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Uses of Emojis in WhatsApp Communication among Male and Female Employees in the Malaysian Banking Community

Nor Farah Nadia Zamri¹  and Naginder Kaur^{2*} ¹Seri Manjung Secondary School, Perak, Malaysia²Academy of Language Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Perlis Branch, Arau Campus, Malaysia

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*Corresponding Author

Naginder Kaur (Assoc Prof, Dr)

E-mail: naginder.kaur@gmail.com

Co-Author(s):

Author 1: Nor Farah Nadia Zamri

E-mail: norfarahnadiazamri@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Recently, emoji use in WhatsApp has become more extensive in Malaysian online interactions, reflecting the rise in the popularity of emoji use and communicative importance. Emojis can improve interactivity among interlocutors in digital conversations, particularly text messaging. However, few studies have examined their role in Malaysian workplace communication, especially regarding gender differences and speech act categories, highlighting a research gap. This quantitative study employed Searle's (1979) Classification of Speech Acts to evaluate gender preferences and functions of emojis in WhatsApp among 430 banking employees in Malaysia. Participants were selected using purposive sampling and the data were analysed using IBM SPSS, with significance levels set at $p < .05$. Data were gathered through an online questionnaire and analysed using SPSS. It was discovered that female employees are more likely than male employees to use emojis with speech acts like Expressives, Representatives, and Directives. Female employees also perceived emojis as applicable for all types of speech acts in text messages. The results showed significant implications for workplace communication, where emojis serve as pragmatic tools to convey relational meaning, enhance interactivity and project illocutionary force that was previously achieved only through words, highlighting their role in shaping engagement and clarity in workplace digital communication.

Keywords: CMC, emojis, functions, gender differences, preference, speech acts, WhatsApp communication

Introduction

Communication is complex as it is not only about conveying meanings between interlocutors but also exchanging information and sharing ideas (Riordan, 2017). Nowadays, influenced by the advancement of technology and the existence of the Internet, humans can communicate instantly. As various digital communication platforms rise, traditional communication patterns are gradually challenged by computer-mediated communication (CMC), compelling users to confer meaning due to the absence of physical cues (Rahmatika et al., 2021). Numerous communication platforms have

been developed, and distance is no longer a concern to interact with one another.

Malaysia is considered to be a digital forerunner of WhatsApp as 97% of the Malaysian population uses WhatsApp (Ali et al., 2019). Recent national survey data showed that approximately 71% of Malaysians use WhatsApp daily, which shows its vital role in communication (Astro Awani, 2023). The use of WhatsApp among Malaysians is not only limited to personal usage but is also vastly employed in the CMC (computer-mediated communication) of many industries in the Malaysian workplace. Technology-mediated



communication in the workplace affects interpersonal behaviour and organisational norms, especially on digital platforms such as WhatsApp (Prusti & Pradhan, 2024). Similarly, research on workplace communication highlights how management practices and organisational practices influence professional interactions, underlining the significance of comprehending emoji use in these settings (Kaur & Kaur, 2025). Nevertheless, despite transforming communication, CMC creates challenges in conveying emotions and nuances.

In the banking industry, communication refers to the exchange of information, ideas, and knowledge within and outside of institutions (Shrestha et al., 2019). Therefore, effective communication should be attained in order to build and strengthen work-team connections (Parajuli et al., 2020). Even though employee background and organisation culture affect communication, few studies examine the influence of gender in professional text messaging. According to Jiang et al. (2021), instant text messaging has been commonly utilised by employees to aid in handling work-related issues. It allows employees to share information quickly and thoroughly, while also improving employee relationships. However, with the absence of non-verbal cues in written digital communication, it prevents emotional clarity and expression (Holtgraves, 2025).

Emojis have become indispensable in CMC platforms to convey nonverbal cues in text messages. Unlike traditional emoticons, emojis provide a means to convey emotions and meanings in CMC and overcome nonverbal limitations in text-based CMC platforms (Al-Rawi, 2025). Prominent use of emojis by users in CMC has piqued scholarly attention. Previous studies largely remain descriptive and focused on social or educational contexts (Ahmad Sabri et al., 2021; Shah & Tewari, 2021). The limitations also include small sample sizes, qualitative-only designs, and lack of systematic gender comparisons (Al Rashdi, 2018; Jones et al., 2020; Hafizh Nur Herdian & Siti Zuhriah Ariatmi, 2025). Despite the growing use of emojis in professional communication, there is a lack of empirical research examining how specific variables such as gender, frequency of emoji use, and the communicative functions of different emoji categories influence workplace messaging in WhatsApp.

