

Semiotics of Emojis A Barthesian Analysis of Human Interpretation and ChatGPT Plus

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سيمياءات الرموز التعبيرية : تحليل بارثي لتأويل الإنسان و ChatGPT Plus

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the interpretation of emojis in the modern digital environment and provides a comparison of human and AI-based interpretations (ChatGPT Plus). Inspired by the difference between denotation and connotation, as developed by Roland Barthes, emojis are regarded as a socially mediated semiotics resource and not just an expression of visual emotion. The research employed an online survey conducted via Google Forms (N = 33), where respondents analyzed selected emojis within controlled textual contexts. The human responses were examined to categorize prevalent interpretive schemas and levels of semantic variance, whereas ChatGPT Plus was asked the same combinations of emotes and context and compared. The results indicate that there is a partial overlap in the human and AI interpretation at the denotative level and in emojis whose meaning is culturally stable. Nonetheless, a prominent deviation is at connotative level where human interpretation is more susceptible to contextual, relational and affective overtones. The study finds that, despite the capability of AI to replicate dominating emoji meanings, the application is still weak in learning socially located and dynamic features of emoji interpretation, which confirms the persistence of human experience in digital meaning-making. **Keywords:** Emojis; Semiotics; Denotation and Connotation; Digital Discourse.

المخلص

تتناول هذه الدراسة تفسير الإيموجي في البيئة الرقمية المعاصرة من خلال تقديم تحليل مقارن بين التفسيرات البشرية وتلك التي ينتجها الذكاء الاصطناعي، ممثلاً بنظام ChatGPT Plus. وانطلاقاً من التمييز الذي طرحه رولان بارت بين الدلالة المباشرة (Denotation) والدلالة الإيحائية (Connotation). تُعالج الإيموجيات بوصفها موارد سيميائية ذات طابع اجتماعي، وليست مجرد تعبيرات بصرية عن الانفعال. اعتمدت الدراسة على استبانة إلكترونية نُفذت عبر منصة Google Forms (N = 33). حيث طُلب من المشاركين تحليل مجموعة مختارة من الإيموجيات ضمن سياقات نصية مضبوطة. وتم تحليل الاستجابات البشرية بهدف تصنيف الأنماط التفسيرية السائدة ومستويات التباين الدلالي، في حين جرى توجيه ChatGPT Plus بالمجموعات نفسها من الإيموجيات والسياقات لإجراء مقارنة مباشرة. وتشير النتائج إلى وجود تداخل جزئي بين التفسيرات البشرية وتفسيرات الذكاء الاصطناعي على مستوى الدلالة المباشرة، ولا سيما في الإيموجيات التي استقر معناها ثقافياً. غير أن تبايناً ملحوظاً يظهر على مستوى الدلالة الإيحائية، حيث تتسم التفسيرات البشرية بحساسية أكبر تجاه الأبعاد السياقية والعلائقية والانفعالية. وتخلص الدراسة إلى أنه، على الرغم من قدرة أنظمة الذكاء الاصطناعي على محاكاة المعاني الإيموجية السائدة، فإنها ما تزال محدودة في التعامل مع الخصائص الاجتماعية الديناميكية لصناعة المعنى، وهو ما يؤكد استمرار مركزية الخبرة الإنسانية في عمليات بناء المعنى في التواصل الرقمي. **الكلمات المفتاحية:** الإيموجي (الرموز التعبيرية)؛ السيميائية؛ الدلالة التعيينية والدلالة الإيحائية؛ الخطاب الرقمي

