

**REJUVENATING SCRIPT FORMAT: THE USE OF EMOJI IN  
SCRIPTWRITING.  
A CASE STUDY ON "KENAPA GUE?" IN OTT VIDIO SERIES**

**<sup>1</sup>Baskoro Adi Wuryanto, <sup>2</sup>Eurico Kevin Pratama**

<sup>1</sup>baskoro.adi@lecturer.umn.ac.id

Program Studi Film, Fakultas Seni dan Desain,  
Universitas Multimedia Nusantara

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**ABSTRACT**

*This research explores the rejuvenation of script format through the innovative incorporation of emojis in scriptwriting. Despite their widespread use in digital communication, emojis have not been conventionally integrated into film scripts. This study aims to investigate the strategic use of emojis as visual elements to enrich communication and evoke emotions effectively in the film narrative. A key case study analyzed in this research is the Indonesian web series, "Kenapa Gue?", produced by Vidio Originals. This series dominantly capture lives on computer and smartphone screens, adeptly weaving together various digital platforms to craft a captivating mystery. Emojis play a pivotal role in "Kenapa Gue?" by visually conveying character emotions and enhancing the authenticity of dialogue. Through an in-depth examination of the impact of including emojis in scripts, this study examines the potential benefits and challenges. By conducting surveys and analyzing the case study, we explore how the creative integration of emojis fosters a more engaging and collaborative environment during production, ultimately elevating the film narrative. This research introduces a novel perspective on scriptwriting, highlighting the seamless blend of emojis with contemporary storytelling. By advocating for the inclusion of emojis as expressive tools within scripts, this study positions emojis as valuable assets in the film industry, rejuvenating the art of scriptwriting and elevating cinematic expression. In conclusion, this study bridges the gap in conventional scriptwriting practices, inspiring filmmakers and scriptwriters to harness the communicative power of emojis. Embracing emojis as an integral part of the script format unlocks exciting possibilities for invigorating storytelling in the digital age, making it a key catalyst for modern cinematic innovation.*

**Keywords:** *Scriptwriting; Script Format; Emoji; Ott; Web-Series.*

## ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi peremajaan format naskah dengan adanya pemakaian emoji dalam penulisan naskah. Meskipun penggunaannya luas dalam komunikasi digital, emoji belum diintegrasikan secara konvensional ke dalam naskah film. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menyelidiki strategi penggunaan emoji sebagai elemen visual untuk memperkaya komunikasi dan membangkitkan emosi secara efektif dalam narasi film. Studi kasus utama yang dianalisis dalam penelitian ini adalah serial web berbahasa Indonesia, "Kenapa Gue?", yang diproduksi oleh Vidio Originals. Serial ini secara dominan menampilkan kehidupan di layar komputer dan ponsel pintar, dengan lihai merangkai berbagai platform digital untuk menciptakan sebuah misteri yang menawan. Emoji memainkan peran penting dalam "Kenapa Gue?" dengan menyampaikan emosi karakter secara visual dan meningkatkan keaslian dialog. Melalui kajian mendalam mengenai dampak penyertaan emoji dalam skrip, penelitian ini mengkaji potensi manfaat dan tantangannya. Dengan melakukan survei dan menganalisis studi kasus, dieksplorasi bagaimana integrasi kreatif emoji menumbuhkan lingkungan yang lebih menarik dan kolaboratif selama produksi, yang pada akhirnya meningkatkan narasi film. Penelitian ini memperkenalkan perspektif baru tentang penulisan naskah, menyoroti perpaduan antara emoji dan pengisahan cerita kontemporer. Dengan menganjurkan penyertaan emoji sebagai alat ekspresi dalam naskah, penelitian ini memposisikan emoji sebagai aset berharga dalam industri film, meremajakan seni penulisan naskah, dan meningkatkan ekspresi sinematik. Kesimpulannya, penelitian ini menjembatani kesenjangan dalam praktik penulisan naskah konvensional, menginspirasi pembuat film dan penulis naskah untuk memanfaatkan kekuatan komunikatif emoji. Menggunakan emoji sebagai bagian integral dari format naskah, membuka kemungkinan menarik untuk memperkuat penyampaian cerita di era digital, menjadikannya hal utama bagi inovasi sinematik modern.

