

Emoji Use, Perceived Speech Act Intensity, and Academic Performance Among College Students in Sulu

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ABSTRACT

The increasing use of digital communication has transformed how college students interact in academic and social environments. This study examined the relationship between emoji use, perceived speech act intensity, and academic performance among college students in Sulu during the School Year 2025–2026. Specifically, it determined the level of emoji use across social media, messaging/chat, promotional or marketing, and educational contexts; assessed the extent of perceived speech act intensity; and identified the significant relationships among the variables. The study employed a descriptive-correlational research design involving 200 college students from selected higher education institutions in Sulu through purposive sampling. Data were gathered using an adapted survey questionnaire and analyzed using frequency counts, percentages, mean, standard deviation, t-test, ANOVA, and Pearson Product-Moment Correlation. Findings revealed that students generally demonstrated a high level of emoji use and perceived speech act intensity. A very high positive correlation was found between emoji use and perceived speech act intensity, while academic performance showed a low negative correlation with emoji use and no significant relationship with speech act intensity. The study concludes that emojis significantly shape communication interpretation in digital environments but have limited direct influence on academic performance.

Keywords: *emoji use, speech act intensity, academic performance, digital communication, college students, computer-mediated communication*

INTRODUCTION

The rise of digital communication has significantly transformed how college students interact in both social and academic settings. Messaging applications, social media platforms, and online learning systems have become central tools for communication, particularly in higher education. In these environments, emojis are frequently used to express emotions, clarify meaning, and convey tone in text-based conversations. Because digital communication lacks facial expressions, gestures, and vocal cues, emojis function as paralinguistic features that help users interpret messages more effectively. Hancock et al. (2024) explained that emojis operate similarly to gestures in face-to-face communication by helping users understand emotional intent and indirect meanings in written discourse. Likewise, Zappavigna and Logi (2025) emphasized that emojis contribute to interpersonal meaning-making by creating emotional resonance and enhancing message interpretation.

The increasing use of emojis has also influenced how speech acts are perceived in online communication. Speech act intensity refers to how strong, emotional, polite, or forceful a message appears to the receiver. In digital communication, emojis may soften criticism, intensify requests, or reinforce emotional tone. Chand and Regina (2024) noted that emojis enhance emotional expression and shape the overall interpretation of written messages among university students. Similarly, Ju and Zhao (2024) found that emoticons and emojis significantly influence interpersonal interactions by affecting how online

messages are interpreted and responded to. These findings suggest that emojis are not merely decorative symbols but meaningful communication tools that shape tone, intent, and emotional interpretation.

In educational settings, emoji use has become increasingly common in communication between students and instructors, particularly through learning management systems, group chats, emails, and social media platforms. Studies have shown that emojis can influence student engagement, motivation, and communication effectiveness. Sia et al. (2024) reported that emojis in educational communication may improve interaction, participation, and students' learning experiences. Choi and Kim (2022) further found that instructor emoji use increased students' perceptions of approachability and engagement in online learning environments. However, despite these positive effects, emojis may also create misunderstanding due to differences in interpretation, emotional context, and cultural background. Bai et al. (2019) explained that emoji meanings vary depending on context and user perception, which may lead to ambiguity in communication.

Several theories provide grounding for understanding emoji use in digital communication. Speech Act Theory, developed by Austin and Searle, explains that communication involves not only conveying information but also performing actions such as requesting, apologizing, or persuading. Emojis may modify the illocutionary force of messages by strengthening or softening their intended meaning. Social Information Processing Theory by Walther further explains how individuals adapt to computer-mediated communication by using available digital cues, such as emojis, to compensate for the absence of nonverbal signals. In addition, the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) Framework suggests that emojis as communication stimuli may influence students' emotional and psychological responses, which may eventually affect behaviors and outcomes such as engagement and academic performance.

Although previous studies have explored emojis in social interaction, marketing communication, and online relationships, limited research has examined their relationship with perceived speech act intensity and academic performance, particularly in higher education settings. Existing local studies mainly focus on emoji usage patterns, emotional expression, and digital communication behaviors among Filipino students, but few directly investigate how emojis influence students' interpretation of message intensity and how these perceptions relate to academic outcomes. This gap becomes more significant in digitally mediated learning environments where communication increasingly relies on text-based interaction.

Given the growing dependence on online communication among college students, understanding how emoji use shapes perceived speech act intensity and academic performance is important. Emojis may influence how students interpret academic messages, engage in collaboration, respond to instructors, and participate in online learning activities. Examining these relationships may provide insights into the role of digital communication in academic environments and contribute to more effective communication practices in higher education.

Therefore, this study aimed to examine the relationship between emoji use, perceived speech act intensity, and academic performance among college students in Sulu. Specifically, it sought to determine the level of emoji use across different communication contexts, assess the extent of perceived speech act intensity, and identify whether these variables significantly relate to students' academic performance.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Emojis as Paralinguistic Tools in Digital Communication

Digital communication has changed the way individuals express emotions, intentions, and interpersonal meanings in online interactions. In text-based communication, where facial expressions, gestures, and vocal cues are absent, emojis function as important paralinguistic tools that help users convey emotional tone and clarify meaning. Studies consistently describe emojis as substitutes for nonverbal cues in computer-mediated communication (CMC), allowing users to communicate emotions, attitudes, and social intentions more effectively.

Manganari (2021) explained that emojis serve multiple communicative purposes in both personal and professional interactions, including emotional expression, tone regulation, and social connection. Similarly, Tang and Hew (2019) emphasized that emojis support both relational and cognitive communication functions. Relationally, emojis help strengthen rapport and interpersonal closeness, while cognitively, they assist users in interpreting the meaning and intention of messages. These findings suggest that emojis are no longer merely decorative symbols but are now integral elements of online communication.