This study addresses these gaps by investigating gender differences, emoji usage preferences, and functional roles of emojis among Malaysian banking employees in professional WhatsApp communication, employing Searle's (1979) Classification of Speech Acts as a pragmatic framework. The inclusion of the pragmatic framework would add value to the study as it is a well-established theory that has been used by many

philosophers and linguists to better understand human communication.

In order to fulfil the purpose of the study in exploring the uses of emojis in WhatsApp among male and female Malaysian employees, the following research questions are formed:

1. What is the difference in the preference to use emojis between male and female employees of the Malaysian banking community?
2. What is the difference in the functions of emojis based on male and female employees of the Malaysian banking community?

These questions directly address the identified gap, focusing on gender, usage preference, and communicative function. The study contributes to understanding the language change occurring through emojis, gendered communication practices and pragmatic functions of emojis in workplace messaging.

1. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

1.1 Literature Review

Various studies explored use of emojis in current CMC. For instance, Kaye et al. (2016) analysed the functions of emoticons in various platforms such as emails, texts and Facebook, while Ahmad Sabri et al. (2021) explored the use of emojis in WhatsApp among Malaysians. Building on this line of research, Pardede and Damanik (2025) found that emojis provides pragmatic and semantic roles in WhatsApp and social media CMC, indicating that emojis are communicative tools used to provide context and not just illustrative symbols.

A recent study highlights that emojis contribute to multimodal meaning-making in workplace digital communication, complementing text with paralinguistic cues and visual context (Neel et al., 2023). In addition, Hickson et al. (2022) discuss communication in technologically mediated settings, highlighting broader themes about digital capabilities and constraints. This is especially relevant to comprehending emojis' function in making up for the absence of non-verbal cues in professional WhatsApp communication. Liegl and Furtner (2024) examined emoji use in workplace digital communication and found that emojis as nonverbal cues significantly affect receivers' impressions in professional interactions.

Despite these contributions, prior research has several limitations. Most studies have examined emojis in social or educational contexts and have only assessed their functions generally, without applying established theoretical frameworks such as Speech Act Theory.

Moreover, gender differences in professional communication remain underexplored. While Holtgraves (2024) found that emojis are used to perform speech acts, there is no correlation between male and female users. Al Rashdi (2018) conducted a qualitative study and observed the functions of emojis among male and female Omani users. Nonetheless, the difference between male and female users was not highlighted. Even though Shah and Tewari (2021) as well as Jones et al. (2020) investigated the use of emojis among gendered lines in the United States, where they found differences in the use of emojis between male and female university students, they have only focused on the school context. Hafizh Nur Herdian and Siti Zuhriah Ariatmi (2025) explored the use of emojis as amplifiers of speech acts in CMC, specifically Instagram comments. Nevertheless, the differences between genders have not been highlighted. Recent studies also show that social anxiety and loneliness influence emoji use differently by gender, with women more frequently using emojis to convey positive meaning in ambiguous contexts (Bendl et al., 2025). Similarly, Zhukova and Herring (2024) found that demographic factors, including gender, affect emoji interpretation, highlighting the gendered nature of digital communication.

While gendered differences are addressed in emoji interpretation, these findings have yet to be examined in Malaysian workplace WhatsApp communication, where practical and relational outcomes matter. Sun et al. (2020) stated that, in face-to-face or digital interaction, identifying gender variations in user behaviour is always a critical topic. Therefore, overlooking the distinction between genders would undermine not only the efficacy of internet-based information services and interfaces but also user interactions, including services and interfaces such as digital advertising, prediction algorithms and social networking sites. Consequently, it could result in an imbalance in information access and expression (Chen et al., 2018). Hence, analysing how Malaysians utilise emojis in WhatsApp could provide insights into multimodal, pragmatic, and gendered communication practices in workplace CMC. This clearly positions the study to address gaps in theoretical grounding, context, and gender analysis, setting the stage for the application of Searle's (1979) Classification of Speech Acts in the theoretical framework.

1.2 Theoretical Framework

This study applies Searle's (1979) Classification of Speech Acts, which categorises utterances based on their illocutionary force—the intended communicative function of a message. Searle proposed five categories of illocutionary acts, widely applied in linguistic and pragmatic research, which are assertives, directives,

commissives, expressives, and declarations. This classification makes the differences in the communicative uses of emojis more easily noted when analysing the data. Each speech act category was integrated into specific questionnaire items to measure the use of emojis in WhatsApp communication. For example, expressive emojis were measured by items capturing feelings or attitudes, while directive emojis were measured by items capturing requests or suggestions. This allows a systematic assessment of how emojis perform or reinforce speech acts in CMC.

