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**Кваліфікаційна робота**  
**НЕВЕРБАЛЬНІ КОМПОНЕНТИ СПІЛКУВАННЯ У МЕРЕЖІ**  
**ІНТЕРНЕТ**

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Спеціальність 01 Освіта / Педагогіка 014 «Середня освіта (Мова і література  
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Науковий керівник:

**Врабель Томаш Томашович,**  
кандидат філологічних наук, доцент

Завідувач кафедри

**Берегсасі Аніко Ференцівна,**  
зав. кафедри, доктор габлітований, професор

Робота захищена на оцінку \_\_\_\_\_, «\_\_» \_\_\_\_\_ 202\_ року

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**Барна Олександра Йосипівна**

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англійська)»

Науковий керівник: **Врабель Томаш Томашович,**

**кандидат філологічних наук, доцент**

Рецензент: **Лехнер Ілона Густавівна,**

**доктор філософії, доцент**

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**Ferenc Rákóczi II Transcarpathian Hungarian College of Higher Education**

**Department of Philology**

**Qualifying paper**

**NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION COMPONENTS ON THE  
INTERNET**

Level of higher education: Bachelor's degree

Presented by:

**Alexandra Barna**  
a fourth year student

**Professional Education program:**  
014 Secondary education (language and literature (English))

Thesis supervisor: **Tamás Vrábely,**  
**Candidate of Philological Sciences, Associate professor**

Second reader: **Ilona Lechner, PhD,**  
**Associate professor**

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## INTRODUCTION

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century has seen the emergence and spread of new ways of communication that were unimaginable even a few decades ago. That does not mean that all technical tools and platforms have appeared in the last twenty years, as many of them go back further, but the digital communication of today is certainly typical of the new era.

While the number of people with computer in their homes was small before the turn of the century, in more developed areas it is now almost inconceivable that a household does not have a smartphone, perhaps a laptop or computer. For this reason, there were not as many online platforms at that time as there are today. Online communication itself was not as frequent, and it was not common to sit in front of a computer all day. But nowadays, everything is speeding up, things are constantly changing.

As technology has advanced, people have become more aware of the benefits of digitalisation. With the passing of the years, more and more people owned some kind of technical device, which among other things is used for communication. Their quick and easy use has made it possible to extend themselves to the whole world. Seeing the success of digitalisation, many developers have started to create websites, applications and other online elements. As a result, there are now plenty of platforms for people to communicate. However, the story does not stop here, as these interfaces have many components that make everyday information exchange more colourful, easier and more interesting. If approaching things from the verbal perspective, it is possible to make calls, video chat and send voice messages. The current topic, in contrast, is about the non-verbal communication space. Online conversations can take place on many platforms and there are countless elements that add to the communication. More on these will be discussed later in this work.

The subject of this study is the Non-verbal communication components on the Internet.

The object of the work is the online non-verbal components themselves and their usage.

The aim of the work is to demonstrate the different non-verbal communication components on the Internet and the online platforms where they can be presented. As a second approach, the goal is to analyse people's attitudes towards these non-verbal elements and the way and extent to which they use them, based on a questionnaire survey. On this basis, the task included designing the questionnaire, sending it out to people, analysing the received data and, ultimately, putting all the information in written form.

The hypothesis is that the elements of non-face-to-face, non-verbal communication are more difficult to decode as they lack body language, facial expressions and vocal background. Non-verbal communication components on the Internet can help to overcome these challenges. Through their use, online communication can be made more understandable, personal, colourful and emotional, as intended. However, their application is not unified, as each person has a different style and expresses themselves in a different way.

The novelty of the paper can be explained by: as mentioned above, today's online communication is completely different from even a few years ago. Therefore, due to the rapid change, there are not really any recent and accurate studies and articles on the subject. The present phenome can change in a short period of time, up to 2-3 years, so people have different attitudes, different ways of thinking, different ways of using non-verbal components. This paper is therefore the most up-to-date writing on this specific topic.

The theoretical description provides an insight into the world of different applications and non-verbal elements to build a prior knowledge to understand the questionnaire data.

The more practical part, which revolves around the questionnaire, gives an insight into what non-verbal elements people use on the Internet, when they use them, with whom and to what extent, and why or why not they like them.

A certain part of the theoretical framework of the thesis was built up through a literature review. The sources were various websites and articles. Most of the literature review covers the history and characteristics of the different platforms and non-verbal communication components on the Internet.

In terms of methods, the first step was to search and review the various sources. Then a questionnaire was drafted on the topic and the finished product was sent out to people in order to get as many responses as possible. The next step was to analyse the data received, which forms the basis of a realistic exploration of the topic. The finishing touch was to edit everything to get a finished work.

The work is structured in two major parts. One half describes the theory and the other half examines and analyses the collected data. The first part deals with communication on the Internet itself, the different types of non-verbal components, a description of the most well-known platforms and other online interfaces. The second half of the paper first introduces the questionnaire, then presents the data in depth with examples and statistics.

# **PART 1**

## **1.1. Communication on the Internet**

At the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – the Internet appeared in society. Therefore, a new way of communication has emerged. While it was possible to hear the other party's voice over the phone, it was not possible to do so via the newly released email system. This was a huge change and also evolution in human history.

It is often difficult to interpret real emotions through text messages. We can't see the other person's body language, which makes up 55% of the communication. The next important factor is the tone of our voice, which includes 38%. The remaining 7% are the words themselves (Calin 2019).

Since the first Internet conversations, a number of elements have appeared that supplement or even replace the text. The following are the most commonly used nonverbal components: emoticons, emojis, GIFs, memes and textual paralinguistic components (Westry 2021).

## **1.2. The different non-verbal communication components on the Internet**

### **Emoticons**

As an article states on the Britannica website: "Emoticons are punctuation marks, letters, and numbers used to create pictorial icons that generally display an emotion or sentiment." Its origin is due to a joke that took place at an American university. A minor chemical accident has been reported in digital form. However, this was a hoax and was created just for fun. The smiley face and the frowning face came out of this misunderstanding. Since then, the smiley face has been written after jokes and positive messages, and the frowning face has been written after less positive texts (Grannan, Cydney. "What's the Difference Between Emoji and Emoticons?").

Professor Scott E. Fahlman made an iconic event when he used the smiley face from the side for the first time in 1982. The symbol he created started a huge wave that made the use of emoticons widespread. Emoticons based on text strings are easy to use, as they can be applied to any browser or digital device with a keyboard (Geysler 2024).

There are hundreds of emoticon types, ranging from those consisting of only two characters to those made up of more than two. They can be used to illustrate most emotions, be it happiness, sadness, anger, joking, confusion, love and many others.



The different emoticons based on the emotional categorisation are demonstrated in the following.

Expressing happiness, laughter, smiles:

- :)
- :-)
- (^\_^)
- (.‘u‘.)
- ( ^ ▽ ^ )

Expressing anger:

- :@
- x=(
- (▴\_▴)
- <( ` ^' )>

Expressing sadness:

- :(
- :/
- (‘\_\_` )
- (;::;)
- (つ、\_、)つ

Expressing love:

- :-\*
- <3
- (。♥\_♥。)
- (°∩°)
- (\*°▽°)=3

There are certainly many other emoticons besides the ones illustrated above, but for demonstration purposes these are sufficient.

### **Emojis**

About 92% of people on the Internet use emojis while expressing their emotions and their thoughts. Internet users can choose from more than 3,600 emoji. People can find different types of cartoony characters, animals, plants, foods, buildings, flags, vehicles, common objects and many more symbols (URL3).

Emojis can be divided into three major groups based on their meaning: positive, negative and neutral. Some of them can be used for more than one expression. It is common – mostly among teenagers and young adults – that an emoji is used for the sake of irony. For example, if someone puts the regular smiling face after the word “great” – the other person knows that the situation is actually not so “great”.

Various researches have shown that women and men use their emojis differently. Women use them 16% more than men. Furthermore, women prefer to use those associated with joyful things, and men prefer those associated with fear (Thompson, Brian. “10 Fun Facts About Emojis”).

A few years ago, an application called TikTok was created, which connects millions of young people. Thanks to that – the use of emojis is constantly changing. In the comment section, it can be observed that in many cases the very popular “face with tears of joy” has been replaced by the “loudly crying face”. This is the new way among Generation Z to express that something is funny. But let’s not forget that these can even be said to be a trend, and trends come and go. What is popular now will no longer be trendy after a certain time.

The whole system has been much more diverse since the beginning. Nowadays, people can choose the right symbols for their skin colour, religion, nationality and gender identity. This makes one feel that they belong to the society.

Overall, emojis reinforce and complement the mood of the text: whether it is an expression of congratulation, a joke, irony, or sadness.

