

A Pragma-Semiotic Analysis of Emoji Usage in Facebook Anniversary Posts Across Generations

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Abstract. In today's modern digital landscape, emojis have become a vital tool for expressing emotions and enhancing online communication. This study examines how various generational groups, specifically Generation X, Millennials, and Generation Z, utilize emojis in Facebook anniversary posts, highlighting the dynamic nature of digital expression across generations. The research aims to identify common patterns in the use of emojis, as well as their communicative functions, to recognize generational preferences and digital literacy. Using the qualitative pragma-semiotic approach, 60 Facebook posts were analyzed to examine the interaction between texts and emojis. Guided by Language Variation Theory and the Pragma-Semiotic Model of Communication, the study classified pragmatic functions, including tone modification, action representation, and aesthetic enhancement. Meanwhile, emojis served emotive, phatic, and decorative roles across generations. Findings reveal that while all generations use emojis to convey affection, humor, and cultural nuance, Gen Z expresses the most diverse and nuanced applications. Millennials balance emoji and text effectively, whereas Gen X tends toward minimal and straightforward usage. These generational variations underscore the role of emoji in shaping interpersonal and cultural communication. The study results suggest practical insights for educators across all levels, communicators, and digital users on the significance of emoji literacy for achieving effective online interaction and cultivating cross-generational understanding.

Keywords: Emojis; Generational differences; Language variation theory; Pragma-semiotic analysis; Qualitative study

1.0 Introduction

With Facebook playing a central role through features like 'Stories' and 'Posts' that allow users to share greetings, social media platforms have changed the ways people celebrate important milestones. The use of emojis that convey nuance and emotion through online communication is a key element in these digital expressions. With emojis known for their use across different platforms, there is less exploration of their role and use in memorable events, such as anniversary greetings on Facebook.

Additionally, as part of a broader category known as graphicons (which includes stickers, GIFs, and images), emojis have many communicative functions, such as modifying tone, expressing reactions, and enhancing narratives (Herring & Dainas, 2017; Dolot & Opina, 2021). Furthermore, their usage is refined through cultural

standards, interpersonal dynamics, and platform-specific practices. For example, emojis are used to build and maintain rapport among Spanish WhatsApp users (Sampietro, 2019), while on platforms like BiliBili, emojis are combined with cultural elements and localized language (Zhang et al., 2022). In Southern China, users combine emojis with stickers and text to create unique styles (Zhou et al., 2017), while Japanese teenagers utilize them to convey aesthetic and relational nuances (Sugiyama, 2015).

Generational and cultural differences also influence the interpretation of emojis. Older generations tend to view the “smile” emoji positively, whereas younger generations may perceive it as sarcastic or insincere (An et al., 2018; Herring & Dainas, 2020). Globally, the emojis are used in various ways: first-world countries often utilize them to counteract emotional restraint, while second- and third-world countries, including the Philippines, prefer more expressive and balanced emoji usage (Ljubešić & Fišer, 2016). As widely known as the social media capital of the world (Mateo, 2022), Filipinos frequently choose emojis over emoticons, noting them as the most used graphics on Facebook (Dolot & Opina, 2021).

Although extensive research has been conducted on emojis in general digital communication, a notable gap remains in understanding how they function in emotionally significant contexts, specifically in Facebook anniversary greetings across different generations. This study aims to fill that gap by examining how emojis interact with text, images, and other elements to convey meaning, emotion, and cultural identity in these greetings. By analyzing emoji use in Facebook anniversary posts, this research contributes to the fields of semiotics, pragmatics, communication studies, cultural studies, and computational linguistics. This study aims to explore the role of emojis in enhancing emotional expression and strengthening social connections, offering valuable insights into their evolving role in digital communication, particularly in specific contexts.

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Research Design

This qualitative study employed a pragma-semiotic analysis with emojis as the focus. Sixty (60) Facebook anniversary posts, twenty (20) posts selected from each generational group to ensure a balanced representation, were analyzed. The analysis focused on the pragmatic and emoji functions of the emojis used by Facebook users from Generation X, Gen Y (Millennials), and Generation Z, as well as the utilization of emojis within each generation.

The posts collected as data include emojis, text, and images. These allowed us to see the interconnection of the elements in expressing emotions and meaning during the celebrations. Focusing on the semantic and pragmatic roles, the researchers analyzed how emojis were used to express feelings, capture cultural practices, and represent connections unique to each group. This study aims to deepen the understanding of how various generations connect on social media, particularly when celebrating special moments, by comparing the multimodal approaches used by Gen Z, Gen Y (Millennials), and Gen X in their posts.

2.2 Research Materials

Data saturation is commonly employed to estimate sample sizes in qualitative research, defined as the point at which no new themes or codes emerge from the data, indicating that additional data collection would not yield new insights (Guest et al., 2020; Braun & Clarke, 2019). This ensured that the data collected effectively addressed the research questions. This study utilized a research sample of 60 Facebook anniversary posts sourced from users belonging to three distinct generational groups: Gen Z, Millennials, and Gen X. By collecting posts that highlight how each generation expresses an anniversary milestone via Facebook, the researchers aimed to capture the unique ways each generation expresses emotions and conveys messages through multimodal elements, including text, images, and emojis. After the 60th post, the researchers observed that no new themes emerged, indicating that the data corpus was sufficiently rich and diverse to capture the use of emojis in each generation and their pragmatic and semiotic meanings.

The selection of Facebook anniversary posts for each generation was guided by criteria inspired by Biber’s (1993) principles for corpus selection, emphasizing representativeness and systematic inclusion. Based on external criteria, posts were selected based on the social context, which utilized Facebook as the platform, the occasion (anniversaries), and the generational group of the post owners. On the other hand, the internal criteria included emoji preferences by generation, language styles, semiotic patterns, and language expressions. To ensure

representativeness, posts were selected from publicly accessible profiles or pages of Facebook users from Davao del Sur, ensuring they authentically reflected the linguistic and stylistic patterns of each generation. By adhering to these criteria, the corpus was systematically collected to provide a rich dataset for analyzing generational variations in emoji utilization.

