

Understanding the Function of Emojis in TikTok Comments for Prabowo Subianto

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the use of emoji in TikTok comments about Prabowo Subianto from the first presidential debate. This study applied Yus' (2014) framework which identifies eight distinct emoji functions. Conducted through a qualitative analysis of 50 comments collected on the day of the video's release, the findings indicated that emoji used performed all functions except for the illocutionary force modifier. The emoji used suggest vibrant and expressive interactions, where the TikTok users reacted both light-heartedly and critically. The absence of illocutionary force modifiers aligns with Prabowo Subianto's direct communication style, which prompts more straightforward responses from the TikTok users.

Keywords: emojis, function of emojis, presidential candidate, TikTok comments

INTRODUCTION

This study explores how emojis are used in TikTok comments on videos featuring Prabowo Subianto discussing key themes of the first presidential debate namely law, human rights, governance, corruption eradication, bureaucratic reform, and democracy strengthening. This debate is crucial as it can help shape voters' opinions when there is limited information about the candidates (Ordway & Wihbey, 2016).

Many people believe that emoji plays a key role in expressing feelings and thoughts digitally, especially when people react to political content online. This research uses Yus' (2014) theory, which breaks down eight specific ways emoji can be used. The theory was used to examine the comments made by the TikTok users during the debate. By looking at the use of emoji, the study aims to reveal more about how people engage with and think about political issues in Indonesia through online platforms especially TikTok.

METHOD

For this study, the data was sourced from comments with emojis on KompasTV's TikTok video, specifically focusing on the first presidential debate held at 7 – 9 p.m. on 12 December 2023. The analysis concentrated on comments related to the video of Prabowo Subianto as he shared his vision and mission, which emphasizes human rights, enhancing government services, combating corruption, and safeguarding Indonesians. In his speech Prabowo Subianto also stated his firm commitment to root out corruption and enforce regulations, highlighting the need for strong leadership in Indonesia.

Data collection was conducted by taking screenshots of comments including emoji reactions delivered to Prabowo Subianto's TikTok video. The video itself lasted for four minutes. The screenshots captured immediate public reactions from the first presidential debate, which took place on the same day, 12 December 2023. Such comments or responses or reactions somehow provided a snapshot of the TikTok users' emotional engagement. To analyze the data,

the writer applied Yus' (2014) framework. Yus' (2014) theory provides a structured approach to understand the emoji reactions in relation to Prabowo Subianto's policy focus.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Prabowo Subianto's speech attracted comments with emojis that function as an attitude signal, attitude enhancer, humor, irony, emotion signal, emotion parallel, and emotion intensity enhancer. From all the functions, only illocutionary force modifier was missing. Each function is discussed below.

Attitude Signal

Emojis can be used to help indicate the propositional attitude that underlies a speech or utterance, making it easier to identify (Yus, 2014). Some emojis in the TikTok comments about Prabowo Subianto show how attitude can be signaled. Below is one of the examples.

Data P.5

“Menjaga uud, bukan merubah uud 😊”

(Uphold the constitution, not changing the constitution 😊)

In his speech, Prabowo Subianto expressed his lifelong commitment to Pancasila and the constitution, acknowledging the contributions of past leaders. Data P.5 highlights a TikTok user's preference for preserving rather than altering the constitution.

The absence of emoji might obscure the commenter's point of view, potentially appearing as a mere statement or even a demand. The emoji used is the smiling face emoji, which is normally used to express positive feelings such as happiness and affection (Dictionary.com, 2024). With the smiling face emoji (Data P.5.1) present, the comment is visibly supportive of Prabowo Subianto's claims about the constitution, which is to respect and follow the current constitution. This emoji successfully signals the positive attitude intended by the commenter, when otherwise, might be seen as a neutral or negative attitude towards Prabowo Subianto and his speech.

Attitude Intensity Enhancer

Emoticons can be used to intensify the already existing or conveyed attitude of the utterance. It can intensify the attitude by adding another level (Yus, 2014). A few emojis in the Prabowo Subianto TikTok comments demonstrate how one can enhance the intensity of attitude. Here is an example.

Data P.44

“semoga menang 😊”

(Hopefully you win 😊)

Data P.44.1 belongs to the second function, which is to enhance the intensity of the already expressed attitude. Reading Data P.44 itself, without the emoji, it is visibly clear that the comment supported Prabowo since it was written that the commenter wanted Prabowo Subianto to win the election. As the comment showed support for Prabowo, explicitly saying that he/she wished for Prabowo to win, the attitude was already shown and clearly expressed in the comment.

