



Emojis

Introduction

'Emojis' are shorthand communication tools a pictogram, logogram, ideogram or smiley used in electronic messaging and web pages. They are used in written communication to illustrate feelings and emotions. They are graphic symbols that represent not only facial expressions, but also concepts and ideas. Emojis have become so popular in the 21st century that the Oxford Dictionary named the face with tears of joy as its 2015 *Word of the Year*. In the field of market research and customer experience, generally, emojis are used when measuring the likeability of a product or service – one may often see this in NPS/customer satisfaction research. They are best used for measuring a customer's emotive responses, that is, their feelings towards the experience. Here we look at the history of emojis, how emojis have moved into the market research space emojis, some findings on the public's opinion about emojis and finally, what emoji language is. This is to see whether emojis have a place in the business sector.

History Of Emojis

Before emojis, there were emoticons (Long, 2000).

Emoticons and emojis are very similar in that they both refer to images which represent a person's emotions in a text format. Emoticons, however, refer to keystrokes which

connect to certain faces, whereas emojis do not connect to any keystrokes, instead they are available in a dropdown menu as an actual image.

The first use of emojis has been credited to Professor Scott Fahlman back in 1982. He posted on the local college bulletin that students should use the “:-)” Emoticon to represent when a text they are sending is intended as a joke. Thus, the birth of the first smiley emoticon.

An emoji is a digital icon which conveys human expressions and emotions. The term Emoji derives from Japanese where “E” in English would translate to picture and “moji” would translate to character. Emojis are not connected to particular keystrokes as with emoticons but are rather part of a standardised drop-down menu choice.

Prisco, (2018) credits Shigetaka Kurita as the founder of emojis. Mr Kurita created the first emoji in 1999. Originally, he created the emojis to ease communication on a Japanese mobile internet system. The combination of these forms of communication have created an entirely new means of communicating.

Where Do Emojis Fit in Research?

The significant impact of visual communication isn't just limited to chatting with friends and family. Market researchers, therefore, have taken advantage of the opportunity to use visual communication to deepen the insights gathered during studies (Miles, 2018). Studies (Miles, 2018) suggest that, not only do consumers feel better understood using visual communication, furthermore, but the majority of age groups also tend feel more connected to people they frequently message when using emoji- thus creating a sense of comfort and familiarity. Images have long been included in research, for instance the paediatric pain questionnaire uses emojis to help children identify where their pain lies and to express the intensity of the pain they are feeling.

When it comes to online surveying, it seems that researchers are capitalising on the adoption of mobile survey-taking- ensuring that surveys are in fact mobile-friendly in order to take advantage of visual communication. It is suggested (Miles, 2018) that Millennials engaging in surveys would be more likely to do so with the use of a mobile device.

Emojis have many benefits, but they also have challenges that come along with using them as a research tool.

Benefits of Emojis Herrera, (2016):

- Emojis are more humanised. People tend to connect more on a personal level when emojis are used in research.
- Emojis can help with understanding. People sometimes struggle to understand what a 2 or 4 means on a five-point scale. Using an Emoji may make the concept easier to understand, making the data more accurate.
- Can facilitate the customers decision making process.
- Emojis make surveys more appealing to the younger demographic.
- Emojis are very helpful to those not proficient in the language the survey is in.
- Emojis make surveys easier to answer. It also makes surveys more fun and engaging for the participants. Projects that make participation fun and easy for consumers get more and better insights.

Challenges of using Emojis Herrera, (2016):

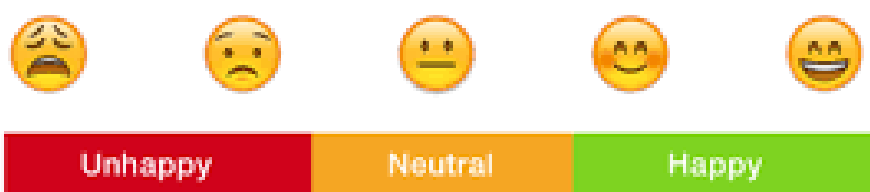
- Emojis are seen as less professional by some and therefore not appropriate for use in business.
- The emotive nature of emojis can potentially influence responses and lead to respondent bias – responses on emojis tend to be skewed towards the more positive.
- Colours have a clear psychological influence. A single colour needs to be applied to avoid bias.
- Emojis indicate a specific emotional state and the customer may not relate to those presented as answer options.

- Also, emojis are interpreted to mean different things by different people or in different contexts which impacts the accuracy of the results.
- Some respondents have reported that emojis require more effort in the cognitive decision-making process

