



Peircean Semiotics Analysis of Emojis and Their Meanings in Comments on the @girls Instagram Account

¹ *Fidela Shaumi Suryadi, ¹ Mahi M. Hkikmat, ¹ R. Myrna Nur Sakinah

¹ English Language and Literature, Faculty of Adab and Humanities, Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung, Jl. A.H. Nasution No. 105, Cipadung, Bandung, Wets Java, Indonesia

*Corresponding Author e-mail: @fidela.shaumisuryadi@gmail.com

Received: April 2026; Revised: May 2026; Accepted: May 2026; Published: June 2026

Abstract

Emoji interpretation has become an important issue in digital communication because emojis do not always carry fixed meanings and are often understood through their relationship with verbal text and interactional context. In semiotic studies, emojis can be examined as signs that contribute to meaning-making in online discourse. This article aims to analyze how emojis function as signs and how their meanings are constructed in the comment section of the @girls Instagram account by applying Charles Sanders Peirce's triadic theory. This research employed a descriptive qualitative design. The data were taken from one selected post uploaded on the @girls Instagram account and consisted of nine comments containing emojis. The data were collected through observation and screenshots, then analyzed using Peirce's triadic framework, which includes representamen, object, and interpretant. The findings show that emojis in the selected comments function as meaningful signs rather than merely decorative elements. The analysis revealed four meaning categories: agreement (1 comment), sadness (2 comments), humor (2 comments), and alternative viewpoints (4 comments). These meanings were shaped by the relationship between the emojis, the accompanying verbal text, and the context of the post. In conclusion, emojis play an important role in shaping meaning in Instagram comments. This study implies that emoji interpretation should be understood as part of visual-verbal meaning-making in digital communication and semiotic analysis.

Keywords: Emojis; Digital communication; Instagram comments; Semiotic analysis; Verbal text

How to Cite: Suryadi, F.S., Hkikmat, M.M., & Sakinah, R.M.N. (2026). Peircean Semiotics Analysis of Emojis and Their Meanings in Comments on the @girls Instagram Account. *Journal of Language and Literature Studies*, 6(2), 740-752. doi: <https://doi.org/10.36312/jolls.v6i2.4832>



<https://doi.org/10.36312/jolls.v6i2.4832>

Copyright© 2026, Suryadi et al

This is an open-access article under the [CC-BY-SA](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/) License.



INTRODUCTION

The development of digital communication is not just about text; it also includes visual elements that convey meaning and can be presented as is. The visual element, a result of the development of digital technology, is the emoji. From a linguistic and semiotic perspective, emojis may be regarded as symbols because they represent socially recognized and understood ideas, emotions, and concepts. Their meaning does not arise solely from their visual form, but also from the shared conventions that develop within a community of users. In the context of digital communication, emojis function as visual cues that complement written language and help convey meaning more clearly. As a result, they often reduce ambiguity and make messages easier for readers to interpret. (Telaumbanua et al., 2024) Duffett & Maraule (2024) stated that emojis have become an important component of digital communication because they allow users to convey thoughts and emotions more visually and directly. As their use has continued to grow, emojis have become a prominent feature across many social media platforms. Instagram, for example, incorporates emojis in distinctive ways to increase user engagement. This indicates that

emojis function not only as expressive elements but also as strategic tools in shaping interaction on social media. Communication is no longer built word by word alone. Social media, especially Instagram, regularly combines written language with elements such as emojis. Mahoney (2022) believes that Instagram has huge power to present communication in this digital age, whether it is to communicate between one person and another, or even more to represent women's opinions. In this context, the interaction between verbal and visual signs on Instagram provides an important basis for semiotic analysis, as meaning is constructed not only through words but also through emojis, which allow users to express and interpret emotions, attitudes, and opinions.

Instagram is one of the most widely used social media platforms today, particularly as a medium for communication and social interaction. Its features allow users not only to share content but also to engage with others in various ways, making it an important part of contemporary digital communication. (Lauren et al., 2022). Instagram has served as a widely used platform for digital interaction, becoming a top social network for sharing information and enabling users to communicate. However, while the platform can initiate engagement and facilitate information exchange, how that information is understood still depends on context and the user's perspective. As a result, understanding Instagram as a communication channel requires examining how meaning is created and negotiated through online interactions. (Rejeb et al., 2022)

One active Instagram account that reflects this form of digital interaction is *@girls*. This account is relevant to study because it often presents women-oriented content related to lifestyle, humor, motivation, relationships, and empowerment. These themes usually invite personal responses from users, especially in the comment section. Since the posts often discuss feelings, everyday experiences, and women's perspectives, the comments do not only contain written opinions but also emojis that help users express their reactions more clearly. In this context, emojis become important because they can show sadness, humor, affection, frustration, irony, agreement, disagreement, or sarcasm. They may also soften criticism or make a comment sound more personal and expressive. Li & Yang (2018) state that emojis often carry meaning and help create the tone of a comment. For example, a laughing emoji can make a response seem playful, while a crying or heart emoji can show sadness, sympathy, or affection. However, the meaning of an emoji is not always fixed. It depends on the surrounding words, the topic of the post, and the way other users interpret the comment. Therefore, the *@girls* comment section provides a meaningful space for analyzing how emojis and verbal text work together to construct meaning in Instagram communication. This makes the account suitable for examining emoji meanings through Peirce's semiotic theory, especially because emojis in this context function not only as visual additions but also as signs that shape user interaction (Erle et al., 2022).

