoji use “🙏” and the potential for misunderstanding in intercultural communication among students.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A. Research Results

1. Use of emojis in everyday life

Table 1. Use of emojis in everyday life

Name	Answer
Abhitarya Candrakusuma	I use Emoji “🙏” to show gratitude, ask for help, apologize, or as a form of politeness and good wishes in daily digital communication.
Anastasia Felicia Stacy	For thanks, asking for help, and apologizing
Dian Oktavia Putri	Begging hand, because it is a hand used to ask for help or say thank you from the deepest heart, as a sign of humility.
Harris Mahanta	Request, formalities when contacting lecturers
Fatina Sri Rahayu	Emoji is a sign of respect and is also used as a sign of apology
Salsabilla Rindita Rahmawati	Usually, when students use emojis when chatting with lecturers, it is as a form of gratitude or as an expression of politeness to the lecturer.
Leany Alfina	The meaning of the emoji “🙏” for me is like a thank you to my friends, family and lecturers.

Lilly	As an emoji to show politeness like hands clasped together, a symbol of thank you, sorry, etc.
Rakha Adrian	As a greeting and apology emoji
Drex Aidrian	Shows politeness, adds a formal impression.

Based on the results of the questionnaire obtained from various students in Indonesia, the majority of students stated that emojis “🙏” used as a form of expression of gratitude or apology in conversations on social media, especially on the WhatsApp and Instagram platforms. Students often feel that this emoji can replace verbal expressions such as "thank you" or "sorry very much" in a shorter and less stiff way. However, in certain situations, this emoji can also be used to ask for help in a subtle way, which is culturally considered more polite and less urgent. (Bagaskara et al., 2023)

This study is in line with the nonverbal theory in digital communication from (Ingman, 2019), who argues that this emoji can replace facial expressions or body movements in face-to-face communication, so that it can expand the message and reduce the risk of misunderstanding. However, as explained in Mehrabian's theory, he said that only 7% of meaning can be conveyed through words, while the rest comes from tone of voice (38%) and in the context of nonverbal communication (55%). Therefore, although emojis can help convey emotional nuances, they can be at risk of misunderstanding if the context or culture of the user is different.

2. The role of emoji in politeness, empathy, feelings between students from different cultures

Table 2. The role of emoji

Name	Answer
Abhitarya Candrakusuma	Emojis play a significant role in maintaining politeness, empathy, and respect, especially when communicating with students from different cultures. Because they are universal and neutral, they help convey good intentions without the need for many words, thus reducing the risk of misunderstanding and building warmer and more respectful communication.
Anastasia Felicia Stacy	It's quite big because we can express gratitude/ask for help/apologize through the existing emojis.
Dian Oktavia Putri	If it's to fellow students, I think it's too much to use that emoji. So for me, it's better to use it to lecturers or superiors.
Harris Mahanta	plays a very important role, the emoji is formal and is basic etiquette when contacting lecturers or colleagues in academic circles.

Fatina Sri Rahayu	very big, because it can be interpreted as a sign of respect or a sign of apology
Salsabilla Rindita Rahmawati	In my opinion, it plays a very important role, because it can be used as a neutral communication tool that is concise, neutral and expectant in someone's chat in the context of politeness and respect between students from different cultural backgrounds.
Leany Alfina	90% of the big role of the emoji. Because emoji can be considered capable of expressing our emotions in digital communication by some people.
Lilly	100/1000. It's really big because I'm used to wearing it, if I don't wear it, it feels impolite.
Rakha Adrian	Big, because I feel like something is incomplete and it would be impolite not to use that emoji.
Drex Aidrian	For now, the emoji is quite widely used to mark or add a formal & polite impression when sending a message, even from different cultures. So maybe adding the emoji in a formal text conversation will give a quite different impression than those who don't use it.