**Kata Kunci:** Penulisan-Naskah, Format-Naskah, Emoji, OTT, Web-Series

## INTRODUCTION

Screenplay is a way of storytelling using descriptive pictures, and dialogue, contextualized within a dramatic structure (Field, 2005, p.20). Since screenplay is the base for film producers to approximate production schedule, budget, and division of tasks regarding all departments in film

production. Having a finished film screenplay(script) is the first step to create a film. (Honthaner, 2010, p.79). Film script will be read and analyzed by the film director. The Director then will explore the script's fullest creative potential before dividing tasks to all other departments (Rabiger & Hurbis - Cherrier, 2020, p.112). Therefore,

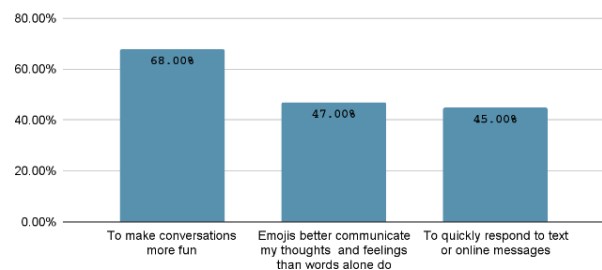
the way a film script is written can influence the creative interpretation of film makers. Most professional script writers submit Scripts that are formatted properly using *Courier Final Draft* font in 90-120 uniform sized pages (Honthaner, 2010, p.79). A proper script should be constructed with a *scene heading*, *visual description*, and *character dialogue*. (Riley, 2021, P.5-6). The script format mentioned in Christopher Riley's book *Hollywood Standard* has been practiced in many film productions. The format has been a default in many modern script writing applications like *Final Draft*, *Writer Duet*, and *Celtx*. This format is an emulator of a typewriter, a typing machine that's commonly used before *digital computers* are generally used by most of the population.

However, as a film is a miniature of an ever changing human life, the way a screenwriter writes the screenplay also evolves. In modern digital society, digital text messages have become a common way of communication. One part of digital text messages is emoji. Emoji are pictograms that can appear in text messages, email, and social media platforms (Stark & Crawford, 2015, p.1). Emoji offers a way of expressing emotion in text based communication by adding pictures that represent emotional expression. Adobe (2022) did an online research regarding the reason people in the United States use emoji in their communication model. 68% of the respondents believe that emojis in communication can make conversations more fun. 47% of the respondents answered emojis better communicate their feelings and

thoughts than using words alone. 45% of the respondents use emojis to quickly respond to text or online messages.

Reasons to use emojis in communications according to emoji users in the United States as of April 2022

Opened from Statista - 11th of September 2023



**Image 1:** Adobe's online research regarding reasons people use emoji in their communication in the United States as of April 2022. (Source: Statista)

In a story of modern society, the depiction of emoji in the character's digital messaging activity is also apparent. Vidio Original Series' *Kenapa Gue?* was released in 2021. The series told a story about a retaliation to a group of bullies, after a bullied student, Danu, committed suicide in the online classroom session. The bullies were later hunted down by a mysterious Figure who threatens to take their lives, or keeps them alive but these bullies must commit social suicide by exposing their darkest secret, which eventually will kill them also. In the series *Kenapa Gue?*, *text messaging* using emoji have become a part of the character's action. The research is trying to examine the impact of emojis usage in *Kenapa Gue* character interaction. By doing this research, the researchers expect to answer "What's the potential benefit and challenges by using emojis in character interaction in Vidio Original Series' *Kenapa Gue?* (2021)?"