However, what has also emerged frequently is the category of emojis that respond to some kind of funny message. Several elements are included in this group. However, the most common are the “face with tears of joy”, the different variations of the “grinning face” and surprisingly the “loudly crying face”. The last one is interesting because while most of the world uses it as a sad symbol, a certain group of people - mainly young people active on social media - use it as a completely identical symbol to funny emojis. This is mainly thanks to an app called TikTok, which has also innovated the use of the Internet in many other areas.



**Picture 1.** Emojis. *Source: Apple.*

## **GIFs**

The use of GIFs is very common nowadays. These are colourful, animated visual contents and they first appeared in the 80's. Their full name is Graphics Interchange Format (URL5).

GIFs are perfect tools for expressing a person's humour. But you have to be careful with them, because not everyone sees them in that way as the person who sent those.

These moving images cannot only complement but even replace the text. Obviously, they cannot replace a voluminous paragraph, but they can be used to express a simple phrase.

As GIFs are moving images, it is not possible to show their full reality through this format, only a single still moment of the scene.

## **Stickers**

When we think of stickers, there are two types that might come to mind. The first might be what the children like to collect and stick them in different places. So these are things that you can touch with your hands, so they are physical. But the other kind of stickers are the ones that we cannot touch with our hands, because they exist in the technological space.

But what are stickers and what is the history behind them?

We would think that the sticker is a modern-day technological invention. However, this is not the case. These objects were already present in ancient civilisations, although they were not used for the same purposes as now. They were used by ancient people for trading, ceremonial and religious reasons, among others. In the Middle Ages, paper stickers appeared and were used mainly for decorative purposes. At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, they became more widespread in advertising. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century it has become part of pop culture all over the world. And in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, due to the increasing availability of various modern technological tools, they are now fully integrated in the digital space (Jazzico Co. 2023).

Overall, stickers are colourful, pictorial elements that can also contain short texts. They are designed to make messages more interesting.



**Picture 2.** Stickers. *Source: Messenger.*

### **Avatar/Bitmoji**

Harriet Phillips defines the term “avatar” on the website called "goat" as follows: “Avatars are essentially on-screen or virtual manifestations of a user. They don’t have to replicate the user’s actual appearance, having the potential to take on any shape or form as long as they reflect human characteristics, such as a face capable of expression.”

The story behind the avatar is set in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when players in video games had to choose a character. To this day, in various games you should/can choose between a two- or three-dimensional illustration (Valyaeva 2023).

These avatars can be found on most social media platforms. In some places these are called Bitmoji. There is even an application by the name Bitmoji.

The Bitmoji and the various avatar figures also provide an identity marker function, as each person can personalise these characters. They allow the user's real-life look and style to be reflected as closely as possible, but also allow creative freedom to make the characters as imaginative as possible. Avatars have inclusive offerings, presenting a broad palette for people with different looks, personalities and mindsets from all over the world. This feature allows anyone to create an online version of themselves, as it displays a variety of different elements representing different external features, such as skin colour, hair type, hair colour, face and eye shape, body type, clothing, accessories and other visible characteristics.

These have changed a lot over the years, with a number of new developments since the beginning to ensure representation for people with different externalities. The changes also introduce a 3D look, making Bitmojis and avatars even more colourful and realistic.

Due to the aforementioned developments, everyone can choose from a plethora of choices, which means that users do not feel excluded, and a further result is that the use of these tools is more widespread, which of course benefits the owners of the various apps, in other words, everyone gets what they want.



**Picture 3.** Bitmoji. *Source: Snap Newsroom – Snap Inc.*

The illustration above shows a great example of the abundance of choices mentioned above. Each person can find options to suit the appearance they like.

### **Memes**

The term meme comes from the Greek word – mimema, which means “imitated” (Rogers, Kara. „meme”).

Memes in the 21<sup>st</sup> century are widespread among Internet users. Memes can be funny images or videos and even people can turn into one of them.

Scrolling through different social media platforms, we often find a meme which we find funny or relatable. Then we can send it to our friends, so we let them know our current state, situation or emotion through that one meme. After that, our friends can react to that in some way and the conversation begins.

The other option is when we see a meme and it reminds us of someone. If we do not chat with that person every day, we should send them the meme and that gesture basically says “Hi. This reminded me of you and I miss you”.

A single meme can indicate what series we are watching right now, how are we feeling, what is troubling us, what we are thinking of and much more.

On different social platforms, there are many pages and channels that are specifically dedicated to memes, and therefore have many memes. There are sites that have general memes, meaning that they can be enjoyed by a wide range of consumers and only require a general understanding, but then there are also those aimed at a much narrower audience. These memes aimed at more specific audiences can also be of a different kind: film-themed (and within that, a specific film), book-themed, political, academic, or linked to a particular geographical location or ethnic group. Specifically defined memes require a certain background knowledge of the given topic, as only then can they be truly understood.

The primary purpose of memes is to entertain, to make people smile. In many cases this is true, but there are examples where they are presented in a negative light. Negative representation can take many forms, but one common feature is the insulting, denigrating or ridiculing of a group or person. This could take the form of racism, caricatures of various mental and health problems, mockery of external characteristics or the use of events in a particular person's life. Such illustrations can be offensive to certain groups and can have a bad effect on the mind. Therefore, both the creators of memes and the users who share them need to be aware of these matters to avoid negative consequences. Belonging to a community is important, and therefore people need to be tolerant of each other, both in real life and online.

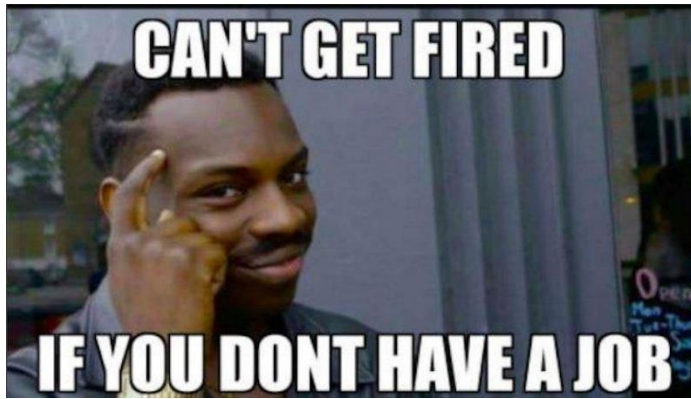
With the exception of the aforementioned malicious memes, however, most of them are innocent and really only serve to give one a little refreshment.

These non-verbal communication components can be really expressive, as they require creativity to produce and they can address people in a way that is appropriate to their purpose.

In terms of their structure, they have some kind of text, which is edited onto some sort of background illustration. The background itself can be a funny picture, but a simple background will do the trick if the text is used well. Some illustrations are known worldwide and have been used in many different texts and contexts over the years. The different backgrounds do not require in-depth research, which means that with a little creativity, anyone can create memes. The process can be a fun activity and people can either make them for themselves or send them to friends and family.

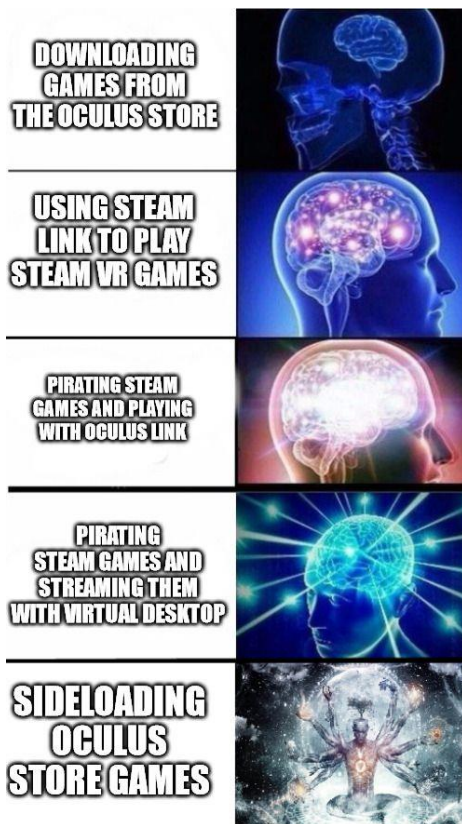
People can find memes on almost any social media that has some kind of timeline and is not just designed for communication, which could be Instagram, Facebook, TikTok or even Reddit. A huge amount of content appears on these platforms, enabling users to spend hours a day exploring and studying them. The content can be published in image format or even as a video. On these platforms, everyone can find the memes to their liking. Elements users like can be shared on their own profile or sent to different people to maybe even cheer someone else up. But attention must also be paid to ensuring that the target person has the background knowledge to understand the meme properly.

The following is a meme that can be understood by a wide audience:



Picture 4. Meme. Source: LiveAbout.