1- Introduction

The swift spread of social media networks and internet-based communication technology has changed the face of digital communication significantly. In this changing communicative context, emojis have become a principal element of the daily digital communication. They are not only decorative appurtenance to text anymore but serve as semiotic resources that are meaningful and contribute to tone, position, and other interpersonal communication in online communication (Danesi, 2017; Kress, 2010). Emojis play a role in influencing the way users feel, socialize, and balance the lack of non-verbal expression that occurs in a face-to-face communication. Even though emojis are represented visually, they cannot be considered semantically transparent and fixed. Their meaning relies substantially on contextual, cultural, and relational dimensions whenever an individual emoji can portray a range of meanings in various communicative contexts. Past studies have revealed that emojis tend to be pragmatically operating, indicating courtesy, or alignment or irony, or restraint of emotions, rather than expressing them literally (Danesi, 2017; Zappavigna, 2012). This conceptual inequality makes emojis fruitful subjects of semiotics, especially where the constructivist label of meaning as a social construct is significant. In line with these processes, new innovations in artificial intelligence have been bringing non-human agents to digital meaning-making activities. Different generative AI systems like ChatGPT are gradually involved in online conversation by generating and decoding words. Nonetheless, these systems lack bodily experience and face-to-face communication with individuals, as it is the case with human individuals. Their products are produced with the help of statistical pattern recognition on the basis of large bodies of data, not with the help of culturally located knowledge (Floridi, 2019; Bender et al., 2021). This difference also poses vital doubts regarding the ability of AI to process semiotic materials and resources which are closely based on context and relationship dynamics, as well as social negotiation, as it generally applies to emojis. Semiotic analysis can be developed to answer these questions fruitfully based on the difference between denotation and connotation that was developed by Roland Barthes. The denotation is called the direct, immediate meaning, of a sign and the connotation is the cultural, emotional, ideological meaning that is produced by use in society (Barthes, 1977). This analytical difference works especially well with emojis which have comparatively constant denotative meanings but much more fluid connotative ones. Inquiring about the ways, in which these two levels of meaning are interacted by humans and AI systems, gives us some idea about what digital semiosis would be in the era of AI. The proposed study serves to add to the already existing research on digital semiotics as it will compare human interpretations of emojis with those produced by ChatGPT Plus. The study examines the interpretations of human subjects based on specific emojis in a controlled textual scenario and compares the responses to those formed by AI users based on the same emoji-context combinations. The study does not center on generalization through statistics but instead aims to find some interpretive regularities, levels of overlap, and marks of difference between human-generated and AI-generated meanings of the world. This research holds that the interpretation of emojis is deeply socially grounded by adopting a semiotic approach that is rooted on the model proposed by Barthes. Although AI systems are able to reproduce dominant and culturally stabilized meaningfulness, they are poor at interacting with connotative, contextualized meaningfulness. When emphasizing these variations, the paper highlights the primary role of the human experience in digital meaning-making and defines the existing frames of the AI-mediated semiosis in the current online form of communication. This work has three contributions to the digital semiotic research. First, it will allow a comparison of human emojis reading to AI-generated readings generated with ChatGPT Plus in a controlled and context-based way. Second, it implements the denotation connotation distinction of the emoji interpretation by defining culturally stable meanings and a connotative variation depending on context. Third, it suggests a descriptive typology of convergence and divergence patterns that highlight in which ways AI adheres to other readings of dominant ones and in which cases AI does not reflect relational and affective nuances.

2- Theoretical Framework

This paper works on a combined semiotic-pragmatic system in order to study the emojis meaning in digital communication during the AI period. The framework is based on the main distinction between denotation and connotation presented by Roland Barthes as well as using the perception of social semiotics, pragmatics, digital discourse studies, and criticism of AI-mediated interpretation. This integration is an indication of the multifacetedness of the emojis as signs functioning at the same time on the visual, social, and contextual planes.

2.1 Semiotics Denotation and Connotation.

This work is theorized based on the discussion of denotation and connotation that was made by Roland Barthes. Denotation is defined as the immediate or literal meaning of a sign whereas connotation describes the cultural,

emotional and ideological meaning which are formed by the application of signs (Barthes, 1977). It is important to note, as Barthes stresses, that connotation is not a peripheral or superficial strata of signification, but a primary aspect that signification has. As he states, "connotation is not the second meaning of the sign, but the way in which the sign is articulated with broader cultural meanings" (Barthes, 1977, p. 91). This point of view brings out non-neutrality of signs. Barthes also says that "there is no sign which is not charged with ideology" (Barthes, 1977, p. 116). A good example of this dual structure of meaning is the emojis. Although they may have standardized visual representations, which because of their standardized visual forms imply comparatively stable denotative meanings, their interpretations at the connotative level are context-dependent, inter-personally influenced and shaped by cultural norms. As a result, the meaning of emojis cannot be subjected to visual interpretation in isolation but should be interpreted as the socially embedded meaning.