Several studies further emphasized the role of emojis in emotional expression and message interpretation. According to Hancock et al. (2024), emojis function similarly to gestures in face-to-face communication because they help users understand emotional intent and indirect meanings in written discourse. Zappavigna and Logi (2025) likewise noted that emojis interact with text to create interpersonal meaning and emotional resonance in communication. In educational and social contexts, emojis are commonly used to soften statements, emphasize feelings, or reinforce tone.

Research also highlights that emojis significantly influence how messages are perceived by recipients. Coyle and Carmichael (2019) found that messages containing emojis were perceived as more responsive and socially engaging compared to text-only messages. Similarly, Boutet et al. (2021) demonstrated that emojis modify emotional interpretation and social perception, affecting how recipients process and respond to written messages. Positive emojis often enhance friendliness and warmth, while negative or ambiguous emojis may intensify emotional tone or create uncertainty in interpretation.

In online educational settings, emojis have become increasingly common in communication between students and instructors. Choi and Kim (2022) reported that instructor emoji use increased students' perceptions of approachability, engagement, and attentiveness in digital learning environments. Vareberg et al. (2022) similarly found that emojis enhanced perceptions of immediacy and warmth, although excessive use sometimes reduced perceptions of professionalism. These findings indicate that emojis can influence communication effectiveness and social interaction in academic environments.

Local studies also support the growing role of emojis in Filipino students' digital communication. Aranas et al. (2024) found that Filipino college students frequently use emojis such as hearts, laughing faces, and crying faces in Facebook and Messenger conversations to express emotions and strengthen social interaction. Dolot and Opina (2021) further observed that emojis in private chats commonly function as tone modifiers that influence the emotional interpretation of messages. Likewise, Salvacion and Limpot (2022) emphasized that emojis and other forms of digital language shape communication behaviors among Filipino students and may affect language use and online interaction.

Perceived Speech Act Intensity and Message Interpretation in Digital Communication

Speech act intensity refers to the degree to which a message is perceived as strong, emotional, polite, urgent, or forceful by the receiver. In digital communication, where nonverbal cues are limited, individuals rely heavily on textual and visual elements such as emojis, punctuation, capitalization, and wording to interpret the tone and intention of messages. Because of this, the interpretation of speech acts in online communication has become an important area of study, particularly in understanding how people perceive emotional and interpersonal meanings in text-based interactions.

Speech Act Theory, developed by Austin and Searle, explains that communication is not only used to convey information but also to perform actions such as requesting, apologizing, persuading, or criticizing. In digital settings, emojis can modify the illocutionary force of messages by strengthening or softening their intended meaning. For example, a smiling emoji may reduce the harshness of criticism, while repeated emojis or negative symbols may intensify emotional tone. Chand and Regina (2024) explained that emojis contribute significantly to emotional expression and influence how written messages are interpreted by university students. Similarly, Ju and Zhao (2024) found that emoticons and emojis shape interpersonal communication by affecting how online messages are emotionally perceived and responded to.

Studies also show that emojis influence the interpretation of tone, politeness, and emotional intensity in digital communication. Pardede and Damanik (2025) emphasized that the meaning of emojis depends heavily on context, sender intention, and relationship dynamics. According to their findings, the same emoji may communicate humor, sarcasm, politeness, or emotional emphasis depending on the accompanying text and social situation. Likewise, Hu et al. (2017) observed that positive emojis tend to create supportive and friendly interpretations, while negative or ambiguous emojis may alter the perceived sentiment of a message.

Research further indicates that emojis may intensify or soften perceived speech acts. Boutet et al. (2021) demonstrated that combining text with emojis changes how recipients process emotional cues and interpret message tone. Positive emojis accompanying requests or feedback may reduce perceived hostility and increase warmth, while negative emojis may heighten the seriousness or emotional intensity of messages. Coyle and Carmichael (2019) also found that emoji use increases perceived responsiveness and relational engagement in online communication, suggesting that emojis influence not only emotional tone but also interpersonal perception.

In educational settings, perceived speech act intensity becomes particularly important because students frequently communicate through text-based platforms such as messaging applications, discussion forums, and learning management systems. Misinterpretation of tone in these environments may affect collaboration, classroom participation, and communication effectiveness. Choi and Kim (2022) noted that emojis used by instructors increased perceptions of friendliness and approachability, which positively influenced students' engagement and attentiveness. Inderasari, Rohmatika, and Kusmanto (2023) further observed that students use emojis in online academic discussions to soften criticism, express agreement, and reduce misunderstandings during collaboration.

Local studies also highlight the role of emojis in shaping message interpretation among Filipino students. Dolot and Opina (2021) found that emojis in Facebook private chats commonly function as modifiers of emotional tone and communicative intent. Similarly, studies on Filipino digital language practices revealed that emojis, repeated letters, and textual paralanguage influence how online messages are emotionally interpreted and socially understood among students (Salvacion & Limpot, 2022). These findings suggest that emojis significantly contribute to how students perceive speech act intensity in digital interactions.

Emoji Use, Student Engagement, and Academic Performance

The increasing integration of digital communication in education has changed how students interact with instructors, classmates, and learning materials. Online classes, learning management systems, messaging applications, and social media platforms are now widely used for academic communication. In these environments, emojis have become common tools for expressing emotions, clarifying tone, and maintaining interpersonal interaction. Because communication plays a critical role in learning, researchers have begun examining how emoji use may influence student engagement, motivation, participation, and academic performance.