The meme that follows is an example of a meme that addresses a specific audience and requires a certain knowledge to be understood:



Picture 5. Meme. Source: Reddit.

### TikTok videos

The latest communication components can include, among others, TikTok videos. It is similar to memes in that they also convey some information, some underlying content. However, in most cases memes are not moving visual elements, and TikTok videos are – as the name implies – in video format, and in most cases they are accompanied by sound.

The communication part itself can take several forms. The first type is the part where the videos are published for the world to see. This is because the creator of the video is communicating something to consumers, asking for opinions or help, or perhaps just

producing the content for entertainment purposes. Either way, videos trigger some kind of reaction in the brain.

The next type is when a video is sent to someone. There are many reasons why people send these videos to each other. It may be because the content is just funny or interesting, it may have an educational background, it may be an idea for different things, or it may be because the sender, the recipient or both can relate to what the content says. Sending the creation may trigger a further reaction or conversation between the parties.

The third type is related to the comment section. There are many videos where you can see hundreds or even thousands of comments. As long as the comment section is not turned off or limited to a certain number of people, anyone can comment on the video and share their thoughts and observations. This gives the users the opportunity to communicate with people from all over the world.

There is also a feature where you can reply to the video with a video. This can be between two users, where they respond to each other's video in some audio-visual form.

Overall, it can be said that TikTok videos are also a kind of information exchange if the user only watches the different contents, but videos can also serve as a means of communication if the consumer forwards these videos to others. They can describe different messages without any commentary by the sender.

### **Instagram Reels**

Instagram Reels are very similar to the concept of TikTok videos. The biggest difference is in the social media platform, as the aforementioned videos are published on the TikTok application and the Instagram Reels are published on Instagram.

### **Textual paralanguage**

Textual paralanguage is a written manifestation of visual elements that supplement or replace written language. It can be expressed through words, symbols, images, punctuation or the combination of these elements (Luangrath 2017:3).

As with the online communication elements mentioned earlier, these also help to make non-face-to-face discourse easier to decode. However, the types are more difficult to group than the previous ones. Instead of categorising, it is possible simply to mention examples of textual paralanguage:

- multiple exclamation/question marks
- ellipsis
- all capital letters



- exclamation words
- repetition of letters or words
- parentheses

The objectives of the use of the non-verbal communication components listed above are not 100% identical, but it could be said that they may be used to emphasise a message or to convey an additional effect. These can be really useful, particularly if one doesn't want to or can't use the communication elements discussed earlier. The different elements of textual paralinguistics are more adapted to the formal medium, than, for example, TikTok videos or memes, and can therefore be used more often to convey a more professional message. In the majority of cases, it is probably more likely to see all capital letters, multiple exclamation marks or possibly parentheses in an email from an employer or perhaps a professor in higher education than, perhaps, emojis or stickers. This statement, however, does not exclude the fact that these components are not restricted to formal communication, which means that they can be used by anyone, even in close and friendly company.

Most people might not pay much attention to these textual paralinguistics, despite the fact that they are very effective in conveying messages and can be easily used within the text. One other possibility is that people do use them, but their use comes so naturally that one does not necessarily separate them from the textual content itself.

Compared to other non-verbal communication components (memes, TikTok videos, avatars, Instagram Reels, etc.), these characters are easily accessible, as they do not require a separate application and do not need to be extensively searched for, as they only need the keyboard itself, on which they are very easy to find. In terms of the keyboard, it could be on a phone, computer, laptop, tablet or any digital device that can use a writing application.

In the following, the different elements are presented through the use of example sentences.

The first element shall be the **multiple exclamation marks**. The question is, for what are they useful? Among other things, they are used to draw attention and emphasise the message. It can also be an expression of the prohibition of something. If the recipient of the message sees that there are multiple exclamation marks somewhere in the text, they know that something important is going on that they need to pay special attention to.

*Don't forget to buy milk at the store!!!*

*Send the completed document as soon as possible!!!*

In the example sentences above, some negative connotations can be detected, but these are not the only forms in which exclamation marks can be used. They can be applied for a positive reason, for example to express excitement or to praise or encourage.

*I can't wait to see you again!!*

*You did very well in the contest and I am proud of you!!!!*

Now let's talk about the **question marks**. Just as the exclamation marks, these can be used as more than one character. The most common reason for their use is to express the confusion of the sender or to indicate that the issue is important, perhaps urgent and needs an answer as soon as possible.

*Could you pick up the package right now????*

*Have you seen the admission requirements????*

*What does this paragraph mean?? I don't understand.*

The third example is the **ellipsis**, which represents three points. It can express a lapse of thought, incompleteness, or perhaps an excuse.

*I'd better not say any more...*

*I was late because I thought I had enough time...*

**All capital letters** are the perfect way to draw attention to something, which happens to be the importance of a text or a passage of text. As they stand out from the context, they are easy to notice and to assess their importance. It is possible to highlight only one word with this method, or even entire sentences.

*The meeting will not be on Tuesday, but on THURSDAY.*

*DO NOT REPLY TO THAT MESSAGE! IT IS A SCAM.*

There are numerous **exclamation words** which can be chosen from. Their wide palette means that they can be used in many different situations, and functionally they are quite useful as they can be applied to convey many different emotions. Exclamation words can be used to convey a variety of emotions or states of mind, such as joy, excitement, astonishment, anger, sarcasm, sadness and many others. One element can mean several things, depending on the context, so it is important to see and understand the message.

These components are usually short, often consisting of only one word, or perhaps a duplication of a word. This can be explained by the fact that these expressions are taken from the spoken language, which makes the sudden expression of emotion come quickly and usually short. The exclamation words can be accompanied by a text (they can be placed at the beginning, middle or end of the text), or they can form a completely separate sentence.

The recipient of the message is able to understand stand-alone exclamations, as they reflect the ongoing communication.

The following examples of these elements can be mentioned and explained:

- oh – can express sadness, surprise, disappointment or even joy

*Oh, so you can't join us on holiday?*

*Oh my goodness, I can't believe I won!*

- wow – suitable for expressing joy, surprise, sarcasm or disappointment

*Wow, I love this bouquet of flowers.*

*Wow, I can't believe you finally got here after two hours late.*

- haha/hahaha – mostly used when replying to a funny message or when the messenger says something funny

*My brother slipped on the ice in front of everyone hahaha.*

- shh – can mean to be quiet, but also not to pass on certain information to anyone

*Sara, shh, I can hear you laughing from the front row! You have to be quiet now.*

- argh – mostly negative in connotation, may express anger, disappointment, pain

*– James, the boss wants you to come to work urgently.*

*– Argh, I can't believe I can't have a peaceful day off.*

- ouch – in most cases it means that someone is hurt or offended

*– I didn't dare to tell you in person, but I think that dress you bought yesterday is really ugly.*

*– Ouch, you don't always have to be so honest.*

- huh – indicates a lack of sense, confusion

*Huh, what do you mean by that?*

- hmm – indicates that the sender is thinking about something, perhaps waiting for a reply

*– What is your favourite film?*

*– Hmm, good question. Let me think about that.*

In addition to the exclamations listed above, there are many others, but these are the ones one may encounter most often.

It is important to note that to use these tools, it is necessary to understand the context and it is good to know the person being communicated with to avoid misunderstandings and possible offence.

The **repetition of letters or words** can express the intensity of emotions. In other words, it indicates that the emotional level is either much higher or much lower than average: someone is very happy or perhaps very anxious.

*I know you are still asleep, but I just want to text you that I am soooo nervous.*

*I am very, very, very happy right now!*

*Nooo, I missed the bus again.*

Placing text in **parentheses** is used, among other things, to present additional information or to make the message clearer. In other words, they help structure the message in line with its purpose.

*I bought so many things at the store (bread, butter, milk, two bottles of water, sausages, flour, potatoes, apples) that I could hardly carry the bag home.*

*In a week I am going on a trip to Tallinn (capital of Estonia).*

*I hope everyone knows that there is an important meeting tomorrow (the 27th of June) at the company.*

Textual paralanguage elements can be of great use to people, as they help them to communicate their emotions and thoughts more accurately. They can be used in a wide range of ways and situations, making them an excellent tool. However, it is important to pay attention to the person one is communicating with and the relationship one has with that person, as it can happen that the communication partner may not interpret them in the way the sender intended.

### **1.3. The different platforms on the Internet**

Over the past decades, many online platforms have emerged for communication and community building purposes. There are a number of online platforms that most people know about, or at least have heard of. But there are many more that the average person does not know about. The reason for this may be cultural, as different nationalities use different applications. But it could also be because some social media platforms are designed to suit the interests of a specific group of people. Furthermore, there are simply so many applications that people do not need to know about them all.