Even though emojis can help users to express their feelings in virtual interactions, their meanings are sometimes understood differently. Users may interpret certain emojis differently, resulting in unclear meanings. Nonetheless, this ambiguity can be reduced by including visual signs in emojis that most likely resemble facial expressions (Boutet et al., 2023). The meaning of an emoji often depends on contextual factors such as the conversation topic, the relationship between users, and cultural or social origins. Because emojis are frequently used alongside text in social media communication, their interpretation depends heavily on the surrounding message and interaction context. This context-based interpretation is commonly discussed in studies of digital communication, particularly because the meaning of emojis often depends on the way they are positioned and used within a message. In other words, emojis do not carry fixed meanings in every situation. Their interpretation is shaped by the surrounding context, including the text, the sender's intention, and the interactional setting in which they appear. (Minich et al., 2025)

Charles Sanders Peirce's theory of signs provides a helpful semiotic framework for explaining how signs are constructed and how meaning is produced through interpretation. Within this framework, Peirce outlines three interrelated components, namely the representamen, the object, and the interpretant. These three elements work together in the process of signification, making his theory especially relevant for analyzing meaning in different contexts. (Kholiq et al., 2025; Widodo & Artiningrum, 2022). Even though this framework has been commonly used in studies of movies (Astari & Alamsyah, 2024) and advertising (Khalisa et al., 2025). The study assessed by Nisa (2024) examined emojis related to the Israel-Palestinian conflict. Putri et al, (2022) showed a strong interest in applying Peirce's theory to a topic related to women's emancipation so that it can expand insights into how signs can convey women's topics, especially within Instagram. Prior research on emojis on Instagram has mostly focused on the thoughts represented through emojis, treating the types of messages they convey as more meaningful, even though semiotics offers a valuable framework for understanding how signs produce meaning. Emojis have also been studied in several studies as visual components of social media interactions. (Logi & Zappavigna, 2023) These perspectives help explain how emojis function in Instagram interactions, particularly as signs that contribute to the construction and interpretation of meaning.

This study addresses the gap by focusing on emoji meanings in a specific Instagram community, namely the comment section of the *@girls* Instagram account. Although previous studies have discussed emojis in digital communication, there is still limited attention to how emojis are interpreted in women-oriented Instagram comment discourse through Charles Sanders Peirce's triadic theory. In this context, emoji meanings are not always stable or universal. The same emoji may create different meanings depending on the verbal text, the topic of the post, and the interactional context in which it appears. Therefore, this study examines how verbal language and visual signs work together to produce meaning through the relationship among representamen, object, and interpretant. Rather than treating emojis as simple decorative features, this research highlights their role as meaningful signs that can express agreement, sadness, humor, disappointment, and alternative viewpoints. By doing so, this study contributes to semiotic and digital communication research by offering a contextual understanding of how meaning is formed in Instagram comment discourse.

The significance of this study lies in its effort to explain how emojis shape meaning in comments on the *@girls* Instagram account. This area has still not been widely discussed in semiotic research. By applying Charles Sanders Peirce's triadic theory, this study offers a way to understand how emojis work as signs through the relationship between representamen, object, and interpretant. It seeks to reveal how emojis, with verbal expressions, convey meanings such as agreement, sadness, humor, disappointment, and alternative opinions in a specific digital context. The main objective of this study is to identify the emojis that appear in selected comments on the *@girls* Instagram account and to interpret their meanings by considering both the accompanying text and the context in which they are used. Through this approach, the study seeks to understand how emojis contribute to meaning-making in digital interaction, rather than viewing them as isolated visual elements. What makes this topic worth exploring is that emojis are not always simple or universally understood. In many cases, their interpretation depends on the context of the comment and the way readers understand it. While previous studies often discuss emojis in broad terms or group them by type, this research pays closer attention to how they actually work in real interaction, especially in showing what users are trying to express in a specific online community.

This research is expected to provide useful insights for both academic study and readers in general. Research shows that semiotics remains relevant to understanding how

people communicate on social media, especially through emojis and written comments. For readers, it can offer a broader view: emojis are not just small symbols used for fun but can also convey feelings, intentions, and specific meanings depending on the context. This study also helps develop a more critical approach to reading online comments, since people often express themselves indirectly through signs rather than in clear words. In the end, this research shows that meaning in digital communication is not always obvious, and that even simple emojis can say more than they seem.