2.3 Data Analysis

In analyzing the data, this study employed pragmatic and semiotic analysis to identify the pragmatic and semiotic functions of the emojis used by each generation, and thematic analysis to gain a comprehensive understanding of emoji usage in Facebook anniversary posts across different generations. Researchers identified the emojis used in each post per generation, provided the official definitions (emojipedia.org), and highlighted the pragmatic functions (Herring & Dainas, 2017) and emoji functions (Danesi, 2017).

Specifically, the Pragma-semiotic model of communication was employed in the analysis, focusing on the pragmatic functions outlined by Herring and Dainas (2017) and the emoji functions described by Danesi (2017). Furthermore, pragmatic functions, as proposed by Herring and Dainas (2017), were employed. The tenets are as follows: *tone modification* which is about graphicon that directly modifies text to clarify how a message should be interpreted; *softening* which makes the comment or text more polite or less forceful; *reaction*, which is used to portray a specific emotion as a response to something that is posted; *action* which is used to portray specific physical action; *mention* that mentions a emoji rather than using it; *riff* pertains to the emoji which is a humorous elaboration on, play on, and parody of a previous graphicon or common; *sequence* which is a series of consecutive graphicons (often of the same type) that convey a narrative as opposed to a composite message; *physical action* that is literally doing what the emoji expresses along with their comments; *decoration* which the emoji does not affect except to make text more visually interesting or appealing; and *multiple functions* that the graphicon has multiple, distinct meanings.

Additionally, emoji functions by Danesi (2017) were also used to analyze each emoji usage. First is the *emotive functions* that pertain to the use of emojis to mimic or replace non-verbal cues in digital communication, facilitating to convey a state of mind and emotions" (Danesi, 2017 as referenced by Terras & Touat, 2021). Examples are facial expressions, opinions, and sentiments. Second, the phatic function is "a visually based version of small talk that is used typically for establishing social contact and for keeping the lines of communication open and pleasant" (Danesi, 2017 as referenced by Terras & Touat, 2021). These are usually hand signs and utterance endings. Last is the *aesthetic function*, which Danesi (2017) stated that the "Facebook platform, just as any other social media, is visually driven". Although many use them for emotive functions, some emojis are also used as decorative elements to represent something (Danesi, 2017, as referenced by Terras & Touat, 2021). Examples include symbols, hand signs, gestures, and word replacements. At the same time, thematic analysis was used to systematically identify, analyze, and interpret patterns within the data. This method aimed to reflect the emerging themes that are integral to the core ideas underlying the research objectives. Clustering of concepts was done for the emojis, pragmatic function, and emoji function from each generation, identifying the common themes and their core ideas. These themes provided a structured framework for exploring and understanding the utilization of emojis across different generations.

2.4 Trustworthiness

The reliability of this study was demonstrated by applying elements such as credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, which are derived from Lincoln and Guba's (1985) model. To ensure credibility, the criteria set for this research, as to the number of posts for each generation and the legitimacy of sourced data, were followed. Also, informed consent forms were distributed and signed by the owners of the post. A consultation with our adviser and professor regarding the study's proceedings took place. To ensure transferability, all the data were placed in a file and will be opened upon request. These will be appropriately organized and always accessible. This step ensures that the research results can be applied to other contexts with different respondents. Dependability was achieved by providing detailed explanations of the study's process and employing underlying research techniques through consultation with experts to verify the accuracy of the procedures, data processing, and analysis. This is to ensure the stability of the findings over time. For confirmability, researchers ensured that the data and interpretation of the findings were derived from the research materials. Experts who are debriefers will review our analysis process and the results.

2.5 Ethical Considerations

This research study adhered to ethical guidelines in the selection and analysis of Facebook anniversary posts to protect the privacy and rights of the Facebook post owners. The samples included were those publicly posted on the Facebook platform, with the owners' consent for use in research purposes, which also adheres to guidelines for digital data utilization. To maintain confidentiality, names, locations, profile pictures, and personal information were excluded, and codes were used to represent each post. Moreover, researchers ensured that the content used complied with ethical standards and was only utilized for academic purposes. These actions support the values of accountability, integrity, and respect in the ethical considerations of social media and digital data.

3.0 Results and Discussion

The study data showed the emoji usage of Facebook anniversary posts across generations. According to the results, Generation X (Born 1965-1980) used 20 varied emojis and emoji sequences. Most were used for tone modification, decoration, emotive, and aesthetic functions. On the one hand, Generation Y (Millennials, born 1981-1996) used 41 varied emojis and emoji sequences, which functioned as tone modification, emotive, and phatic functions. On the other hand, Generation Z (Born 1997-2010) used 52 diverse emojis and emoji sequences. Tone modification, action, decoration, sequences, and emotive are the standard functions observed.

Table 1 presents the pragmatic and emoji functions of Generation X users. The first few emojis, such as Confetti Ball, used to convey celebration and congratulations, are associated with tone modification, decoration, and emotive/aesthetic functions. Smiling Face with Hearts and Heart with Ribbon express affectionate feelings, especially love, used for tone modification, decoration, and emotive/aesthetic purposes. The Revolving Hearts, Sparkles, and Family emojis reflect intense emotions of love, joy, or affection, while also conveying beauty and excitement, enhancing sentiment with their emotive/aesthetic roles. The Red Heart and Smiling Face with Heart-Eyes symbols convey love, infatuation, and adoration, and are primarily used for tone modification and emotive function. Emojis play a crucial role in digital communication by expressing emotions and providing clarity to discourse, mimicking facial expressions seen in face-to-face interactions, and eliciting emotional and interpretative responses (Erle et al., 2021). In the same study by Rashdi (2018), WhatsApp conversations among Omani friends and relatives revealed that emojis serve as emotional indicators, contextual cues, and tools for various communicative purposes, thereby enriching user interactions and improving the tone of messages.