Most respondents said they had experienced misunderstandings when sending or receiving emojis “🙏”, especially in the context of cross-cultural conversations or with friends from other regions. Some students consider this emoji to be a symbol of “prayer” or “hope,” while others interpret it as a sign of “apology” or “asking for help.” This difference occurs because the meaning of emoji is not only interpreted as its visual form, but also on the cultural background and social context of its users. (Guntuku et al., 2019)

According to (Ingman, 2019), he emphasized the cultural dimension in digital communication. Countries with high-context cultures such as Indonesia, Japan, and Korea tend to understand symbols implicitly and rely on nonverbal cues, in contrast to low-context cultures such as Germany or the United States which prioritize verbal clarity. In this case, it explains that emoji “🙏” has the potential to create ambiguity when used without additional explanation among users from different cultural backgrounds. (Darics & Lockwood, 2023)

3. Differences in emoji usage in formal and informal situations

Table 3. Differences emoji usage formal and informal situation

Name	Answer
Abhitarya Candrakusuma	In formal contexts (chatting with lecturers or campus organizations), the “🙏” emoji is used as a symbol of politeness, gratitude, or a polite apology. While in informal contexts (chatting with friends), its meaning is more relaxed and emotional, such as a form of familiarity, jokes, or light hopes. The

	meaning remains the same, but the nuances change according to the context: more polite in formal, more relaxed in informal.
Anastasia Felicia Stacy	No change, still the same
Dian Oktavia Putri	For formal, it is for a request or expression of gratitude (begging hand). In an informal context, it is not used because what for.. if you want to high-five, you can use “👏”. Although the original emoji “🙏” is for high-five, it just doesn't seem to fit, it's weird.
Harris Mahanta	there is no different meaning, its function is to show polite ethics and provide an interpretation to ask for something
Fatima Sri Rahayu	the meaning will change if you are with a lecturer and with friends
Salsabilla Rindita Rahmawati	If used in formal and informal contexts, I think the meaning will remain the same and will not change.
Leany Alfina	For me, the meaning of the emoji doesn't change when the context is different.
Lilly	No
Rakha Adrian	Just the same
Drex Aidrian	The meaning varies slightly, depending on the context of the conversation.

In the world of digital student conversations, emojis “🙏” is often used not only as a form of emotional expression, but also as a means of maintaining politeness and communication ethics. Students argue that using this emoji can help them appear more polite when expressing criticism, requests, or apologies, especially to lecturers or seniors. This shows that this emoji has an important role in shaping the user's self-image on social media.(Rustan, 2020)

Research conducted by (Basri, 2021) shows that this emoji is often used to convey social expressions such as respect, apology, or support, especially in relationships between students. This is also supported by (Basri, 2021)in analyzing semiotics, he stated that each emoji has a symbolic meaning that can be translated differently depending on the context and purpose of communication. Emoji “🙏” become a digital symbol that can help to maintain the values of politeness typical of Eastern culture in the world of digital communication.

4. The Influence of Duration and Intensity of Social Media Use on the Meaning of Emojis

Table 4. The Influence Duration and Intensity

Name	Answer
Abhitarya Candrakusuma	Understanding cultural differences in emoji usage “🙏” is important because each culture

	can interpret emojis differently. An emoji that is meant to be a sign of respect or gratitude can be misinterpreted in another culture. By understanding these differences, we can communicate more wisely, avoid misunderstandings, and still show respect in cross-cultural interactions.
Anastasia Felicia Stacy	If it's for chat and formal informal contexts, it's still okay to use it, except for example via email or something more official, in which case it's better not to use it.
Dian Oktavia Putri	Actually it is important, but because in Indonesia most people interpret it as begging hand, so yeah, just follow it. Because if you use “🙏” too much, it's not wong koryah or nihon
Harris Mahanta	Not everyone is familiar and considers it polite when given the emoji. Sometimes there are those who are offended by the emoji
Fatina Sri Rahayu	It is very important, because if you do not understand the difference in emojis “🙏” on social media it can create feelings that are not done
Salsabilla Rindita Rahmawati	It is very important because it can maintain politeness, empathy, and avoid misunderstandings in communication, especially since each region definitely has its own way of using emojis “🙏”
Leany Alfina	It is very important in digital communication, especially in the context of social media, because emojis have different meanings depending on the culture of the user.
Lilly	Quite important, actually the “🙏” emoji is originally a hi-five but is often used as a begging emoji so we still have to fully understand the context of the conversation to know the meaning of the emoji used.
Rakha Adrian	It is very important, because cultural differences can increase insight and reduce the risk of conflict.
Drex Aidrian	The use of any emoji is actually not a mandatory thing to do. However, currently many people add emoji to emphasize or provide "expression" from the writer to make it easier for readers to understand. So, in my opinion, understanding cultural differences in the use of emoji is important but not mandatory, "important" here is so that we can

easily understand the meaning that the writer wants to convey.