The most popular social media platforms in Europe are Gmail (or other email platforms), Messenger, Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, WhatsApp. Other applications are of course also used (Tang 2020).

These online platforms make it quick and easy to reach anyone, anywhere in the world. They play a crucial role today, with the vast majority of people using some form of online platform to communicate with others. It is also important to highlight the various non-verbal communication components that appear in these applications and websites. If it weren't for the different interfaces on the internet, we wouldn't be using and knowing these non-verbal elements today.

The online space has brought with it many innovations and interesting new features that greatly enhance the success of everyday communication. Over the years, a wide variety of non-verbal communication elements have appeared on the internet, serving different functions.

However, in order to better understand the purpose and use of these elements, we need to familiarise ourselves with the different online platforms that give space to non-verbal communication elements.

### **Email**

Michael Sampson in 2003 formulated the meaning of email in the following way: “Electronic mail (e-mail) is a computer-based application for the exchange of messages between users. A worldwide e-mail network allows people to exchange e-mail messages very quickly. E-mail is the electronic equivalent of a letter, but with advantages in timeliness and flexibility.”

Email is one of the oldest online communication platforms. The history of email dates back to the 1970s. By the 1990s, the use of this platform had spread worldwide. Although nowadays, the importance of maintaining day-to-day communication with loved ones and acquaintances is mostly not via email, it is still relevant. Email continues to play a prominent role in higher education, business and various organisations (Tang 2020).

There are several different email mediums, however the most commonly used is the Gmail platform.

### **Facebook/Messenger**

Facebook is an American social media platform created in 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg, Eduardo Saverin, Dustin Moskovitz and Chris Hughes. The young men listed were Harvard students at the time (Hall 2024).

Initially the name of the website was “Thefacebook”, and in 2005 it became the “Facebook” we know today. Furthermore, at the beginning of its creation, it was only for college students. In 2005, this changed as Facebook opened its doors to high school students and Microsoft and Apple employees. 2006 brought further changes in that anyone over the age of 13 could register on the site (Sivakumar 2023).

2008 was a landmark year for Facebook, as it became the most visited site on the internet, beating many popular online spaces (Hall 2024).

In 2011, the Facebook Messenger app was created to ensure that users didn't have to log in to the website every time they visited. This made the messaging process even easier (Sivakumar 2023).

There are many factors that can be said about the structure of Facebook. Among other things, it allows users to personalise their profile, upload pictures, add friends, join groups according to their interests and, of course, send messages.

The Messenger app, as mentioned above, is closely related to Facebook. Those who have a Facebook profile can use the application. The main difference between the two platforms is that Messenger is more focused on messaging features. Thus, we do not have a timeline, we do not have access to the full profiles of other users. However, the "Messenger Story" feature allows us to share photos with our friends. However, these will be automatically deleted after 24 hours.

As an interesting side note, the 2021 data showed that Facebook has three billion users (Hall 2024)

### **Instagram**

Instagram was created in 2010 by Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger. The main idea behind creating the application is to share photos and videos with the world. It is currently under the control of Meta Platforms, the parent company of Facebook. It has a huge user base, similar to Facebook, with two billion users (Eldridge 2024).

The possibilities offered by Instagram go beyond simply posting photos and videos. Posts in the so-called "feed" (which is similar to Facebook's timeline) or Instagram story can convey content to users in different ways.

Users can attach any text to the images or videos to express their thoughts or provide information about the post.

Instagram provides an excellent platform for various companies, organisations and artists to advertise certain things, or to draw attention to anything. Advertising should be mentioned here, as users may encounter a variety of paid or even unpaid content. And such

ads have a big influence on people, especially since Instagram has two billion users. By advertising, we can mean almost any physical or intellectual product, from clothing to food to health or beauty services.

Instagram Reels, a prominent feature within the app, is a short video of up to 90 seconds (Worb 2023). This can also be seen as a communication element, as it conveys some kind of content to the audience, who can comment on the video or send it to their friends and family for various reasons.

Last but not least, Instagram also has a messaging interface that can be used for personal communication.

### **TikTok**

At the moment, this app is one of the most popular online platforms. People all over the world use it on a daily basis.

TikTok is a video sharing application where content can range from a few seconds to up to ten minutes (Geysler 2024).

One of the main differences between TikTok and the other online services mentioned so far is that from the very beginning it has focused on videos and not pictures.

TikTok's predecessor was called Musical.ly, which was most known for being popular for lip-syncing.

In 2018, the app underwent a significant transformation: it was rebranded as TikTok, its design changed, new features were added and new trends emerged alongside lip-syncing. In the same year, it was the most downloaded app in the photo and video category. By the year 2022, TikTok had more than one billion active users, making it one of the most widely used apps in the world (Geysler 2024).

Music and various audios are one of the main building blocks of the application. This provides a huge platform for musical artists to promote their work. Many of the world's best-known artists have TikTok accounts, which only further attracts people to use the app.

Music also plays a crucial role in many other contexts: it is the basis for many viral trends, it connects communities, it allows people to showcase their singing and/or dancing talents and, last but not least, it can be used for entertainment.

In a similar way to Instagram, TikTok is a very powerful platform for promoting a wide range of products, be it clothing, music, film, beauty products, travel destinations, food and many other goods.

However, it should not be assumed that the app is only relevant for promotions, as it is only one part of the overall concept. There is a reason why there are more than a billion

profiles. Every user can find the content that suits them best, as there is a wide variety of different themes and styles of videos. While the primary aim of TikTok is to entertain, this does not mean that only shallow content is displayed. Its educational role is also remarkable, as everyone can find videos that may be useful to them. There are a thousand different channels to transfer some kind of knowledge to the consumers. By no means exhaustive, the videos on TikTok can help you with topics such as language learning, gardening, sewing, crafting, improving your lifestyle, cooking, exercising, self-improvement and many more. In addition, it provides an excellent platform for users to discover new things, for instance music they have never heard of before, art works and their history, books, films, series, useful tips.

In common with many social media platforms, TikTok also offers the possibility to send messages. Videos can be sent to the people we choose from within the app, but we also have the option to send the content to other social media.

### **WhatsApp**

WhatsApp was created in 2009, the brainchild of Brian Acton and Jan Koum. One of its main concepts is that there are no ads or games, so users can use the app quickly and conveniently without any difficulty. In 2014, Facebook became the owner of WhatsApp and at the same time gained an even larger user base. According to statistics, the app has one and a half billion users worldwide. It is used for both personal and business purposes (Pahwa 2023).

WhatsApp is designed for messaging itself, so it does not have a timeline the way Facebook or Instagram do. However, it lets users send pictures, videos, files, voice messages and various non-verbal components to the message recipients. Furthermore, it is possible to make audio and video calls, just as most social networking platforms offer.

### **Snapchat**

Snapchat, originally called Picaboo, was launched in 2011 (Fadiloglulari 2023). It was created with the idea that text messages and images should disappear in a short period of time (Cuofano 2024).

Evan Spiegel, CEO of Snapchat, once said the following about his invention: “Snapchat isn’t about capturing the traditional Kodak moment. It’s about communicating with the full range of human emotion – not just what appears to be pretty or perfect. Like when I think I’m good at imitating the face of a star-nosed mole, or if I want to show my friend the girl I have a crush on (it would be awkward if that got around), and when I’m away at college and miss my Mom...er...my friends.”



The app is most popular among teenagers and young adults, with 332 million total users (Cuofano 2024).

#### **1.4. Other online platforms**

Above, the history, structure and features of email, Facebook and Messenger, Instagram, TikTok, WhatsApp and Snapchat have been covered. These platforms are some of the most popular and widespread online communication platforms, with some of them exceeding a billion users. However, it is important to point out that there are a huge number of other applications that can (also) be used for communication. Many platforms have millions of users, connecting people all over the world.

Different websites and apps focus on different target groups or functions. The different online spaces can specifically target certain groups, such as people with a common geographical location, different age groups, video game enthusiasts or even religious communities. When it comes to functionality, these platforms can be used for language learning, socialising (making new friends or online dating), tutoring in certain subjects, playing online games with others, for business or travel, and many other purposes. The link that connects them all is the opportunity to engage in communication.

According to the data from the questionnaire on this topic, respondents use the following messaging services (in addition to those mentioned above): Viber, Telegram, iMessage, Discord.

From the above, it can be concluded that today's modern individuals are very familiar with and use a wide range of social networking platforms. The mentioned online services are only the most commonly and widely used, but in reality hundreds of others could be listed.

On these platforms, all is given for the possibility of using various non-verbal communication elements.

In the following, the ways in which people use and perceive these elements will be discussed in more detail.