METHOD

This study used a descriptive qualitative design because it focused on interpreting the meaning of emojis in a specific digital context. The purpose of this research was not to measure emoji use in a large number of Instagram comments, but to understand how emojis work as signs in selected comments on the *@girls* Instagram account. This design was considered suitable because emoji meanings are closely related to the verbal text, the topic of the post, and the interactional context in which they appear. Therefore, the analysis needed to be done contextually rather than statistically.

The descriptive qualitative design also fits Charles Sanders Peirce's triadic theory, which examines meaning through the relationship among representamen, object, and interpretant. In this study, each emoji and its accompanying verbal expression were analyzed as signs. The representamen refers to the form of the sign, such as the emoji or the phrase used in the comment. The object refers to the idea, feeling, or situation represented by the sign, while the interpretant refers to the meaning understood from the relationship between the emoji, the verbal text, and the context of the post. Through this approach, the study explains how emojis help construct meaning in Instagram comments, especially in expressing agreement, sadness, humor, and alternative viewpoints.

The data for this study were taken from posts uploaded on the Instagram account *@girls*. To limit the scope of the analysis, the researcher selected one post published on 10 March 2026 and focused on comments containing emoji signs. This decision was considered suitable for a descriptive qualitative study because the research was not intended to cover a large amount of data, but to examine the meaning of emojis more deeply within a particular interactional context. After identifying the relevant post, the researcher read through the comments and selected those that included emojis, whether they appeared on their own, within phrases, or as part of complete sentences. The selected comments were then documented through screenshots. After that, the data were classified by type to organize them more systematically and facilitate analysis.

To ensure the validity of the analysis, the researcher reviewed the collected comments repeatedly and examined each emoji in relation to the surrounding words and sentences. This step was necessary because the meaning of an emoji cannot be interpreted independently of the linguistic context in which it appears. Therefore, the interpretations were made contextually to reflect the users' intended expressions more accurately. Through this method, the researcher explained how emojis function as signs in digital interaction, particularly within Instagram comment sections. Nevertheless, this study has certain limitations. Since the analysis was based on a single post, the findings are limited to that specific dataset and are not intended to represent all comments posted on the *@girls* Instagram account.

This study is intended to identify the total number of signs, in this case emojis, found in the comment section of each post. It also seeks to interpret their meanings by applying Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic theory. To do this, the data were collected through an observational procedure carried out in several stages before the analysis began. Once all the data had been gathered, they were examined using a descriptive qualitative approach to explain the findings clearly and in detail. In interpreting emoji meanings, this

study relies on Peirce's triadic model, which consists of the representamen, object, and interpretant.

One way to examine how meaning is constructed in communication is through semiotics. Semiotics is a field that studies signs and the processes by which signs create meaning in communication. (Kholiq et al., 2025) Among various semiotic theories, Charles Sanders Peirce's theory offers a useful way to understand how signs are interpreted and how they function. Peirce explains that a sign is composed of three interconnected components: representamen, object, and interpretant. These elements cannot be separated, because meaning emerges through the relationship between the sign itself, the thing it refers to, and the way it is understood by the interpreter within a particular communicative context. For that reason, a sign is not simply something that stands for another thing, but a process through which meaning is produced and interpreted. (Zhu, 2024) Semiotics is one of the fields of linguistics concerned with signs and the ways meaning is formed through them. In this study, the discussion focuses on symbols now commonly used on Instagram as part of everyday digital communication. (Henny cited in Ibrahim & Sulaiman, 2020: 24). The definition that comes from several experts about semiotics is cited in Ibrahim & Sulaiman (2020) The term semiotics is derived from the Greek word *semeion*, which means "sign." (Azab, 2022), or *sème*, which refers to a sign (Cobley & Jansz, 1997), or what is generally understood as a sign through which something can be recognized or understood (Keane, 2018). According to Charles Sanders Peirce, semiotics comprises 3 aspects: (1) representamen, (2) object, and (3) interpretant (Andrews et al., 2024).

According to Peirce, signs can be classified in three different ways. First, they can be categorized by their mode of existence as representamen, namely, *qualisign*, *sinsign*, and *legisign*. First, based on their own nature, signs are divided into *qualisigns*, *sinsigns*, and *legisigns*. A *qualisign* refers to a quality in the abstract, a *sinsign* refers to a particular object or event, and a *legisign* refers to general rules, laws, or habitual conventions. Second, signs may also be classified according to their relationship with the object, namely into icons, indexes, and symbols. Icons represent objects through similarity, whereas indexes refer to objects through an actual or causal connection. Symbols, by contrast, signify objects through convention or shared social understanding. Third, signs can also be distinguished based on their relation to the interpretant, namely, *rheme*, *dicisign*, and *argument*. A *rheme* presents a possibility of meaning without making a definite statement. A *dicisign*, on the other hand, conveys a more complete meaning by indicating something as a fact. Meanwhile, an *argument* is a sign understood through a logical process of interpretation (Kissel & Fuentes, 2017). According to Charles Sanders Peirce, *semiosis* consists of three interconnected components: representamen, object, and interpretant. These three elements are inseparable, since each of them performs a distinct role in the process through which meaning is formed and understood (Jappy, 2023).

