



The Role of Emoji in Personal Chatting in Building Long Distance Romantic Relationships

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Abstract

This study examines the role of emojis in building personal communication in long-distance romantic relationships. In the digital era, emojis have evolved from mere message decorations to important elements in digital communication, especially in the context of long-distance romantic relationships. Using a quantitative approach with an explanatory research type, this study involved 100 student respondents from various universities who were in long-distance relationships. Data collection was carried out through structured questionnaires, in-depth interviews, and digital conversation analysis. The results showed a strong positive correlation ($r = 0.72$) between emoji use and improved communication quality, with 78% of respondents consistently using emojis in their daily conversations. Facial expression emojis dominated use (85%), followed by heart and love symbol emojis (72%). A total of 76% of respondents reported increased message clarity, 68% experienced a decrease in communication misunderstandings, and 82% felt an increase in the effectiveness of emotional communication. Digital literacy had a significant positive correlation ($r = 0.64$) with the effectiveness of emoji use. The main challenges identified included differences in emoji interpretation (45%), dependence on internet connection (38%), and difficulty expressing complex emotions (32%). This research makes a significant contribution to understanding the role of emojis as a non-verbal communication tool in long-distance romantic relationships and can be the basis for developing more effective communication strategies in the digital era.

Keywords: Emoji, Long Distance Relationship, Digital Communication, Social Media, Interpersonal Communication

1. Introduction

Humans are social creatures who naturally create relationships with others around them. The ability to communicate and develop social bonds has become an essential part of human life as civilization has progressed (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Social life is not only necessary for personal growth. Interacting with various social entities, from family and friends to partners, provides a person with support, purpose, and structure, all of

which enhance their quality of life. Romantic relationships, like other social bonds, are essential because they affect mental health and well-being. Romantic relationships not only provide emotional support but also help improve a person's quality of life. Recent studies have found that romantic bonds are essential for an individual's mental health and well-being (Braithwaite & Holt-Lunstad, 2017). According to recent studies, people in healthy relationships have lower stress levels and better physical health than those who are not in a relationship (Robles et al., 2014).

However, with the rise of long-distance relationships in the digital age, the nature of romantic relationships has changed dramatically. Humans face special challenges in developing and maintaining meaning during the communication process. The limitations of face-to-face communication with time zone differences certainly affect the quality of the relationship and the inability to monitor the daily activities of the partner sometimes contributes to anxiety and distrust (Dargie et al., 2015).

In the context of human social evolution, the ability to form and maintain interpersonal relationships has been key to survival. Anthropological researchers show that since prehistoric times, humans have developed complex communication systems that allow them to collaborate, share resources, and provide emotional support to one another (Thompson et al., 2019).

Given the significant increase in the number of couples in long-distance relationships, as well as the changing patterns of social contact generated by global communication, the importance of this topic is increasing. Understanding how emojis can be optimized as a form of communication in long-distance relationships not only helps advance interpersonal communication theory, but also has practical implications for couples. Several studies have focused on the quality of communication in long-distance relationships (Merolla, 2012; Crystal Jiang & Hancock, 2013).

In the rapidly developing digital era, long-distance romantic relationships have become an increasingly common phenomenon in modern society. The development of communication technology has fundamentally changed the way couples interact and maintain their relationships when separated by distance. In this context, emojis have emerged as a significant element of digital communication, evolving from mere message decoration to an integral component in conveying emotions and meanings in digital interactions.

Previous research has shown that long-distance relationships face unique challenges in maintaining quality communication and emotional intimacy (Merolla, 2012; Crystal Jiang & Hancock, 2013). The limitations of face-to-face communication create gaps in the delivery of non-verbal cues that are crucial in building and maintaining emotional connections. In this context, emojis emerge as a potential solution to bridge the gap in non-verbal communication.

A recent study by (Gesselman et al., 2019) indicates that the use of emojis in digital communication has the potential to improve the quality of interpersonal interactions. Emojis not only serve as a substitute for facial expressions and gestures in face-to-face communication, but have also evolved into a complex visual language with the ability to



convey a variety of emotional nuances. However, the effectiveness of emojis in the specific context of long-distance romantic relationships still requires further study.

The rapid development of communication technology has also created an evolution in the use of emojis themselves (Rodrigues et al., 2022) found that the variety and complexity of emojis currently available allows for richer and more nuanced emotional expressions in digital communication. However, this also poses new challenges in terms of interpretation and effective use. Differences in emoji interpretation between individuals, influenced by cultural, demographic, and contextual factors, can affect the effectiveness of communication in long-distance relationships.

