

The Problem of Gendered Emojis in Online Communication Platforms: A Study to Understand Digital Dependence on Using Emotions During Pandemic

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Abstract—Digitalization, affordable smart gadgets, and social distancing have turned virtual communication into a lived phenomenon. However, we should be aware of the fact that the virtual communication process is entangled with positive and negative consequences. On the one hand, it has enabled people to develop a feeling of togetherness and belonging, and on the other, it is steeped in conflict and dispute due to the extensive use of emojis that are context-sensitive and are subjected to multiple interpretations. The problem of emojis connected with sexual connotations has not been studied in an online conversation parameter. Hence, the current study examines the sexual connotations that are embedded in the usage of non-facial emojis such as eggplant, cherry, etc., in virtual communication and analyses sexual connotations that are generated in closed group interactions. The methodology undertaken in this study is a quantitative experimental research method to collect data. Participants (N=64) will determine how certain context-sensitive emojis are perceived by them in closed group online conversations. Results suggest that non-facial emojis possess sexual connotations which are highly context-specific and used extensively in interpersonal conversations. In this way, this paper will prepare the ground to study more hidden sexual connotations in emojis.

Index Terms—emojis, gender studies, electronic-mediated communication, interpersonal relationships, sexual connotations

I. THE HISTORY OF EMOJIS

In the current culture of online communication, emojis have turned into an integral component of teenagers' virtual conversations. The integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI), in almost every part of life, has enabled us to share feelings and promote empathy virtually via the use of emojis. The replacement of words such as OMG, and Ugh, with emojis makes it less time-consuming for digital natives to disseminate messages via virtual mode. Emotional words, emojis, and expressive punctuations are used in abundance in language practices, especially during a shared interpersonal conversation (Pérez-Sabater, 2021). The rapid spread of emojis has revolutionized the online platform thereby leading to more research on their communicative functions in interpersonal relationships.

A recent study by Rodrigues et al. (2022) unveiled the fact that the most commonly used emoji on the Twitter platform is not a face emoji but 'a heart emoji'. Emojitracker by Rothenberg tracks the usage of emojis on Twitter and it is surprising to know that among the top 10 emojis, only four were face emojis. Other emojis were objects that embody the underlying intention/motivation of the users. Various research has been conducted to find out the communication effect of face emojis but none to determine the effect of emojis (face and non-facial) that embody sexual connotations in them (also see Riordan, 2017a).

The popular emojis circulated on social media have sexual meanings hidden behind them. Studies have proved that non-facial emojis possess the quality of expressing emotions (such as expressing romantic interest or experiencing a sexual encounter) while messaging (Herring & Dainas, 2020). This phenomenon creates friction in intergenerational communication. For instance, when a 45-year-old sends an emoji that is interpreted as a sexual symbol by a 23-year-old, the latter would consider this message as a risky text (Ganster et al., 2012) which causes relationship conflicts. The primary question is whether the non-facial emoji user knows the meaning of the emojis before using them on an online platform. Although the usage of emojis can be appealing while sending them through social media, the multiple meanings they embody must be studied in order to understand the context-sensitive features.

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For example, the combination of a peach 🍑 and a clap 🙌 emoji indicates the sexual performance of ‘booty smack’ which is used to avoid the usage of such words in online communication (Bond, 2016). In many instances, most users decide not to revert or even block the other user if 🍆 is sent in a chat. The sexual intention behind this emoji is clear to some users and they choose not to continue the conversation with the other person (Weissman, 2019; Rodrigues et al., 2022). There are many non-facial emojis that are to be explored in the light of the sexual context. The outcome of such a study will save interpersonal relationships from unnecessary and unintentional sexual approaches in online conversations.

Ideally, emojis are considered a mixture of pictograms and ideograms. Most of the standardized Unicode emojis fall into either one of the two categories. For example, the ‘camera’ 📷 and the ‘popcorn’ 🍿 are pictograms and represent what they show. Whereas the ‘face with tears of joy’ 😂 expresses emotion in order to convey the idea of being extremely happy or laughing too much. Some emojis have both qualities combined. For example, the ‘No mobile phone’ 🚫 has a mobile phone pictogram inside the red circle conveying the idea of not to use mobile phones in that particular region. Understandably, a red circle with a diagonal cross indicates ‘forbidden’.