Besides Peirce's triadic framework, this study is also supported by multimodality theory, especially the idea that meaning is formed through the interaction of different semiotic modes, not only through language. In social media communication, especially on Instagram, written text is frequently combined with visual elements such as emojis. For this reason, multimodality provides a useful supporting perspective for understanding how emojis contribute to meaning-making in online interaction (Jovanovic & Van Leeuwen, 2018). Peirce's semiotic theory is particularly useful for explaining how meaning is produced through the triadic relationship among the sign, the object it refers to, and the interpretation constructed by readers. This framework becomes especially relevant in social media discourse, where meaning is often not conveyed through words alone. Instead, it is shaped by the interaction of multiple elements, such as text, emojis, images, and context. Comments on Instagram often combine linguistic and visual resources,

making multimodality an important supporting perspective. From this view, emojis are not separate ornaments but part of the communicative process through which users negotiate tone, emotion, and position in relation to a post (Poulsen & Kvåle, 2018).

Due to the issue's limitations and the need for further investigation in other categories, the only research to be conducted in this study is the categorization of the object, which is called a symbol. According to Peirce (1940:102) A symbol is a type of sign that represents something through convention, shared meaning, or social agreement. In contrast to icons and indices, the relationship between a symbol and its object is not based on physical resemblance or a direct connection. Instead, it is established through collective understanding within a particular community. In this study, the symbol under analysis is the emoji, as its meaning is generally understood through social usage and the context in which it appears.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The sentence *"No one gives me butterflies anymore"* can be seen as the representamen (R) because it directly shows the user's emotional condition. The object (O) refers to the feeling of no longer experiencing excitement or happiness in a romantic sense. The interpretant (I) in this sign can be understood as a feeling of sadness or emotional emptiness. It suggests that the user is not simply reacting to the topic, but is also revealing a deeper emotional state. In this context, it seems that romantic excitement is no longer present in the user's life.

This section presents the findings of the emoji meanings found in the selected comments on the *@girls* Instagram account. From the selected post uploaded on 10 March 2026, the researcher identified nine comments containing emojis. These comments were analyzed by using Peirce's triadic model, which consists of representamen, object, and interpretant. The analysis shows that the emojis in the comments were used to express several meanings, namely agreement, sadness, humor, and alternative viewpoints.

Overall, the most dominant meaning category found in the data was alternative viewpoints, with four comments. These comments show that users responded to the post by offering other things that could still give them "butterflies," such as dogs, good skin, dramas, and money. The second categories were sadness and humor, with two comments each. Sadness appeared when users expressed disappointment or emotional loss, while humor appeared when users responded to the post in a playful or ironic way. Agreement appeared in one comment, showing that the user directly supported the message of the post. These findings indicate that emojis do not stand alone as visual elements, but work together with verbal text and context to shape meaning in Instagram comments.

After identifying the general pattern of the data, the following section presents the analysis of each comment based on representamen, object, and interpretant. The following are the elaborations of 9 data points.

Data 1

In the first data, the comment *"So true 🙌"* can be analyzed as a combination of verbal and visual symbols. The phrase *"So true 🙌"* functions as the representamen (R) because it directly agrees with the statement in the post. The object refers to the feeling conveyed in the post that the user no longer feels romantic excitement. The clapping hands emoji 🙌 serves as a symbol that reinforces the meaning of the verbal text, indicating approval of the content. As a result, interpretation (I), derived from the relationship between the phrase and the emoji, conveys a strong sense of agreement that validates the user's feelings towards the content. So that the user not only understands the post's message but also relates to it.

Data 2

Based on Peirce's theory, the comment above can be analyzed as a symbol. The phrase "*Except my dogs*  " serves as the representamen (R) because it symbolizes a contrasting idea to the original statement. The object (O) refers to the attachment that the user still experiences, but it is indeed toward their dogs rather than their romantic partner.

Otherwise, the heart emoji  functions as a symbol of love, so that this sign can be understood as showing how the representamen and the object work together to form the interpretant (I). In this case, the interpretant points to the user's sense of love and happiness, which is still expressed through their pets. The comment seems to suggest that, even though romantic excitement may no longer exist, emotional fulfillment has not completely disappeared. Instead, it is still present, just in a different form.

Data 3

The third data represents a meaningful symbol. The expression "*Sad truth*  " serves as the representamen (R) because it conveys the user's perception that the post's statement reflects a reality she experienced herself. The object (O) refers to the situation described in the post, specifically the grief over romantic excitement that the user no longer feels.

The crying emoji  represents a symbol that commonly signifies emotional distress. In this case, the interpretant (I) may be understood to express both agreement and sadness simultaneously. The response does not merely confirm that the statement is true; it also reveals an emotional reaction to it. This suggests that the user accepts the statement as valid while simultaneously experiencing sorrow about its meaning.