## **PART 2**

### **2.1. The questionnaire**

The title of the present thesis is Non-verbal communication components on the Internet. For the given theme, an online questionnaire has been created to assess how and how often people use various online non-verbal communication elements and to gauge their attitudes and thoughts on the topic.

The questionnaire was made up of thirty parts, providing responses to thirty different types of data. At the end of the form, there was an additional section where the respondent could comment either on the topic or on the questionnaire itself. However, this was not made a compulsory element. This additional field was not the only part that was not made mandatory, as not everyone could necessarily answer all the questions, or might not have preferred to. Thus, the questionnaire has some questions that are marked as compulsory and others that the respondent could choose whether or not to answer. In this connection, not least of all, it can also be said that the empty fraction can also be regarded as data. In this context, not everyone necessarily understands the subject or has a specific opinion on certain issues. Therefore, those parts are left blank.

It is worth noting that the questionnaire was sent to respondents online instead of on paper forms. There are many reasons behind this: it saves time, it requires no financial investment, it gets to people faster and easier, and the data is then easily returned to the person responsible. Nowadays, every student in higher education has some kind of electronic device to connect them to the world. To take advantage of this situation, a questionnaire was sent to a large number of people. However, it could be completed by anyone other than students who wished to do so.

The questionnaire, as far as the language question is concerned, was designed in English and Hungarian. Given the student composition of the Ferenc Rakoczi II Transcarpathian Hungarian College of Higher Education, the questionnaire was given in Hungarian, but in order to allow other nationalities to participate, the questionnaire was published in a bilingual format. The structure was therefore set up in such a way that the English text was included first, followed by the Hungarian translation after the slash.

There were several types of questions, ranging from general data (such as age and gender) to personal opinions.

The questions and data collection sections of the questionnaire were as follows, in order:

1. Gender
2. Age
3. How often do you communicate with people online?
4. Which online platforms do you most frequently use for communication?
5. Which of the following non-verbal components do you use on the Internet?
6. Do you know the difference between emoticons and emojis?
7. Briefly explain the differences if your response to the previous question was yes.
8. If you use emoticons, which ones?
9. What is your opinion on emoticons?
10. If you use emojis, which ones do you use the most? (Please insert them!)
11. How often do you use emojis? (1 - never; 2 - rarely; 3 - sometimes; 4 - often; 5 - very often)
12. Do you use the same emojis with different conversation partners?
13. How are these used differently depending on who you are conversing with?
14. If you use GIFs, who do you send them to most often?
15. How often do you use GIFs? (1 - never; 2 - rarely; 3 - sometimes; 4 - often; 5 - very often)
16. If you use GIFs, why do you like them?
17. If you use stickers, how often? (1 - never; 2 - rarely; 3 - sometimes; 4 - often; 5 - very often)
18. If you use Bitmoji, how often? (1 - never; 2 - rarely; 3 - sometimes; 4 - often; 5 - very often)
19. If you use memes, who do you send them to most often?
20. How often do you send memes to others? (1 - never; 2 - rarely; 3 - sometimes; 4 - often; 5 - very often)
21. Why do you like to use memes?
22. Do you consider the use of TikTok and Instagram Reels videos as communication components?
23. Please explain your answer to the previous question!

24. Which of the following elements do you use in some cases?
25. If you use any of the above, for what purpose?
26. Do you think non-verbal components are useful for online communication?
27. Please explain your answer!
28. Have you ever experienced misunderstandings or misinterpretations in online communication due to the lack of non-verbal components? If yes, please explain!
29. In your opinion what are the benefits and drawbacks of incorporating non-verbal components into online communication?
30. Can non-verbal communication components strengthen online relationships or communities? Please explain!

As mentioned earlier, after the thirty questions, an extension entitled “Other comments, observations” was added.

The questionnaire was filled in by a total of fifty respondents and both English and Hungarian are represented in the responses for different people.

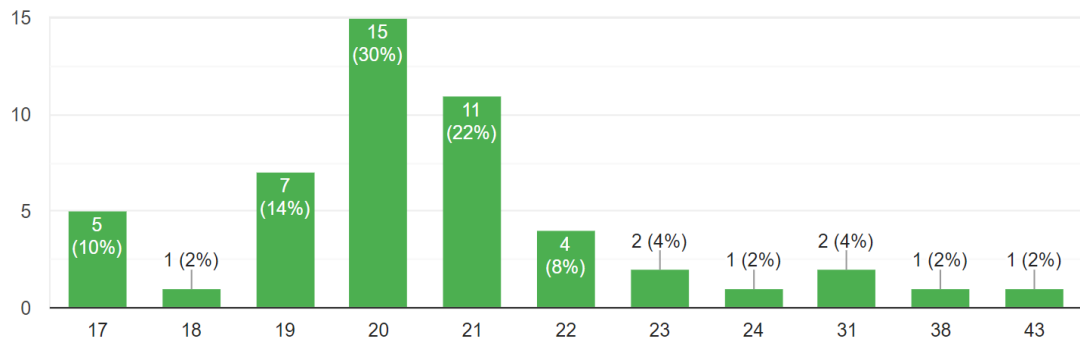
## **2.2. Data analysis**

The questionnaire's wide range of questions on this topic received varied responses. Examining the gender and age factor is also relevant in this regard. The female respondents significantly outnumber the male respondents, indicating that the data obtained are most representative of the attitudes of the female population towards the matter. Based on the responses obtained, a number of observations were made that illustrate the way people in the 21<sup>st</sup> century think about and use non-verbal communication components on the Internet.

To begin with, it is important to examine and present the gender and age data fields, as these are the data on which the other responses can be compared. Out of 50 respondents, 39 women and 11 men are represented, which in percentage terms means that 78% are women and 22% are men. The disproportion variable suggests that women are more likely to spend time helping others with their research. This statement may look harsh, however, the quantity and quality of the data suggest this conclusion. Nevertheless, it is worth adding that this research is not examining the gender specific responses, but the societal picture as a whole. After the field regarding gender follows the age field. From this it appears that the age of respondents ranges from 17 to 43 years. The former represents the teenager age group, while the latter represents the middle-aged demographic. Most of the data came from people

in their early 20s and the least from people aged 30 and over. Therefore, it can be said that the responses of Generation Z are the most illustrative of the different internet habits of today. The different responses by gender and age provide a deeper insight into people's attitudes towards different online platforms and non-verbal communication elements.

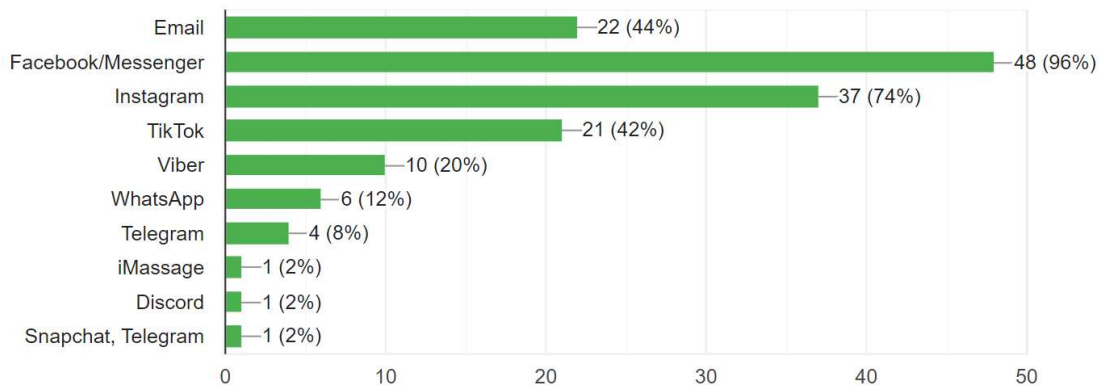
The following diagram shows the age distribution by number and percentage:



**Picture 6.** Age distribution. *Source: Self-made questionnaire.*

The following column illustrates how important and widespread communication on the Internet is today. When asked “How often do you communicate with people online?”, a fairly homogeneous data set was found. This translates into 96% of respondents who use online communication every day and only 4% (representing a total of two people) who chose to communicate online a few times a week. In response to this question, there were five factors to choose from, two of which have already been mentioned. None of the remaining three options were selected, demonstrating that the different age groups represented in the questionnaire rely heavily on online communication. However, it is not possible to determine how the older generation relates to this question, as the oldest respondent was 43 years old. Nevertheless, the responses from the age groups concerned show how important the Internet is in the daily life of modern society. It is the reason why it is possible to reach anyone, even from the other side of the world. Its easy, fast and reliable nature makes it understandable why so many people rely on this form of communication. Nowadays, it is more or less impossible to live without the Internet, as workplaces, educational institutions, family and friends all use it for different reasons.

A number of online platforms were discussed in the theoretical framework. Respondents were asked to choose from a list of platforms. They were given the option to select more than one, as well as the option to enter their own, which were not included in the options.