It is often the case where most of the pictograms possess meanings beyond what it represents thereby working as ideograms (Seargeant, 2019). The pictogram, ‘camera’ 📷 stands simply for a camera and signifies the art of photography. Likewise, ‘popcorn’ 🍿 can simply signify popcorn and conveys the idea of someone eating popcorn while watching a movie. Therefore, it is considered to be the same with emojis representing ‘eggplant’, ‘peach’, and many more. An ‘eggplant’ 🍆 emoji stands for eggplant in the first place, but with significant changes in meaning over the years, it represents a ‘male sex organ’ in any conversation. In a specific context, an ‘eggplant emoji’ may convey the underlying sexual intention of the user. Likewise, a ‘peach’ 🍑 stands for the fruit peach and is interpreted as a ‘woman’s butt’ in an online conversation (Hernandez et al., 2016; Bhunjun, 2018).

Therefore, the current study aims to examine the gender dynamics and sexual connotations that are embedded in the usage of non-facial emojis such as eggplant, cherry, etc., in virtual communication and to bring out the pictographs’ underlying sexual connotations that are generated in closed group interactions. This study helps in understanding how people, irrespective of age, gender, or social class, perceive emojis in a gender-specific way. In addition to this, this paper will also delineate how teenagers use emojis as coded symbols to protect their interpersonal relationships and secure their privacy in online communications.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

In the initial phase of online communication, emoticons were identified by the usage of punctuations which represent facial expressions to reduce misunderstandings in text messages (Miller, 2016). Gradually, the growing usage of emojis motivated the software engineers to extend the list by creating more desirable emoticons, :-/ (Hesitant face), and characters such as Santa Claus, *<|:-). Later, the trend of emoticons spread far and wide and the users created objects such as <3 (Hearts), @}->-- (Rose) with keyboard characters (Riordan, 2017b).

As the use of keyboard characters was time-consuming, the introduction of pictorial icons i.e., Emojis helped a lot of people around the world in their computer-mediated conversations. Unicode is the standard coding language in technology that has enabled the creation of new pictorial representations of emojis. There are 3,664 emojis in total which can be used on online platforms. In the current version, Unicode 14.0, 37 new emojis were added to the former list (Unicode.org, 2021). The graphic designers and software developers created new emojis by taking emoticons as inspirations. These emojis had more detailing than the emoticons and the introduction of these demanded new creations from the developers. Unicode allows endless possibilities for creating new emojis from time to time and they introduced emojis representing food, activities, vehicles, flags, animals, weather, clothing and so on (Rodrigues et al., 2018).

A recent study focuses on identifying the gaps in the usage of emoticons and emojis in a cross-cultural context. It was conducted in 2021 and shows that emoticons like :-/ (Smiley face), :-((Frowny face), were predominantly used by East Asians to reimburse positive reactions than Americans in Computer-Mediated Communications (Togans et al., 2021). East Asians preferred to use CMC cues more in their conversation to retain the emotional value of the message and to impart reactions to their text. Another study indicates that Britain and America show strong similarities in emoji usage because their language is the same while no similarity was identified between Spain and Italy (Barbieri et al., 2016). In a similar vein, Vandergriff (2013) concluded that emojis rely on linguistic, textual, and cultural backgrounds because they were found to be context-sensitive. This context-sensitive nature of emojis builds a gap in cross-language conversations where one person’s interpretation is different from the other.

Lo (2008) experimented by showing his participants a message that had an ambiguous tone accompanied either by a smiley facial expression, or a frowning facial expression and had neither of the two expressions. The results suggested that adding a smiley face emoji made the message look positive and while using a frowning face emoji, the message seemed negative. The addition of emoticons had an impact on the message conveyed when compared to the text that had no emoticons included. Derks et al. (2008) concluded that the primary action of an emoticon or emoji is to nullify ambiguity in a verbal message. However, a recent study by Rodrigues et al. (2022) revealed that the usage of emojis is steeped in ambiguity. Text messages embedded with emojis have implied connotations influencing the motive of the sender’s and recipient’s interpretation by and large. From the interpretation of the data and real-time experiments in

online platforms, scholars (Hays, 2015; Sampietro, 2016) have concluded that comparatively, the messages shared on the Twitter platform top in sexual undertones.