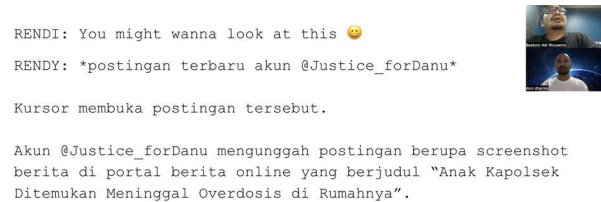
## METHODOLOGY

This research employs a multifaceted methodology to investigate the incorporation of emojis in scriptwriting for the screen-life series "Kenapa Gue?" on Vidio OTT. The methodology includes script analysis and in-depth interviews with key stakeholders of creative aspect of the script that will be affected by the use of emojis: the director, actors/ actresses, and editor. The researchers can gain access and interview the professionals and important figures in these departments, they are:

1. Dom Dharmo, film director and the series director of *Kenapa Gue?* (2021).
2. Susilo Badar, an actor and prolific Indonesian acting coach who worked on big movies, such as: *Tenggelamnya Kapal Van der Wijck* (2013), *Suzanna* film series (2018-2023), and many more.
3. Herman Panca, a film editor with broad range of films, from box office films like *A Man Called Ahok* (2018), to festival-darling international films such as: *Bunohan* (2013),

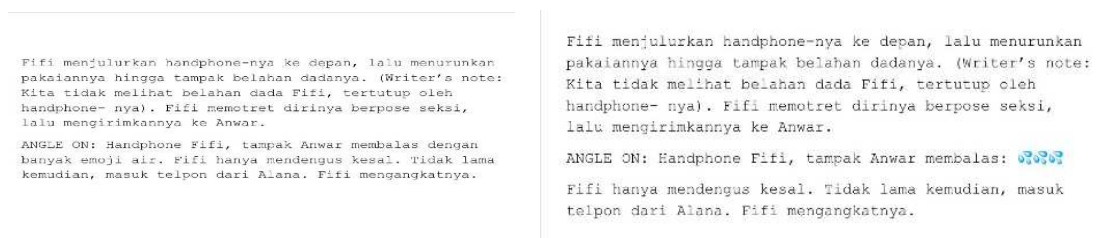
*Postcards from the Zoo* (2011), and many more.

4. Teddy Soeriaatmadja, an award winning and prominent Indonesian film director with notable works such as: *Lovely Man* (2011), *Berbalas Kejam* (2022).



**Figure 2:** Interview with Dom Darmo. Director of Vidio Original, *Kenapa Gue?* (2021). (Source: Personal research documentation)

We include a portion of the research Exhibit, as shown in Figure 3 below. The researchers presented this Exhibit to the interviewee and discussed the context of emojis in scriptwriting. The interviewee viewed a script excerpt with described emojis and a script excerpt with emojis attached to the script.



**Figure 3:** Some part of research Exhibit (Source: personal research documentation)

Content analysis was applied to the script to examine the strategic integration of emojis. Stakeholders were contacted and

invited to participate in interviews following the script analysis. The interviews were conducted in Bahasa Indonesia via

recorded Zoom sessions. Ethical considerations included obtaining informed consent from interviewees and ensuring the protection of privacy and confidentiality. This methodology integrates content analysis, script examination, and qualitative in-depth interviews to comprehensively explore the use of emojis in scriptwriting. The objective is to uncover insights from key stakeholders and establish a robust foundation for understanding the creative and narrative implications of emoji integration within the storytelling context. This comprehensive methodology ensures both rigor and depth in investigating how emojis enhance communication and emotional expression in film scripts and how they are perceived by industry experts.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

During the interviews, researchers provide five different Exhibits for the interviewees to respond. Researchers discuss the comparison of the script formats, where the researchers and the interviewees discuss script excerpts, one with described emojis, and one with emoji put in the script (as shown in Figure 4). Each interviewee individually gives the researchers their interpretation regarding the script displayed and how the emojis' apparent in script format affect their creative process.