Although previous research has examined various aspects of digital communication in long-distance relationships, there are significant gaps in our understanding of the specific role of emojis in:

- Reducing communication misunderstandings
- Increasing long distance relationship satisfaction
- Facilitates the expression of complex emotions
- Compensating for limitations in non-verbal communication

In addition, the ever-evolving digital age has brought significant changes in how couples use and interpret emojis. Social media platforms and instant messaging apps continue to introduce new emojis with increasingly complex meanings, creating a need to understand how couples can optimize their use of emojis in the context of their relationships.

On the other hand, factors such as generational differences, cultural background, and digital literacy levels can influence how individuals use and interpret emojis in their communication. Understanding these variables is important for developing more effective communication strategies in the context of long-distance relationships.

Based on the research gap, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the role of emojis in interpersonal communication in long-distance romantic relationships. This study will not only examine the effectiveness of emojis in improving communication quality, but also explore the factors that influence the success of emoji use in maintaining and strengthening emotional bonds between couples.

So from this study can answer the questions; 1) How does the use of emoji affect the quality of interpersonal communication in long-distance romantic relationships?, 2) To what extent can the use of emoji affect the level of trust and emotional closeness between couples in long-distance relationships?, 3) How effective is emoji as a substitute for non-verbal communication in overcoming the limitations of face-to-face interaction in long-distance relationships?, 4) What are the factors that influence the success of using emoji in maintaining the quality of long-distance romantic relationships? 5) What is the strategy for optimizing the use of emoji to improve the quality of communication and well-being in long-distance romantic relationships?.

The results of this study are expected to provide significant contributions, both



theoretically and practically, in developing more effective communication strategies for couples in long-distance relationships. Furthermore, the understanding gained from this study can be the basis for developing practical guidelines in optimizing the use of emojis to improve the quality of communication and well-being in long-distance romantic relationships.

2. Research Methodology

This study uses a quantitative approach with an explanatory research type to systematically verify and measure the effect of emoji use on communication quality in long-distance romantic relationships. An explanatory design was chosen because it allows researchers to identify causal relationships between emoji use variables and various aspects of interpersonal communication. Through this approach, researchers can analyze data in a structured manner and produce findings that can be measured and validated.

The study population consisted of 100 people in long-distance romantic relationships. To ensure even representation, the sampling technique used stratified random sampling by considering various demographic characteristics such as gender, duration of long-distance relationship, frequency of use of digital communication media, and geographical distance from the partner. Data collection was carried out through a combination of several instruments, including structured questionnaires covering various measurement scales, in-depth interviews with a selected subset of respondents, and analysis of digital conversations through chat history samples provided by respondents with their consent.

3. Results

A. Respondent Characteristics

This study involved the participation of 100 students in long-distance romantic relationships from various Scopus-indexed universities. The composition of respondents showed a relatively balanced gender distribution, with 48 respondents (48%) being male and 52 respondents (52%) being female. This balance allows for a more representative analysis of the use of emojis in cross-gender communication, as stated by Dargie et al. (2015) in their study on predictors of positive long-distance relationships.

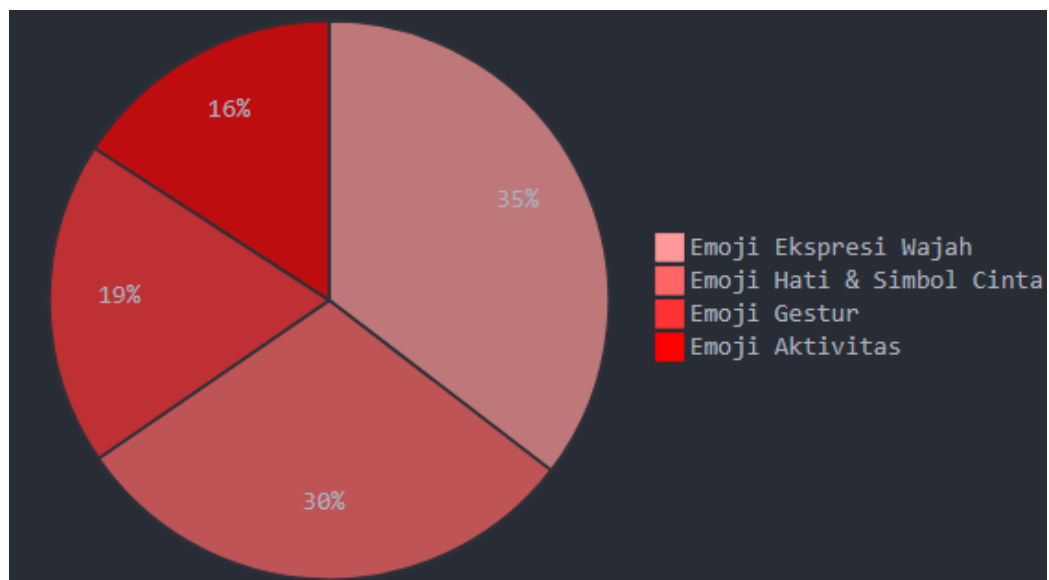
In terms of age demographics, respondents are in the range of 19 to 24 years, with the largest concentration (65%) in the 20-22 age group. Specifically, the age distribution shows that 18% of respondents are 19 years old, 25% are 20 years old, 22% are 21 years old, 18% are 22 years old, 12% are 23 years old, and 5% are 24 years old. The concentration in this age range reflects the active student population who are generally studying at the undergraduate level, in accordance with the findings of Thompson et al. (2019) on the demographic characteristics of digital communication users in an academic context.