Studies have shown that some face emojis such as 😊, 😏, and 😘 are considered playful and flirtatious and are known to increase intimacy in digital interaction with a positive tone (e.g., Kelly, 2015; Konrad et al., 2020; Rodrigues et al., 2022). Kavanagh (2016) suggested that Computer-Mediated Communication cues are mere substitutes for politeness markers and hence reduce the possibility of misinterpretation of the text message. As a conversational style, the kisses emoji 😘 is used as a pictorial representation of closing the conversation as well as appreciating someone for their victory or success. In addition to this, kisses emoji 😘 is used in much closer relationships to encourage affiliation, intimacy, and friendship (Hays, 2015; Sampietro, 2016; Perez-Sabater, 2019; Konrad et al., 2020). Nevertheless, non-facial emojis serve the digital natives with several meanings to be interpreted based on the context of the messages.

One of the experiments conducted by Walther and D'Addario (2001) revealed that pictographs turn out to be an effective way to communicate about hidden codes negotiated in a closed group. The emojis might have a different connotation for a reader not belonging to that particular group. For instance, if a person uses a 'sweat emoji' 💦 at the end of a sentence (Sakai, 2013), 'Let us sweat it out! 💦', the message conveyed here might be direct for one group but can mislead the other. Since the 'sweat emoji' has a sexual connotation of 'sexual fluids' hidden behind it, the receiver is presented with an ambiguous, confusing message. Emoji use tends to result in sending ambiguous messages or portraying negative attributions about the sender (Glikson et al., 2018). Therefore, it becomes clear that emojis have two main roles to serve: one is to reduce confusion in a message, and the other is to affect communication.

Combining one or two emojis like this tends to convey ideas sexually as every one of the emojis has evolved into something rather different from what they used to mean. Kelly and Watts (2015) suggest that emojis are used to maintain social relationships; enhance and terminate conversations as well as connections and create new secretive meanings. More than pictograms and ideograms, emojis are being contaminated with meanings that do not belong to them.

III. RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

A review of the literature has shown that non-facial emojis are being used as a substitute for words and constitute a large part of the sentence used in online conversations (e.g., Mittmann et al., 2021; Scott et al., 2021). This study will work on decoding the gradual conversion of emojis as a language system and the usage of non-facial emojis tainted with sexual connotations in a closed group conversation. The conversational norm followed by digital natives during the pandemic will be studied in order to examine how they use emojis to protect their privacy and to find out whether the users are aware of the intended meaning of certain emojis. The following were the hypotheses postulated from the mentioned research:

H1: Addition of non-facial emojis, like fruits and food items, will alter the meaning of the message in a sexual manner.

H2: With the influence of the Pandemic, the addition of non-facial emojis with sexual connotations has increased on social media due to less human contact.

H3: The normative notion of communication is significantly altered in the virtual platform because the normative notions of verbal and nonverbal cues are significantly compromised.

H1 will be discussed from the survey taken in light of how people perceive different emojis of food items and fruits concerning sexual meanings. The study draws on Diana Graber's article 'How teens misuse emojis in a sexual context' released in January 2021 in order to analyze the status of Hypothesis 2. The compromise of normative notions of communication will be reviewed from past literature to arrive at a significant conclusion.

IV. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How are the denotative as well as the connotative meanings of the emojis problematized in the closed group interactions on virtual modes?

2. How are the gender performances played via emojis?

3. How emojis are used by teenagers to protect interpersonal relationship status and privacy during the pandemic when they are subjected to strict monitoring by the elders in the family?

V. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Online platforms are utilized to make new digital connections with strangers and maintain the existing relationship in equilibrium in order to avoid communication gaps (e.g., Brody et al., 2016; Van Ouytsel et al., 2016; Mittmann et al., 2021; Scott et al., 2021). Teens use certain emojis while communicating which symbolizes sexual performance assuming that adults will not know the meaning behind the emojis used. Some emojis are combined to convey sexual performances which many teens and adults use predominantly while having online conversations (Couch & Liamputtong, 2008; Sumter et al., 2017; Graber, 2021).

Emojis have replaced words by becoming a language of their own and many researchers are still examining the emerging emoji trends in linguistics (e.g., Thomson et al., 2018; Alprtraum, 2019; Sampietro, 2019; Rodrigues et al., 2022). With its raising usage in online communication, it becomes necessary to understand the sexual connotations underlying emojis in order to protect oneself from unnecessary sexual conflicts. Emojis are known to reduce miscommunication by adding a tone to the message but engaging in sending emojis with sexual connotations corrupts the minds of online users which, ultimately, paves the way to body-shaming and objectifying opposite genders (Baron, 2004).

VI. METHOD

The methodology undertaken in this study is a quantitative experimental research method to collect data. 64 participants, irrespective of age, gender, or social class, completed the online survey using a questionnaire formulated by the researcher. The sample was restricted to one common quality of knowing how to use smartphones and the participant's experience of having closed group conversations. The age of the participants who participated in the survey is expected to be from 20 to 28 since exponential non-discriminative snowball sampling was used.