2. 2 Emojis as Social Semiotic Resources

According to the social semiotic view, signs do not have their own meaning and thus meaning is constructed through the social practice (Kress, 2010). Kress explicitly points out that, "meaning is made, not found" (Kress, 2010, p. 59). In this context, emojis are considered semiotic resources which users selectively use in combination with written communication to create a meaning in online communication. Digital discourse studies show that emojis constitute an important part of stance expression, affiliation building, and identity negotiation especially in a community whereby the facial expression is not available (Zappavigna, 2012). This is because, according to Zappavigna, online discourse lacks the orientation to exchange information but, on the contrary, it is discourse which is concerned with social bonding, and according to Zappavigna, proves to be more of a discourse of affiliation than having an exchange of information "digital discourse is fundamentally about affiliation" (Zappavigna, 2012, p. 12). To this end, emojis are not seen as the individual symbols, but as the part of more extensive multimodal combinations with accompanying texts, platform affordances, and norms of interaction.

2.3 Emojis as Pragmatic Resources in Digital Interaction

In addition to their semiotic value, emojis also play significant pragmatic, digital communicative functions. Research on computer-mediated discourse suggests that the use of emojis is common in softening a statement, dampening the face-threatening actions, and to direct the recipients towards the desired meaning (Dresner and Herring, 2010). Dresner and Herring stress that emojis cannot merely be regarded as emotive, as emoticons are not the most important signals as to whether something is emotive, but they serve as pragmatic signifiers, to signify illocutionary force (2010, p. 256). The pragmatic aspect of this is so clear in interpersonal communication where emojis are used in deriving the relational meaning. As Kelly and Watts (2015) show, emojis are imaginatively used in intimate relationships to trade intimacy and social affiliation. Equally, Danesi (2017) notes that emojis have become structurally embedded into the digital communication and states that emojis are no longer the peripheral decoration that it is a component of the grammar of digital interaction (Danesi, 2017, p. 7). This knowledge can be used to find out why communicative intention is given much consideration by human interpreters as opposed to emotional labeling.

2.4 Emoji Polysemy and Semantic Flexibility

One of the distinguishing characteristics of emojis is that they were polysemous. Emojis have many usages that are context-dependent, co-textual, and social relational in nature unlike fixed or fixed lexical variables. Barthes understands connotation as an open arena of meaning production and this semantic flexibility makes it pretty close to it. Evans (2017) emphasizes that emoji meaning is not visually determined, stating that "the meaning of an emoji does not reside in its graphic form, but in how it is used in context" (Evans, 2017, p. 18). Previous studies have shown that the same emoji can convey different, and sometimes contradictory, meanings depending on communicative purpose and cultural setting (Danesi, 2017). Emoji polysemy explains the difference in interpretation of emojis among human beings and argues against the fact that emojis cannot be fully semantified.

2.5 Contextualization and Meaning Construction in Digital Discourse

The interpretation of emojis is very relative. The emojis seldom stand alone, though they create their meaning as a result of the interactions in a sequence of texts, the perceived interaction between interlocutors, as well as the overall context of communication. Dresner and Herring stress that "the interpretation of emoticons depends heavily on the interactional context in which they appear" (2010, p. 264). In the digital context, emojis tend to replace the lack of prosody and facial expression and gesture, and emojis allow users to put messages in context and minimize uncertainty. The interpretation of emojis is more of a dynamic and context-specific process as

well as it is dependent on contextual, relational and cultural knowledge, which is utilized by human interpreters to draw meaning.

2.6 AI as an Algorithmic Interpreter of Emojis

To explain the interpretation of non-human, this paper relies on critical insights provided by AI ethics, as well as computational linguistics. Artificial intelligence applications like ChatGPT Plus are considered as algorithmic interpreters whose results are created by statistical pattern recognition as opposed to embodied or social situated understanding. Floridi argues that "artificial systems do not understand meaning; they process information" (Floridi, 2019, p. 75). Similarly, Bender et al. (2021) caution against attributing human-like understanding to language models, asserting that "language models are not meaning makers but systems for pattern completion" (Bender et al., 2021, p. 617). As a result, although AI systems can mimic dominant and culturally stabilized meanings in emojis, they do not interact with context-sensitive and pragmatic and affective aspects of meaning.