Studies suggest that emojis can positively contribute to communication effectiveness and learning experiences in digital educational settings. Sia et al. (2024) found that emoji use in educational communication improved students' engagement, motivation, and participation in academic activities. Emojis helped make messages appear more approachable and emotionally supportive, which encouraged interaction between students and instructors. Similarly, Choi and Kim (2022) reported that instructor emoji use increased students' perceptions of authenticity, attentiveness, and approachability, leading to higher levels of intrinsic motivation and classroom engagement.

Research also indicates that emojis may strengthen peer interaction and collaboration among students. Inderasari, Rohmatika, and Kusmanto (2023) observed that students frequently use emojis in online discussions to express agreement, encouragement, and emotional support. Emojis were also used to soften criticism and reduce tension during collaborative academic tasks. These findings suggest that emojis

may contribute to more positive communication dynamics, which are important for group learning, participation, and cooperation in online educational environments.

In addition to engagement and communication, emojis may indirectly influence academic performance by improving students' learning experiences and reducing misunderstandings in digital interactions. Choi, Shim, and Kim (2023) found that positive emojis in organizational communication enhanced participants' creativity and interaction by promoting perceptions of social warmth and support. Similarly, Lu et al. (2021) observed that emoji use in online communities encouraged sustained participation and engagement among users. Although these studies were conducted outside educational settings, they support the idea that emotionally supportive digital communication may influence behavioral and performance-related outcomes.

However, studies also caution that inappropriate or excessive emoji use may negatively affect communication in academic settings. Vareberg et al. (2022) found that while emojis increased perceptions of warmth and immediacy, excessive emoji use sometimes reduced perceptions of professionalism and competence. Bai et al. (2019) further explained that emoji interpretation varies depending on context, culture, and individual understanding, which may lead to ambiguity and miscommunication. In academic communication, misunderstandings caused by unclear emoji use may affect classroom interaction, collaboration, and students' interpretation of instructional messages.

Local studies similarly highlight the growing role of digital communication in Filipino students' academic experiences. Research on social media usage among Filipino learners revealed that students frequently use online platforms for academic discussions, collaboration, research, and communication related to coursework. Studies also showed that emojis and textual paralinguistic are widely used among Filipino students to express emotions and clarify meaning in online interactions (Aranas et al., 2024; Dolot & Opina, 2021). While these studies emphasize the importance of digital communication in students' academic lives, they do not directly examine how emoji use and perceived communication intensity influence academic performance.

Despite growing interest in emojis and online communication, limited research has specifically investigated the relationship between emoji use, perceived speech act intensity, and academic performance among college students. Most existing studies focus on emotional expression, communication effectiveness, or social interaction rather than measurable academic outcomes. Furthermore, few studies have explored these variables within Philippine higher education contexts. This gap highlights the need for further investigation into how emojis and message interpretation may influence students' academic experiences and performance in digitally mediated learning environments.

Synthesis of the Reviewed Literature

The reviewed literature shows that emojis have become important paralinguistic tools in digital communication. Studies consistently explain that emojis help express emotions, clarify tone, and strengthen interpersonal interaction in computer-mediated communication where nonverbal cues are absent (Manganari, 2021; Tang & Hew, 2019). Research also emphasizes that emojis influence how messages are interpreted by affecting emotional tone, responsiveness, and communicative intent (Coyle & Carmichael, 2019; Boutet et al., 2021). These findings suggest that emojis play a significant role in shaping online communication among students.

The literature further reveals that emojis influence perceived speech act intensity by modifying how messages are understood in terms of politeness, urgency, friendliness, and emotional force. Guided by Speech Act Theory and Social Information Processing Theory, studies explain that emojis may strengthen or soften the intended meaning of digital messages (Chand & Regina, 2024; Ju & Zhao, 2024). In educational settings, emojis have also been associated with increased engagement, motivation, and interaction among students and instructors (Choi & Kim, 2022; Sia et al., 2024). However, researchers also

note that emoji interpretation depends on context, culture, and user perception, which may lead to misunderstanding or ambiguity in communication.

Despite the growing body of literature on emoji use and digital communication, limited studies directly examine the relationship between emoji use, perceived speech act intensity, and academic performance, particularly in higher education settings in the Philippines. Existing local studies mainly focus on communication patterns and emotional expression among Filipino students, with little attention given to how emojis influence message interpretation and academic outcomes. This gap highlights the need for further investigation into how emoji-mediated communication affects students' academic experiences and performance, particularly among college students in Sulu.

METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive-correlational research design to examine the relationship between emoji use, perceived speech act intensity, and academic performance among college students in Sulu. The descriptive component was used to determine the level of emoji use, the extent of perceived speech act intensity, and the academic performance of the respondents. Meanwhile, the correlational component was utilized to determine the relationship and significant differences among the variables based on the respondents' demographic profile. This design was considered appropriate because it allowed the study to describe existing conditions and examine associations among variables without manipulating the research environment.

Population and Sampling

The respondents of the study were 200 college students enrolled in selected public and private higher education institutions in Sulu during the School Year 2025–2026. The participants came from Notre Dame of Jolo College, Sulu College of Technology Inc., Southwestern Mindanao Islamic Institute, Sulu State College, Mindanao State University-Sulu, Hadji Butu School of Arts and Trades, and Lapak Agricultural College. The study employed purposive sampling to ensure representation across gender, age, year level, primary language spoken at home, and parents' educational attainment. This sampling technique was appropriate because participants were selected based on their availability and relevance to the objectives of the study.