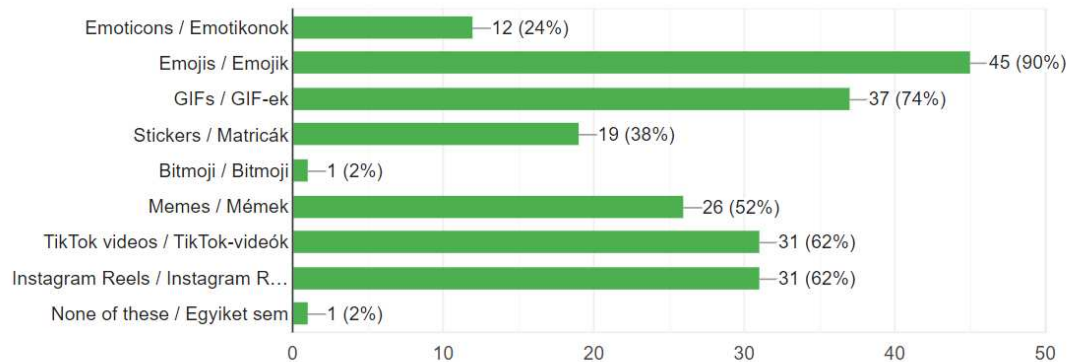


**Picture 7.** Online platforms. *Source: Self-made questionnaire.*

As the illustration demonstrates, Facebook, and with it Messenger, is the overall leader in the most widely used online platforms. With 96% of people using these related applications, there is no doubt that Facebook continues to enjoy unbroken popularity. Next in line is Instagram, with 74% use rates. In third place is Email, which is used mostly in formal spaces, given that in many workplaces and educational institutions it is the primary means of communication. It is of course also used by other places and groups in these locations. TikTok is not far behind Email, with 44% of people using the former and 42% the latter. While not everyone necessarily uses TikTok to communicate, some people use it for their own entertainment, whether they just watch the videos on it or make them themselves. Viber and WhatsApp have also been added to the list of options. However, these two applications are significantly less used than the social media platforms mentioned previously. There were also some online platforms that had been written by the data contributors themselves. These include Telegram, Snapchat, iMessage and Discord.

The next question box focuses on the online non-verbal communication components themselves, more specifically on which elements people use and to what extent. As with online platforms, the history and characteristics of these non-verbal tools have been explained in the theoretical part. The elements have been listed as follows: emoticons, emojis, GIFs, stickers, Bitmoji, memes, TikTok videos, Instagram Reels. The last option gave the respondent the option to indicate that they do not use any of the listed choices. The responses revealed that emojis are used by a large number of people, with 90% of respondents ticking this option. The occurrence of the other elements varied according to the data received. These are used in the following order, from most to least occurrences: emojis, GIFs, an equal ratio of TikTok videos and Instagram Reels, then memes, stickers, emoticons and lastly Bitmoji. One person marked that they do not use any of these. The equal

representation of TikTok videos and Instagram Reels proves that the two are very closely related and have similar features.



**Picture 8.** The use of non-verbal components. *Source: Self-made questionnaire.*

As can be seen, the first two options to appear are the emoticons and the emojis. The question with regard to these issues was whether respondents knew the difference between the two, because although they may look similar, they are not the same. 58% of people, which is the majority, said no, while the remaining 42% said yes.

People who answered yes to the previous question were then asked to describe in their own words the difference between the two components. As this was an open question, the style and length of the answers varied, with each person giving their own unique insight. Moreover, this was a field that was not set as mandatory, which resulted in not all of those who answered yes expressing their thoughts on the matter. Regardless, 16 people wrote down their own perceptions of the difference between emoticons and emojis. The following are some examples of responses to the question:

- *We type the emoticons, they are not predefined.*
- *An emoticon is a small sign used in writing, e.g. :), and an emoji is a small pictorial emoter.*
- *Emoticons are made by using letters, numbers, punctuation marks, while emojis are small little pictures.*
- *There are more emojis and they have a different structure. They are more popular than emoticons, which also aim to convey emotions or moods, but in a much simpler form. You could say emoticons are the ancestors of emojis*
  - *Emoticons tend to be combinations of text characters, while emojis are colourful, more detailed images or symbols.*
  - *One consists only of “symbols used in text”, e.g. colon, parentheses, etc. The emoji is a digitally generated graphic emoter.*

- *The emoticon is made up of the symbols you find on the keyboard, while the emoji is pre-made.*

- *Emojis are colourful, emoticons are made up of more geometric figures.*

The explanations given above prove to be true, so to speak, and correspond to the definition of the two elements.

In terms of emoticons, respondents use the following:

- :)
- :(
- :/
- <3
- :D
- XD / xD / xd
- ))
- :\*
- :O / :o

On the question of the respondents' opinions on emoticons, a variety of responses were received. Some data were presented in a positive light, but some were negatively portrayed. Some responses received from respondents to this issue:

- *I don't use them anymore, I think they are "out of fashion".*
- *Very cute*
- *I prefer to use them, because they convey emotions well.*
- *I do not use them, mainly because I use emojis instead. Besides that, I consider it not to be 'cool'.*
- *I think that the use of emoticons can be very helpful in understanding the emotional context*
- *I rarely use it, it's not very fashionable*
- *They make emails more pleasant. Especially workplace ones.*
- *I prefer them and use them more often than emojis*
- *Sometimes it takes you back a little to the "analogue world". I really like them and my friends use them too.*

As it is obvious, opinions on it differ. Although some people are very fond of them, some think they are out of fashion.



With the case of emojis, parallels can be drawn in terms of their frequency of occurrence. In most instances, they are those that symbolize the human face and with it various emotions. According to the respondents, other types are certainly also used, such as the heart, some kind of hand signs, animals, natural phenomena. Their use depends on the context. In general, the use of emojis is distributed in the following proportions: 40.8% very often, 34.7% often, 16.3% sometimes, 8.2% rarely and none chose never to use them.

The next pair of questions asked whether people use the same emojis with different people, and if not, how do they use them differently depending on who they are communicating with? The data shows that 63.3% of people use the same emoji regardless of who they are communicating with, 34.7% said they use them selectively and 2% said they sometimes use the same emoji and sometimes not. Based on the explained answers, the following can be used as a demonstration:

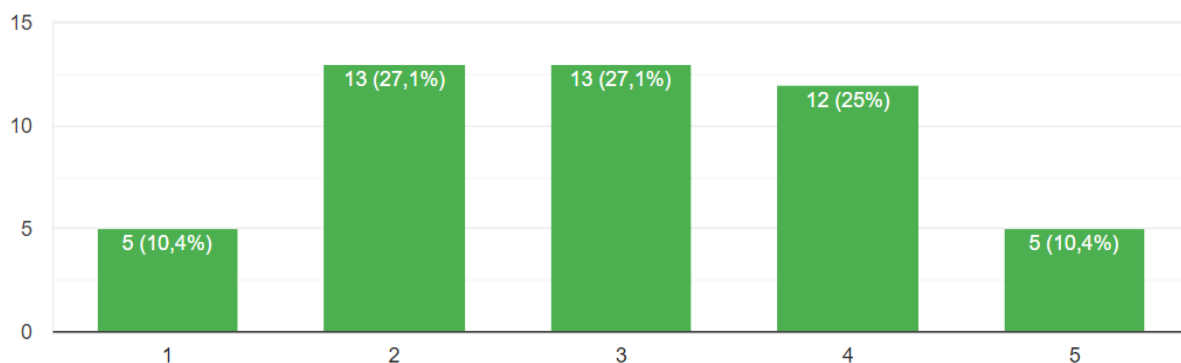
- *I use it differently depending on the level of familiarity.*
- *Not everyone can understand, because I use it lightly (for fun)*
- *I use them more often with people who are in a closer relationship, while I use them less often with older people or people who are more distant, or only some of them in terms of distance.*
- *I use the same ones with my age group, I don't use anything with older age groups, just plain text.*
- *Some people consider certain emojis to be inappropriate; some people do not use emojis, in this case I try not to use too. Some emojis are created for chatting with close ones.*
- *I send a closer person more "emotional" emojis e.g. heart*
- *With older people, with strangers, I don't use the same emojis I use with my friends, because they wouldn't understand them.*
- *I use a lot of emojis ironically so it would be inappropriate to send them to some people.*

The following non-verbal communication component to be analysed is the GIF. In the previous section it was stated that 74% of the respondents use GIFs, and this group was asked to whom they send these. The data showed that the majority of people send GIFs to their friends most often. The next most popular category is family members, followed by partners and lastly colleagues. Regarding the frequency of use of these elements, 6.1% of respondents use them very often, 18.4% often, 40.8% sometimes, 28.6% rarely and 6.1%

never. But why do people like GIFs? The responses reflect the following opinions: they are more expressive than emojis, they usually recreate the same exact face and reaction that i want to convey, they can represent a situation or an emotion better or even show memes to give a better response to something, they are funny and can express one’s attitude in a sarcastic way, they are humorous.