Table 1. Functions of Emojis Utilized by GEN X (Born 1965 - 1980) Facebook Users

Emoji	Official Definition (Emojipedia.org)	Pragmatic Function (Herring & Dainas, 2017)	Emoji Function (Danesi, 2017)
	Confetti Ball This is commonly used to convey congratulations and celebration.	Tone Modification and Decoration	Emotive and Aesthetic Functions
	Smiling Face with Hearts It expresses a range of happy, affectionate feelings, especially when in love. The placement of the hearts varies slightly by platform.	Tone Modification, Decoration, and Sequence	Emotive and Aesthetic Functions
	Heart with Ribbon This may be either a gift box, a box of chocolates, or a jewelry box.		
	Revolving Hearts This is used to reflect overwhelming, dizzying feelings of love, joy, or affection.	Tone Modification, Decoration, and Sequence	Emotive and Aesthetic Functions
	Sparkles This is commonly used to indicate various positive sentiments, including love, happiness, beauty, gratitude, and excitement, as well as newness or cleanliness, and may also be used as a form of emphasis or to convey sarcastic or mocking tones.		
	Family: Man, Woman, Girl, Boy It is a family with a father, mother, daughter, and son.		

**Red Heart**

This is traditionally used to express love and romance across many cultures. However, this is also often used to express non-romantic, positive sentiments, such as appreciation for various people, places, groups, objects, or ideas associated with the same color.

Tone Modification
and Decoration

Emotive and
Aesthetic
Functions

**Smiling Face with Heart-Eyes**

It often conveys enthusiastic feelings of love, infatuation, and adoration.

Tone Modification

Emotive
Function

**Clinking Glasses**

Two flutes of champagne or sparkling wine are being clinked together, as done at a celebratory or convivial toast ("Cheers!").

Action
and Sequence

Aesthetic and
Phatic
Functions

**Two Hearts**

It can be used to display that "love is in the air".

Tone Modification,
Decoration, and
Sequence

Emotive and
Aesthetic
Functions

Sparkling Heart

A pink love heart with stars around it, making it look like it is sparkling or shimmering.

Revolving Hearts

This is used to reflect overwhelming, dizzying feelings of love, joy, or affection.

**Kiss Mark**

It is used in place of 'xxx' (kisses), or to send a kiss to someone.

Tone Modification,
Decoration, and
Sequence

Emotive and
Aesthetic
Functions

Birthday Cake

A frosted cake with lit candles, as presented for a birthday celebration.

Bottle with Popping Cork

This is used for a range of celebratory occasions, including birthdays, weddings, and other significant life accomplishments.

Wine Glass

This is used to represent actual and metaphorical wine, alcoholic drinks, romance, fine dining, fancy restaurants, and wealth.

**Grinning Face with Smiling Eyes**

This conveys a general sense of happiness and a good-natured amusement.

Tone Modification
and Riff

Emotive and
Phatic
Functions

**Party Popper**

It is a party popper, which explodes in a shower of confetti and streamers at a celebration.

Tone Modification,
Decoration, and
Sequences

Emotive and
Aesthetic
Functions

Bottle with Popping Cork

This is used for a range of celebratory occasions, including birthdays, weddings, and other significant life accomplishments.

**Folded Hands**

This means placing two hands together, symbolizing 'please' or 'thank you' in Japanese culture. An everyday alternative use for this emoji is for prayer, using the same gesture as the praying hands emoji.

Action and
Sequences

Emotive and
Phatic
Functions

Smiling Face with Halo

This represents angels, prayers, and blessings. This may also convey *angelic* behavior, such as performing good deeds, as seen in Baby Angel.

**Growing Heart**

This is intended to give the impression of a heart increasing in size.

Decoration and
Sequences

Aesthetic
Functions

Confetti Ball

This is commonly used to convey congratulations and celebration.

Partying Face

This is used to celebrate joyous occasions and enjoy good times more generally.

**Smiling Face with Hearts**

It expresses a range of happy, affectionate feelings, especially when in love. The placement of the hearts varies slightly by platform.

Decoration and
Sequences

Aesthetic
Function

Wrapped Gift

This is commonly used to represent gifts and presents on various holidays, celebrations, and special occasions.

Red Heart

This is traditionally used to express love and romance across many cultures. However, this is also often used to express non-romantic, positive sentiments, such as appreciation for various people, places, groups, objects, or ideas associated with the same color.

**Fork and Knife**

This term is often used more generally for eating and dining and may be paired with a Spoon or used in conjunction with a Fork and knife on a plate.

Mention, Decoration,
and Tone
Modification

Emotive and
Aesthetic
Function

Smiling Face with Heart-Eyes

It often conveys enthusiastic feelings of love, infatuation, and adoration.

Face Savoring Food

This phrase is often used to convey that a food item is delicious and may also imply that the person who enjoys it is attractive.

Moreover, Clinking Glasses symbolizes celebration, often used in sequences to enhance festive tones. Two Hearts and Sparkling Heart reflect love and affection, indicating that "love is in the air" through their sequence. Emojis like the Kiss Mark, Birthday Cake, Bottle with Popping Cork, and Wine Glass are used to celebrate special occasions, such as birthdays, weddings, and milestones. The Party Popper sequence continues the theme of celebration and fun. Grinning Face with Smiling Eyes conveys happiness and good-natured amusement, often used to express lighthearted joy. Folded Hands and Smiling Face with Halo represent prayer, gratitude, and blessings, with spiritual and respectful meanings. The sequence Growing Heart, Confetti Ball, Partying Face indicates a festive atmosphere, focusing on celebration and affection. For Generation X, emojis are often used as celebratory symbols in digital communication to express special occasions, congratulations, and share joy. The use of emojis in this context helps to convey positive emotions and create a sense of shared celebration (Bai et al., 2019).