3- Methodology

3.1 Research Design

In this study, a comparative research design based on semiotic analysis is used regarding qualitative research design. Its intention is not to test hypotheses about statistics or to measure such hypotheses and extrapolate the results to a larger population, but to analyze trends of meaning-making when it comes to interpreting emojis. The paper presents a comparison of human interpretations of emojis with the interpretations generated by AI on ChatGPT Plus with the aim of identifying similarities and differences on both denotation and connotation levels.

3.2 Data Selection

The data were gathered on the platform of Google Forms as an online questionnaire was created and sent. In this questionnaire, the respondents were provided with textual messages (with emojis) that were very short, and each was requested to choose an interpretation that best represented their interpretation of this emoji in the given context. Respondents were free to participate and all responses were anonymized prior to analysis. The number of participants who answered the questionnaire was 33 (N = 33). The sample size was deemed to be sufficient enough, suitable to a qualitative study of semiotic, since the aim of the study was to determine interpretive patterns, and not establish statistical generalisation.

3.3 Emoji Selection

Ten emojis that seem to be frequently used were chosen to be analyzed based on two factors:

- (1) the high rate of their occurrence in ordinary daily digital communication, which is so high.
- (2) their possibility of being interpreted in a number of ways based on context.

The selected emojis were:



The emojis were made to be placed in a controlled textual setting so that the interpretation could become less ambiguous as well as guarantee that human and the AI interpretation could be compared.

3.4 Questionnaire Design

The questionnaire was in the form of multiple-choice questions which were context-based. There were a short sentence with an emoji in each item and then it was followed by a list of predetermined interpretive choices. The alternatives were meant to draw an emotional and a pragmatic meaning, including politeness, mitigation, affection or intensification instead of persuading the participants to legitimize a single self-evident solution. This design has enabled the identification of dominant interpretations in addition to the extent of semantic dispersion in relation to responses.

3.5 AI Data: ChatGPT Plus

The model ChatGPT Plus (open stream Open AI) was used to generate AI-interpretations on the subscription-priced feature ChatGPT Plus, which allows clients to gain access to supplementary capabilities in language operations. ChatGPT Plus was given the same combinations of emojis-sentences used on human participants and requested to generate the meaning of each emoji between the contexts of the text. The outputs of the AIs were not taken as a definitive account, but rather as comparative analytical information. This method has permitted a comparative systematic analysis between human and AI meaning-making operations.

3.6 AI Promoting Protocol and Recreatability.

. ChatGPT Plus (OpenAI) was asked the same combinations of emojis and context to achieve comparability and transparency with the questionnaire. Each item was presented to the model (a) sentence, (b) target emoji and (c) an instruction to give an interpretation with a limit of one or two sentences. All the prompts were made on [January 25, 2026]. Each was repeatedly prompted [three times]; in case of several output occurrences the interpretation given in the analysis was the one most repeated across runs (i.e., the repeat semantic core). The prompts employed in this research are given in the Appendix B.

3.7 Analytical Procedure

The analysis has followed in three steps:

1- Interpretation Analysis by Man: The results were discussed in terms of human reaction towards each emoji to choose the most popular interpretation. Percentages were done to show the most regularly chosen meanings and to measure the levels of agreement or variance.

2- AI Interpretation Analysis: The semantic orientations of the interpretations that ChatGPT Plus produced were assessed and classified as per their predominant semantic orientation.


3- The human and AI meanings were compared in a descriptive manner by the differentiation of denotation and connotation offered by Barthes. When the AI interpretation matched the widespread human interpretation, convergence was found, and when the human interpretations had connotative variation not represented by a given AI output, divergence was found. This operation was to outline interpretive alignment patterns as opposed to calculating statistical agreement.

A comparative analysis of the presence of the emojis within digital discourse has been informed by the works of Roland Barthes where he distinguishes the difference between the denotation and connotation of signs as negotiated signs within a social context.

4- Data Analysis

The given section is an in-depth semiotic examination of some of the emojis selected and how they are used in a certain set of texts. The analysis is conducted on the comparison of the human interpretation made out of the questionnaire answers with the one created by ChatGPT Plus, with the specific attention paid to the differences between denotative and connotative meanings.