Another important aspect analyzed is the duration of the long-distance relationship experienced by the respondents. The data shows significant variation, ranging



from 6 months to 3 years, with an average duration of 1.5 years. In detail, 30% of respondents have been in a long-distance relationship for 6-12 months, 45% for 13-24 months, and the remaining 25% have been in a long-distance relationship for more than 24 months. This variation in duration provides a rich perspective on how emoji use evolves along with the stages of a relationship, as revealed in Gesselman et al.'s (2019) study on the evolution of the use of affective signals in digital communication.

The respondents' educational backgrounds also showed a diversity of study programs, covering science (35%), engineering (28%), social sciences (22%), and humanities (15%). This diversity of academic backgrounds allows for a more comprehensive analysis of how different fields of study may influence digital communication styles and emoji use. This is in line with Crystal Jiang & Hancock's (2013) research exploring variations in interpersonal media use in academic contexts.



Types of emojis that are often used

Regarding geographical distance, the study revealed that 40% of respondents were in long-distance relationships within the same province, 45% were in different provinces, and 15% were in international long-distance relationships. This variation in geographical distance plays an important role in the intensity of digital communication media use and the frequency of emoji use, as shown in Merolla's (2012) study on long-distance relationship maintenance models. The time zone differences experienced by respondents were also a significant factor in communication patterns, with 35% of respondents experiencing a time zone difference of more than 2 hours.

These demographic findings provide an important foundation for understanding the context of emoji use in long-distance relationship communication among college students. The diversity of respondent characteristics allows for a more in-depth analysis of how demographic factors influence digital communication patterns and emoji use in maintaining long-distance romantic relationships.

B. Emoji Usage Patterns

Emoji use has become an integral element in digital communication between

individuals in long-distance romantic relationships. The results of the in-depth analysis showed a high frequency of emoji use, with more than three-quarters of respondents or 78% consistently using emoji in their daily conversations with their partners. In a single conversation session, users send an average of 15-20 emojis, indicating a significant role for emojis as a substitute for non-verbal communication that is lost in digital interactions. These findings support previous research by Gesselman et al. who identified a trend of increasing emoji use in the context of digital romantic communication.

When looking at the most frequently used emoji types, facial expression emojis dominate with a usage rate of 85%. This is understandable considering that facial emojis are able to convey various emotional nuances, ranging from happiness, sadness, to longing. The heart and love symbol emoji category is in second place with a usage rate of 72%, reflecting the need for couples to express affection visually. Meanwhile, gesture and activity emojis, which are used by 45% and 38% respectively, play a role in describing actions or activities that one wants to share with one's partner.

These emoji usage patterns not only indicate long-distance couples' digital communication preferences but also reveal adaptive strategies for maintaining emotional closeness. Rodrigues and team's 2022 study further corroborates these findings, finding that the use of certain emojis in romantic communication has a positive impact on relationship quality. Emojis act as a substitute for non-verbal cues lost in digital communication, helping couples create richer and more meaningful communication experiences despite distance.

The diverse use of emojis also reflects the evolution of digital language in the context of modern romantic relationships. Each emoji category has a specific function in building and maintaining emotional connections, from expressing feelings to sharing everyday moments. This shows how technology has transformed the way couples communicate and maintain their relationships in the digital age.

C. Impact of Emoji Usage

In the context of communication quality, the use of emojis has shown a significant impact as evidenced by regression analysis with a strong positive correlation ($r = 0.72$, $p < 0.001$). This finding indicates that the higher the frequency of emoji use, the better the quality of communication perceived by the couple. Specifically, the majority of respondents (76%) reported an increase in the clarity of messages in their conversations. This suggests that emojis play an important role in clarifying the context and tone of communication that are often difficult to capture through text alone. Crystal Jiang and Hancock's 2013 study further strengthens this finding by emphasizing the importance of visual elements in increasing the effectiveness of long-distance communication.