Locale of the Study

The study was conducted in selected higher education institutions in the province of Sulu during the School Year 2025–2026. The locale included both public and private colleges and universities to obtain a broader representation of college students in the province. The study focused on students' emoji use and perceived speech act intensity within digitally mediated communication environments commonly used for academic and social interactions.

Instrumentation

A survey questionnaire was used as the primary instrument for data collection. The questionnaire was adapted from the work of Herring and Dainas (2018), which explored emoji use in educational contexts. The instrument consisted of two major parts. The first part gathered the demographic profile of the respondents, including gender, age, year level, primary language spoken at home, and parents' educational attainment. The second part measured emoji use across four categories: social media, messaging/chat, promotional or marketing, and educational purposes. The third part assessed perceived speech act intensity in terms of lexical means, syntactic means, phonetic or acoustic means, loudness or amplitude, pitch, and pace and pauses. To ensure applicability to the local context, the instrument underwent expert validation by faculty members from the Graduate Studies Department of Sulu State University.

Data Analysis

Both descriptive and inferential statistics were used in analyzing the data gathered in the study. Frequency counts and percentages were employed to describe the demographic profile of the respondents.

Mean and standard deviation were used to determine the level of emoji use, perceived speech act intensity, and academic performance. Independent sample t-tests and one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) were applied to determine significant differences in the variables when grouped according to demographic profile. Furthermore, Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient (Pearson's r) was used to determine the significant relationship between emoji use, perceived speech act intensity, and academic performance.

Data Gathering Procedure

Prior to data collection, the researcher secured permission from the Office of the Dean of Graduate Studies of Sulu State University and from the administrators of the participating colleges and universities in Sulu. After approval was granted, the researcher personally administered and retrieved the survey questionnaires from the respondents. The participants were informed about the purpose of the study and were given sufficient time to answer the questionnaire accurately and honestly.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles were strictly observed throughout the conduct of the study to ensure the protection of the participants' rights, welfare, and confidentiality. Participation in the study was voluntary, and respondents were informed about the objectives of the research before data collection. Informed consent was secured from all participants, and they were allowed to withdraw from the study at any point without penalty. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained by excluding identifiable information from the data gathered. The researcher also ensured objectivity in data interpretation and avoided personal bias during the conduct of the study. Furthermore, the research underwent ethical review and obtained clearance from the appropriate ethics committee of Sulu State University.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RQ1: What is the demographic profile of the college students in Sulu in terms of gender, age, year level, primary language spoken at home, and parents' educational attainment?

Table 1: Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Variables	Indicators	Frequency	Percentage %
Gender	Male	57	28.5%
	Female	143	71.5%
Age	17 years old and below	3	1.5%
	18–19 years old	45	22.5%
	20 years old and above	152	76.0%
Year Level	First Year	21	10.5%
	Second Year	78	39.0%
	Third Year	36	18.0%
	Fourth Year	65	32.5%
Primary Language Spoken at Home	Tausug	189	94.5%
	Sama	10	5.0%
	Filipino/Tagalog	1	0.5%
Parent's Educational Attainment	Elementary Level	55	27.5%
	High School Level	116	58.0%
	Master's Degree	26	13.0%
	Doctorate Degree	3	1.5%

The demographic data indicate that the respondents were predominantly female, comprising 71.5% of the total participants, while male students accounted for 28.5%. In terms of age, most respondents were 20 years old and above (76.0%), suggesting that the participants largely belonged to late adolescence and early adulthood, a developmental stage characterized by active engagement in digital communication

and social media interaction. Regarding year level, second-year students formed the largest group (39.0%), followed by fourth-year students (32.5%). This distribution implies that most respondents already had considerable exposure to academic and online communication environments within higher education institutions.

The findings further reveal that Tausug was the dominant primary language spoken at home among the respondents, representing 94.5% of the sample. This reflects the strong linguistic and cultural identity of the participants within the province of Sulu. In terms of parents' educational attainment, the majority of respondents reported that their parents had reached only the high school level (58.0%), while fewer had parents with postgraduate education. This may suggest varying levels of academic support and educational exposure within students' home environments. The demographic composition of the respondents provides important context for understanding emoji use and perceived speech act intensity. Previous studies suggest that age, gender, and cultural background influence communication styles and the interpretation of digital symbols. Tang and Hew (2019) emphasized that emoji use varies according to social context and user characteristics, while Pardede and Damanik (2025) noted that cultural and contextual factors shape how emojis and digital expressions are interpreted. Similarly, Social Information Processing Theory explains that individuals adapt their communication behaviors according to the available digital cues and their social environment, including cultural and linguistic background.

These findings imply that the respondents' demographic characteristics may influence how they use emojis, interpret online messages, and engage in digital communication within academic settings. The dominance of female respondents and Tausug-speaking students also suggests that communication patterns observed in the study may reflect shared cultural and social experiences among college students in Sulu. Consequently, demographic variables remain important considerations in understanding students' digital communication behaviors and their possible relationship with academic performance.

RQ2: What is the level of emoji use of college students in terms of social media, messaging/chat, promotional/marketing, and educational purpose?