Finally, sequences like Smiling Face with Hearts, Wrapped Gift, and Red Heart combine expressions of affection, gift-giving, and love. Emojis such as Fork and Knife, Smiling Face with Heart-Eyes, and Face Savoring Food are used to convey feelings related to dining and food, often expressing enthusiasm for delicious meals or romantic dining experiences. Similarly, emojis are suitable for cross-cultural research, with face savoring food, clapping hands, and party popper being the most appropriate for food and beverage contexts (Jaeger et al., 2018). The consistent use of heart emojis across many sequences emphasizes affection, appreciation, and celebration, showcasing how Generation X utilizes these visual cues to enhance emotional expression, particularly for special occasions, relationships, and festive moments (Alshenqeeti, 2016).

Table 2 reveals a range of emojis to express love, affection, and celebratory emotions in the anniversary posts by Generation Y. The Heart Suit emoji is consistently used to convey feelings of love, romance, and positive intentions, functioning to modify tone and reactions. It appears in various sequences, such as Heart Suit followed by Face Blowing a Kiss, which emphasizes affectionate emotions and enhances the emotional tone of the message. Similarly, emojis like Smiling Face with Hearts and Smiling Face with Heart-Eyes are frequently used to convey love, adoration, and affection, often placed in sequences to intensify the sentiment. The use of emojis in relationship-oriented digital communication is associated with maintaining romantic connections over time (Gesselman et al., 2019). The Face with Tears of Joy and Grinning Face with Sweat emojis, used in combination with other positive emojis, highlight humor and light-hearted reactions, contributing to the emotive and phatic function of the conversation. In the same way, the 'Face with Tears of Joy' emoji is a marker of the mash-up of Japanese and American cultures in digital discourse, reflecting the playfulness and intimacy of global digital culture (Moschini, 2016).

Table 2. Functions of Emojis Utilized by GEN Y (Millennials Born 1981 - 1996) Facebook Users

Emoji	Official Definition (Emojipedia.org)	Pragmatic Function (Herring & Dainas, 2017)	Emoji Function (Danesi, 2017)
	Heart Suit It is a heart symbol emoji, used in card games for the hearts suit. In emoji form, this is most commonly used to express love, affection, romance, and positive intentions.	Tone Modification and Reaction	Emotive Function
	Smiling Face with Hearts It expresses a range of happy, affectionate feelings, especially when in love. The placement of the hearts varies slightly by platform.	Tone Modification and Sequence	Emotive and Phatic Function
	Smiling Face with Heart-Eyes It often conveys enthusiastic feelings of love, infatuation, and adoration.	Tone Modification and Sequence	Emotive and Phatic Function
	Face Blowing a Kiss It represents a kiss goodbye or good night and conveys feelings of love and affection more generally.	Tone Modification, Action, and Sequence	Emotive and Phatic Function
	Smiling Face with Heart-Eyes It often conveys enthusiastic feelings of love, infatuation, and adoration.		
	Heart Suit It is a heart symbol emoji, used in card games for the hearts suit. In emoji form, this is most commonly used to express love, affection, romance, and positive intentions.		
	Smiling Face with Heart-Eyes It often conveys enthusiastic feelings of love, infatuation, and adoration.	Tone Modification	Emotive Function
	Heart Suit It is a heart symbol emoji, used in card games for the hearts suit. In emoji form, this is most commonly used to express love, affection, romance, and positive intentions.	Tone Modification and Reaction	Emotive Function
	Face Blowing a Kiss It represents a kiss goodbye or good night and conveys feelings of love and affection more generally.		
	Smiling Face with Hearts It expresses a range of happy, affectionate feelings, especially when in love. The placement of the hearts varies slightly by platform.	Tone Modification	Emotive and Phatic Function
	Birthday Cake A frosted cake with lit candles, as presented for a birthday celebration.	Tone Modification and Sequence	Emotive and Aesthetic Function
	Party Popper It is a party popper, which explodes in a shower of confetti and streamers at a celebration.		
	Two Hearts It can be used to display that “love is in the air”.		
	Kiss Mark It is used in place of ‘xxx’ (kisses), or to send a kiss to someone.		
	Clinking Glasses Two flutes of champagne or sparkling wine are linked together, as done at a celebratory or convivial toast (“Cheers!”).	Tone Modification and Sequence	Emotive and Aesthetic Functions
	Sparkles It is commonly used to convey various positive sentiments, including love, happiness, beauty, gratitude, and excitement, as well as notions of newness or cleanliness.		
	Heart Suit It is a heart symbol emoji, used in card games for the hearts suit. In emoji		

form, this is most commonly used for love, affection, romance, and positive intentions.

In addition, these emoji sequences reveal their function in modifying tone and contributing to the overall message, with each symbol enhancing the emotional impact of the message. For example, the sequence Face Blowing a Kiss, Smiling Face with Heart-Eyes, and Heart Suit can intensify expressions of affection, while the combination Birthday Cake, Party Popper, Two Hearts, and Kiss Mark) indicates a celebratory occasion filled with love and joy. Emojis like Clinking Glasses and Sparkles are used in a sequence to amplify the sense of celebration and excitement (Rashdi, 2018). These sequences not only communicate affection but also work as aesthetic enhancers, contributing to the overall tone of the conversation and making the message more expressive and engaging (Koltsova & Kartashkova, 2022). The results suggest that Gen Y incorporates a broader range of romantic and celebratory symbols, with an added emphasis on positive emotions (Bai et al., 2019).