A. Materials Used

Thirteen questions were crafted for people who qualified for the requirement of being well-equipped with smartphones and having regular closed group conversations. Some non-facial emojis (🍑, 🌽, 🍷, 🍒, 🍆, 🍌, 🌷, 💦) were used to analyze the minds of the participants with respect to how they perceived them. Eight emojis were included with multiple choices given, for some questions, the participants were asked to generate meanings for the emojis specified.

For example, each question with an emoji is accompanied by options that have the direct meaning of that emoji and the hidden metaphor of sexual attributes. Participants were expected to choose from either of the options given to understand what most of them perceive about certain emojis. The questions were framed in such a way as to trigger stimuli in the participants specifically in the area of gender-based attributes of emojis.

B. Procedure

This study is an attempt to delineate the usage of non-facial emojis from the aspect of gender dynamics in closed group conversations. Participants were randomly selected and were asked to participate only if they were interested in answering the questions which were based on the sexual attributes of emojis. After agreeing to participate, the link was shared with them to access the questions. The first few questions were framed in such a way that confirm their usage of online mediums for communication and whether they were aware of emojis having sexual connotations in them.

By preparing them to understand what the survey was about, they were exposed to emojis with sexual connotations and were asked to interpret them. Also, participants were asked to indicate how comfortable they were with answering these questions. This is to identify the rate of people who were comfortable with talking about sensitive topics such as gendered emojis and gender roles inculcated in non-facial emojis. In this manner, it is identified that this psychological aspect of being able to talk about gendered emojis might provoke teens/adults to use them without feeling guilty while flirting online (e.g., Thompson, 2019; Maclean, 2022). The direct questioning on how they feel about certain emojis will help in bringing awareness among elders on how teenagers use coded emojis to safeguard their interpersonal relationships.

VII. RESULTS

H1: Addition of non-facial emojis, like fruits and food items, will alter the meaning of the message in a sexual manner.

It was expected that the addition of non-facial emojis might change the context of the message with ambiguity and the results pertained to this hypothesis. 60.9% ($N=40$) of the total participants were clearly aware of the fact that emojis have sexual connotations apart from what they represent.

Thirty-five participants, out of 64, identified the 'peach' 🍑 emoji as female buttocks and breasts. 31.3% ($N=20$) of them identified the 'corn on the cob' 🌽 as an object related to sex. 60.9% ($N=40$) of the participants identified the 'eggplant' 🍆 emoji as a male sex organ. 15 out of 64 identified the 'cherry' 🍒 emoji as a woman's butt, breasts, and male sex organ. 37.5% ($N=25$) of the participants identified the 'hotdog' 🍌 emoji as something related to male and female encounters. 42.2% ($N=30$) of them think that the 'sweat' 💦 emoji is related to sex. 23.4% ($N=17$) of them identified the 'tulip' 🌷 emoji as something related to the female sex organ.

The highest rate of 72.7% ($N=48$) participants were comfortable answering these questions implying sexual meanings in emojis. 56.1% ($N=37$) were already aware of what those emojis meant internally, 34.8% ($N=23$) claimed that they have not used those emojis, and 9.1% ($N=6$) were 100% clueless about what those emojis meant.

H2: With the influence of the Pandemic, the addition of non-facial emojis with sexual connotations has increased on social media due to less human contact.

Given the social situation related to online platforms, people were restricted from going out of their homes to avoid human contact. If the study conducted by Clive Thompson shows that 92% of online users use emojis to express their feelings, then the rate of using gendered emojis in the light of expressing feelings during the restriction of human contact will also be high. Diana Graber identified many teens casually using emojis to flirt on online platforms. Although she says whether the emojis shared by teens contained unsettling sexual connotations, she mentions that teens were interested to know about sex even before they were given mobile phones. As this survey was conducted with people, irrespective of their age, gender, and social class, the study prepares the ground to conduct research based on age, gender, and social class to identify the percentage of users who rely on gendered emojis while conversing with their partners or anybody for that matter.

H3: The normative notion of communication is significantly altered in the virtual platform because the normative notions of verbal and nonverbal cues are significantly compromised.