4.1

Context: Good news 

• Human Interpretation:

The most commonly interpreted by the participants was a form of positive reaction/ friendly acknowledgment as opposed to very strong happiness. The distribution of responses was between the options of politeness, mild happiness, and social warmth, indicating that the emoji can be applied as a pragmatic tool of regulating the tone and preserving social harmony.

• ChatGPT Plus Interpretation:

ChatGPT Plus was mostly understood as a proclamation of positivity or joy, where the emphasis was made on the generalized emotional reading.

• Barthesian Reading:

On a denotative level, the emoji signifies a smiling facial expression, which is visually related to a positive affect the sign is seemingly emotionally clear and comparatively untainted at this level.

But connotatively, human meanings make it clear that is more of a pragmatic indicator instead of a happiness indicator. In the specified setting, the emoji will serve to make the statement softer, minimize the possible interpersonal stress, and retain a collaborative tone. This connotative level moves the emoji out of the emotional signifier category, into the relational one.

According to Barthesian view, such transformation exemplifies how meaning is not embedded in the sign itself but made by the cultural use. The significance of the emoji is managed by repetitive social actions whereby amiability and courtesy are played out strategically instead of occurring naturally. On the other hand, ChatGPT Plus is still more inclined towards the denotative reading, where is understood as generalized positivity, and thus, its interactional and pragmatic role is not taken into account.

4.2

Context: That was really funny 

• Human Interpretation:

The high level of interpretive agreement was in the fact that a clear majority of the participants related to strong laughter or great amusement.

- ChatGPT Plus Interpretation:

ChatGPT Plus also understood the emoji as an indication of extreme laughter or great humor.


- Barthesian Reading:

Denotatively, depicts a face with tears in it, and visually this is used to express extreme amusement.

Connotatively speaking, the human and AI interpretations agree on the purpose as an online enhancer of humour. The emoji does not only imply laughing but executes exaggeration and mutual enjoyment to the digital conversation.

In Barthesian terms, is an example of a sign that has reached its culturally valid connotative meaning through repetition. Consequently, the reproduction of a shared interpretive frame by human readers and ChatGPT Plus with slight variation occurs.

4.3

Context: Can you help me 

- Human Interpretation:

Respondents were mostly identified with a feeling of emotional appeal, helplessness or soft pleading. According to these readings, one is sensitive to the dynamics of interpersonal and emotional

- ChatGPT Plus Interpretation:

ChatGPT Plus took the interpretation of a polite or softened request.

- Barthesian Reading:

On the denotative level, represents a facial expression which is related to pleading or vulnerability. This visual imagery implies some state of desperation or attractiveness.

Connotatively, human readings are more than emotional to include interpersonal positioning. The emoji is a discursively directed strategy, which marks emotional vulnerability and requests empathy or tolerance on the side of the interlocutor. It does not mean sadness on its own, but it is formed by its context in a request-based meaning.

In the Barthesian perspective, can be discussed as an unstable, context-related connotative sign. Whereas human beings are negotiating this meaning of shared social conventions and emotional experience, ChatGPT Plus narrows the sign to a practical measure of politeness. This shrink shows that the model depends on the prevalent patterns to the detriment of subtle connotative production.

4.4

Context: You said that in front of everyone 

- Human Interpretation:

There was a high level of agreement on as an indicator of embarrassment or social shock by the majority of the participants.

- ChatGPT Plus Interpretation:

ChatGPT Plus also recognized the emoji as being a sign of surprise or shock.

- Barthesian Reading:

Denotatively, expresses open eyes and red cheeks, which are usually linked with surprise or shock.

Human connotations recognize the emoji as the sign of embarrassment and social uneasiness. It has some meaning due to its position in a social or an interpersonal situation not because of the facial expression.

In a Barthesian perspective, it shows a somewhat normalized connotation of social awkwardness, which allows the overlap in the human and AI interpretations.

4.5

Context: I really tried 

- Human Interpretation:

Semantic dispersion was exhibited through human reactions being spread out through the interpretations of emotional pressure, disappointment, and sadness.

- ChatGPT Plus Interpretation:

ChatGPT Plus was mostly understood triviality to be that of sadness, or worry.


- Barthesian Reading:

Denotatively, expresses distress or discomfort by an expression of concern on his face.