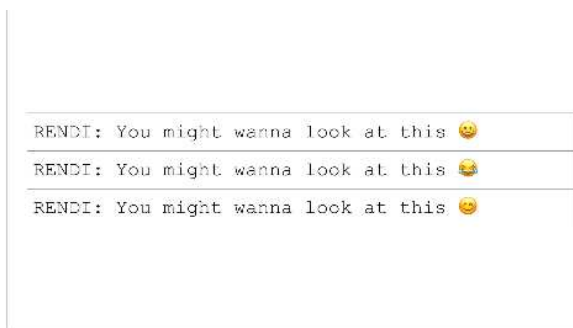
Descriptive
<p>RENDI: You might wanna look at this *emoji senyum*</p> <p>RENDI: *postingan terbaru akun @Justice_forDanu*</p> <p>Kursor membuka postingan tersebut.</p> <p>Akun @Justice_forDanu mengunggah postingan berupa screenshot berita di portal berita online yang berjudul "Anak Kapolsek Ditemukan Meninggal Overdosis di Rumahnya".</p>
Emojis
<p>RENDI: You might wanna look at this 😊</p> <p>RENDI: *postingan terbaru akun @Justice_forDanu*</p> <p>Kursor membuka postingan tersebut.</p> <p>Akun @Justice_forDanu mengunggah postingan berupa screenshot berita di portal berita online yang berjudul "Anak Kapolsek Ditemukan Meninggal Overdosis di Rumahnya".</p>

**Figure 3:** Comparative script Exhibit 1.

(Source: Personal research documentation)

In the Exhibit 1, as shown on Figure 3, Dom Darmo as the director of *Kenapa Gue? (2021)* stated that the descriptive format without any emoji apparent is more familiar and conventional to the filmmakers nowadays. But, Dom also mentions that the filmmakers will adapt with a film script using emojis in the future. For Susilo Badar the usage of emoji in the first Exhibit will not hinder the actor's creative process. The Actor still has to achieve the same understanding with the

film director and acting coach regarding how he/she will act in front of the camera. Herman Panca, a professional editor, thinks the emoji's apparent in the Exhibit compress the possibilities of interpreting character imagination. Panca also states emoji interpretation is relative to its socio-cultural context. Teddy Soeriaatmadja as a film director sees emoji in Exhibit 1 diminish the tonality of a story written by a script writer. For Teddy, emoji on a daily basis are associated with fun and playful interaction. He stated that the fun & playful nature of emoji may enhance the tonality of the stories if the script writer also meant to tell a fun & playful story via script.

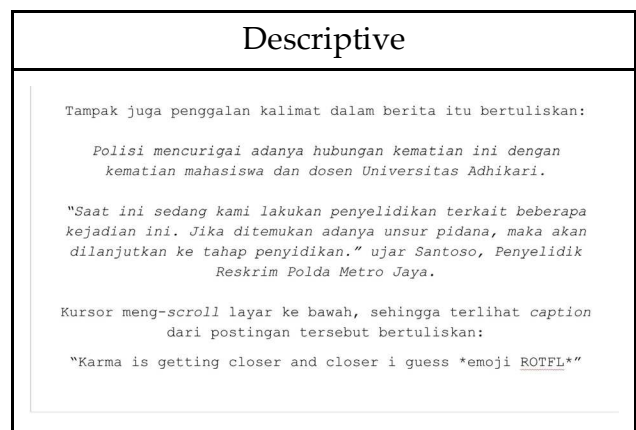


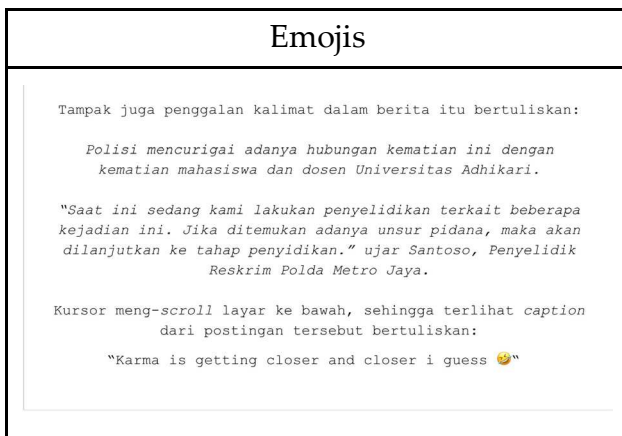
**Figure 4:** Comparative script Exhibit 2.  
(Source: Personal research documentation)