Implementing Searle's framework with recent research on workplace digital communication, functions of emojis and gendered interactions, provides strong support. It also allows systematic exploration on the use of emojis in a professional CMC setting, particularly WhatsApp messaging. Emojis are treated as illocutionary markers because they convey pragmatic meaning, clarify the speaker's intent, and reinforce the illocutionary force of textual messages in the absence of non-verbal cues. The study addresses gaps from prior research and provides insights into the pragmatic use of emojis, clarity in communication and gendered communication in a workplace context.

While this study applies Searle's (1979) Classification of Speech Acts to examine emoji use, it is important to note that many pragmatics scholars argue that emojis often function as modifiers or amplifiers of speech acts rather than independent illocutionary acts (Dresner & Herring, 2010; Al Rashdi, 2018). Emojis can enhance, clarify, or emphasise the illocutionary force of textual messages, rather than performing a standalone speech act. Accordingly, emojis are interpreted as both reinforcers of illocutionary meaning and context-sensitive cues that shape pragmatic communication in professional WhatsApp interactions. It fills in the gaps found in previous research by allowing the current study to explore how gender affects the use and function of emojis in professional WhatsApp messaging.

2. Methodology

2.1 Research Design

The current research implemented a quantitative approach with a descriptive research design to achieve the objectives stated in the first chapter. According to Creswell (2014, as cited in Ishtiaq, 2019), a quantitative approach was used to test objectives by examining the relationships among variables, which can be analysed and evaluated through the use of statistical procedures. The current descriptive research identifies the relationships between variables such as gender, frequency of emoji use in a day, preference to use emojis and functions of emojis.

2.2 Research Sample

The researcher used purposive sampling to choose the participants for the study. Etikan et al. (2016) noted that purposive sampling allows researchers to extract a large quantity of information from the data, which enables the characterization of the primary influence in the findings to have on the population. As the study was carried out to fill the gap in the uses of emojis in the Malaysian context, the sample of this research were employees from banking organisations in Selangor, Malaysia, who are familiar with the use of emojis in computer-mediated communication, particularly WhatsApp. The purposive sampling was used to ensure the participants had adequate exposure to WhatsApp in a professional context. As there are respondents below the age of 24 which includes, permanent employees and interns/trainees, this demographic composition is acknowledged as a limitation affecting the generalisation of the findings to other districts and working sectors.

Approximately 471 respondents were able to answer the questionnaire for the present study. Out of the 471 responses, only 430 responses were valid after eliminating the responses which did not pass the requirements to answer the questionnaire. According to Meyer (1979) and Fox et al. (2007), if there is an infinite number or an unknown number of population, the corresponding sample size to derive the population is about 384 (as cited in Oribhabor & Anyanwu, 2019). Moreover, when using an online sample size calculator with a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin error, the ideal sample size for this study is 385. Therefore, a sample size of 430 respondents is sufficient for the research. Although effect sizes (Cohen's *d*) were not calculated for the T-tests, 95% confidence intervals were reported to indicate the precision of the differences between groups. Furthermore, the study was not designed around experimental power or standardised effect sizes. Following the recommendation by Cumming (2012), Cohen's *d* was omitted. This choice directly matches the original sampling goals of the study. Future studies could include effect size calculations to provide a more complete understanding of the magnitude of observed effects.

2.3 Research Instrument

Roopa and Menta (2012) stated that a questionnaire is a 'highly organised tool' to gather data where a variety of questions need to be answered by various representative groups of people. The questionnaire contained a range of questions such as gender, employment status, the frequency of emoji usage (in a day), the preference to use emojis and the functions of emojis in WhatsApp.

The questionnaire was divided into two sections: Section 1 and Section 2. Section 1 was created to obtain demographic information such as employment status, levels of employment in the bank, gender, age and frequency of emoji use in WhatsApp (in a day). On the other hand, Section 2 is on the uses of emojis, which consists of two parts: Part A and Part B. The statements for Part A and B are created and adopted based on Searle's (1979) Classification of Speech Acts. Part A was developed to find the difference in the preference to use emojis between male and female employees of the Malaysian banking community, while Part B was designed to determine the difference in the functions of emojis based on male and female employees of the Malaysian banking community.

Part A and B in Section 2 consist of 15 statements each, which include uses such as Representatives, Commissives, Directives, Expressives and Declaratives. Each of these uses is represented by three speech acts. The first use is Representatives, which includes three items such as representing statements, asserting claims and giving suggestions. The second use is Commissives, which comprises making promises, giving threats and making pledges or oaths. The third use is Directives, consisting of giving commands, requesting and inviting. The fourth use is Expressives, where it is used for congratulating, apologising and showing condolences. Lastly, the fifth use is Declaratives, which includes items such as appointing, announcing judgment and rejecting.