Connotatively, the human readings put a focus on the emotional strain, effort and internal pressure particularly, when accompanied with the claim of personal investment or failure. The emoji is therefore an indicator of affective labor and not sadness per se.

Barthesianly, this deviation brings out the fact that connotation is reliant on experience. ChatGPT Plus also reduces the signature to a single category of emotions, which is not based on its context.

4.6

Context: I can't come today 

- Human Interpretation:

Participations understood as an expression of sadness, apology, or a request to be sympathized with implying that it has a multifunctional pragmatic meaning.

- ChatGPT Plus Interpretation:

ChatGPT Plus identified sadness as the dominant meaning.

- Barthesian Reading:

Denotatively, is a crying face, which is graphically associated with sadness.

Connotatively, human interpretations carry this meaning further to apology, vulnerability, and a demand to be sympathized with. The emoji acts as a face-saving mechanism, which regulates the expectations between people.

In a Barthesian perspective demonstrates how connotation is created in a social context. Whereas ChatGPT Plus determines the predominant emotional meaning, it does not reflect the bigger relational implications aroused by human readers.

4.7

Context: That's great news 

- Human Interpretation:

Majority of the participants took as sincere happiness or thrill.

- ChatGPT Plus Interpretation:

This interpretation was also similar to that advanced by ChatGPT Plus by focusing on happiness.

- Barthesian Reading:

Denotatively, portrays a widely grinning face that is related to happiness.

Connotatively, human and AI interpretations are the same in their efforts to assign the emoji with the mood of pure happiness or excitement. It is straightforward in terms of its operation and emotionally expressive.

Barthesianly speaking, can be observed as the example of a sign that has a very narrow denotative and connotative meaning, which leads to the stability of the interpretation.

4.8

Context: Please remember me 

- Human Interpretation:

Association was made by participants with supplication, and emotional appeal, and humility.

- ChatGPT Plus Interpretation:

ChatGPT Plus was interpreted as a general request.

- Barthesian Reading:

Denotatively, portrays open hands, which is graphically linked to giving or taking.

Connotatively, human meanings are added of supplication, humility and emotional appeal. The emoji appeals to cultural scripts of requesting, dependence, and ethical standpoint.

Barthesian perspective views as a culturally coded sign that has its connotation rooted in social conventions. ChatGPT plus, in its turn, deciphers it as a request that is neutral, making it less symbolic.

4.9

Context: Please help me 🙏

• Human Interpretation:

A very good majority of participants construed as a respectful or a polite appeal.

• ChatGPT Plus Interpretation:

ChatGPT Plus also understood the emoji as either a request or gratitude.

• Barthesian Reading:

Denotatively, it shows hands clenched together.

In connotative terms, human and AI interpretations are that the emoji is a sign of politeness, respect or a plea. It has been given a standard meaning in the online arena.

Barthesianly speaking, is a stabilized connotation that has been accomplished through massive conventionalization and as such it can be reproduced effectively by AI systems.

4.10 🔥

Context: Your work was amazing 🔥

• Human Interpretation:

Participants strongly perceived as the indicator of excellence, enthusiasm or high quality.

• ChatGPT Plus Interpretation:

Excitement and high approval were found by ChatGPT Plus.

• Barthesian Reading:

Denotatively, it illustrates a flame.

Connotatively, both human and AI understandings meet at its evaluative role as an indicator of the excellence, passion, or zeal. The emoji is used as a figurative enhancer but not a literal one.

Barthesian perspective demonstrates that metaphorical connotation may become culturally entrenched such that the shared understanding between human readers and AI readers is possible.

The analysis shows that convergence between human and AI interpretations is the most apparent when emojis have culturally stabilised meanings, whereas divergence emerges when emojis are used in work that is subtle relational or emotional. Such results support the argument about the denotation and connotation by Barthes and emphasize the social contextuality of emoji meaning in digitally mediated forms of conversation.

Table 1 includes a summary of the predominant human interpretations and their correspondence with those made AI-generated interpretations.