In Exhibit 2, Researchers provide a set of almost identical text dialogue as displayed in Figure 5. The identical text dialogue then imbued with three different emojis at the end. Dom Darmo stated that different emojis will impact the interpretation of the actor regarding the emotion that character experiences in film. Susilo Badar, also has similiar opinion in response to this Exhibit. For Badar, there's three types of smiling: the one with the character's teeth apparent, without the

character's teeth apparent, and a smile only with the character's eye movement. Badar believes emojis facilitate actors & actresses to understand the character's emotion and expression effortlessly. In the Exhibit 2 context, the usage of specific smile emoji directly gives the actor or actress how he/she should smile. But on the other hand, Badar also thinks emojis limit the creativity of an actor or actresses. Herman Panca as an editor also thinks that every different emoji has its own interpretation. This difference in interpretation might help scriptwriters to deliver more messages in script better than using descriptive text.

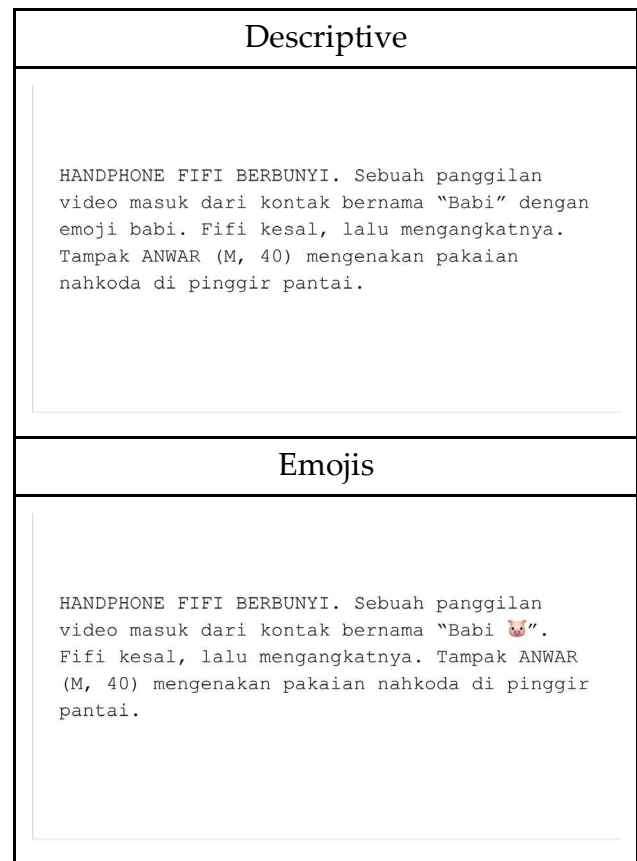
Herman Panca also shares that emojis' variety is increasing by the time. The increase of emojis' variety will express more concise emotion, and might help script writer to deliver clearer and stronger messages to production crew in the future. As for Teddy Soeriaatmadja, without knowing the context of the story in Exhibit 2, he cannot differentiate the feelings for each of the emoji. He also mentioned that the kind of emoji used in the script will not affect his visual treatment in the production process.





**Figure 5:** Comparative script Exhibit 3.  
(Source: Personal research documentation)

In the third Exhibit, Dom Darmo mentioned that the descriptive version of abbreviation *ROTFL* (Rolling on the Floor Laughing) might not be familiar to readers compared to the pictogram version. Susilo Badar also believes the pictogram emoji version, may transcend the language barrier especially in a film production where not everyone speaks English fluently. In the context of the scene Exhibited, it helps the actor who acts as the reader of the text messages to feel the emotion within the text messages. Teddy Soeriaatmadja prefers to have the descriptive version, since for him, it's easier to understand the psychology of the character through descriptive text. The descriptive version also gives the director some space to work on the context and the final product.