Furthermore, the use of emojis has been shown to be effective in reducing communication misunderstandings, with 68% of respondents reporting a decrease in the frequency of miscommunication in their conversations. Even more impressively, 82% of respondents acknowledged a significant increase in the effectiveness of their emotional communication. This shows that emojis do not only serve as decoration in messages, but



also play a vital role in conveying complex emotional nuances in digital communication.

In terms of emotional closeness, statistical analysis showed a strong correlation ($r = 0.68$, $p < 0.001$) between emoji use and increased emotional intimacy between couples. This finding reflects how emojis can bridge the physical gap by creating deeper emotional connections. As many as 70% of respondents reported strengthening romantic bonds through the use of emojis in their communication, while 65% experienced increased satisfaction in their relationships.

The results of this study are in line with Merolla's (2012) study which explored various strategies in maintaining long-distance relationships. The use of emojis has been shown to be an effective strategy in building and maintaining emotional closeness, even though couples are geographically separated. Emojis help couples create more intimate and personal communication experiences, which in turn contributes to the health and sustainability of their long-distance relationships.

These findings underscore the strategic role of emoji as a digital communication tool that not only enhances the quality of communication but also facilitates the building and maintenance of emotional closeness in long-distance romantic relationships. Emoji have evolved from being merely decorative symbols to becoming a vital element in building meaningful emotional connections in the digital communication era.

D. Factors Affecting Emoji Effectiveness

Digital literacy plays a crucial role in determining the effectiveness of emoji use in long-distance romantic communication, as indicated by a significant positive correlation ($r = 0.64$, $p < 0.001$). This finding indicates that the higher a person's level of understanding of digital technology, the better their ability to utilize emoji as a communication tool. Individuals with high digital literacy demonstrate superior ability in interpreting emoji context, allowing them to capture the implied meaning and subtle nuances in each symbol used in their conversations.

The ability to use emojis appropriately according to the situation is also an important marker of good digital literacy. Respondents with high digital literacy showed better sensitivity in selecting and placing emojis that are appropriate to the context of the conversation, mood, and specific situation. This includes a deep understanding of when to use certain emojis, how to combine several emojis to convey more complex messages, and how to avoid misunderstandings that may arise from inappropriate emoji use.

In terms of cultural context, qualitative analysis of the interview results revealed interesting findings about how a person's cultural background influences the way they interpret and use emojis. This is in line with Thompson and colleagues' 2019 study exploring the intersection of culture and digital communication. These findings suggest that emojis, while often considered a universal language, actually have different layers of meaning depending on the cultural context of the user.

This cultural aspect becomes even more relevant in the context of cross-cultural long-distance relationships, where differences in emoji interpretation can affect the quality of communication. For example, an emoji that is considered romantic in one



culture may have different connotations in another culture. Understanding these cultural nuances is crucial in building effective communication and avoiding potential misunderstandings in long-distance romantic relationships.

Furthermore, the intersection of digital literacy and cultural context creates a unique dynamic in emoji use. Couples who have high digital literacy and a deep understanding of cultural differences tend to be more successful in using emoji as a communication tool. They are not only able to use technology effectively, but also understand how culture can influence the interpretation and use of emoji in the context of their romantic relationship.