In Part A and Part B of Section 2, respondents were asked to report their level of agreement on a 5-point Likert scale. According to Adeniran (2019), the Likert scale is suitable for analysing attitudes, perceptions, emotions, personalities, opinions, and descriptions of people's environment in social and behavioural sciences. Although Likert-scale responses are technically ordinal, they are often treated as interval-level data in research. With a sufficiently large sample size, parametric tests such as independent samples t-tests are robust and appropriate for analyzing these data (Norman, 2010). Part A, the respondents were requested to choose their preference for using emojis. In Part B, the respondents were asked to select their level of agreement on the functions of emojis in WhatsApp.

Due to time and resource limitations, a formal pilot research was not carried out. Nonetheless, the questionnaire's content validity and item clarity were guaranteed by specialists. Reliability was established through Cronbach's Alpha, confirming high internal consistency across all constructs. Subsequent studies could implement a pilot study to improve questionnaire items and administration procedures. Additionally, although expert assessment and item alignment with

Searle's (1979) speech act framework were employed to guarantee content validity, formal validity testing was not carried out. Hence, future studies could implement a formal validity assessment to validate the constructs.

2.4 Data Collection Procedures

Ethical approval was received from UiTM Research Ethics Committee and participants were treated in line with the ethical guidelines at all times. Before proceeding with the data collection, the respondents were informed that their participation in the study was voluntary and their responses would only be used for research purposes. For confidentiality, no information was collected that could identify them personally. The responses only included interactions with colleagues at the lateral level and did not include interactions with subordinates or superiors.

2.5 Operational Definitions

Based on self-report, the frequency of emoji use across Searle's Speech Act categories was used to operationalise emoji preference. The perceived function of emojis in communication, illocutionary force in WhatsApp messages, was described as emoji functions. Gender was recorded as male or female based on self-report.

2.6 Data Analysis

The responses were imported into SPSS as data, where the variables of the study were determined, such as gender, frequency of emoji usage, preference to use emojis and functions of emojis. Descriptive statistics were used to analyse the frequencies of the demographic details such as employment status, levels of employment in the bank, gender, age and frequency of emoji use in WhatsApp (in a day), where the number of responses and percentages for each variable were obtained. It would also show the most important to the least important uses of emojis according to the respondents, where the means for each use were compared to find out the highest mean value. In addition, cross-tabulation from Descriptive Statistics and Chi-Square test in SPSS was also used. These statistical tests help to identify how males and females differ regarding the frequency of daily emojis used in WhatsApp among employees in the banking community.

According to Mishra et al. (2019), a large amount of experience is required to prevent incorrect interpretations when assessing normality using graphical approaches, which consequently makes statistical methods more dependable. For a large sample size, the Shapiro-Wilk and Kolmogorov-Smirnov statistical tests are inaccurate, whereas the Skewness and Kurtosis statistical tests

may be relatively valid in both small and large samples (Wulandari et al., 2021). Thus, the current study employed Skewness and Kurtosis in order to test the normality of the data in the study. If either of the values for Skewness or Kurtosis is less than ± 1.0 , the distribution's Skewness or Kurtosis is not beyond the normality range. Therefore, the distribution can be deemed normal. However, if the values are more than ± 1.0 , the distribution of Skewness or Kurtosis is outside the range of normality, which consequently makes the distribution cannot be termed normal.

In order to answer the research questions of the study, the Independent Sample T-test was administered to explore the difference in the preference to use emojis between male and female employees of the Malaysian banking community, and to determine the difference in the functions of emojis based on male and female employees of the Malaysian banking community. This inferential statistic is appropriate as it can be utilised to establish whether a difference in the means of two samples of scores is significant. When an independent dichotomous variable is assessed at the category level and the dependent variable is evaluated at the interval or ratio level, this statistical test is implemented. If the probability value (Sig. 2-tailed) gained from the Independent T-test is less than 0.05 ($p < 0.05$) or 0.01 ($p < 0.01$), there is a significant difference in mean value between male and female respondents. In the current study, the independent variable was gender, which was at a categorical level, while the dependent variables were the preference to use emojis and functions of emojis, which were measured at the ratio level using scales in the questionnaire.'