The results of data collection obtained from the questionnaire show that the duration of students using social media per day is correlated with their understanding and frequency of using emojis “🙏”. Students who access social media for more than 4 hours per day tend to have a more flexible interpretation of the meaning of emojis and use them more often in various contexts. This is in line with the opinion put forward by ((Surjandy et al., 2020) that the duration of social media use affects the level of student tendency to spread messages, including symbols or emotional expressions through emojis.

More broadly, the use of emojis such as “🙏” in the digital context is also influenced by gender and communication habits. Female students, according to the study, are more likely to use emojis expressively as emotional and social representations. This suggests that demographic factors such as gender and length of time using social media can also shape the meaning and purpose of emoji use in communication between students.

5. Misunderstandings Due to Lack of Nonverbal Cues on Social Media

Table 5. Lack of Misunderstandings

Name	Answer
Abhitarya Candrakusuma	Yes, I sometimes avoid using the “🙏” emoji in serious or sensitive situations, such as when delivering criticism, giving bad news, or in formal discussions that require clarity and professionalism. I worry that it might be misconstrued as insincere, too casual, or even sarcastic if the context is not right.
Anastasia Felicia Stacy	Maybe if you have asked many times you can avoid it or apologize many times
Dian Oktavia Putri	Never, only worn to lecturers or superiors. Because when I'm with fellow students, I'm cold but I don't cover myself #Allrounder #EverythingIDoMySelf
Harris Mahanta	never avoid
Fatina Sri Rahayu	Absolutely not at all
Salsabilla Rindita Rahmawati	If I don't, whether it's a serious situation or not, I often press the “🙏” emoji
Leany Alfina	Yes. In serious situations.
Lilly	No
Rakha Adrian	No
Drex Aidrian	I didn't really think about it, so yeah, I've never avoided using the “🙏” emoji for fear of being misinterpreted.

Based on the results of the questionnaire, several respondents said that they had experienced or witnessed misunderstandings due to the use of emojis “🙏” which do not fit the cultural context or relationship between social media users. This misunderstanding often occurs because text-based communication, especially on social media such as WhatsApp and Instagram, loses the main elements of face-to-face communication, namely facial expressions, tone of voice, and body language. (Prof. Dr. Hazim Hakkush Muarich & Abdul-Kadhim Jasim, 2017)

According to (Ingman, 2019) in the journal *Nonverbal Communication on the Net*, the absence of nonverbal cues in online communication triggers a high potential for miscommunication. She explains that emojis and other visual elements serve as substitutes for facial expressions or voice intonation in direct conversations, but still depend on shared cultural understanding to be interpreted correctly.

In line with that, in the study of (Bhattacharya et al., 2024) discussing miscommunication on social media, he explained that short messages and limited context on social media platforms make meaning ambiguous emoji “🙏”, **although it is able to refine the message, it also has the risk of different understandings from each individual**, especially if there is no shared personal or cultural background.

In the context of public and fast social media, students tend to reply to messages impulsively without considering emotional nuances more deeply. This is in accordance with the explanation that social media algorithms create an “echo chamber” which is a space that strengthens one's own point of view and reduces tolerance for other interpretations. In this contact, the meaning of emoji “🙏” often misunderstood as a form of sarcasm or teasing, especially when delivered outside of strong social relationships.

Thus, we can conclude that the use of emojis is not free from the risk of disinterpretation, especially in a social media environment with minimal context. Therefore, digital literacy and pragmatic awareness are the main keys to minimizing the potential for misunderstanding.

6. Sociocultural Factors in Influencing Emoji Interpretation “🙏”

Table 6. Lack of Misunderstandings

Name	Answer
Abhitya Candrakusuma	Yes, emojis can have negative connotations depending on the context and who is using them. For example, if sent without words in a tense situation or while ignoring someone else's request, it can come across as passive-aggressive or insincere. Also, if used excessively or inappropriately, it can come across as sarcastic or tongue-in-cheek. So, even if the intention is good, the meaning still depends on the tone of the communication and the relationship between the users.
Anastasia Felicia Stacy	There isn't any because I think the emoji is polite
Dian Oktavia Putri	No, that shows humility and a request from the deepest heart (a bit embarrassed). If someone thinks negatively, it's just that their life is full of negative energy.