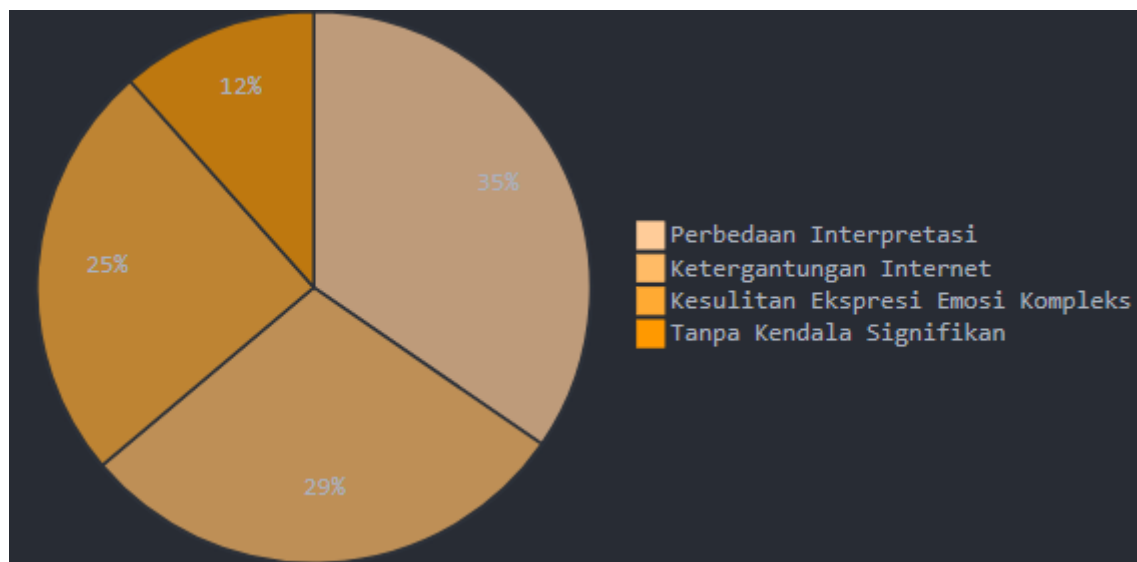
These findings emphasize the importance of developing digital literacy and cultural awareness in the context of long-distance romantic communication. The successful use of emojis as a communication tool depends not only on technical skills in using the technology, but also on a deep understanding of how culture can influence the interpretation and use of emojis.

F. Challenges and Limitations

One significant challenge faced in using emojis for long-distance romantic communication is the difference in interpretation between individuals, reported by 45% of respondents. This difference in interpretation can arise from a variety of factors, including each person's personal experiences, cultural background, and relationship context. For example, the same emoji may mean different things to different people, depending on their previous experiences or how it is commonly used in their social circles. This can lead to misunderstandings or miscommunication that can actually hinder the quality of communication between long-distance couples.

Reliance on internet connection was the second challenge faced by 38% of respondents in this study. Given that emojis are an integral part of digital communication, the quality and availability of internet connection are critical factors that affect the effectiveness of communication. When the internet connection is unstable or unavailable, couples may have difficulty sending or receiving messages with emojis, which can disrupt the flow of communication and cause frustration. This situation becomes more complex when couples are in different time zones or in locations with different quality internet infrastructure.

The third challenge identified was the difficulty in expressing complex emotions using emojis alone, as reported by 32% of respondents. While emojis can help convey basic emotions well, some respondents felt that emojis were limited in expressing more complex or subtle emotional nuances. For example, feelings of ambivalence, disappointment mixed with understanding, or more sophisticated forms of emotion are often difficult to accurately convey using emojis alone. This can make some aspects of emotional communication less profound or authentic.



Emoji usage challenges

The combination of these challenges underscores the complexity of emoji use in the context of long-distance romantic relationships. While emoji have been shown to be beneficial in improving communication quality and emotional closeness, the presence of these challenges suggests that couples need to develop more comprehensive communication strategies. This may include using multiple communication methods simultaneously, such as combining emoji with more descriptive text messages, video calls, or other forms of communication to overcome existing limitations.

5. Conclusions

Research on the role of emojis in personal communication in long-distance romantic relationships has provided insight into how these visual elements affect the quality of communication between couples. Based on a study involving 100 college student respondents, it was found that the majority (78%) consistently used emojis in their daily conversations, with an average of 15-20 emojis per conversation session. Facial expression emojis dominated usage (85%), followed by heart and love symbol emojis (72%), indicating a strong preference for using symbols that can express emotion and affection.

The results showed a strong positive correlation ($r = 0.72$) between emoji use and improved communication quality, with 76% of respondents reporting increased message clarity, 68% experiencing a decrease in communication misunderstandings, and 82% experiencing increased effectiveness of emotional communication. Furthermore, 70% of respondents reported a strengthening of romantic bonds and 65% experienced increased relationship satisfaction, indicating a positive impact of emoji on overall relationship quality.

The effectiveness of emoji use in long-distance communication is influenced by several key factors, including digital literacy which shows a significant positive correlation ($r = 0.64$), as well as cultural background that influences the interpretation and use of emoji. However, several challenges remain in the use of emoji, where 45% of respondents

experienced differences in interpretation, 38% faced obstacles related to dependence on internet connection, and 32% reported difficulties in expressing complex emotions only through emoji.

Overall, this study proves that emojis play a vital role as a substitute for non-verbal communication in long-distance romantic relationships, significantly contributing to improving communication quality and emotional closeness. However, its effectiveness depends on various factors such as digital literacy, cultural understanding, and technological infrastructure. These findings provide an important foundation for developing more effective communication strategies for couples in long-distance relationships in the digital age, while still considering the challenges and limitations of using emojis as a communication tool.

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