According to Dictionary.com, this emoji is called the smiling face with hearts emoji and it is commonly used to represent love or romance or to say how much somebody really likes a

person or thing. Data P.44.1 only enhances the positive attitude shown by the comment rather than signaling it, as the comment itself already has a positive attitude. Without the emoji, the comment is merely a positive comment praising Prabowo, but the attitude is enhanced with the help of the smiling face with hearts emoji, that represents positive feelings and attitude.

Illocutionary Force Modifier

Emoticons can be used to reduce or increase the force of a speaking act. It has the power to boost or lower the impact and force of the act inside the utterance (Yus, 2014). Amongst Prabowo Subianto's TikTok video comments, there was no use of emoji as an illocutionary force modifier. This function, important for moderating or highlighting the impact of statements, arises when commenters notice statements that require a delicate affirmation or a gentle softening. Due to Prabowo's straightforward approach to announce and promote his vision and mission, his speech may attract more explicit responses, making such modifiers less necessary for the TikTok users.

Humor

Emoticons can be used as a way to show humor by contradicting the explicit content of the utterance. It indicates that the statement can be taken as a joke rather than to be taken seriously (Yus, 2014). A few emojis show how to create or represent humor in Prabowo Subianto's TikTok comments. Below is an example.

Data P.3

“ekonomi aman 😊 rakyat kecil menjerit pak.”

(The economy is safe 😊 the commoners are screaming sir.)

During his speech, Prabowo Subianto said that people should be grateful amidst the disadvantages because Indonesia is peaceful, controlled, and the economy is stable and safe due to the leadership. The commenter disagreed with that statement, apparent by the use of sarcastic jokes. This comment directly opposed Prabowo Subianto's statement about a stable economy by saying that the commoners are screaming, meaning that they do not feel the 'stable economy' Prabowo Subianto mentioned in his speech.

The emoji used (Data P.3.1) is the face with tears of joy emoji that is usually used to express amusement and laughter (Dictionary.com, 2024). Without the emoji, the comment is criticizing Prabowo Subianto's claim explicitly and with a more negative tone. The commenter uses a sarcastic joke to express the humor, underlying his disagreement towards Prabowo Subianto's claim that Indonesia's economy is stable.

Irony

Emoticons can be used to convey a distinct meaning that is the opposite from the actual explicit content of the utterance, it can also show sarcastic content (Yus, 2014). In Prabowo Subianto's TikTok comments, a few emojis demonstrate how to convey or create irony. Below is an example.

Data P.10

“pa ekonomi gak aman loh ini 😊😬”

(Sir, the economy is not safe right now 😊😬)

During his speech, Prabowo Subianto said that although Indonesia does have its disadvantages, people should still be grateful because due to the leadership in the past, Indonesia is still peaceful, controlled, and stable.

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After analyzing data P.10.1 which is the face with tears of joy emoji, the writer concluded that it represents irony. The content of the comment is explicit and dark as it claims that the country's economy is not stable and safe. However, since the commenter used a laughing emoji in contrast to the dark and tragic comment, it shows the irony of the situation. The face with tears of joy emoji is usually used to express amusement and laughter (Dictionary.com, 2024). Without the emojis, this comment can be seen as the commenter trying to tell Prabowo Subianto the grim reality of Indonesia's economy. Even though the comment still has the same meaning even with emoji, the way the commenter presents the issue is different. With the emoji, it shows that the commenter is trying to convey the issue at hand using irony, using the contrast between the happy and positive emoji compared to the sad and negative comment.

Emotion Signal

Emoticons can be used as a representation to show a person's feelings towards the subject of the utterance or speech (Yus, 2014). A few emojis from Prabowo Subianto's TikTok video's comment section show how to signal emotion. An example is shown below.

Data P.38

"Prabowo gibran mantap 🥰"
(Prabowo Gibran is solid 🥰)

The emoji (Data P.38.1) shows the commenter's emotions or feelings towards the subject of the utterance or comment. The subject of this utterance was the second candidate, Prabowo Subianto and Gibran Rakabuming, which the commenter claimed as solid. According to Dictionary.com the term solid has a lot of meaning, however when used as slang, it means reliable or excellent.