EMOJI	HUMAN IN-MEANING	CHATGPT PLUS MEANING	ALIGNMENT
😊	Politeness	Positivity	Divergence
😂	Strong laughter	Strong laugh	Convergence
🙏	Emotional appeal	Polite request	Divergence
😳	Embarrassment	Surprise	Convergence
😓	Emotional strain	Sadness	Divergence
😞	Sadness / apology	Sadness	Divergence
😄	Genuine happiness	Happiness	Convergence
🙏	Supplication	Request	Divergence
🙏	Polite plea	Request gratitude	Convergence
🔥	Excellence	Strong approval	Convergence

5. Results and Discussion

In this work, the author aimed to review the understanding of emojis in online communication and compare the results of understanding it between human comprehension and ChatGPT Plus based on the concept of

denotation and connotation suggested by Barthes. The results show convergence, as well as divergence between human and AI interpretation is not a chance but a systematic response of the emojis to semiotic functions in context. Since a stably culturally-neutral meaning of emojis, including 🤔, 😊, 🙏, 😬, and 🌟, others, is summarized in Table 1, such emojis have an extended level of interpretive consistency between human participants and ChatGPT Plus. In such scenarios, human and AI meanings depend on the conventionalized meanings that have become reasonably rigid as a result of being used in digital communication constantly. This intersection indicates that massive language models are useful in the reproduction of hegemonic, socially sedimented meanings at the denotative and near-denotative tiers. In comparison, emojis that do relational, affective or pragmatic work such as 😏, 😏, 😏, 😏, and 🙏 reveal obvious interpretive difference. More readings of these emojis were done by human participants with a lot of them going beyond simple labels of emotion to interpersonal goals like mitigation, appeal, apology or exposure of emotions. These connotative levels based on the sensitivity to social context and positioning in relations became totally missed by ChatGPT Plus, the interpretations of which were often limited to generalizations and functional descriptions. According to Barthesian view, this trend brings out the disparity between frozen connotation and non-frozen connotation. Even though certain emojis gained somewhat rigid cultural associations which can be synthesized by the AI platform, some are semiotically unrestricted and situational. The meanings of these meanings are actively negotiated by human interpreters in lived social experience using the common norms, emotional cues, and history of relationships. On the other hand, ChatGPT Plus develops interpretations by statistical pattern recognition, which makes it possible to reproduce the most popular meaning of the words but does not allow skillfully operating on the nuanced meaning of connotative change. These results are consistent with other arguments against AI-mediated language understanding, which point out that big language models are actors that simulate the meaning but are not engaged in the social and embodied life of the meaning production. The observation of divergence between relational and expression emojis depicts that the interpretation of emojis is not a simple issue of decoding visual symbols only, but rather a process of social meaning-making within the context of interactions. In this regard, emojis are both emotion signs and practical solutions in controlling status, affiliation, or interpersonal relationships, aspects that AI systems find rather difficult to fulfill youthfully. Significantly, this work does not imply that AI understandings are erroneous, but, instead, they are insufficient. ChatGPT Plus also exhibits consistency and stable performance as to conceiving dominant and conventional meanings, but its readings are lacking in elasticity of context as they are in human comprehension. This difference confirms the opinion that AI systems work at the stage of functional semiosis and not at the stage of socially situated semiosis at the moment. Comprehensively, it is revealed in the discussion that the boundaries of AI interpretation can most be seen in the field in which the meaning is determined by connotation, nuanced relationships, and intent of affection. In this manner, Emojis offer a fruitful avenue of studying the limits of human and machine meaning-making showing that human experience has remained central to the comprehension of socially engrained digital signs.

6- Conclusion

This study examined emoji interpretation in modern digital communication through a comparative analysis of human and AI-generated readings produced by ChatGPT Plus. The analysis is grounded in Roland Barthes' distinction between denotation and connotation. The study established that interpretive difference and similarity between human and AI under controlled textual conditions is systematically positive with respect to the semiotic processes carried out by emojis instead of randomness. The results indicate that convergent interpretations are more likely in the case of emojis whose meanings are stabilized by culture since both human respondents and ChatGPT Plus use the same conventional associations. By contrast, emojis used in relational, affective, or pragmatic roles generate more dispersed interpretive patterns, with human interpretations exhibiting a higher degree of contextual sensitivity and connotative variability. Such trends signalize that although AI systems can replicate hegemonic and traditional meanings, they are still barred in addressing the socially circumstantial and relational aspects of meaning-making. Through a semiotic approach, the research legitimizes the assertion by Barthes that meaning is not constructed within the signs but arises within the context of culture and negotiation. The example of emojis, being ordinary digital gestures, illustrates this process since they serve as an instrument of controlling interpersonal relations, stance, and emotion instead of unchangeable symbols of emotions. The analogy with AI puts emphasis on the fact that connotative work is