Harris Mahanta	no, the emoji only interprets something like a pleading thing when you want to do something
Fatina Sri Rahayu	There is no negative impression
Salsabilla Rindita Rahmawati	In my opinion, it is possible, but it depends on the context of what is being discussed in the sentence.
Leany Alfina	I think so, because there are some people I met who use this emoji which can give a negative impression, such as making fun of friends by using this emoji.
Lilly	Yes, sometimes when we ask for help (when we are very frustrated) and then use the emoji 🙏 to show that the thing we are asking for help with is very urgent and indirectly becomes a passive-aggressive approach so that the person we are asking for help can feel the urgency so that they quickly do what we ask.
Rakha Adrian	No, because in my opinion, this emoji shows humility even though we don't know the real intention.
Drex Aidrian	Nope, I myself have never found any negative impression in chat texts that use these emojis.

This study shows that a person's cultural background and personal experiences in social media can influence how they interpret emojis “🙏”. Students who are accustomed to using this emoji in social media in English or interacting with friends across countries tend to have a more flexible understanding. Meanwhile, students who rarely interact with foreign cultures rely on local meanings such as "excuse me", "thank you", or "respect".

In a study conducted by (Oprea & Magdy, 2020) entitled The Effect of Sociocultural Variables on Sarcasm Communication Online, it is explained that the effectiveness of digital communication is greatly influenced by the similarity of sociocultural background between the speaker and the listener. In the context of emojis, this also applies: meaning is not only done by the sender, but also depends heavily on the interpretation of the recipient of the message which is influenced by age, language habits, and culture.

The study emphasizes that even English-speaking countries like the US and the UK can interpret sarcastic remarks differently, especially when involving users from countries with different languages and cultures. This is supported by the assumption that emojis “🙏” can be interpreted as sarcasm or a request, depending on the cultural norms that apply in the social group receiving the message.

Student Perception in Indonesia, emphasizes the importance of intercultural awareness. Students not only need to understand the local meaning of emojis, but also need to develop

sensitivity to the possibility of other interpretations that may occur in cross-cultural communication or between social media platforms.

7. Student Strategies to Avoid Misunderstandings in Using Emojis “🙏”

From the results of the data obtained from the questionnaire, several students often explicitly stated that they preferred not to use emojis “🙏” in the context of formal communication or with people who are not yet personally familiar. The reasons vary, from concerns about being misinterpreted as “sarcastic” to the idea that the emoji is “too ambiguous” for the context of social media that is limited to text.

Some strategies identified from respondents:

- Avoiding emojis “🙏” in academic and professional contexts, because it is feared that it will create an impression that is not in accordance with the intention.
- Using explicit sentences like “thank you very much” or “sorry in advance” to replace the pragmatic function of emojis “🙏”.
- Replace with another emoji that is more neutral or specific, such as “👍”(thumbs up) to express support or “😊”(smile) to show politeness.

This study agrees with the Politeness Strategy theory from Brown & Levinson developed by (Waziri, 2022), which states the importance of choosing a form of expression that maintains the user's "face" or social image in a digital context. Emoji “🙏” which in terms of meaning can contain nuances of “begging” or “thanking” can actually become ambiguous if there is no shared cultural context.

In this situation, Indonesian students demonstrate a form of careful pragmatic adaptation: avoiding ambiguity through a more explicit form of verbal expression. This is a positive indicator that digital literacy is not only about technology, but also about pragmatic precision in choosing forms of communication.

8. The Importance of Cross-Cultural Digital Communication Education

Most of the students who filled out the questionnaire stated that they had never received any specific training or formal learning on cross-cultural digital communication, including the appropriate use of emojis in multicultural contexts. However, they acknowledged the importance of this education, especially since interactions on social media often involve individuals from different cultural backgrounds, including when discussing in international forums or interacting on platforms such as Instagram, Twitter, and WhatsApp.