Table 2: Level of Emoji Use Among College Students

Variables	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Social media	3.2430	0.52739	Agree
Messaging/Chat	3.2560	0.49446	Agree
Promotional/Marketing	3.0540	0.54826	Agree
Educational Purpose	3.0850	0.52147	Agree
Overall Mean	3.1595	0.52300	Agree

Legend: (4) 3.50 – 4.00= Strongly Agree (A); (3) 2.50 – 3.49=Agree (A); (2) 1.50 – 2.49=Disagree (D); (1) 1.00 – 1.49=Strongly Disagree (SD)

The results indicate that college students in Sulu generally demonstrated a high level of emoji use across different communication contexts, as reflected by the overall mean of 3.1595 (SD = 0.52300), interpreted as "Agree." Among the four categories, messaging/chat obtained the highest mean score (M = 3.2560), followed closely by social media (M = 3.2430). This suggests that emojis are most frequently used in conversational and interactive digital spaces where students communicate informally with peers and classmates. Meanwhile, educational purpose and promotional or marketing contexts also yielded positive responses, indicating that emojis are not limited to social interaction but are likewise integrated into academic and informational communication.

The findings suggest that emojis have become normalized components of students' online communication practices. In social media and messaging platforms, students commonly use emojis to express emotions, emphasize tone, confirm understanding, and create more engaging interactions. This supports the observations of Manganari (2021), who described emojis as multifunctional communication tools that regulate tone, strengthen social connection, and enrich emotional expression in computer-

mediated communication. Tang and Hew (2019) similarly explained that emojis serve both relational and cognitive functions by helping users establish rapport while also clarifying message meaning.

Interestingly, the respondents also agreed that emojis are used for educational purposes. Students perceived emojis as tools that help them better understand messages, interpret emotional tone, and make academic communication more engaging. These findings align with Choi and Kim (2022), who reported that emoji use in educational communication increased students' attentiveness and engagement in online learning environments. Likewise, Sia et al. (2024) found that emojis may improve communication effectiveness and participation in academic settings by making digital interaction appear more approachable and less formal. The relatively lower mean for promotional or marketing contexts, although still interpreted positively, may indicate that students primarily associate emojis with interpersonal interaction rather than persuasive communication. Nonetheless, respondents still recognized that emojis help improve message clarity and make promotional content more appealing. This finding supports the work of Boutet et al. (2021), which emphasized that emojis shape emotional interpretation and influence audience perception in digital communication.

From a theoretical perspective, the findings support Social Information Processing Theory, which explains that individuals adapt to the absence of physical nonverbal cues in online communication by relying on available digital signals such as emojis. Emojis therefore function as substitutes for facial expressions, gestures, and vocal tone, enabling users to convey emotional and relational meanings more effectively in text-based environments. The results imply that emoji use has become an essential part of students' communication behavior in both social and academic contexts. Since emojis influence how messages are interpreted and responded to, their widespread use may affect students' interaction, collaboration, and engagement within digitally mediated learning environments. This highlights the growing importance of understanding emoji-mediated communication in higher education settings.

RQ3: What is the extent of perceived speech act intensity of the college students in terms of lexical means, syntactic means, phonetic means, loudness/amplitude, pitch, and pace and pauses?

Table 3: Extent of Perceived Speech Act Intensity Among College Students

Variables	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Lexical Means	2.9560	0.56822	Agree
Syntactic Means	3.0410	0.55200	Agree
Phonetic Means	3.1180	0.54700	Agree
Loudness/Amplitude	3.0840	0.53100	Agree
Pitch	3.0670	0.54400	Agree
Pace and Pauses	3.0210	0.55900	Agree
Overall Mean	3.0478	0.55020	Agree

Legend: (4) 3.50 – 4.00= Strongly Agree (A); (3) 2.50 – 3.49=Agree (A); (2) 1.50 – 2.49=Disagree (D); (1) 1.00 – 1.49=Strongly Disagree (SD)

The findings reveal that the respondents generally agreed on the presence of perceived speech act intensity in digital communication, as indicated by the overall mean of 3.0478 (SD = 0.55020). Among the indicators, phonetic means obtained the highest mean score (M = 3.1180), followed by loudness/amplitude (M = 3.0840) and pitch (M = 3.0670). These results suggest that students are highly attentive to textual features that imitate vocal and emotional cues in online communication, such as capitalization, repeated letters, punctuation marks, and emoji combinations that convey emphasis and emotional tone.

The prominence of phonetic and loudness-related indicators reflects how students interpret intensity in text-based environments where spoken cues are absent. In digital communication, users often compensate for the lack of facial expression and vocal intonation through textual and symbolic elements that mimic speech patterns. Pardede and Damanik (2025) emphasized that emojis and textual paralanguage significantly influence how emotional tone and communicative intent are interpreted in online interaction.

Similarly, Hu et al. (2017) found that visual and textual cues shape users' perception of friendliness, urgency, and emotional force in digital messages.

The respondents also agreed that lexical and syntactic features contribute to perceived speech act intensity. Word choice, sentence structure, punctuation, and message framing influence how students interpret requests, feedback, or statements in online communication. These findings support Speech Act Theory, which explains that communication involves performing social actions through language, with meaning shaped not only by words themselves but also by how they are delivered and interpreted. Emojis and digital textual cues therefore modify the illocutionary force of messages by strengthening or softening their intended meaning. The results further indicate that students are sensitive to pacing and emotional rhythm in online communication. The use of pauses, ellipses, repeated punctuation, and pacing markers may affect how urgency, hesitation, sarcasm, or emotional intensity are perceived. This observation aligns with Boutet et al. (2021), who explained that digital cues alter emotional interpretation and cognitive processing of online messages. Likewise, Chand and Regina (2024) noted that emojis and textual features enhance emotional expression and influence how university students interpret written communication.