Given their similarities, Bitmoji and stickers can be discussed in the same paragraph. These are used much less frequently than emojis, for example. In terms of specific numbers, Bitmoji is not used very often by any of the respondents, whereas 80.9% never use it. Stickers are somewhat more widely used, with data showing that 37.5% of people never use them, 33.3% rarely, 8.3% sometimes, 12.5% often and 8.3% very often when communicating online.

Memes are relatively popular, with 52% of respondents using them at some interval. As with the results on the data on GIFs, people send memes to friends most often, followed by family members to a lesser extent, then partners, and finally colleagues. The frequency of their use in communication is as follows (from never to very often):



**Picture 9.** The occurrence of memes. *Source: Self-made questionnaire.*

As with GIFs, the question of why the respondent likes to use these components has also appeared in the topic of memes. One of the most common points is that memes are funny, they make the conversation more cheerful and interesting. Therefore, one of the main reasons why they are so popular is the humour they convey. The next most important factor is that they may present some sort of relatable situation, or perhaps communicate some specific truth. Last but not least, it can also be used to unite people, groups of people, as a certain background knowledge is necessary to understand many memes.

In the next round, respondents were asked whether or not they consider the use of TikTok videos and Instagram Reels to be communication elements. Those who answered

yes were in the lead, with 78% choosing yes and only 22% answering no. This gives the conclusion that videos can also function as a communication element. As with most of the open questions, there were different answers as to why or why not respondents consider these types of videos as online communication components. Among the many responses, the following can be highlighted:

- *We can find out things about the person we are talking to that we may not have known or thought to ask. Or even express their feelings.*
- *Sometimes a video says everything I have to say and all it takes is an emoji next to the video and the person knows what I mean or why they got it.*
- *TikToks and Reels can be counted as communication components, because many of them have some type of text on them along with the video that can convey the message that I want to send.*
- *They are not very meaningful, but it's a way to keep in touch.*
- *It's a waste of time, not worth the money, but the comments under the videos always win our approval, especially if the humour is very different from the usual.*
- *Watching Reels videos we perceive some information about other users; creating our own videos is like a kind of response on previously seen pieces.*
- *Instagram Reels contain some kind of content if I send it to someone I usually communicate the idea that the same happens to me or that I can relate to it and so on.*
  - *Because this could also be a good topic for discussion*
  - *Because we cannot express our thoughts in concrete terms*
  - *They can be communication components, since they can demonstrate situations that might be telling something familiar or important to the other person. It can generate more topics to talk about, which makes the conversation more interesting.*
- *Videos are not communication tools.*

As can be seen from the responses, there are some individuals who do not consider videos to be an element of communication, but the majority believe that they are.

Regarding textual paralanguage, it can be observed that a significant percentage of people use one of these elements to communicate on the Internet. Only 10% of the respondents indicated that they do not use any of these non-verbal tools, in other words, they

do not pay much attention to them. In response to the question of which of the listed components are used in certain cases, the following could be selected: multiple exclamation marks, multiple question marks, ellipsis points, exclamation words, all capital letters. In addition, the option mentioned above was that the person completing the questionnaire does not use either of these options, resulting in only 10% of respondents clicking on this checkbox.

Out of the five options to be marked, respondents' answers indicate that multiple question marks are the most frequent in their non-verbal communication, more specifically, 66% of respondents use them in certain situations. Not far behind with 64%, exclamation words are in second place in terms of the number of times of occurrence. In third place are the ellipsis points, which implies that 54% of respondents take the opportunity to include these characters in their written message. Statistics show that multiple exclamation marks come next in line, used by less than half (48%) of completers. The least commonly used elements are all capital letters, with 44% of appearances.

Those who answered that they use some form of textual paralanguage elements were asked about the purposes for which they chose to apply them. Some of the responses received are short, some are longer, but all are useful in terms of better understanding of why these components can be useful. The following list illustrates the explanations related to the topic, which serve as examples for a deeper understanding:

- *I always use them to emphasise a particular point. Repeated !/?- is a way of deepening the statement or question. I use exclamation words to characterise the reaction more clearly and capital letters to achieve a more elevated tone.*

- *I use it for emphasis and to enhance the effect.*

- *Exclamation marks - if I'm very excited*

- *Question marks - if I'm very confused*

- *Ellipsis - if I want to seem mysterious or if I just simply don't have words*

- *Exclamation words - I use them sometimes if I don't want to reply but I also don't want to leave someone on seen, but these can also convey awkwardness in some cases*

- *All capital letters - if I'm very excited about something, or if I want to seem like I'm yelling*

- *To intensify my reaction/message*

- *The multiple question marks, mostly to show that something shocked me.*

*Ellipsis points to show how I would sound in real life after finishing a sentence*

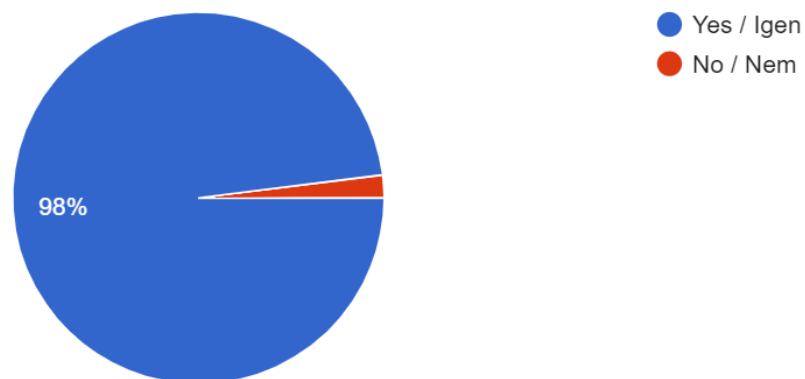
*Exclamation words to make the sentences shorter*

*All capital letters to show that I'm upset*

- *I use them all. When I want to emphasize something (!!!!), when I really don't understand something and I'm impatient for an answer (????), "I have nothing more to say" (.....), I use "haha" for sarcasm, and when I'm really excited or angry about a situation and I use capital letters to explain it, or when I'm talking to someone and I'm angry at them.*

- *I use them to emphasize my feelings about certain topics.*

The next point asked in the questionnaire is the following: Do you think non-verbal components are useful for online communication? The affirmative answer was the clear leader, as shown in the diagram.



**Picture 10.** Percentage of data. *Source: Self-made questionnaire.*

The explanations given to the question were as follows:

- *It adds colour to non-verbal communication.*
- *A sentence written without an emoji or other symbols is much harder to interpret, if there are elements next to it, we can better imagine what the person is feeling, because we can't see their face, so we can't read it, they make up for it a bit.*
- *They are a way to make your words more meaningful, convey emotions, just like non-verbal communication does in real life.*

- *Because they better convey the emotions we would have shown in person with facial expressions, body movements, etc.*
- *Non-verbal elements clarify the person's attitude toward the information and help to avoid any misunderstanding in interpretation.*
- *Yes, because our messages can convey more information with a few emojis.*
- *Yes, it's definitely useful, because it makes it easier to know how a person is feeling. It also gives a much more positive image and mood.*
- *By using non-verbal elements, we can better express our feelings in the online space.*
- *They are useful, since they make the conversation more engaging and joyful.*
- *They can make the message more colourful, unique and even personal. They can also make it more understandable.*

Can misunderstandings occur in online communication because of the lack of non-verbal elements? By asking this question, respondents were encouraged to reflect on this issue and express their views. Some people stated that they had never experienced being misunderstood or perhaps misunderstanding the person they were talking to because of the absence of various elements. However, those who have encountered such a situation have put it this way:

- *Yes, there are some people who interpret certain expressions differently or who may not be aware of the irony.*
- *I have. I misunderstood something and my messages were misunderstood as well. People think that I am too strict, but when I put emojis it changes. Moreover, I frequently use sarcasm, and without emojis people perceive this like offend.*
- *Of course. Sometimes it is difficult to understand someone in an online conversation rather than in person. Non-verbal components are helpful in conveying the meaning.*
- *Yes, I meant it as a joke and it didn't turn out to be due to its absence.*
- *Yes, of course. Sometimes it is hard not to misunderstand someone with the lack of these non-verbal components, especially, if you don't know someone that much.*

- *Yes, it was not read in the way I intended and became a conflict.*
- *Yes. There were times when I didn't understand whether the person was asking or saying something. Or, in some cases, I couldn't tell if they were sending me a message with ironic/sarcastic intent or not.*