In Table 3, Generation Z uses emojis such as Sparkling Heart. Moreover, Sparkles highlights their decorative role, enhancing the message tone and visual appeal. Pragmatically, these are used for "Tone Modification, Decoration, and Sequences," serving aesthetic and emotive functions. Generation Z utilizes emojis as virtual gifts, aesthetic identifiers, and affectionate language in diverse interpersonal contexts (Liu, 2023). Similarly, Red Heart, Clinking Glasses, and Heart Suit convey love, affection, and celebration, while also enhancing emotional undertones in communication. Emojis in digital communication are perceived as emotionally more intense and of more extreme valence, emulating facial expressions of emotion (Erle et al., 2021). Moreover, sequences like Red Heart, Two Hearts, Face with Tears of Joy, and Face Blowing a Kiss integrate humor, warmth, and affection, demonstrating how emojis can associate multiple sentiments (Novak et al., 2015).

Table 3. Functions of Emojis Utilized by GEN Z (Born 1997-2010) Facebook Users

Emoji	Official Definition (Emojipedia.com)	Pragmatic Function (Herring & Dainas, 2017)	Emoji Function (Danesi, 2017)
	Sparkling Heart A pink love heart with stars around it, making it look like it is sparkling or shimmering.	Tone Modification, Decoration, and Sequences	Emotive and Aesthetic Functions
	Raising Hands Two hands raised in the air, celebrating success or another joyous event.	Action	Emotive and Phatic Functions
	Clinking Glasses Two flutes of champagne or sparkling wine are being clinked together, as done at a celebratory or convivial <u>toast</u> ("Cheers!").	Tone Modification, Decoration, and Sequences	Emotive and Aesthetic Functions
	Heart Suit It is a heart symbol emoji, used in card games for the hearts suit. In emoji form, this is most commonly used to express love, affection, romance, and positive intentions.		
	Red Heart This is traditionally used to express love and romance across many cultures. However, this is also often used to express non-romantic, positive sentiments, such as appreciation for various people, places, groups, objects, or ideas associated with the same color.	Tone Modification, Decoration, and Sequences	Emotive and Aesthetic Functions
	Sparkles It is commonly used to convey various positive sentiments, including love, happiness, beauty, gratitude, and excitement, as well as notions of newness or cleanliness.	Tone Modification, Decoration, and Sequences	Emotive and Aesthetic Functions
	Beaming Face with Smiling Eyes This often expresses a radiant, gratified happiness. Tone varies, ranging from warm to silly, amused, or proud.	Tone Modification and Riff	Emotive Function
	Flushed Face	Tone Modification	Emotive and

	This evokes feelings such as embarrassment, but the meaning varies widely. Other senses include flattery, surprise, disbelief, admiration, affection, and excitement.	and Action	Phatic Functions
❤️💗💖💓💔	Red Heart This is traditionally used to express love and romance across many cultures. However, this is also often used to express non-romantic, positive sentiments, such as appreciation for various people, places, groups, objects, or ideas associated with the same color. Two Hearts It can be used to display that “love is in the air”. Face with Tears of Joy It is widely used to indicate that something is amusing or pleasing. Face Blowing a Kiss This represents a kiss goodbye or good night and conveys feelings of love and affection more generally.	Tone Modification, Action, and Sequences	Emotive and Phatic Functions
👉👈	Crossed Fingers This is commonly used as a gesture to indicate luck or to express a desire for a favorable outcome. Revolving Hearts This is used to reflect overwhelming, dizzying feelings of love, joy, or affection.	Tone Modification, Action, and Sequence	Emotive and Phatic Functions
🎉	Partying Face This is used to celebrate joyous occasions and enjoy good times more generally.	Tone Modification and Action	Emotive Function
🙌	Heart Hands The two hands forming a heart shape are used to express love and support, currently depicted as the heart being formed through two hands curved into a C-shape with their thumbs touching. This is stereotypically referred to as the "Millennial Hand Heart".		
🎊👏🥳	Party Popper It is a party popper, as it explodes in a shower of confetti and streamers at a celebration.	Tone Modification, Action, and Sequences	Emotive and Phatic Functions
	Heart Hands The two hands forming a heart shape are used to express love and support, currently depicted as the heart being formed through two hands curved into a C-shape with their thumbs touching. This is stereotypically referred to as the "Millennial Hand Heart".		
	Ring This piece of jewellery is often associated with a proposal and subsequent engagement to be married.		
😏😜	Winking Face It may signal a joke, flirtation, hidden meaning, or general positivity. Tone varies, ranging from playful and affectionate to suggestive and ironic. Blowing a Kiss This represents a kiss goodbye or good night and conveys feelings of love and affection more generally.	Action, Riff, and Sequence	Emotive and Phatic Functions

Furthermore, action-oriented emojis like the Raising Hands, Heart Hands, and Partying Face embody celebratory and phatic functions, enabling users to express joy, support, and a sense of community. Pragmatically, combinations such as Party Popper, Heart Hands, and Ring reflect multifaceted messages, often tied to love and milestones like engagements. Emojis like Beaming Face With Smiling Eyes and Flushed Face add emotional depth, ranging from happiness to subtle embarrassment. Notably, tone-specific pairs such as Crossed Fingers and Revolving Hearts indicate luck and overwhelming emotions, while Winking Face and Blowing a Kiss infuse playfulness and affection. Action-oriented emojis are frequently used to express celebratory emotions and reactions, enhancing the emotional tone of messages. Emojis are the most recognizable for discrete emotions compared to human faces and emoticons (Alharbi & Mahzari, 2023; Riordan, 2017; Fischer

& Herbert, 2021). These patterns highlight the skillful and versatile use of emojis to enhance communication in various digital settings (Tang & Hew, 2018).