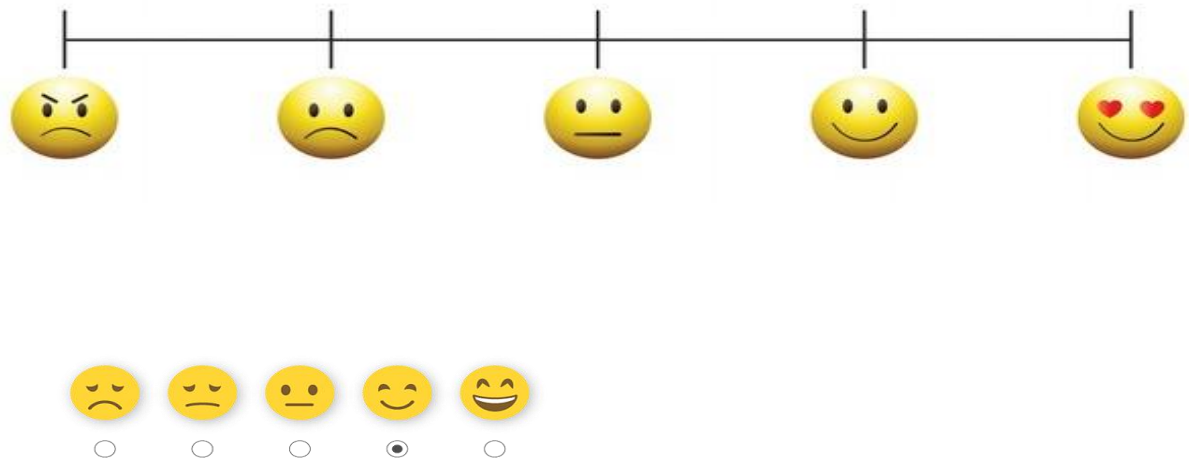
Colours and Response Bias

When looking at current research, we often see that a survey is done in only one colour. We see colour where the survey is branded, but the survey itself tends to be a single shade. Hoolio, (2017) notes that originally this colour was grey, as grey is considered to be a cool, neutral colour that psychologists find does not trigger any particular emotion. We do not want the colour of a survey to trigger emotion in a participant, as this may increase the response bias of our survey participants. A higher response bias means that the responses may not be as honest and accurate as we would want.

Scales with colours associated with scores, implicitly guide the customer in their response and introduce bias. They are considered to be poor research practice and are to be avoided.



Scales with emojis in the same colour, are more objective and allow the participant to decide for themselves. This is research best practice and is encouraged by Leaver, (2021).



General Research Findings

Emojis can add a fun and interesting dynamic to a survey, however there are things to take into consideration when adding emojis to a survey.

Organisations need to carefully consider how appropriate an emoji would be in their survey. As an organisation, you would need to consider the type of product you are selling. In 2015, USA Today experimented with using emojis in headlines. Cribb, (2015) described the attempt as unsuccessful as many readers felt the newspaper was trying to tell them how to feel about the news stories.

You also need to carefully consider your audience when considering the use of emoji. Older generations may feel excluded or confused by emojis whilst younger audiences will understand the use better, (Bosch, 2018).

Finally, we need to consider the type of transaction, or *Moment of Truth*. Emoji use in research surveys is a relatively new research area, but preliminary findings show that the above three areas greatly determine the appropriateness of emojis. For example, an older customer replying to a survey regarding funeral insurance would in all

likelihood find emojis to be inappropriate. Emojis are generally considered casual and fun and as such it may be inappropriate in certain companies.

It is worthwhile remembering, though, that numbers tend to be perceived in a more neutral manner or even as more 'professional' as in comparison to emojis, whereas words and emojis tend to trigger emotional responses and that factors into the customer's decision making and response.

How Does the Population Feel About Emojis?

Adobe runs a very insightful Global Emoji Trend Report annually. Hunt, (2021) found that this year the biggest take away is that 88% of emoji users feel more empathetic towards someone if they use emojis. It was found that in a virtual world, emojis help foster feelings of empathy as they approximate the tone of voice, gestures and emotion associated with the written text.

89% of the survey population found that emojis make communication across language barriers easier.

In the business space, Hunt, (2021) found that 66% of the emoji users like when people use emojis at work. 71% of emoji users find that using emojis at work positively impacts likeability and 62% found that using emojis positively impacts credibility. Global Emoji Users believe that using emojis at work can help quickly share ideas (73%), make team decision-making more efficient (63%) and reduce the need for meetings and calls (51%).

Emoji users seem to have mixed feelings when it comes to brands using emojis to communicate. 60% of users say they are more likely to open emails or push notifications that contain emoticons, especially if it is their favourite emoticon (63%). While 42% of users believe they are more likely to purchase products that are advertised using emojis.

Emojis As a Language

It is important to note that emojis have evolved beyond just a way to express ourselves and add emotion to a text message. Emojis have in fact become a language of their own. What previously was an innocuous emoji representing a fruit or vegetable, has since evolved into something very different. As Meehan, (2016) points out, the problem around the use of emojis is twofold, firstly an emoji may look different depending on the platform. For instance, the emoji below depicts the 'Grinning with smiling eye' emoji.



As a result, miscommunication may happen when an emoji looks a certain way when you send it, but drastically different to the person receiving it.

The second issue is with how emoji language is constantly evolving. What may seem innocent to one group, may have underlying meaning in another group. Before the emoticon to express laughter and humour was the laughing emoji, or the laughing to tears emoji. Later generations express the same humour with a skull. Understanding what emoticons mean to different groups and generations can help avoid any potential social faux pas.

Emojis done badly can come off as awkward and condescending to the intended target market, but some companies execute it very well. Finding the right balance can only benefit your brand. Often simplicity is key.



Conclusion

It is becoming clear that emojis are becoming a part of business language, especially in marketing. Rather than fight the process, it may be best to embrace and understand the everchanging world of emojis. If you consider your product, audience, and the moment of engagement emojis can work in your favour.

When executed with finesse and successfully, emojis can improve customer engagement, increase virtual interaction, and potentially humanise how your company is seen by the consumer. When it comes to market research, emojis may be used by converting survey scales and question response options to emojis to better capture emotional responses. For instance, instead of using a Likert scale from 1 to 5 use a 👍 and 👎 or a range of 😊 to 😄. Emojis can be particularly valuable in conducting product development research. A range of emoji options can be used to gather respondents' reaction to new product concepts or features.

Genex Insights suggests emojis may be best to incorporate emoji's in less serious contexts.

Be sure to reach out to a Genie to gain insights to when it would be best to use emojis for your organisation's surveys.

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