2.7 Maintaining Data Reliability

In order to measure the internal consistency or reliability of the items in the questionnaire, which are in a set of scales, Cronbach's Alpha was used. Taber (2018) noted that the Cronbach Alpha was designed to fulfil the need to provide an accurate way to measure the internal reliability of an instrument used in quantitative research when there are multiple-item measures of a concept in the research being conducted. Hence, the reliability test suits the current study to measure the strength of that consistency.

Below are the results of the 15 items on the preference to use emojis between male and female employees in the Malaysian banking community, and the 15 items on the functions of emojis based on male and female employees in the Malaysian banking community.

Table 1 shows that the questionnaire consisted of 15 items on the preference to use emojis between

Table 1 Reliability Test for Items on the Preference to Use Emojis

Cronbach's Alpha	N of items
.951	15

Table 2 Reliability Test for Items on the Functions of Emojis

Cronbach's Alpha	N of items
.954	15

Table 3 Respondents' Gender

	Frequency	Percent
Male	256	59.53
Female	174	40.47
Total	430	100.0

Table 4 Respondents' Age

	Frequency	Percent
Below 24	150	34.88
25 - 35	144	33.49
36 - 45	56	13.02
46 - 55	54	12.56
Above 56	26	6.05
Total	430	100

male and female employees in the Malaysian workplace context of the banking community. The value of Cronbach's Alpha is .951. This indicates that there is a high level of internal consistency for the scale items with this specific sample.

Table 2 displays that the questionnaire comprised 15 items on the functions of emojis based on male and female employees in the Malaysian banking community. The value of Cronbach's Alpha is .954. This indicates that there is a high level of internal consistency for the scale items with this specific sample.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Demographic Results

Table 3 shows that 59.53% of participants were male (n = 256) and 40.47% were female (n = 174).

Table 4 illustrates the majority of respondents were below 24 years (34.88%) or between 25–35 years (33.49%).

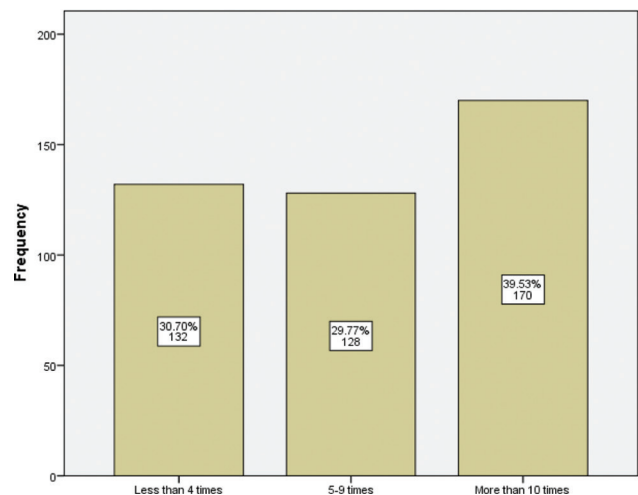
Table 5 exhibits the employment levels of the participants: 42.79% were officers, 23.95% were analysts,

Table 5 Respondents' Level of Employment

	Frequency	Percent
Officer	184	42.79
Analyst	103	23.95
Manager	74	17.21
Teller	56	13.02
Other	13	3.02
Total	430	100

Table 6 Respondents' Employment Status

	Frequency	Percent
Permanent	215	50.00
Daily	121	28.14
Contract	85	19.77
Other	9	2.09
Total	430	100

**Figure 1:** Frequency of Emoji Use in WhatsApp (Daily)

17.21% were managers, 13.02% were tellers and 3.02% were of other employment levels.

Table 6 reports that half of the respondents (50%) were permanent employees in the banking community, 28.14% were daily-paid employees, and 19.77% were contract employees, while 2.09% of the respondents were of other employment status.

Figure 1 discloses that the highest frequency of daily emoji usage in WhatsApp was more than 10 times, with a percentage of 39.53%, followed by 5 to 9 times with 22.40% and less than 4 times with 12.80%. This suggests that emoji use is a common communication practice among Malaysian banking employees and highlights its influence in workplace CMC.