Data 4

In the comment "*Good skin does*  ", there are two types of signs identified in this data. The first type comprises three main components. The representamen (R) appears in the sentence "Good skin does," which functions as the sign and conveys a particular idea. In this context, the object (O) refers to physical appearance, since the comment suggests that having good skin can still create excitement or attraction. The interpretant (I), then, may be understood as the user's view that attraction has not completely disappeared. However, it seems more strongly connected to outward appearance than to any deeper emotional quality.

On the other hand, the emoji  can also be examined through Peirce's three components of signification. In this case, the representamen (R) is embodied in the emoji, which functions as the primary sign expressing uncertainty. The object (O), meanwhile, refers to the doubt associated with the issue being discussed. Based on this relationship, the interpretant (I) may be understood as the user's manner of expressing an opinion informally and casually, as though the answer were already self-evident.

Data 5

The comment "*They just give headaches these days*  " shows the user's response to the idea in the post. The clause "*They just give headaches these days*" can be understood as the representamen (R) because it expresses the belief that romantic relationships no longer bring joy, but instead create a burden. In this case, the object (O) refers to the present experience of relationships, which is seen as more exhausting than something that brings enjoyment. So, the interpretant (I) is formed as the idea that the relationship is merely a source of problems that can lead to disappointment.

The emoji  also serves as a sign in this comment. The emoji serves as the representamen (R), symbolizing amusement. The object (O) refers to the way the user

presents the situation, not as something completely serious, but as something that can be joked about. The interpretant (I) shows that the user uses humor to express frustration with the ups and downs of their own relationship.

Data 6

The comment “*Only moths* ” can be analyzed using Peirce’s semiotic theory. The phrase “*Only moths*” functions as the representamen (R) because it presents a metaphorical response to the original statement about “butterflies.” The object (O) refers to the idea: instead of feeling excited about the romantic attraction (symbolized by butterflies), the user experiences something less meaningful with a negative aura, represented by “*moths*”. So, the interpretant (I) is formed by a sense of disappointment with the absence of genuine love.

The broken heart emoji  also functions as a sign in this comment. It acts as the representamen (R) because it represents sadness. The object (O) refers to the feeling of failure in a romantic experience. Meanwhile, the interpretant (I) shows that the user is expressing disappointment about their emotions.

Data 7

The comment “*But that k-c dramas doo* ” may be interpreted through Peirce’s triadic model. The statement “*But that k-c dramas doo*” serves as the representamen (R) because it presents another point of view in response to the post. The object (O) refers to Korean or Chinese dramas that the user believes can still create emotional thrills. The interpretant (I) formed from this relation is the understanding that fictional romance in dramas can still trigger strong feelings, even when real-life relationships no longer do so.

The two crying emojis  also function as signs in this comment. As the representamen (R), these emojis signal intense grief. The object (O) points to the emotional effect that dramas have on the user. The interpretant (I) suggests that the user is deeply touched by the stories shown in those dramas.

Data 8

The comment “*Except money* ” can be interpreted using Peirce’s semiotic framework. The phrase “*Except money*” functions as the representamen (R) because it introduces a contrasting idea to the original statement. The object (O) refers to the belief that money, rather than romantic relationships, can create satisfaction. The interpretant (I) that emerges is the idea that material factors, such as financial stability or wealth, may replace romantic feelings in generating happiness.

The shrugging emoji  also acts as a sign within the comment. As the representamen (R), the emoji expresses a casual, indifferent, or slightly humorous attitude. The object (O) refers to the user’s relaxed stance toward the topic being discussed. The interpretant (I) suggests that the statement is delivered in a light, non-serious tone, possibly implying an ironic perspective.

Data 9

The comment “*They just give me dinosaurs* ” may be interpreted through Peirce’s triadic framework. The statement “*They just give me dinosaurs*” serves as the representamen (R) because it conveys the user’s response figuratively and humorously. The object (O) refers to the lack of romantic excitement, where the expected feeling of “butterflies” is replaced with something strange and exaggerated.

The dinosaur emoji  also functions as a sign that emphasizes this unusual image. The interpretant (I) derived from the relationship between the text and the emoji is that the user expresses a lack of romantic feelings in a playful, ironic way.

Discussion

The findings of this study show that emojis in the comment section of the *@girls* Instagram account do not function merely as decorative visual elements. Instead, their meanings are produced through their interaction with the comments' verbal text and the post's broader context. Across the nine selected comments, emojis were consistently used to reinforce, modify, or add nuance to the written message. This suggests that emoji meaning is not autonomous or fixed, but emerges contextually. In this study, emojis helped commenters communicate approval, disappointment, sadness, humor, and alternative viewpoints, indicating that they serve as important semiotic resources in digital interaction.