The outcome of this survey and a few past works of literature (Herring & Dainas, 2020; Rodrigues et al., 2022) support the statement that the normative notions of verbal and non-verbal cues are significantly compromised in an online environment. Most of the participants identified 🍒, 🍑, & 🍆 as sexual symbols since the questionnaire was an open-ended questions survey. This phenomenological permanence due to emoji usage in a closed conversation, especially in an interpersonal relationship, clearly reveals that digital natives are impacted by these gendered emojis and use them to sustain their bond which erases the normative use of emojis.

VIII. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Since everything starts with a conversation, online natives began to impart meanings to emojis by adding them, either at the end or beginning of the sentence. The ability to enhance a chat is possible when one uses emojis to emphasize certain feelings. Individuals tend to use more emojis when they communicate with their close ones (e.g., Kaye et al., 2016; Jones et al., 2020) and it has been found that the usage of emojis with sexual partners has its implications (e.g., Troiano & Nante, 2018; Gesselman et al., 2019; Nexø & Strandell, 2020). Most online texters use particular emojis in order to objectify genders and impart sexual meanings to emojis. This develops fear and intimidates a few digital natives regarding emoji usage.

A famous online site named Match conducts an online survey every year regarding ‘Most used Emojis by Singles to attract partners.’ The survey shows that most of the users use wink, smile, and kiss emoji to act casual while impressing the opposite gender. The survey also found out that women in higher ranking/status resist using these emojis in normal online conversations to avoid getting trapped in the net of the flirting game. If one emoji can alter the intensity of a message, it is highly likely that one or two nonverbal cues together will have a lasting effect on the information intended to be shared (Stark & Crawford, 2015; Riordan, 2017b). This answers the first research question of how the denotative meaning of the emoji is problematized in close group conversations.

Emoji experimentation revealed that online users combine certain emojis to convey messages that would sound uncomfortable when encrypted into words. For example, the combination of a peach emoji 🍑 and an eye emoji 👁️ means that someone is checking out a female’s back. This presents the answer to the second research question of whether emojis are being bombarded with sexual performances. Through the lens of Butler’s study on gender performances, it can be deciphered that these practices are defined out of gendered notions due to which gendered meanings are gradually imparted to emojis. Even a simple ‘smirking face’ 😏 emoji is perceived as a man who is super confident about his manhood while approaching a female (Graham, 2019). The performative quality of emojis iterates subtle gender performativity. An increasing number of online users tend to apply many meanings according to the context of the conversation. For example, when a man uses a rocket emoji 🚀 or a horse 🐎 emoji while texting (see Roberts, 2017), it means he is trying to imply that he is highly potent as a man.

The importance of being conscious while sending emojis to a receiver is high as the selection of emojis might affect the relationship as well as how the message is perceived by the other person (Walther & D’Addario, 2001; Gangster et al., 2012; Butterworth et al., 2019). To maintain personal relationships, a study reveals that sending a message to a partner on a daily basis initiated a positive response in relationship satisfaction (Eckstein, 2001; Luo & Tuney, 2015). Therefore, during the times like pandemics, teenagers prefer smartphones to send codes (romantic cues, sexual encounters, encrypted messages) using emojis to their partners in order to maintain interpersonal relationships (Doering, 2002, p. 3). The feeling of connectedness is improved by being connected through text messages and sending coded emojis. This stance is supported by past literature where most people had something positive about texting, where texting allowed them to stay in contact with their romantic partners all the time and maintain autonomy (Pettigrew, 2009). However, when emojis are misinterpreted, ineffective communication may lead to disruption in discourse and terminate interpersonal relationships (Tigwell & Flatla, 2016).

The main aim of using emojis should be to avoid misinterpretation and send messages that are direct in conveying meanings. A study conducted in 2020 found that people above the age of 30 did not understand the functions of emojis while the younger generation of smartphone users interpreted emojis in a more conventional way. Thus, it is clear that teenagers use coded emojis to maintain their interpersonal relationships by sending sexually suggestive emojis (Thomson et al., 2018) which are less likely to be understood by elders (Herring & Dainas, 2020).

One of the studies conducted among college students revealed that being in contact through social media is directly related to the intimacy or closeness of the relationship. The most interesting observation was that the “casual environment can create a relaxed environment conducive to intimate exchanges” (Hu et al., 2004, p. 4). It is conceivable that a casual environment is a place where one can be without any distress and here, teenagers use gendered emojis as codes to communicate with their partners. In such a way, teenage couples expect to develop their personal secret codes with the help of emojis to maintain the integrity of their relationship without disclosing it to their parents (Alshenqeeti, 2016; Juhasz & Bradford, 2016).