Table 7 Skewness and Kurtosis Normality Test

		Statistic	Std. error
PREFERENCE TO USE EMOJIS			
Representatives	Skewness	-.052	.118
	Kurtosis	-.793	.235
Commissives	Skewness	.368	.118
	Kurtosis	-.585	.235
Directives	Skewness	.134	.118
	Kurtosis	-.636	.235
Expressives	Skewness	-.059	.118
	Kurtosis	-.892	.235
Declaratives	Skewness	.128	.118
	Kurtosis	-.639	.235
FUNCTIONS OF EMOJIS			
Representatives	Skewness	-.084	.118
	Kurtosis	-.612	.235
Commissives	Skewness	.310	.118
	Kurtosis	-.640	.235
Directives	Skewness	.121	.118
	Kurtosis	-.669	.235
Expressives	Skewness	-.045	.118
	Kurtosis	-.828	.235
Declaratives	Skewness	.078	.118
	Kurtosis	-.548	.235

3.2 Normality Test Results

Table 7 illustrates the Skewness and Kurtosis normality test results of the data from the current study. The results show that the values for Skewness and Kurtosis are less than ± 1.0 . The distribution can be considered relatively normal as the Skewness and Kurtosis for the distribution are not outside the range of normality. Moreover, Kim (2013, as cited in Mishra et al., 2019) noted that if a sample size is more than 300, either an absolute Skewness value ≤ 2 or an absolute Kurtosis (excess) ≤ 4 in SPSS may be used as reference values for determining considerable normality. Thus, the data for this particular study are considered normal.

3.3 General Uses of Emojis in WhatsApp among Malaysian Banking Employees

In order to evaluate which use of emojis was the most important in the preference to use emojis between male and female employees in the Malaysian workplace context of the banking community, the means for each use of emojis were analysed. The results in Table 8 illustrate that the preference to use emojis as Expressives in WhatsApp had the highest mean score ($M=3.05$, $SD=.1.144$), while the preference to use emojis as Commissives had the lowest mean score ($M=2.62$, $SD=.1.104$). The employees'

Table 8 Preference to Use Emojis in WhatsApp

	n	Mean	Std. deviation
Expressives	430	3.054	1.144
Representatives	430	2.9390	1.122
Directives	430	2.789	1.074
Declaratives	430	2.776	1.073
Commissives	430	2.623	1.104

Table 9 Functions of Emojis in WhatsApp

	n	Mean	Std. deviation
Expressives	430	3.195	1.106
Representatives	430	3.133	1.028
Declaratives	430	3.059	1.016
Directives	430	3.022	1.045
Commissives	430	2.846	1.066

preference to use emojis in WhatsApp as Expressive could be due to the fact that emojis convey better facial expressions and body gestures that are missing in most modes of online communication, such as text messages.

Table 9 displays the results for the most significant function of emojis in WhatsApp among Malaysian employees in the banking community. The table shows that the function of emojis as Expressives had the highest mean score ($M=3.20$, $SD=.1.106$), while the function of emojis as Commissives had the lowest mean score ($M=2.85$, $SD=.1.066$). It could be assumed that employees in the Malaysian banking community use emojis as a medium to express their feelings and thoughts in online communication.

3.4 What is the difference in the preference to use emojis between male and female employees of the Malaysian banking community?

Table 10 shows the means for the preference to use emojis between male and female employees of the Malaysian banking community. The results reveal that in the preference to use emojis between male and female employees of the Malaysian banking community. Females scored significantly higher than males in Expressives ($M=3.52$ vs. 2.74), Representatives ($M=3.21$ vs. 2.76), and Directives ($M=3.08$ vs. 2.59). In order to determine whether there are significant mean differences between male and female employees of the Malaysian banking community in their preference to use emojis, an Independent Samples T-test was conducted.

Table 11 displays that no significant differences were observed for Commissives ($p = .240$) and Declaratives ($p = .082$). Although statistically significant, the mean

differences indicate moderate practical significance, showing meaningful gender-related differences. It can be concluded that the preference to use emojis as Commissives and Declaratives in WhatsApp communication was about the same between both genders.

On the other hand, Independent samples t-tests confirm these differences: Expressives, $t(428) = -7.435, p < .001$; Representatives, $t(428) = -4.194, p < .001$; Directives, $t(428) = -4.786, p < .001$. It can be concluded that females prefer to use emojis in WhatsApp communication as Expressives, Representatives and Directives more than males in the Malaysian workplace context of the banking community.

3.5 What is the difference in the functions of emojis based on male and female employees of the Malaysian banking community?

Table 12 shows the means for the functions of emojis based on male and female employees of the Malaysian banking community. The results display that

in the functions of emojis based on male and female employees of the Malaysian banking community, females scored higher mean values as Representatives ($M=3.39, SD=.987$), Commissives ($M=2.98, SD=1.118$), Directives ($M=3.42, SD=1.013$), Expressives ($M=3.67, SD=.959$) and Declaratives ($M=3.26, SD=1.019$) compared to males. In order to determine whether there are significant mean differences between male and female employees of the Malaysian banking community in the functions of emojis, an Independent Samples T-test was conducted.