**Figure 6:** Comparative script Exhibit 4.  
(Source: Personal research documentation)

In the fourth Exhibit, the researchers discuss the use of emoji as a prop. The researchers showed Figure 6, two almost identical scripts where a contact named *Babi* (in english: pig) is displayed on one of the character's phones. The descriptive version doesn't have any emoji, while the other is imbued by emoji at the end of the script. Dom Darmo thinks that the emoji usage in this context is not really helpful for him. For Dom, it's better to use emoji to

express feelings directly in dialogue. However, Dom proposes a format where the text is changed with a character's name. Dom thinks the proposed format will implicate the character's emotional state or relation regarding the character she/he's communicating with. Susilo Badar on the other hand thinks that emoji helps him to understand the character's hatred towards a character named "Babi" displayed in the character phone contact. He also mentioned that if the character "Babi" read this text, the character would be very upset, therefore affecting the actor's performance.

Herman Panca as an editor gives perspective regarding the pig emoticon. Panca sees that pig emoji interpretation can also be affected by its socio-cultural background. If someone's having a bad-sentiment towards a pig animal, then the emoji creates a hatred impression towards the "babi" character. Because for Panca, it's possible for a character to put the same emoji and think that "babi" is someone close for the reader, since color pink of pig also represents cuteness. For Teddy Soeriaatmadja, the emoji in this Exhibit also creates a fun tonality. When Teddy read the script he feels like the script writer tells him as a director if the story in this film has a fun and light tone.

Descriptive
<p>Fifi menjulurkan handphone-nya ke depan, lalu menurunkan pakaiannya hingga tampak belahan dadanya. (Writer's note: Kita tidak melihat belahan dada Fifi, tertutup oleh handphone- nya). Fifi memotret dirinya berpose seksi, lalu mengirimkannya ke Anwar.</p> <p>ANGLE ON: Handphone Fifi, tampak Anwar membalas dengan banyak emoji air. Fifi hanya mendengus kesal. Tidak lama kemudian, masuk telpon dari Alana. Fifi mengangkatnya.</p>
Emojis
<p>Fifi menjulurkan handphone-nya ke depan, lalu menurunkan pakaiannya hingga tampak belahan dadanya. (Writer's note: Kita tidak melihat belahan dada Fifi, tertutup oleh handphone- nya). Fifi memotret dirinya berpose seksi, lalu mengirimkannya ke Anwar.</p> <p>ANGLE ON: Handphone Fifi, tampak Anwar membalas: 🐷🐷🐷</p> <p>Fifi hanya mendengus kesal. Tidak lama kemudian, masuk telpon dari Alana. Fifi mengangkatnya.</p>

**Figure 7:** Comparative script Exhibit 5.  
(Source: Personal research documentation)

In Exhibit 5, displayed at Figure 7, researchers provide two almost identical scripts. The descriptive version describes one of the character's reply with "*banyak emoji air*" (in english: a lot of water emoji). While the emojis version displays an actual emoji in the script. Dom Darmo noticed there's a different context of emoji's usage in this context. The version with actual emoji in Dom's perspective resonates as a *verb* in a sentence. In Dom's opinion, the

character who's receiving text messages with actual emoji will feel more degraded than the text messages without actual emoji.

From Susilo Badar's perspective, the pictogram version provides a multi-perspective

interpretation regarding the dialogue. The pictogram could indicate "the character is drenched under the rain", "the character is having an orgasm", or "the character is in shower". Displayed emoji also affect character's motivation, it creates confusion & anger, strengthening the actor's emotion to act. Herman Panca as an editor thinks the water emoji clearly symbolize orgasm or sexual interaction between the characters. For Teddy Soeriaatmadja, the emoji in Exhibit 5 makes the script even funnier than the descriptive version. Outside of the five exhibits displayed by researchers, Herman Panca also shares how emoji might be able to help him during one of his projects in the past. Panca was editing a foreign film with a foreign language that he does not speak. Panca believes that emoji might also be useful for him to understand the content of the script if it was written by the script writer.