IX. CONCLUSION

The evolution of the digital technological world promised the audience virtual communication to be made easy and reliable. As far as virtual communication is concerned, there are so many barriers and negative reactions to it. These digital barriers can get anyone in trouble due to the inability to convey in an intended way via email, chat, applications, social media, websites, and any online platform for that matter. Some of the barriers are inevitable because no matter how much the users try, they cannot achieve the satisfaction of virtual communication (Girardin, 2020). Physical barriers are unavoidable since the motive of virtual communication is that the users can stay remote and communicate with their friends and family. Apart from staying remote, physical barriers can induce emotional barriers side by side.

The importance of emotions in any online communication should be understood in order to overcome psychological barriers. The message perceived depends on the attitude and social position of the receiver. However, people can easily misinterpret digital communication which often fails to include tone of voice, facial expressions, body gestures or any other kind of verbal or nonverbal cues to understand the emotional dissemination from the sender. To modify the inability to convey a message emotionally, the users were presented with visual signs and symbols. This added more inaccuracies to the way people perceived emojis. The semantic problem of emojis being differently interpreted while communicating produced an adverse reaction to online communication.

Effective electronic communication cannot happen if the sender and receiver do not have the same understanding of the intended message. After examining the emojis with gender signifiers, it is clear that the issues run deeper than just a matter of miscommunication. As West and Zimmerman (2009) suggest ‘gender’ is created gradually in the process of interaction between two people who know how they are perceived. Basic emojis such as 🙌 are interpreted as high five by some and praising, giving blessings by others. Here, the problem of misinterpretation arises from the non-facial emojis where the users give different meanings to the same emoji. Emoji users are not expected to add words to the sentence, which is a phenomenal achievement in digital communication. Yet this development failed to aid the destruction of preconceived stereotypes in matters concerning gender.

Emoji renders different meanings on different platforms, so people may interpret emojis on one platform differently than the other. Psycholinguistic theory suggests that understanding of a text structure must be consistent between two people in order to avoid communication problems. The disagreements from the users of different platforms increase misinterpretations to the next level. Several researchers added cultural value to the context but failed to find out the cultural significance present in the emojis. This expands the scope of this paper for further research and identifies the cultural signifier present in the emojis. Since emojis were developed in Japan, the impact of cultural and societal norms can be applied to every other location as emojis are globally used. Exploring the problems of Emojis beyond the level of linguistics will help in providing a resolution to the hidden trouble lingering with gender. To determine how people of different ages, gender, and sociological background perform gender performativity and to consider all gendered emojis, it will be necessary to collect a wide range of data, categorise, and analyse them in the framework of gender performativity. In this endeavour, the analytical lenses of performative utterances and gender performativity can provide useful guidelines on how gendered lines in online communication can be understood from newer perspectives.

X. LIMITATIONS AND SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The limitations of this study include the small participant size of 64 anonymous subjects contributing answers to the gender-based questions on emojis. Every step in the study was made sure to be systematic; yet, obtaining other information such as gender-specific answers from the participants seemed inappropriate as they were survey-takers and some of them felt uncomfortable while attending the survey. The inability to know whether the participants were open-minded while responding to the questions is one of the limitations of the study as well. However, this first stage of limitation can be nullified by asking the participants to reveal their gender.

The results generated from this study had thirteen questions out of which only seven questions were emoji-related in order to trigger stimuli in the participants. While many of the same patterns were derived from the study, it would be unreasonable to suggest that this project is generalizable to all the other emojis that denote gender performativity. Other variables and constants such as gender fluidity, age, and social background remain untested in this study.

In this research, only a set of few gendered emojis has been assessed. The practice of emojis based on gender along with cultural differences leads to different perceptions and preferences regarding the usage of emojis (Wolf, 2000; Jack et al., 2009). As mentioned earlier, there are currently 3,664 anthropomorphic emojis to be assessed overall. Therefore,

analyzing how people of different age groups, gender, and sociological background perceive gendered emojis and considering all emojis within the framework of gender performativity can be a further scope of this research.

It would not be unreasonable to suggest that non-facial emojis have useful roles in communication, even when they employ sexual meanings in a message. The increasing rate of non-facial emoji usage combined with the increasing rate of their development, suggests their purpose is useful and universal in online conversations (Dresner & Herring, 2010; Riordan, 2017a). The denotative meaning of emojis is substantially compromised in a closed group conversation. Therefore, the connotative context in which these non-facial emojis are used, who is using them with whom, and what roles they might serve as questions for future research.

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