Table 13 illustrates that there were significant mean differences in all functions of emojis, which accompany speech acts by male and female Malaysians of the banking community. Females scored higher across all categories: Expressives ($t(428) = -7.736, p < .001$), Directives ($t(428) = -6.905, p < .001$), Representatives ($t(428) = -4.439, p < .001$), Declaratives ($t(428) = -3.401, p = .001$), and Commissives ($t(428) = -2.208, p = .028$). These results indicate that females use emojis more frequently to convey relational meaning, reinforce directives, and express thoughts, reflecting their

Table 10 The Means of the Preference to Use Emojis Based on Gender

	Gender	n	Mean	Std. deviation
Representatives	Male	256	2.755	1.108
	Female	174	3.209	1.091
Commissives	Male	256	2.572	1.088
	Female	174	2.699	1.127
Expressives	Male	256	2.736	1.104
	Female	174	3.523	1.038
Declaratives	Male	256	2.701	1.027
	Female	174	2.887	1.130
Directives	Male	256	2.590	0.996
	Female	174	3.082	1.119

Table 12 The Means of the Functions of Emojis Based on Gender

	Gender	n	Mean	Std. deviation
Representatives	Male	256	2.956	1.020
	Female	174	3.394	0.987
Commissives	Male	256	2.752	1.021
	Female	174	2.983	1.118
Directives	Male	256	2.750	0.978
	Female	174	3.423	1.013
Expressives	Male	256	2.876	1.087
	Female	174	3.665	0.959
Declaratives	Male	256	2.923	0.994
	Female	174	3.259	1.019

Table 11 Preference to Use Emojis Based on Gender Independent Samples T-test

		Levene's test for equality of variances		T-test for equality of means		
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Representatives	Equal variances assumed	0.705	.401	-4.194	428	.000
	Equal variances not assumed			-4.206	375.380	.000
Commissives	Equal variances assumed	0.531	.467	-1.177	428	.240
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.169	362.816	.243
Expressives	Equal variances assumed	1.693	.194	-7.435	428	.000
	Equal variances not assumed			-7.522	386.228	.000
Declaratives	Equal variances assumed	1.181	.278	-1.774	428	.077
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.741	347.463	.082
Directives	Equal variances assumed	2.115	.147	-4.786	428	.000
	Equal variances not assumed			-4.681	342.046	.000

Table 13 Functions of Emojis Based on Gender Independent Samples T-test

		Levene's test for equality of variances		T-test for equality of means		
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Representatives	Equal variances assumed	.210	.647	-4.439	428	.000
	Equal variances not assumed			-4.466	379.554	.000
Commissives	Equal variances assumed	1.911	.168	-2.208	428	.028
	Equal variances not assumed			-2.170	348.735	.031
Directives	Equal variances assumed	.307	.580	-6.905	428	.000
	Equal variances not assumed			-6.859	362.844	.000
Expressives	Equal variances assumed	2.798	.095	-7.736	428	.000
	Equal variances not assumed			-7.924	400.225	.000
Declaratives	Equal variances assumed	.220	.639	-3.401	428	.001
	Equal variances not assumed			-3.385	365.353	.001

role as illocutionary markers in workplace WhatsApp messaging (Bendl et al., 2025; Zhukova & Herring, 2024). It can be concluded that females use emojis in WhatsApp communication, which functioned as Expressives, Directives, Representatives, Declaratives, and Commissives, more than males in the Malaysian workplace context of the banking community.

The present study aims to examine the difference in preference to use emojis between male and female employees of the Malaysian banking community and the functions of emojis in WhatsApp. The investigation discovers that the most significant use of emojis based on Searle's (1979) Classification of Speech Acts is the use of emojis as Expressives, such as congratulating, apologising and expressing condolences, as it had the highest mean score out of all the other uses of emojis in Malaysian online communication. This suggests that emojis serve as pragmatic tools to convey illocutionary force in the absence of facial expressions and gestures. This discovery is concurred by previous studies of Holtgraves (2025) and Al Rashdi (2018), who affirmed that emojis are used to convey feelings and thoughts of the users. Hafizh Nur Herdiana and Siti Zuhriah Ariatmi (2025) and Kaye et al. (2016) also provide support to the current findings, as they confirmed that these digital icons are important in communication, as they are used as indicators of emotions in CMC.

In addition, the analysis between gender and the preference to use emojis in WhatsApp communication among employees in the banking community suggests that females prefer to use emojis with speech acts such as Expressives, Representatives and Directives. Thus, it implies that females used emojis as a medium to express how they feel about a situation, represent their state of affairs or ideas, as well as to try to direct the addressee to perform an action. This aligns with the theoretical perspective that digital communication tools like emojis

function as modifiers of pragmatic meaning, reinforcing speech acts in online interactions.