From a theoretical standpoint, the findings strongly support Social Information Processing Theory, which posits that individuals adapt to computer-mediated communication by using available digital cues to convey relational and emotional meaning. In the absence of face-to-face interaction, students rely on emojis, textual emphasis, punctuation, and stylistic features to interpret communicative intent and emotional tone. The findings imply that perceived speech act intensity is an important aspect of students' digital communication experiences. Since students actively interpret emotional and relational cues in online interaction, these perceptions may influence communication effectiveness, classroom participation, collaboration, and engagement in academic environments. Understanding how students perceive speech act intensity may therefore help improve digital communication practices within higher education settings.

RQ4: What is the level of academic performance of the college students according to their GPA?

Table 4: Level of Academic Performance of College Students

Indicator	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Grade Point Average (GPA)	2.87	0.46	Satisfactory

Legend: (1.0) 90-100=Outstanding; (1.1-2) 85-89= Very Satisfactory; (2.1-3) 80-84=Satisfactory; (3.1-4) 75-79=Fairly Satisfactory; (4.1-5) Below 75=Did not meet the expectation

The data indicate that the respondents attained a generally satisfactory level of academic performance, with an average GPA of 2.87 and a standard deviation of 0.46. This suggests that most students were able to maintain acceptable academic standing despite the increasing integration of digital communication into their daily academic and social interactions. The relatively small standard deviation further implies that the respondents' academic performance did not vary widely across the sample.

This outcome may reflect the growing adaptability of college students to digitally mediated learning environments. Since communication through online platforms has become part of classroom interaction, collaboration, and information exchange, students appear capable of balancing academic demands alongside continuous engagement in social media and messaging applications. The findings support earlier observations that digital communication tools may contribute positively to engagement and participation when used appropriately in academic contexts (Sia et al., 2024; Choi & Kim, 2022).

At the same time, academic performance is influenced by several interconnected factors beyond communication behavior alone. Prior studies emphasize that motivation, learning environment, social interaction, emotional support, and communication clarity contribute to students' academic outcomes. In online settings, emojis and other digital cues may help reduce ambiguity and promote smoother interaction among students and instructors, which can indirectly support participation and learning engagement. Tang and Hew (2019) noted that digital communication cues enhance relational interaction and comprehension,

both of which are important in collaborative learning environments. The findings may also be interpreted through the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) Framework. Within this perspective, digital communication behaviors such as emoji use serve as stimuli that shape students' emotional and psychological responses, including motivation, attentiveness, and engagement. These internal responses may eventually influence behavioral outcomes, including academic performance. Although the present findings only indicate a satisfactory level of GPA, they provide a basis for examining whether communication-related variables contribute meaningfully to students' academic experiences.

The results imply that college students in Sulu are functioning within a learning environment where digital communication is already embedded in everyday academic interaction. Consequently, understanding how communication practices, including emoji use and perceived speech act intensity, relate to academic outcomes becomes increasingly relevant in improving student engagement and communication effectiveness in higher education.

RQ5: Is there a significant difference in the level of emoji use of college students when grouped according to gender, age, year level, primary language spoken at home, and parents' educational attainment?

Table 5: Difference in the Level of Emoji Use According to Demographic Profile

Variable	Test Statistic	p-value	Decision	Interpretation
Gender	t = 1.84	0.067	Fail to Reject Ho	Not Significant
Age	F = 1.29	0.278	Fail to Reject Ho	Not Significant
Year Level	F = 2.11	0.101	Fail to Reject Ho	Not Significant
Primary Language Spoken at Home	F = 0.94	0.392	Fail to Reject Ho	Not Significant
Parents' Educational Attainment	F = 1.67	0.174	Fail to Reject Ho	Not Significant

The analysis revealed no significant difference in the level of emoji use when respondents were grouped according to gender, age, year level, primary language spoken at home, and parents' educational attainment, as all computed p-values were greater than the 0.05 level of significance. These findings indicate that emoji use among college students in Sulu is generally consistent across demographic groups, suggesting that emojis have become widely accepted and commonly practiced forms of digital expression regardless of individual background characteristics.

The absence of significant variation may reflect the normalized and universal nature of emoji use among digitally connected students. Because social media platforms, messaging applications, and online communication tools are now deeply integrated into students' daily lives, emojis have become routine communication features shared across different demographic categories. This supports the findings of Aranas et al. (2024), who observed that Filipino college students commonly use emojis in online interaction regardless of communication context. Tang and Hew (2019) likewise emphasized that emojis are now embedded in everyday computer-mediated communication, particularly among younger generations. Interestingly, the findings suggest that demographic characteristics such as gender and age no longer strongly determine emoji usage patterns among college students. Earlier studies often associated emoji use with gender differences and social communication preferences. However, the present results may indicate that the increasing exposure to digital platforms has minimized these distinctions, leading to more uniform communication behaviors among students. Manganari (2021) explained that the widespread adoption of emojis across online environments has contributed to their normalization as standard communication tools rather than specialized expressive devices.

From a theoretical perspective, the findings align with Social Information Processing Theory, which posits that individuals adapt to digital environments by developing shared communication practices using available online cues. As students continuously interact through social media, messaging applications, and online academic platforms, emoji use becomes part of a collective communication culture rather than a behavior shaped solely by demographic differences. The findings imply that emoji use among college students in Sulu is a common and socially integrated communication behavior. Since the use of emojis appears consistent across demographic groups, their influence on communication and message interpretation may be experienced similarly by students regardless of background. This further suggests that emojis have become stable features of students' digital communication practices within academic and social contexts.

RQ6: Is there a significant difference in the extent of perceived speech act intensity when grouped according to gender, age, year level, primary language spoken at home, and parents' educational attainment?