The analysis reveals distinct themes in emoji utilization among Generation X, Generation Y (Millennials), and Generation Z, showcasing how each generation adapts these symbols to their communication styles and needs, as observed on their Facebook posts. Common themes that emerged across the three generations are shown in Table 4, denoting that emojis are used to: *express emotions and affection, modify or soften tones, maintain social interaction and connection, show romantic and intimate gestures, add humor and playfulness, add aesthetic and decorative features, depict cultural and contextual nuances, represent actions and concepts, display sequential storytelling and complex expressions, and highlight pragmatic functions.*

Table 4. Utilization of Emojis per Generation

Generations	Themes	Core Ideas	Examples
GEN X, Y, Z	Express Emotions and Affection	Emojis are frequently used to express a range of emotions, including love, happiness, gratitude, and joy. Generations often leverage emojis to convey emotional states in a concise and visually engaging manner.	You will always be beautiful in my eyes...love you much 🥰🥰🥰❤️🌸 (Gen X17) They say 'when you wait on God's best for you, He gives you more than what you ask for 🏠👨👩❤️ (Gen Y 5) Happy 3rd Anniversary, my loveee! (name) ❤️❤️❤️ (Gen Z 2)
	Modify or Soften Tones	Emojis are employed to adjust or soften the tone of a message. They add context or indicate the sender's intent, ensuring that the message is understood as playful, sarcastic, or friendly.	I will always love u and put my hands in you are back always, as requested, hahahah 😊 (Gen X 9) Our relationship is not perfect, <i>kay</i> no marriage is perfect <i>gyud mga badii</i> 😊 Our relationship is not perfect because no marriage is truly perfect, bothers 😊 (Gen Y 6) Ps: not pregnant po 😊 (Gen Z 3)
	Maintain Social Interaction and Connection	Emojis support interpersonal communication by enhancing expressions of goodwill, thankfulness, and community spirit. They function as tools for maintaining relationships and building rapport in both personal and professional contexts.	Let us keep the fire of love burning in us 🙌🔥 (Gen X 18) Let us rock the world together. 🤘🤘 (Gen Y 10) Belated Happy wedding anniversary with you (name) 🎉👰🤵 (Gen Z 11)
	Show Romantic and Intimate Gestures	Emojis are used to communicate romantic intentions and affectionate sentiments in a playful or heartfelt manner.	Thank you for the flowers, Papa 🌹❤️ (Gen X 1) Happy 8th mommy (name) 🤑❤️ (Gen Y 6) ILYSM! 🥰😘 (Gen Z 5)
	Add Humor and Playfulness	Emojis often add a humorous or playful element to messages, reflecting the lighthearted communication style.	I will always love u and put my hands on you are back always, as requested, hahahah 😊 (Gen X 9) P.S. I still get a crush on you every day. 😊👩 (Gen Y 5) Still the best damn decision I ever

		made 😊 (Gen Z 4)
Add Aesthetic and Decorative Features	Emojis are used to mark special occasions or to add flair to messages.	Happy anniversary.. 25th wedding (Gen X 12) ❤️❤️❤️ #Happy 1st wedding anniversary to us (name) ❤️🎉🥳🥰 (Gen Y 15) And to many more 🎉 Happy First Anniversary🥳 (Gen Z 17)
Depict Cultural and Contextual Nuances	The meanings of emojis may vary based on cultural or contextual factors.	Let us keep the fire of love burning in us 🙌🔥 (Gen X 18) Truly, He makes everything beautiful in its time. Ayie hehe ❤️🙌🙌🙌 (Gen Y 15) To God be the Glory ✨🙌 (Gen Z 3)
Represent Actions and Concepts	Some emojis represent physical gestures, actions, or concepts, making communication more dynamic and relatable.	🙌🙌 To another sixteen years, Dad (name) (Gen X 5) I love you from me and Baby A ❤️🙌 (Gen Y 9) Always and Forever 🥰❤️ (Gen Z 13)
Display Sequential Storytelling and Complex Expressions	Emojis are combined in sequences to tell stories or convey complex emotions and ideas that go beyond a single emoji's meaning.	Happy 20th wedding anniversary, both of us 🥰🥰🥰🎂🥳🥳 (Gen X 8) Hugs and kisses. 🎂🎉❤️🥰 (name) (Gen Y 14) Padayon lang ta sa life, magbunga ra tanan puhon! 🙌🥰❤️ Let us continue with our lives. Everything will pay off soon.! 🙌🥰❤️ (Gen Z 2)
Highlight Pragmatic Function	Emojis are used pragmatically to modify tone, emphasize meaning, or substitute for words, making text communication more dynamic and expressive.	Today marks our 15th Wedding Anniversary🥳 (Gen X 1) Happy 1st Wedding Anniversary husband (name) 🎉🥳🥰❤️💍 (Gen Y 10) And to many more 🎉 Happy First Anniversary🥳 (Gen Z 17)

Express Emotions and Affection. This theme suggests that emojis are often used to convey a range of emotions, including love, happiness, gratitude, and joy. As analyzed, all generations often support their emotional disposition with emojis to show conciseness and visually engaging posts, especially on occasions. Emojis are used to emphasize celebratory events, such as anniversaries, as focused on in this study, to create a joyous atmosphere and add visual stimulation to the text. The combination of emojis helps readers to understand the varied emotions that the sender is feeling. This result supports Lin (2019), who found that emojis more often express positive emotions rather than negative ones, which aligns with Riordan's (2017) finding that emojis foster positive effects, particularly joy. Shown below are examples of emoji usage for this theme, expressing

positive emotions and affection :

"You will always be beautiful in my eyes...love you much 🥰🥰❤️🌸"- (Gen X17)

"They say, 'when you wait on God's best for you, He gives you more than what you ask for 🏠👶❤️"- (Gen Y 5)

"Happy 3rd Anniversary, my loveee! (name) 💖💖💖"- (Gen Z 2)

Modify or Soften Tones. Emojis are used to supplement context or convey the sender's intention, ensuring the message is understood and received accurately. By adjusting or softening the tone of a message, the readers appropriately interpret the entire message conveyed in the posts. This finding is consistent with the results of Cramer et al. (2016), who suggest that emojis can add emotional or situational meaning, adjust tone, make the message more engaging, and facilitate conversation management and relationship maintenance. Moreover, Erle et al. (2021) demonstrated that emojis effectively convey emotionality and disambiguate meaning in digital communication.