The interview was done via zoom meetings in September of 2023. By the time this research was conducted, emoji had already become a natural aspect in human's digital communication. Therefore the response of each interviewee may differ according to their experience with emoji in digital communication. Dom Darmo, the director of *Kenapa Gue?* (2021), believe that the filmmaker will be able to

adapt with emoji apparent in script format. Researchers believe this to be a possibility since emojis are becoming more generally-used in society by the time.

Another interesting point comes from Susilo Badar as acting coach. He believes there's a condition where emoji in script format is favorable. For Badar, The usage of emoji in script format would be very helpful for the actor or actress who needs to grasp the essence and emotion of a character efficiently due to certain situations like production schedule and director understanding in acting discipline. However the usage of emoji might also limit the creativity of an actor or actresses. Without emoji, actors or actresses need to find the expression of character through deeper understanding regarding text, subtext, and context of a scene. By directly telling the expression an actor should show using an emoji, the script writer might eliminate this process. Eliminating this process might create a benefit or hindrance depending on the situation and film objective. Herman Panca's analysis on how an emoji usage is affected by the socio-cultural context of the user may support the response of Susilo Badar. By reading a specific emoji used by a character in the script, the actor or actress might be able to establish the emotion and motivation of a character based on specific socio-cultural context through pictograms. By increasing the variety of emojis, the socio-cultural context variety it represents also increases by the time. But this socio-cultural context is also the reason why Teddy Soeriaatmadja thinks that emoji usage in script writing might be limited

only to films with fun & light tonality.

Based on Teddy's observation, emoji represent funnier and less formal interaction in real life. The socio-cultural context of emoji that's commonly used for less funnier and formal communication, might diminished the tonality a scriptwriter trying to tell in a script for film like *Seven* (1995) by David Fincher or *Silence of the Lamb* (1991) by Jonathan Demme, which had more tension and suspense in the storytelling. For Teddy, putting emoji in a script might create unnecessary experience while reading the script if not used in the right script and story. This implies that there are type of stories and film that might be good to be written with emojis applied at certain parts. This implication might spark a new question, whether a visual material can be included in a script will affect the production flow in terms of its time and complexity.

This study has limitations. For further studies, the researchers propose to have wider and more variety of respondents: roles in filmmaking, age groups, and backgrounds. Longer and deeper interviews will allow researchers to extract more insightful perspective from the interviewees. Further researches might also necessary to study this matter involving filmmakers that represent later generations: Generation Z and Generation Alpha.

## CONCLUSION

After interviewing some of the key stakeholders in the filmmaking, the researchers find that the use of emoji is not

conventional, but open to the idea if used in the right context and precise film tone. With the wider use of social media and messaging apps, it will also expand the use of emoji, which will be captured in films. So rejuvenating script format with emoji might be inevitable. When the film industry is introduced to better technology, the filmmakers who live inside the ecosystem have a choice to embrace, and use the best out of it. Scriptwriters must be skilled to pick a correct diction and symbol which will make the readers to have a clear idea about the story. Scriptwriters must understand his readers and speaks their languages, sometimes they must avoid using unusual terms, idioms, or slang in their script. The use of emoji will break this boundaries, since emoji, presented in pictures, is perceived as more universal language. The use of emoji shows some benefit in scriptwriting. The use of emoji will show a clearer emotion of the characters depicted in the film. For researchers of this journal, who also a professional scriptwriter, this study is an entry point to make scriptwriting format to be more dynamic. There are many cases when scriptwriter has gaps with the production team to materialize the script that has been written. With more dynamic scriptwriting format, the writers hope that the gaps can be narrowed down and will make the creative process to be more effective and efficient.

Using emoji in scriptwriting looks like make the scriptwriting job to be easier. In fact, the scriptwriters will face a new challenge: choosing the correct emoji to

apply on the script. When the correct emoji is chosen and put in place, the whole production process will get easier.

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