Table 6: Difference in the Extent of Perceived Speech Act Intensity According to Demographic Profile

Variable	Test Statistic	p-value	Decision	Interpretation
Gender	t = 2.41	0.017	Reject Ho	Significant
Age	F = 1.56	0.213	Fail to Reject Ho	Not Significant
Year Level	F = 2.87	0.038	Reject Ho	Significant
Primary Language Spoken at Home	F = 1.12	0.328	Fail to Reject Ho	Not Significant
Parents' Educational Attainment	F = 1.94	0.125	Fail to Reject Ho	Not Significant

The findings show that perceived speech act intensity significantly differed according to gender and year level, while no significant differences were observed in terms of age, primary language spoken at home, and parents' educational attainment. This indicates that students' interpretation of emotional tone, urgency, politeness, and communicative force in digital messages may vary depending on certain personal and academic factors, particularly gender and level of exposure to higher education environments.

The significant difference across gender suggests that male and female students may interpret online messages differently in terms of emotional intensity and communicative meaning. Previous literature supports this observation, noting that communication styles and emotional interpretation in digital environments are often influenced by gender-related social behaviors. Coyle and Carmichael (2019) emphasized that emojis and online cues shape perceptions of responsiveness and emotional engagement, while Pardede and Damanik (2025) explained that interpretation of digital expressions depends on personal and contextual factors. Female students may be more attentive to emotional nuances and relational cues in online interaction, which could explain differences in perceived speech act intensity.

Year level also emerged as a significant factor, suggesting that students' academic exposure and communication experiences may shape how they interpret digital messages. Higher-year students are likely to have greater familiarity with formal and informal online academic communication, which may influence their sensitivity to textual and emotional cues. This finding aligns with studies emphasizing that prolonged engagement in digitally mediated learning environments enhances individuals' ability to interpret online communicative signals more effectively (Choi & Kim, 2022; Inderasari et al., 2023). On the other hand, the absence of significant differences in age, language spoken at home, and parents' educational attainment suggests that students generally share similar perceptions of digital communication intensity regardless of these demographic factors. This may indicate that exposure to common online platforms and communication practices creates relatively uniform interpretive behaviors among students. The

widespread use of social media and messaging applications may therefore contribute to shared norms in understanding emojis, punctuation, and other digital cues.

These findings can also be understood through Speech Act Theory, which explains that meaning is shaped not only by the literal content of a message but also by how it is interpreted by the receiver. Emojis and textual signals influence the illocutionary force of communication, causing messages to appear softer, stronger, friendlier, or more emotionally charged depending on the recipient's perception. Similarly, Social Information Processing Theory suggests that users rely on available online cues to construct meaning and emotional understanding in digital interaction. The results imply that students' perception of speech act intensity is influenced more by communication experience and interpersonal interpretation than by purely demographic characteristics. Since gender and academic exposure affect how digital messages are interpreted, educators and students may benefit from greater awareness of how online communication cues shape understanding and interaction in academic settings.

RQ7: Is there a significant difference in the academic performance of the college students when grouped according to gender, age, year level, primary language spoken at home, and parents' educational attainment?

Table 7: Difference in Academic Performance According to Demographic Profile

Variable	Test Statistic	p-value	Decision	Interpretation
Gender	t = 2.63	0.009	Reject Ho	Significant
Age	F = 1.48	0.229	Fail to Reject Ho	Not Significant
Year Level	F = 3.14	0.027	Reject Ho	Significant
Primary Language Spoken at Home	F = 0.88	0.417	Fail to Reject Ho	Not Significant
Parents' Educational Attainment	F = 4.02	0.008	Reject Ho	Significant

The analysis indicates that academic performance significantly differed according to gender, year level, and parents' educational attainment. In contrast, no significant differences were found in terms of age and primary language spoken at home. These results suggest that academic achievement among college students in Sulu may be influenced by educational background, academic experience, and certain social factors rather than linguistic profile or age alone.

The significant difference across gender may imply variations in learning habits, academic engagement, or study behaviors between male and female students. Previous educational studies frequently report that female students tend to demonstrate stronger academic persistence, classroom participation, and learning discipline, particularly in higher education settings. Although the present study did not specifically measure these behaviors, the findings suggest that gender-related academic experiences may contribute to differences in GPA among the respondents.

Year level also showed a significant relationship with academic performance. This may be attributed to differences in academic demands, adjustment experiences, and exposure to college learning environments across year levels. Students in higher year levels may already possess more developed study routines, communication skills, and academic coping mechanisms compared to those in earlier years of study. Choi and Kim (2022) noted that communication engagement and interaction in online learning environments may influence students' attentiveness and academic participation over time, which could indirectly contribute to academic outcomes. Parents' educational attainment likewise emerged as a significant factor. Students whose parents attained higher levels of education may receive stronger academic guidance, motivation, or educational support at home. This finding aligns with broader educational literature emphasizing that parental educational background often influences students'

academic expectations, learning environment, and access to educational resources. In the context of the present study, parental educational attainment may also shape students' communication practices, learning attitudes, and academic confidence. Meanwhile, the lack of significant differences in age and primary language spoken at home suggests that academic performance among the respondents was relatively stable across these categories. The dominance of Tausug-speaking respondents may have contributed to the linguistic consistency observed in the sample, while the narrow age distribution among college students may explain the absence of substantial variation in academic outcomes.

The findings may also be viewed through the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) Framework, which posits that environmental and social stimuli influence individuals' internal responses and behavioral outcomes. Academic performance may therefore be shaped by students' communication experiences, social support systems, and learning environments, all of which interact with personal and demographic characteristics. These results imply that academic performance is influenced by multiple interconnected factors beyond digital communication behaviors alone. While communication practices remain important in online learning environments, demographic and educational backgrounds continue to shape students' academic experiences and outcomes in higher education.