From the perspective of Peirce's triadic model, this meaning-making process can be understood through the relationship between representamen, object, and interpretant. (Schmidt, 2022) In the context of Instagram comments, the emoji or phrase used in the comment functions as the representamen, or the form of the sign. The object refers to the feeling, idea, experience, or attitude being pointed to, such as love, frustration, irony, emotional exhaustion, or agreement. The interpretant is the meaning readers derive by connecting the emoji to the surrounding text and the post's social context. Therefore, this study demonstrates that semiosis in digital communication is highly contextual. Readers do not interpret emojis in isolation, but through their relation to accompanying verbal expressions and the interactive environment in which they appear. (Koltsova & Kartashkova, 2022)

A broader pattern found in the data is that emojis are frequently used to signal the commenter's stance toward the post. Several comments used emojis as markers of agreement or approval, while others conveyed sadness, disappointment, humor, or even an alternative perspective on the issue being discussed. This indicates that emojis are not simply emotional add-ons, but communicative tools that help users position themselves socially and affectively in relation to online content. In this sense, the combination of emoji and text creates a layered meaning: the text may provide the propositional content, while the emoji sharpens the tone, intensifies emotion, softens criticism, or introduces irony. As a result, the interpretive process depends not only on what is said verbally, but also on how the emoji frames that utterance. (Erle et al., 2022; Riordan, 2017)

These findings support previous studies that argue that emojis play an important role in shaping tone and meaning in digital communication. (Astari & Alamsyah, 2024; Deng & Jiang, 2025; Erle et al., 2022; Hand et al., 2022) A similar study was reported in an article by Jannah et al. (2022), titled "Semiotics analysis of symbol (emoji) found in the captions of *@brianmanuel's* Instagram account," which used Peirce's triadic theory. The study found that emojis function as symbols that convey meaning through the relationship between representamen, object, and interpretant. Earlier research has shown that emojis serve as visual cues that enrich online interactions and help users express emotional and interpersonal meanings more effectively. (Boutet et al., 2023; Erle et al., 2022; Gesselman Id et al., 2019) This study confirms those claims and adds more specific insight by focusing on Instagram comments on the *@girls* account. In this context, emojis not only express feelings; they also serve social functions such as validating opinions, conveying irony, signaling shared experience, and presenting alternative viewpoints. Because *@girls* is associated with themes such as women's experiences, lifestyle, humor, motivation, and

empowerment, the comment section becomes a space where emojis help users relate, share, and build social bonds. Thus, the use of emojis in this setting reflects not only emotion, but also interpersonal alignment and community-based meaning-making.

The significance of these findings lies in demonstrating that digital communication is constructed not only through words but also through visual signs that work in tandem with language. Emojis allow users to express attitudes and emotions more concisely, while also shaping how others interpret messages. For semiotic and linguistic studies, this emphasizes the importance of analyzing online discourse contextually rather than treating symbols as having stable, universal meanings. At the same time, this study has limitations. Since the data were limited to nine comments from a single Instagram post, the findings cannot be generalized to all comments on *@girls* or to all emoji use on Instagram more broadly. Nevertheless, this limitation does not diminish the value of the study; rather, it shows that the present research offers a close, in-depth reading of a specific interactional context. Future studies may expand the dataset by examining multiple posts, larger numbers of comments, or comparisons across different Instagram communities to develop a broader understanding of emoji meaning in digital discourse.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that emojis in the comment section of the *@girls* Instagram account are not only used as visual additions, but also as signs that carry meaning. Through Peirce's triadic theory, the meaning of each emoji can be understood from the relationship between the representamen, object, and interpretant. In the selected comments, emojis were used to express agreement (1 comment), sadness (2 comments), humor (2 comments), and alternative viewpoints (4 comments). This shows that emojis help users express their feelings, opinions, and reactions in ways that are closely connected to the verbal text and the context of the post. The findings also indicate that meaning in Instagram comments is formed through the combination of words and visual signs. However, this study is limited because it only focuses on nine comments from one Instagram post. Future studies can analyze more comments, different Instagram accounts, or other social media platforms to gain a broader understanding of how emojis create meaning in online communication. Overall, emojis can be seen as meaningful signs whose interpretation depends on text, context, and user interaction.

RECOMMENDATION

Based on the findings of this study, future research is recommended to examine a larger dataset by including comments from multiple posts or from different Instagram accounts to obtain a broader understanding of emoji use in digital communication. Further studies may also compare emoji meanings across different social media platforms, such as Instagram, TikTok, and X, to identify similarities and differences in how users construct meaning through visual signs. In addition, researchers are encouraged to explore other semiotic categories proposed by Charles Sanders Peirce, such as icons and indexes, so that emoji interpretation can be analyzed more comprehensively. This study was limited to 9 comments on a single post, so the findings cannot be generalized to all Instagram interactions. Therefore, expanding the scope of the data and combining semiotic analysis with other approaches, such as discourse analysis or pragmatics, may provide deeper insights into how emojis function in online communication.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The authors would like to express their sincere appreciation to Olivia Husay for the personal financial support given for the publication of this article. This support has been very meaningful in helping the authors complete the publication process. The first author, Fidela Shaumi Suryadi, would also like to express her deepest gratitude to her beloved

parents for their endless love, prayers, patience, and support throughout her academic journey. Their encouragement has been one of the greatest sources of strength for her in completing her study and this article. She is also deeply thankful to her cousins, Gya, Kaka Daffa, and Silmi, for their kindness, motivation, and support up until her college years.