The discovery opposes previous results by Putri and Marnita (2019) as well as Tanjung (2019), who investigated the speech acts of males and females in movies. The studies asserted that there is no difference between genders, and people use all classifications of speech acts similarly. The contrast between the current research and with aforementioned studies may also suggest that there are dissimilarities between online interactions in real life and conversations in movies among males and females. Nonetheless, the discovery coincides with Rivai (2015), who found that there are differences between males and females in the use of speech acts during real-life interactions. Thus, the findings provide the answer to the first research question: female employees prefer to use emojis with Expressives, Representatives, and Directives more than male employees in WhatsApp communication.

Furthermore, there are differences in the functions of emojis based on male and female employees in the Malaysian banking community. The results exhibit that the female employees believed emojis could be used in all classifications of speech acts categories more than male employees. The findings contradict Herring and Danias (2020), who argued that there is little difference between gender and the assumed functions of emojis. They contested that although there are differences in the frequency of emojis used in online communication, both genders recognised the functions of emojis similarly. Nevertheless, previous studies by Jones et al. (2020) and Prada et al. (2018) corroborated the present analysis. While Prada et al. (2018) confirmed that in comparison to males, females expressed more positive feelings about emojis and associated more with the reasons for using them, Jones et al. (2020) stated that females have higher familiarity and emoji usage compared to males.

These results suggest that gendered emoji use can affect professional attitude and interpersonal clarity within online workplace communication, which has practical implications for the organisational communication environment.

Overall, the study demonstrates that emoji use is both prevalent and gendered in workplace WhatsApp communication. Emojis function pragmatically to convey emotion, reinforce speech acts, and support relational interactions, offering theoretical contributions to digital linguistics and pragmatics. The results demonstrate that training programs on digital professionalism and interpersonal tone can be strengthened by an understanding of emoji use, thereby improving workplace communication strategies.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, with the growing popularity of emojis, there is a need to research their use in Malaysia, as this could help users interact more effectively. Based on Searle's Classification of Speech Acts, the current quantitative study examined 430 male and female employees in the banking community on their preference to use emojis and the functions of emojis in WhatsApp communication. Emojis function pragmatically to convey illocutionary force, supporting relational and affective communication where non-verbal cues are absent. The analysis revealed female employees prefer to use emojis with speech acts such as Expressives, Representatives and Directives, more than male employees do. Furthermore, female employees believed that emojis could be used with all classifications of speech acts in text messages compared to male employees. This study contributes to scholarship by providing empirical evidence on gendered emoji usage in professional Malaysian contexts and demonstrates the application of Searle's Speech Act Theory as a methodological framework for analyzing emoji functions. Understanding gendered emoji use can enhance workplace communication by improving interpersonal tone, message clarity, and relational effectiveness.

Nonetheless, there are certain limitations to the current study. The research mainly focuses on the respondents from the banking community in Selangor, Malaysia, which may limit generalizability. A longitudinal study could explore underlying factors influencing emoji use and perceptions over time. Future research could examine differences in emoji types used for each speech act, and consider variables such as age, employment level, and sector. Comparative studies across industries, including retail, construction, tourism, and education, could provide a broader understanding of professional emoji use in workplace CMC. Overall,

the study demonstrates that emoji use is both prevalent and gendered in workplace WhatsApp communication. Emojis function pragmatically to convey emotion, reinforce speech acts, and support relational interactions, offering theoretical contributions to digital linguistics and pragmatics.

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Declaration of Generative AI and AI-assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

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Biographical Statement of Author(s)

Nor Farah Nadia Zamri is an independent researcher in Malaysia. She conducted this research while pursuing her postgraduate studies at Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) in Master of Language Studies. Currently, she works as a secondary school teacher in Malaysia.



Her research interests include digital communication, pragmatics, and workplace discourse, with particular focus on emojis and speech acts in computer-mediated communication.

Ms. Nor Farah Nadia Zamri

Independent Researcher
Malaysia

E-mail: norfarahnadiazamri@gmail.com

Associate Professor

Dr. Naginder Kaur is an English language lecturer at the Academy of Language Studies, UiTM Perlis Branch, Malaysia. She has about 30 years of teaching experience at secondary school and tertiary level in Malaysia.



She is an avid writer and her research interests include learner autonomy, writing and vocabulary instruction.

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Naginder Kaur

Academy of Language Studies
Universiti Teknologi MARA
Perlis Branch, Malaysia

E-mail: naginder.kaur@gmail.com