

Gendered Digital Expression: A Comparative Analysis of Emoji Usage Patterns among Undergraduates

Samarawickrama, K.A.R.K. *, Sandamali, N.W.N., Upananda, M.G.C.L.
Rajarata University, Sri Lanka
ruwini2013@gmail.com

Technology has transformed communication patterns in the digital era, with emojis emerging as pivotal tools for conveying emotions, actions, and objects in digital interactions. Emojis are pictorial icons that express emotions and actions. While prior studies explore emojis as emotional aids, few examine gender-based differences in their usage among undergraduate populations. This study aims to investigate how male and female undergraduates employ emojis, focusing on preferences, contextual use, frequency, and perceived functional roles in text-based communication. Using a mixed-methods approach, the researcher collected quantitative and qualitative data via a structured questionnaire administered to 100 final-year students including 50 males and 50 females from Eastern University, Sri Lanka. The questionnaire included closed-ended questions (e.g., Likert-scale responses on emoji frequency, types) and open-ended questions (e.g., subjective interpretations of emoji use in professional vs. casual contexts). Random sampling ensured equal gender representation. Data were analyzed to identify gendered patterns in emoji usage, revealing the following distinctions. Females predominantly use heart emojis and facial expressions in informal conversations, viewing emojis as essential for clarity. Males favor symbols such as thumbs up and smileys, often deploying a single emoji to replace words or emphasize points, while considering them optional. Both genders avoid emojis in professional communication. The study highlights how gender shapes undergraduates' emoji usage for emotional expression and social negotiation offering insights into youth digital communication trends.

Keywords: Gender-based differences, Emoji usage, Computer-mediated communication, Undergraduate students, Emotional expression