In addition, Fidela would like to express her heartfelt gratitude to her close friends from different stages of her life, especially Felicia, Farah Aulia, Dina, Hafsa, Ellin, Meutia, Aidel, Yesi, Wanda, Najla, Silvia, Kayla, Bunges, and Shafira. She is deeply thankful for their presence, encouragement, and companionship, especially during some of the most difficult moments in her life. Their support, kindness, laughter, and willingness to stay by her side have meant a great deal to her. They have not only made her academic journey more bearable, but also helped her find strength during times when she needed it the most.

REFERENCES

- Andrews, E., Bierman, H., Hannon, B., & Ling, H. (2024). Semiosis and embodied cognition: The relevance of Peircean semiotics to cognitive neuroscience. *Sign Systems Studies*, 52(1–2), 49–69. <https://doi.org/10.12697/SSS.2024.52.1-2.02>
- Astari, A. W., & Alamsyah, A. (2024). Semiotic Analysis in Barbie Film by Charles Sanders Peirce's Theory. *Jurnal Riseta Soshum*, 1(2), 42–50. <https://doi.org/10.70392/jrs.v1i2.4250>
- Azab, Y. E.-S. I. (2022). The Development of Multimodality as a recent trend in Linguistics: A Critical Review. *Journal of the Faculty of Arts and Humanities, Suez Canal University*, 5(40), 42–67. <https://doi.org/10.21608/jfhsc.2022.224409>
- Boutet, I., Guay, J., Chamberland, J., Cousineau, D., & Collin, C. (2023). Emojis that work! Incorporating visual cues from facial expressions into emojis can reduce ambiguity. *Computers in Human Behavior Reports*, 9, 100251. <https://doi.org/10.1016/J.CHBR.2022.100251>
- Cobley, P., & Jansz, L. (1997). *Introducing Semiotics* (Richard Appignanesi, Ed.). Icon Books UK & Totem Books USA. <https://www.felsemiotica.com/descargas/Cobley-Paul-and-Jansz-Litza-Introducing-Semiotics.pdf>
- Deng, Y., & Jiang, J. (2025). Emojis as mediators of digital communication: a social semiotic analysis of Taylor Swift's Instagram posts. *Popular Communication*, 23(3), 179–195. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15405702.2025.2552775>
- Duffett, R. G., & Maraule, M. (2024). Customer engagement and intention to purchase attitudes of generation Z consumers toward emojis in digital marketing communications. *Young Consumers: Insight and Ideas for Responsible Marketers*, 25(5), 607–624. <https://doi.org/10.1108/YC-08-2023-1817>
- Erle, T. M., Schmid, K., Goslar, S. H., & Martin, J. D. (2022). Emojis as Social Information in Digital Communication. *Emotion*, 22(7), 1529–1543. <https://doi.org/10.1037/EMO0000992>
- Gesselman Id, A. N., Ta, V. P., & Garcia Id, J. R. (2019). *Worth a thousand interpersonal words: Emoji as affective signals for relationship-oriented digital communication*. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0221297>
- Girls. Retrieved 14 March 2026, from <https://www.instagram.com/girls>
- Hand, C. J., Burd, K., Oliver, A., & Robus, C. M. (2022). Interactions between text content and emoji types determine perceptions of both messages and senders. *Computers in Human Behavior Reports*, 8, 100242. <https://doi.org/10.1016/J.CHBR.2022.100242>
- Ibrahim, I., & Sulaiman, S. (2020). Semiotic Communication: An Approach Of Understanding A Meaning In Communication. *International Journal of Media and*