"I will always love u and put my hands in ur back always as requested hahahah 😊"- (Gen X 9)

"Our relationship is not perfect, *kay* no marriage is perfect, *gyud mga badii* 😊", "Our relationship is not perfect because no marriage is truly perfect, brothers 😊"- (Gen Y 6)

"Ps: not pregnant po 😊"- (Gen Z 3)

Maintain Social Interaction and Connection. With the use of emojis, the connection between the sender and the reader is supported through improved expressions. Emojis are regarded as tools for bridging relationships and maintaining rapport personally and professionally. This theme is related to Chen's (2023) findings on the impact of emojis in reducing cultural misunderstandings, expressing various emotions, and enhancing intercultural communication efficiency and intention.

"Let us keep the fire of love burning in us 🙌🔥"- (Gen X 18)

"Let us rock the world together. 🤝🥳"- (Gen Y 10)

"Belated Happy wedding anniversary with you (name) 🎉👰🤵"- (Gen Z 11)

Show Romantic and Intimate Gestures. All generations have used emojis to convey their romantic feelings and affections in a playful or heartfelt manner. According to Wagner (2022), couples who share romantic feelings follow implicit rules in using flirting symbols, which include the same use of emojis, frequency, timing, and message length. This is evidently seen from the corpora:

"Thank you for the flowers, Papa 🥰💖"- (Gen X 1)

"Happy eighth, mommy (name) 🥰❤️"- (Gen Y 6)

"ILYSM! 🥰🥰"- (Gen Z 5)

Add Humor and Playfulness. Some emojis carry humorous and playful meanings that, when added to the text, are also modified. These reflect a lighthearted communication style among all the generations. This corroborates the result of Sampietro (2019), who posited that emojis contribute to humor in daily digital conversations through visually reproducing laughter, signaling play frames, and responding to humor.

"I will always love u and put my hands in ur back always as requested hahahah 😊"- (Gen X 9)

"P.S. I still get a crush on you every day. 😊👩"- (Gen Y 5)

"Still the best damn decision I ever made 😊" - (Gen Z 4)

Add Aesthetic and Decorative Features. Emojis, when used with celebratory messages, often add beauty and aesthetic appeal. A combination of different emojis adds a unique flair to the messages. According to Sugiyama (2015), emojis were prevalent among Japanese teens on their mobile phones for conversational purposes and to express their aesthetic sensibilities. Furthermore, Heidari (2023) emphasized that emojis are a form of digital representation that can enhance the aesthetics of texts, adding dynamic and unique elements online.

"Happy 25th wedding anniversary.. 💕💕💕" - (Gen X12)

"Happy first wedding anniversary to us (name) 💕🎉👪😊🥰" - (Gen Y 15)

"And to many more 🥂 Happy First Anniversary👩" - (Gen Z 17)

Depict Cultural and Contextual Nuances. Certain emojis vary in meaning based on cultural or contextual aspects. In the examples shown below, the 🙏 (Folded Hands) is used for pleading (Gen 18) and praying (Gen 15). In Japan, this emoji can connote gratitude. Another is the 🙌 (index finger pointing up) emoji, which denotes the number one or is used to ask questions. However, in the sample, it accompanies the text "To God be the Glory", indicating that the emoji represents an acknowledgment of an omniscient one up above. This supports Guntuku et al. (2019), who found that normative and culture-specific patterns existed in emoji usage between East and West, emphasizing the possibility of cross-cultural communication.

"Let us keep the fire of love burning in us 🙏😊" - (Gen X 18)

"Truly, He makes everything beautiful in its time. Ayie hehe ❤️😊🙏🙏🙌😊" - (Gen Y 15)

"To God be the Glory ✨🙌" - (Gen Z 3)

Represent Actions and Concepts. Physical actions, gestures, or concepts are also well represented by emojis. These make the communication more dynamic, mobile, and relatable. As Gibson et al. (2018) concluded, their analysis provides valuable insights into the verifiable meanings of gestural emojis. The examples below represent real actions.

"🥂🥂 To another sixteen years, Dad (name)" - (Gen X 5)

"I love you from me and Baby A ❤️😭" - (Gen Y 9)

"Always and Forever 🤝💕" - (Gen Z 13)

Display Sequential Storytelling and Complex Expressions. Generations combine emojis to tell stories or convey complex emotions and ideas that cannot be represented by a single emoji alone. Boutet et al. (2021) found that quick and easy comprehension of verbal messages was influenced by the series of emojis used alongside the text. This is evident in the various samples below.

"Happy 20th wedding anniversary, both of us 💍💍💍🎂🥂🍷" - (Gen X 8)

"Hugs and kisses. 🍰🎉💕💍(name)" - (Gen Y 14)

"Padayon lang ta sa life, magbunga ra tanan puhon! 🙏🔥❤️. Let us continue with our lives. Everything will pay off soon! 🙏🔥❤️" - (Gen Z 2)

Highlight Pragmatic Functions. Emojis are used to highlight the pragmatic functions behind their usage, showing the emotive, phatic, and aesthetic aspects. They are pragmatically used to adjust tone, emphasize meaning, or substitute words, making the message more creative and expressive. Ali-Chand and Naidu (2024) highlighted in their results that emojis play a significant role in nonverbal communication, particularly in

expressing emotions that are difficult to put into words; hence, emojis are pragmatically used. Some emojis seen in the analysis are as follows:

"Today marks our 15th Wedding Anniversary 🎉" - (Gen X 1)

"Happy 1st Wedding Anniversary husband (name) 🏠👨👩💖👨👩👧👦" - (Gen Y 10)

"And to many more 🎉 Happy First Anniversary👩👨" - (Gen Z 17)

As analyzed, Gen X's use of emojis is minimal compared to the other two generations, offering a smaller amount of data. Most posts are short sequences of emojis that tend to cater to fewer pragmatic functions. They also tend to use only a few emojis. This observation is supported by Boutet et al. (2024), who found that older generations use fewer emojis, tend to avoid using diverse emojis, and perceive difficulty in using emojis. In Japanese culture, emojis are often used informally, as they also value hierarchies in communication; hence, they pay attention to whom they are conversing with. Dharma et al. (2022) posited that Gen X avoid using emojis in communicating with their superiors or elders to avoid committing offenses. Due to socio-cultural practices, it has been found that fewer Gen Xers use emojis in communication (Dharma et al., 2022). Moreover, Azad et al. (2023) found that Gen Xers moderately started to integrate emojis into their communication, reducing formality by using shorter sentences with formal elements and adopting visual formats.