In line with the research presented by (Bhattacharya et al., 2024), digital communication without pragmatic and cultural education can create communication “noise” that triggers conflict, misunderstanding, or even division on social media. The research suggests that training on four main aspects of pragmatics such as media literacy, cultural norms, and context sensitivity can minimize intercultural conflict on social media.

In the Indonesian student environment, cross-cultural digital communication education needs to be conveyed in learning activities, especially in:

1. Courses such as Intercultural Communication, Digital Ethics, or Pragmatics of Digital Language.
2. Digital-based extracurricular activities such as online debates, virtual student exchanges, and cross-country classes.
3. Training in the use of emojis and visual symbols based on cultural and platform differences, as each application has a different interface and audience.

In closing, it is necessary to instill the perception that emojis are not just “message decorations”, but are a form of visual semiotics that must be interpreted with cultural sensitivity.

In the era of globalization, cross-cultural awareness is an important part of responsible digital communication ethics.

B. Discussion

This study aims to examine the findings of a study on the use of the "🙏" (begging hand) emoji among Indonesian university students in social media communication from various cross-cultural perspectives. The results indicate that the use of the "🙏" emoji plays a significant role in digital nonverbal cues, often used to express politeness, gratitude, apologies, and requests. However, its meaning is not universal and depends heavily on cultural background, social context, formality, and user experience in digital communication. This study confirms that emoji use functions as a pragmatic symbol whose interpretation is negotiated rather than fixed.

The findings confirm that most participants perceived the "🙏" emoji as a symbol of politeness and respect, supporting previous research on nonverbal communication in computer-mediated contexts. (Ingman, 2019) explains that emoji often substitute for facial expressions, gestures, and intonation that are absent in text-based communication on social media. In Indonesian culture, which tends to emphasize collectivism, respect, and indirectness, the "🙏" emoji aligns with cultural values that prioritize harmony and humility. This supports the findings of (Guntuku et al., 2019), who expressed their opinion that emoji use in Eastern cultures is often associated with maintaining relationships and emotional sensitivity.

However, this study also found that many Indonesian students avoid using the "🙏" emoji in both formal and academic communications, such as when contacting lecturers or engaging in institutional contexts. This behavior reflects pragmatic awareness and aligns with the Politeness Strategy theory proposed by (Waziri, 2022). According to her, individuals strategically choose forms of expression that protect their own social "face" and that of others. In formal contexts where there is power distance, emojis can be perceived as inappropriate or ambiguous, leading students to rely more on explicit verbal expressions. This finding largely contradicts the opinion of (Basri, 2021), who stated that emoji use generally increases politeness in student interactions. This difference is very much explained by contextual factors, as politeness strategies vary according to the social hierarchy and current communication setting.

Cultural background plays a crucial role in shaping the interpretation of emoji use in the world. Although many students understand the "🙏" emoji as an expression of gratitude or apology, they also associate it with prayer, hope, or even sarcasm. This is also supported by (DANESI, 2020), who emphasizes that visual symbols are polysemic and culturally embedded. Similarly, (Arviv & Tsur, 2022) explain that emoji use often experiences semantic shifts, meaning their interpretations can change across communities and over time. In cross-cultural interactions, such shifts increase the risk of misunderstanding when users assume shared meanings that may not exist.

This finding is also supported by (Darics & Lockwood, 2023), who argue that digital communication lacks the immediate feedback mechanisms that help clarify meaning in face-to-face interactions. Emoji use is not only used to compensate for deficiencies but can also create ambiguity when cultural assumptions differ. This explains why some respondents

perceived the "🙄" emoji as potentially passive-aggressive or insincere in certain contexts, especially when used without accompanying text.

Another important finding relates to the influence of social media usage duration on emoji interpretation. Students who spent more time on social media showed greater flexibility in interpreting the "🙄" emoji. This aligns with findings from (Surjandy et al., 2020), who argued that increased exposure to digital communication environments enhances pragmatic competence. Social media users interact with diverse communication practices, allowing them to adapt to varying interpretations of emojis across social media platforms and cultures.

Gender differences in emoji use were also observed in this study, with female students tending to use emojis more expressively. This finding supports the findings of (Bagaskara et al., 2023), who stated that women often use emojis to convey warmth, empathy, and relational closeness in digital communication. This suggests that emoji interpretation is influenced not only by culture but also by social identity and communication style.