- Communication Research*, 1(1), 22–31. <https://doi.org/10.25299/IJMCR.V1I1.4584>
- Jannah, R., Maharani, P. D., & Winarta, I. B. G. N. (2022). Semiotics analysis of symbol (emoji) that found in the captions of @brianmanuel instagram account. *Journal of Language and Applied Linguistics*, 3(1), 104–113. <https://doi.org/10.22334/TRVERSE.V3I1.60>
- Jappy, T. (2023). Biosemiotics and Peirce. *Language and Semiotic Studies*, 9(2), 143–162. <https://doi.org/10.1515/lass-2023-0011>
- Jovanovic, D., & Van Leeuwen, T. (2018). Multimodal dialogue on social media. *Social Semiotics*, 28(5), 683–699. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10350330.2018.1504732>
- Keane, W. (2018). On Semiotic Ideology. *Signs and Society*, 6(1), 64–87. <https://doi.org/10.1086/695387>
- Khalisha, F., Nur Sakinah, R. M., Saehu, A. (2025). Semiotic Analysis of the Advertisement “iPhone 15 Face ID” Using Peirce’s Theory Fairuz Khalisha Firdaus Andang Saehu. *Journal of English Language Teaching and Literature (JELITA)*, 6(1), 78–96. <https://doi.org/10.56185/jelita.v6i1.884>
- Kholiq, M., Ningsih, S., & Dinda Amelia, R. (2025). Signs, Symbols, and Identity: A Semiotic Reinterpretation of Javanese Womanhood in “Losmen Bu Broto” ARTICLE HISTORY. *Journal of Research and Innovation in Language ISSN*, 7(1), 16–28. <https://doi.org/10.31849/reila.25959>
- Kissel, M., & Fuentes, A. (2017). Semiosis in the Pleistocene. *Cambridge Archaeological Journal*, 27(3), 397–412. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0959774317000014>
- Koltsova, E. A., & Kartashkova, F. I. (2022). Digital Communication and Multimodal Features: Functioning of Emoji in Interpersonal Communication. *RUDN Journal of Language Studies, Semiotics and Semantics*, 13(3), 769–783. <https://doi.org/10.22363/2313-2299-2022-13-3-769-783>
- Lauren, S., Saputri, H., & Magda, S. (2022). Analysis of the Use of Instagram as a Publication Media in Building a Brand Image of @Kurve.official. *Budapest International Research and Critics Institute (BIRCI-Journal)*, 5(1), 1687–1696. <https://doi.org/10.33258/birci.v5i1.3770>
- Li, L., & Yang, Y. (2018). Pragmatic functions of emoji in internet-based communication--a corpus-based study. *Asian-Pacific Journal of Second and Foreign Language Education*, 3(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40862-018-0057-z>
- Logi, L., & Zappavigna, M. (2023). A social semiotic perspective on emoji: How emoji and language interact to make meaning in digital messages. *New Media and Society*, 25(12), 3222–3246. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448211032965>
- Maulana, M. (2016, September 28). *Mengenai Pemikiran Charles Sanders Peirce Tentang Semiotika*. Retrieved 15th March 2026, from <https://www.muradmaulana.com/2016/09/mengenai-pemikiran-charles-sanders.html>
- Mahoney, C. (2022). Is this what a feminist looks like? Curating the feminist self in the neoliberal visual economy of Instagram. *Feminist Media Studies*, 22(3), 519–535. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2020.1810732>
- Minich, M., Kerr, B., & Moreno, M. (2025). Adolescent Emoji Use in Text-Based Messaging: Focus Group Study. *JMIR Formative Research*, 9. <https://doi.org/10.2196/59640>
- Nisa, L. A. (2024). *Semiotics Analysis of Emojis and GIF Comments on Israel-Palestinian Conflict at @Guardian Official Instagram Account* [State Islamic University Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang]. <http://etheses.uin-malang.ac.id/70886/>
- Peirce, C. S. (1940). *Philosophical writings of Peirce*. <https://philpapers.org/rec/PEIPWO>
- Poulsen, S. V., & Kvåle, G. (2018). Studying social media as semiotic technology: a social

- semiotic multimodal framework. *Social Semiotics*, 28(5), 700–717. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10350330.2018.1505689>
- Putri, S. A. M., Anggraeni, D., & Sigalingging, M. (2022). A Semiotic C.S Pierce Analysis of the Feminist Representation in Enola Holmes Movie. *Scripta: Jurnal Ilmiah Mahasiswa*, 4(2), 107–119. <https://doi.org/10.33019/scripta.v4i2.105>.
- Rejeb, A., Rejeb, K., Abdollahi, A., & Treiblmaier, H. (2022). The big picture on Instagram research: Insights from a bibliometric analysis. *Telematics and Informatics*, 73, 101876. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tele.2022.101876>
- Riordan, M. A. (2017). Emojis as Tools for Emotion Work: Communicating Affect in Text Messages. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 36(5), 549–567. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0261927X17704238>
- Schmidt, J. A. (2022). Peirce's evolving interpretants. *Semiotica*, 2022(246), 211–223. <https://doi.org/10.1515/SEM-2020-0115/XML>
- Telaumbanua, Y. A., Telaumbanua, N. T. N., Halawa, M. D., Gulo, B., Halawa, D. M. E., & Waruwu, E. K. (2024). The Use of Emojis in Language Communication on Social Media Platforms. *Journal of English Language and Education*, 9(4), 118–130. <https://doi.org/10.31004/jele.v9i4.524>
- Widodo, T., & Artiningrum, P. (2022). The semiotics study of Al-Ahdhar Mosque architecture using the trichotomy of Charles Sanders Peirce. *ARTEKS: Jurnal Teknik Arsitektur*, 7(2), 259–268. <https://doi.org/10.30822/arteks.v7i2.1827>
- Zhu, Z. (2024). Peirce's philosophy of language. *Chinese Semiotic Studies*, 20(3), 425–446. <https://doi.org/10.1515/css-2024-2025>