Furthermore, it was observed that Gen Y's use of emojis was diverse. Some used sequences and some used them in between words or phrases, either replacing words or just expressing an emotion. In the manual count, GenY has more emojis used, and they are more into relating the meaning of the text to their choices of emojis. However, texts are perceived as being longer in this generation. This is also evident, as Al-Kuwari (2019) discovered that Gen Y mainly relies on text rather than emojis, and that this generation believes emojis can never substitute for words on social media platforms. He also pointed out that the combination of emoji and text can deliver the intended message being communicated; thus, emojis are used to express emotions that cannot be conveyed by words (Al-Kuwari, 2019). In addition, Dharma et al. (2022) found that Gen Y used emojis more flexibly compared to older generations, indicating a greater comfort with digital communication. Nurjain et al. (2023) suggested that millennials must adapt to the fast-paced advancements of technology, as they struggle to filter information posted on social media.

Consequently, the most significant number of emoji usage is accounted for by Gen Z. They have used diverse symbols, combined them into sequences, or even presented various emojis that provide context to the message. Siagian and Yuliana (2023) revealed that Gen Z formed their communication environment by understanding and responding to social media use, emphasizing the crucial role of social constructs in enhancing their communication experiences. Moreover, Shamim and Riaz (2023) highlighted that Gen Z is knowledgeable about the use and limitations of various social media platforms and apps, and discreetly utilizes this knowledge to craft and interpret multimodal messages in digital communication. With this, individuals, organizations, and society are significantly influenced by Gen Z's social media behavior and usage, considering both environmental and personal factors (Prakash Yadav, G., & Rai, J., 2017).

All the results of the research questions were analyzed using the pragma-semiotic model of communication developed by Charles Saunders Peirce (1905). This pragma-semiotic approach is employed in the analysis of corpora to gain insights into the pragmatic functions, as outlined by Herring and Dainas (2017), and the functions of emojis, as explored by Danesi (2017). Through an examination of the emojis used by each generation, alongside the text, themes emerged regarding how each generation utilized emojis. Themes seen were common across generations, as elaborated above.

Finally, the results from each generation can be elaborated through the Language Variation Theory proposed by William Labov (1966). This theory highlights the systemic differences between social and cultural contexts of language use. According to Bayley & Cameron (2019), linguistic, social, and individual differences greatly influence language variation. As shown in the results of the research questions one to three, emojis vary across generations. Gen X was more inclined to use less common emojis without considering their appropriateness. On the other hand, Gen Y (Millennials) were more focused on striking a balance between emoji usage and text. Lastly, Gen Z's use of emojis was more into understanding the use of emojis and pragmatically applying them in

the discourse.

With these insights in hand, we can see the broad scope of sociolinguistics. These results can be elaborated through understanding the communication style, cultural norms, formality, different interpretations, skepticism on emoji usage, cultural sensitivity, and contextual use of emojis among Gen X. As the use of emojis evolves, studying the appropriateness of emoji use should be channeled across different generations to foster transparent and effective communication within the generations. Through these results, the generational gap can be bridged.

Implications for Educational Practices

Emojis in Facebook posts reflect generational differences in digital communication, offering valuable insights for educational practices in teaching communication and media literacy. The findings imply that educators can incorporate discussions on emoji use to highlight their pragmatic functions, such as signaling tone, enhancing emotional expression, and providing cultural context. Analyzing generational variations, such as the creative use of Gen Z, the blend of professionalism and personal expression among Millennials, and the often-humorous approach of Gen X, can teach students audience awareness and adaptability. Additionally, curriculum developers may develop professional development initiatives to provide educators with information on digital literacy and digital communication. Moreover, teachers may provide lessons on interpreting emojis that can foster critical thinking about multimodal communication and digital identity while addressing potential misinterpretations due to cultural or individual differences. By integrating these elements, educators can better prepare students to navigate and engage effectively in the evolving digital world.

4.0 Conclusion

To conclude, this pragma-semiotic study highlights the growing role of emojis as powerful tools for digital communication. Drawing from Herring and Daina's (2018) pragmatic functions and Danesi's (2026) semiotic framework, the results reveal that emojis are used to express emotions, improve visual appeal, reinforce interpersonal bonds, and emphasize cultural values. They have different purposes. Additionally, both universal and distinct patterns of emojis reflect the changes in communicative preferences, digital literacy skills, and socio-cultural orientation. Moreover, Labov's (1972) theory of language variation across social groups affirms the playful and expressive use of emojis by Gen Z, as well as the more reserved and formal use of emojis by Gen X. This difference reveals how emojis function as cultural and linguistic markers that drive interaction and shape identity on online platforms. Finally, the results of this study show that emojis do not merely serve as decorative units but also carry pragmatic and semiotic value that supplements texts and bridges generational and cultural gaps. More importantly, emojis are vital in today's digital discourse, which makes communication more nuanced, inclusive, and engaging.

5.0 Contributions of Authors

Author 1: Conceptualization, data gathering, data analysis, data curation, research administration, writing, editing, and revising for publication.

Author 2: Conceptualization, data gathering, data analysis, data curation, research administration, writing, and editing.

Author 3: Conceptualization, methodology arrangement, checking of formal analysis, validation, and finalization of the paper.

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The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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