RQ8: Is there a significant correlation between emoji use, perceived speech act intensity, and academic performance of the college students in Sulu?

Table 8: Correlation Between Emoji Use, Perceived Speech Act Intensity, and Academic Performance

Dependent Variable	Independent Variable	Pearson r	Sig.	Description
Academic Performance	Emoji Use	-0.145*	0.040	Low Negative Correlation
Academic Performance	Speech Act Intensity	-0.103	0.148	Low Negative Correlation
Emoji Use	Speech Act Intensity	0.821**	0.000	Very High Positive Correlation

**Correlation is significant at alpha .05*

The findings reveal a significant low negative correlation between academic performance and emoji use ($r = -0.145$, $p = 0.040$). This indicates that students with higher levels of emoji use tended to demonstrate slightly lower academic performance, although the relationship was weak. The result suggests that excessive engagement in emoji-mediated communication may not necessarily contribute positively to academic achievement. One possible explanation is that students who are highly engaged in informal digital interaction may devote more attention to social communication than to academic tasks. However, since the correlation is low, emoji use alone cannot strongly predict students' academic outcomes.

Meanwhile, the relationship between academic performance and perceived speech act intensity was also negative but not statistically significant ($r = -0.103$, $p = 0.148$). This implies that students' sensitivity to emotional tone, communicative force, and online message intensity did not substantially influence their academic performance. Although digital communication cues may affect interaction and interpretation, the findings suggest that academic achievement is likely shaped more strongly by other factors such as study habits, motivation, learning environment, and access to academic support.

In contrast, emoji use and perceived speech act intensity demonstrated a very high positive correlation ($r = 0.821$, $p = 0.000$). This indicates that greater emoji use was strongly associated with higher perceptions of speech act intensity in digital communication. Students who frequently used emojis were also more likely to perceive stronger emotional tone, urgency, politeness, and communicative emphasis in online messages. This finding strongly supports the argument that emojis function as important paralinguistic cues in computer-mediated communication. The result is consistent with the work of Hancock et al. (2024), who explained that emojis help users interpret emotional intent and communicative meaning in digital interaction. Likewise, Chand and Regina (2024) emphasized that emojis significantly

influence emotional expression and message interpretation among university students. The strong relationship between emoji use and speech act intensity also aligns with Speech Act Theory, which posits that communication meaning is shaped not only by literal words but also by how messages are delivered and interpreted. Emojis therefore modify the illocutionary force of digital messages by intensifying or softening emotional and interpersonal meaning.

The findings may also be interpreted through Social Information Processing Theory, which explains that individuals compensate for the absence of face-to-face cues in online communication through alternative digital signals such as emojis, punctuation, and textual emphasis. Students who frequently use emojis may therefore become more attentive to emotional and relational cues embedded in digital interaction. Overall, the results suggest that while emoji use is strongly connected to how students perceive communication intensity, its direct relationship with academic performance remains weak. This implies that emojis primarily influence communication behavior and message interpretation rather than academic achievement itself. Nevertheless, since digital interaction has become deeply integrated into educational settings, understanding how emojis shape communication remains important in promoting clearer and more effective online academic engagement.

CONCLUSION

The findings of the study reveal that emojis have become deeply embedded in the digital communication practices of college students in Sulu, particularly in social media, messaging, and educational interactions. Students generally demonstrated a high level of emoji use and a high perception of speech act intensity in online communication, indicating that emojis are now recognized not only as expressive symbols but also as functional communication tools that shape emotional tone, message interpretation, and interpersonal meaning in digital environments. The strong positive relationship between emoji use and perceived speech act intensity further confirms that emojis significantly influence how students interpret urgency, politeness, emotional emphasis, and communicative intent in text-based interaction.

Despite the increasing use of emojis in academic communication, the study found only a low negative relationship between emoji use and academic performance, while perceived speech act intensity showed no significant relationship with students' GPA. These findings suggest that emojis primarily affect communication dynamics rather than directly determining academic achievement. Academic performance remains influenced by broader educational, personal, and environmental factors beyond digital communication behavior alone. However, the results also indicate that students' interpretation of online communication cues may shape engagement, interaction, and communication experiences within digitally mediated learning spaces.

One of the most important contributions of this study lies in its attempt to connect emoji use, perceived speech act intensity, and academic performance within a single research framework. While previous studies commonly focused on emojis as tools for emotional expression or social interaction, this study extends the discussion by examining how emojis influence students' perception of communicative intensity and how these perceptions relate to academic contexts. The very high correlation between emoji use and speech act intensity highlights the evolving role of emojis as modern paralinguistic markers that increasingly substitute for facial expressions, vocal tone, and emotional cues in online communication.

The study also offers a contextual contribution by focusing on college students in Sulu, an area that remains underrepresented in digital communication research. The findings suggest that even within culturally and linguistically distinct communities, emojis function as shared digital communication resources that transcend demographic differences. This reflects the growing standardization of online communication practices among students despite variations in gender, language, and educational background.

Overall, the study provides a deeper understanding of how digital communication behaviors operate in higher education settings. It highlights that emojis are no longer peripheral elements of online interaction but are becoming central components of meaning-making, emotional expression, and communication interpretation among college students. As educational communication continues to shift toward technology-mediated environments, the role of emojis and digital paralinguistic cues may become increasingly relevant in shaping student interaction, engagement, and communication effectiveness in the modern academic landscape.

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