Misunderstandings arising from the lack of nonverbal cues were frequently reported by participants. Several students expressed concern about the "🙄" emoji, which is often misinterpreted in serious or sensitive conversations. This finding is supported by the work of (Prof. Dr. Hazim Hakkush Muarich & Abdul-Kadhim Jasim, 2017), who emphasized that communication in today's digital world can increase the potential for misunderstanding due to the absence of tone of voice, facial expressions, and body language. Although emojis attempt to compensate for these missing cues, they rely heavily on shared cultural understanding.

Interestingly, several participants reported never experiencing misunderstandings when using the "🙄" emoji. This supports the findings of (Oprea & Magdy, 2020), who argue that socio-cultural similarities between communicators reduce misinterpretation. When users share similar cultural norms and communication habits, the meaning of emojis becomes more predictable and less ambiguous.

This study also highlighted that the use of this emoji can carry unintentional negative connotations, such as sarcasm or passive aggression, depending on the context and relationship dynamics. This finding aligns with the theoretical understanding of (Bhattacharya et al., 2024), who argue that miscommunication on social media often stems from short messages and limited contextual information. In a fast-paced digital environment, emojis can reinforce emotional interpretations rather than clarify pragmatic intent.

In this crucial situation, students demonstrated strategic behavior to avoid misunderstandings. Many chose to substitute emojis for explicit verbal expressions, avoid using emojis in formal contexts, or opt for more neutral emojis. This may reflect a strong pragmatic awareness and aligns with intercultural pragmatics theory, which emphasizes audience awareness and context sensitivity in meaning-making. These strategies may indicate that students actively negotiate meaning rather than use emojis uncritically.

Overall, the results of this study strongly support previous research that views emojis as culturally mediated pragmatic resources rather than universal symbols. However, this study provides new insights by focusing specifically on the "🙄" emoji in the context of intercultural students at various universities in Indonesia. By examining a single emoji in depth, this study reveals how this widely used symbol, with its multiple meanings, can lead to ambiguity and misunderstanding.

Finally, this study underscores the importance of cross-cultural digital communication education. Most participants reported never receiving formal instruction on emoji use or visual pragmatics, despite frequently engaging in intercultural digital spaces. This supports the research of (Bhattacharya et al., 2024), he argues that digital literacy must encompass current pragmatic and cultural competencies. Integrating visual pragmatics into higher education

curricula can help students communicate more responsibly and effectively in the global digital environment.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that the use of emojis “🙏” by Indonesian students in social media has many meanings, and depends on the social context or situation, interpersonal relationships, and cultural background of the social media user. The results of the questionnaire showed that most students were aware of the potential for misunderstanding in the use of emojis, especially when used in formal situations or to unfamiliar parties. Some students even actively avoided using emojis “🙏” in certain contexts to avoid negative interpretations such as being considered sarcastic or insincere. This study is in line with the theory of Politeness Strategy by (Lander & Brown, 2022) which states that speakers will choose a form of expression that maintains social harmony and the "face" of the interlocutor in communication on social media.

Based on the theory of Nonverbal Communication in CMC by Krystal Ingman (2019), it explains that in text-based communication, emojis replace facial expressions, intonation, and gestures that are lost in direct conversation. However, because emojis are highly dependent on the cultural background and social relations between users, the potential for disinterpretation is high. This is reinforced by the opinion of (Oprea & Magdy, 2020) who emphasize that the interpretation of digital symbols is influenced by factors such as age, cross-cultural exposure, and language habits. Therefore, it is important for students to develop pragmatic sensitivity and intercultural awareness in communicating in digital spaces.

It is recommended that further research be able to expand the focus not only on emojis “🙏”, but also on other emoticon symbols that are prone to multiple interpretations such as “😏”, “😬”, or “💀” which are often used in intercultural communication. This study can also compare views across regions in Indonesia, or even between Indonesian students and students from other countries to reveal variations in meaning globally. In addition, a larger quantitative approach and experimental studies can be applied to directly test how people from different cultural backgrounds interpret the same message when using certain emojis. This kind of development effort is important to support the development of digital literacy that is not only technical, but also ethical and contextual in the era of global communication.

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