Without the emoji it is only a normal comment praising Prabowo and Gibran, but with the emoji, it further shows what the commenter feels about them. The commenter loves Prabowo and Gibran, as evident in the emoji used as representation of those feelings. Data P.38.1 is called the smiling face with hearts emoji and it is commonly used to represent love or romance or to say how much somebody really likes a person or thing (Dictionary.com, 2024). Therefore, the emoji is used as a way to signal the commenter's emotions towards the subjects of the comment, Prabowo Subianto and Gibran Rakabuming.

Parallel Emotion Signal

Emoticons can be used as a representative of someone's emotion or feelings during the event of the utterance or speech (Yus, 2014). In the TikTok comment section for Prabowo Subianto's video, the emojis show how to indicate the emotion in accordance with the speech by using a few emojis. Below is an example.

Data P.23

"sampai hati banget pak 🥺"
(Very heartfelt sir 🥺)

The comment referred to Prabowo Subianto's speech as "sampai hati," which is often interpreted as hurtful or deeply affecting, rather than heartfelt. However, additional research revealed that the commenter had reposted a TikTok video by Gibran Rakabuming, indicating support for Prabowo Subianto as a candidate. Therefore, it is likely that "sampai hati" in this context was meant to express a profound emotional impact, aligning with the notion of being heartfelt.

The emoji used in this comment is the pleading face emoji (Data P.23.1), which is usually for winning compassion and begging for mercy (Dictionary.com, 2024). However, this emoji can sometimes be misused as a representation of shyness, gratefulness, and the feeling of being touched. In this particular scenario, the commenter used this emoji to express the feeling of being touched, as he/she got touched by Prabowo's speech. This emoji shows the commenter's emotion during the event of the speech.

Emotion Intensity Enhancer

Emoticons can be used to further intensify an emotion or feeling that is already expressed in the utterance or speech (Yus, 2014). The comments found from Prabowo Subianto's video uses a few emojis in his TikTok comment section to demonstrate how to intensify the emotions from the utterance. Here is an example.

Data P.39

“suka sama pak Prabowo yg perkataannya itu ga di rankai tapi berbicara apa adanya 🥰❤️”

(I like Mr. Prabowo, who speaks straightforwardly and says things as they are 🥰❤️)

The commenter appreciated Prabowo Subianto for his straightforwardness, noting that he speaks frankly and directly. The emoji used is called the smiling face with hearts emoji and it is commonly used to represent love or romance or to say how much somebody really likes a person or thing (Dictionary.com, 2024). Hence why Data P.39.1 functions to intensify the 'like' or 'love' emotion that was already expressed in the comment. The emoji is usually used to express love, so in this case, it stays the same and helps the commenter enhance the emotion of love towards Prabowo Subianto.

As the feelings and emotions of the commenter was already showed and expressed in the comment, the emoji served as to function as an enhancer not as a signal to said emotion, which is love. Without the emoji, the comment serves as a normal praise expressing the commenter's love towards Prabowo Subianto, however the emoji functions as an intensifier of the expressed emotion.

CONCLUSION

This report examines the functions of emojis in TikTok comments on the video of presidential candidate, Prabowo Subianto, analyzed through Yus' (2014) eight-function framework: attitude signal, attitude intensity enhancer, illocutionary force modifier, humor, irony, emotion signal, parallel emotion signal, and emotion intensity enhancer. The study involved collecting 50 comments containing emojis from TikTok video about Prabowo Subianto's first presidential debate. The TikTok video and the comments were posted on the same day as the debate (12 December 2023). The findings show how emoji can enhance engagement with political content.

In comments for Prabowo Subianto's TikTok video, emojis were used for attitude signaling, attitude intensity enhancement, humor, irony, emotion signaling, parallel emotion signaling, and emotion intensity enhancement. The variety of emojis used for humor and irony suggests that Prabowo's statements often prompt lively or interesting discussions, allowing users to engage both light-heartedly and critically. Emojis related to emotion signaling and intensity enhancement indicate that his messages resonate deeply, prompting expressive reactions from

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the TikTok users. The use of parallel emotion signaling amplifies this connection between his words and the TikTok users' feelings. Such various responses showcase how TikTok users apply emoji to express their complex feelings about political topics.

In comments for Prabowo Subianto's TikTok video, the illocutionary force modifier function was absent. Prabowo's straightforward approach may attract more explicit responses, making such modifiers less necessary for the TikTok users.

For future studies, the writer would suggest more studies on emoji usage across different social media platforms, not just TikTok, to see if platform dynamics influence emoji functions. Additionally, examining the changes in emoji usage before, during, and after political events could offer insights into how public sentiment evolves in real-time. Such studies would enrich public understanding of digital political engagement in Indonesia and global political discourse.

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