What are the benefits and drawbacks of incorporating non-verbal components into online communication? There were different answers to this question:

- *It has the advantage of being easier to understand, it makes us better informed, it brings us closer to the person, it emphasises. The disadvantage is that their excessive use can sometimes lead to impersonal communication, for example, too many emoji bother me.*

- *Benefits - cute, substitute for verbal communication, easy to use, saves time*

*Drawbacks - mostly informal, can be misunderstood, the interpretation depends on the person*

- *Usage makes communication more interesting and colourful. Disadvantage is that it replaces whole sentences, and people are not able make their own bigger messages anymore.*

- *I don't think there are any drawbacks of the non-verbal components.*
- *The benefits are evident. There is a drawback, in incorporating non-verbal elements into a conversation one might not know the exact meaning of an element and might use it incorrectly, which would lead to further misunderstandings.*

- *Benefits: they make the individual's texts understandable; they create more topics to talk about; they make the conversation engaging and interesting.*

*Drawbacks: they can make you feel like the other person is pretending some feelings.*

- *It can be an advantage to make the conversation personal. So you can adapt their use to the style of the person you are talking to. The disadvantage may be that not everyone can understand the different elements, so misunderstandings or even insults may occur.*

The last question in the questionnaire asked whether non-verbal communication components can strengthen online relationships or communities, and why or why not?

- *Yes, because they help us to get to know each other better, to get to know each other's interests.*
- *I think yes, it conveys emotions, or for example if you only use certain emojis or other signs for a certain person it can become personal, or only a certain community understands it then it can connect them.*
- *Yes, inside jokes can be created by using this.*
- *I think yes. Using non-verbal elements, we add extra meaning to our messages and look open to others which might strengthen our relationships.*
- *They can. With memes for example people can show their humour to others which can strengthen relations online. While also said above that it makes the conversation feel alive. It can show the person online an image of how you might have reacted to that message in real life.*
- *I wouldn't necessarily say they strengthen it, I'd say they just brighten it up.*
- *They can strengthen it because they can be used to indicate that you are part of a certain group. For example, young people who spend a lot of time on the internet have a particular non-verbal use of gestures. Or, for example, a meme can show that we are fans of certain films, series, music, and thus belong to certain groups.*
- *I am in a lot of online groups and we share memes that only we understand.*

### **2.3. The results of the questionnaire**

The first and one of the most important findings is that people use a variety of non-verbal communication components on the Internet. This may be an obvious point, but it is certainly confirmed by the data obtained from the questionnaire. Their use is enabled by the fact that the vast majority of people use the internet every single day for communication. This is certainly a process that has started in the last decade, since before then not so many people took the advantage of the opportunities offered by the digital world.

When it comes to online platforms, the top three are Facebook, Instagram and Email. The latter is included here because many students use it during their years in higher education. In these and in all the other spaces occur the non-verbal elements, of which emojis are by far the most popular and most frequently used. Not everyone can tell the difference



between emojis and their predecessor, the emoticon, and many people do not know what characterises each or how they differ. In addition, emojis are used by every single data provider, to a different extent and at different times.

If the user wants to express something that emojis cannot, memes, GIFs, TikTok videos or Instagram Reels are a great way to achieve this. Memes are best associated with humour, with laughter, and therefore they are truly expressive. However, the other elements listed are also great for adding colour to the communication. As the responses from those who completed the questionnaire show, there are a number of reasons why so many people like to use them. They have an emotional charge, they are tools of expression, they help people to express themselves better, they can emphasise a certain information, they convey relatable content, they make the message more understandable. This shows how important it is to have and use them nowadays.

The absence of these components within a message can also lead to misunderstandings in online communication. Because one cannot see the face, body language or hear the voice of the person being spoken to, it can often be difficult to understand what they are really thinking of feeling. This can lead to misunderstandings, which is not exactly a positive outcome.

The respondents gave many examples of the advantages of using non-verbal communication elements on the Internet, but also the disadvantages. Some people are bothered by their overuse, not everybody understands them, they are not appropriate for all places or communication partners.

The answers to the questionnaire prove the validity of the hypothesis. Non-verbal communication components facilitate conversations that are not face-to-face. Their use allows the message to be clearer.

Overall, these components are very popular and many people around the world use them for various purposes.

## GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

It is impossible for the modern mind to live without technology. There are a wide variety of such devices that are part of people's everyday lives, but keeping in touch and connected to the world is done through different communication tools.

Smartphones, computers, laptops and other devices provide the space for a variety of applications and web interfaces. The most popular are Facebook, Messenger, Instagram, Email, TikTok, WhatsApp, Snapchat, Viber, Telegram. However, there are countless other platforms in addition to these. The popularity of apps varies between geographical areas. Some are used in high numbers in certain parts of the world and low in numbers in other places. Nevertheless, there is no doubt about how important they are for many people at the present time. The majority of people communicate online on a daily basis. This can be for a variety of reasons, such as easy access to individuals living far away, saving time and energy, delivering information to more people in a short time. This means that the message can reach any corner of the world in a matter of seconds. It is possible to communicate with members of different social groups on the Internet: family, friends, colleagues, teachers, or people with similar interests. Therefore, it is easy to make and maintain contact with anyone.

The above platforms have a number of features that facilitate and enhance non-verbal online communication. The emoticons are among the oldest of these, dating back to the 1980s. However, their use is no longer as widespread as other non-verbal components. Their relatives, the emojis – small pictorial characters – are much more commonly used. Other picturesque elements include stickers, avatars, memes and GIFs with a moving image structure. In the moving footage category, TikTok videos and Instagram Reels are the most popular. The so-called textual paralanguage group includes multiple exclamation and question marks, ellipsis points, exclamation words, all capital letters, parentheses.

The previously listed components are so highly popular among Internet users for a number of reasons. According to the replies of the people who filled in the questionnaire, these elements brighten the mood, emphasise the message and make it clearer. Memes and videos also have the function of expressing a person's situation, thoughts or emotional state. Thus they are great means of expression.

The nature of communication on the Internet changes over time. But there is no doubt that the various non-verbal components are essential to online conversation today.

## РЕЗЮМЕ

Сучасний індивід не може жити без технологій. Існує велика різноманітність таких пристроїв, які є частиною повсякденного життя людей, але підтримувати зв'язок і бути на зв'язку зі світом можна за допомогою різних засобів комунікації.

Смартфони, комп'ютери, ноутбуки та інші пристрої надають простір для різноманітних додатків та веб-інтерфейсів. Найпопулярнішими з них є Facebook, Messenger, Instagram, Email, TikTok, WhatsApp, Snapchat, Viber, Telegram. Однак, крім них, існує незліченна кількість інших платформ. Популярність додатків варіюється в різних географічних регіонах. Деякі з них використовуються у великій кількості в одних частинах світу, а в інших - ні. Тим не менш, немає жодних сумнівів у тому, наскільки вони важливі для багатьох людей в даний час. Більшість людей спілкуються онлайн щодня. Це може бути пов'язано з різними причинами, такими як легкий доступ до людей, які живуть далеко, економія часу та енергії, донесення інформації до більшої кількості людей за короткий час. Це означає, що повідомлення може досягти будь-якого куточка світу за лічені секунди. В Інтернеті можна спілкуватися з членами різних соціальних груп: сім'єю, друзями, колегами, вчителями або людьми зі схожими інтересами. Тому легко встановити і підтримувати контакт з будь-ким.

Вищезгадані платформи мають низку функцій, які полегшують і покращують невербальну комунікацію в Інтернеті. Емотикони є одними з найстаріших з них, що з'явилися ще в 1980-х роках. Однак їхнє використання вже не таке поширене, як інших невербальних компонентів. Їхні родичі, емоджі – маленькі піктограми – використовуються набагато частіше. Інші мальовничі елементи включають стікери, аватарки, меми та GIF-файли з рухомою структурою зображення. У категорії рухомих кадрів найпопулярнішими є відео з TikTok та Instagram Reels. До так званої текстової парамовної групи належать численні знаки оклику та питання, багатокрапки, еліпси, вигуки, всі великі літери, дужки.

Перераховані вище компоненти користуються такою великою популярністю серед інтернет-користувачів з ряду причин. Згідно з відповідями людей, які заповнювали анкету, ці елементи покращують настрій, підкреслюють повідомлення та роблять його зрозумілішим. Меми та відео також мають функцію вираження ситуації, думок або емоційного стану людини. Таким чином, вони є чудовими засобами самовираження.

Характер спілкування в Інтернеті з часом змінюється. Але немає жодних сумнівів, що різні невербальні компоненти є важливими для онлайн-спілкування сьогодні.

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