based on lived social experience, and it cannot be replicated fully by language models based on patterns. The methodological approach of the research establishes the usefulness of the combination of the qualitative questionnaire data with the output of the AI in the analysis of the digital discourse. Emojis represent a fruitful location of studying the frontiers between human and machine semiosis that can give insights into both the capabilities and the limitations of AI-based interpretation that exists. The study is limited by its relatively small sample size, its focus on a single AI model (ChatGPT Plus), and its culturally specific participant group. It adds to the current debate on the topic of the meaning-making in the AI era and opens future studies on the topic of emoji interpretation by various linguistic groups, platforms, and AI systems. Finally, the results support the main role of human experience in the process of producing and interpreting meaning in digitally mediated communication.

Ethical Considerations

Who responded to the questionnaire was on a voluntary basis and no personal identifiable information was gathered. All the responses were anonymized and were not utilized beyond the academic research. The research is conducted ethically with regard to research work involving human participants.

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Appendix A:

Emoji Interpretation Questionnaire

Participant Information:

Age:

Gender: Male Female

Emoji Interpretation Items:

1-Good news 😊

what does the emoji 😊 express here?


Politeness / friendliness

Mild happiness


Social warmth


other

2. That was really funny 😂


what does the emoji  indicate?


- Strong laughter
- Mild amusement
- Exaggerated reaction
- other

3. Can you help me 


what does the emoji  convey?

- Emotional appeal
- Gentle pleading
- polite request
- other

4. You said that in front of everyone 


what does the emoji  express?


- Embarrassment
- Surprise
- Social discomfort
- other

5. I really tried 


what does the emoji  indicate?


- Emotional strain
- Disappointment
- Sadness
- other

6. I can't come today 


what does the emoji  convey?


- Sadness
- Apology
- seeking sympathy
- other

7. That's great news 


what does the emoji  express?


- Genuine happiness
- Excitement
- Positive reaction
- other

8. Please remember me 

what does the emoji  indicate?

- Supplication
- Emotional appeal
- Request
- other

9. Please help me 

what does the emoji  express?

- polite plea
- Respect

Gratitude

Other

10. Your work was amazing 🤩
what does the emoji 🤩 indicate?

Excellence

Enthusiasm

Strong approval

other

Appendix/B

AI Emoji Interpretation Tasks This appendix presents the AI interpretation tasks used to generate emoji readings by ChatGPT Plus. Each task mirrors the structure of the human questionnaire presented in Appendix A. The only difference is that the AI was asked to provide an open-ended interpretive response rather than selecting from predefined options.

Task 1: 😊

Message: Good news 😊

Instruction: Explain what the emoji conveys in this message.

Task 2: 😂

Message: That was really funny 😂

Instruction: Explain what the emoji conveys in this message.

Task 3: 😞

Message: Can you help me 😞

Instruction: Explain what the emoji conveys in this message.

Task 4: 😳

Message: You said that in front of everyone 😳

Instruction: Explain what the emoji conveys in this message.

Task 5: 😞

Message: I really tried 😞

Instruction: Explain what the emoji conveys in this message.

Task 6: 😞

Message: I can't come today 😞

Instruction: Explain what the emoji conveys in this message.

Task 7: 😊

Message: That's great news 😊

Instruction: Explain what the emoji conveys in this message.

Task 8: 🙏

Message: Please remember me 🙏

Instruction: Explain what the emoji conveys in this message.

Task 9: 🙏

Message: Please help me 🙏

Instruction: Explain what the emoji conveys in this message.

Task 10: 🤩

Message: Your work was amazing 🤩

Instruction: Explain what the emoji conveys in this message.

Appendix Note: The qualitative analysis of the AI responses to the given tasks was compared to their interpretations on a dominant level, derived by the human subjects using the questionnaire featured in the Appendix A. The answers were considered as examples of arrived at interpretative discourses, but not as fixed meanings.