

Emojis are changing the language of marketing

Author : The Wall

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The last few years have seen an explosion of emoji, stickers, lenses, GIFs, masks and visual language **innovation**.

You can order a pizza, get room service and even fight bullying with emoji. And now, you can do more than just Like on Facebook – you can use a new highly focused set of emoji to show how you really feel.

The ubiquitous Like button has new flavours and very shortly we will see the results as consumers adopt this new tool.

Social listening is about to get a whole lot more interesting.

Yet, while emoji have been at the intersection of story and technology for around twenty years, consumers are now speaking with emoji, stickers and various images more and more. This evolving, visual communication language is becoming a natural – and highly useful – part of our daily **digital** conversations.

Emoji and their brethren (ie, stickers) will certainly continue to evolve and, while the concept of visual language is not a new one, this contemporary manifestation looks to have staying power.

Emoji and stickers are more than cute platforms for campaigns targeted at the coveted millennial.

Through them people have found a shortcut for expressing complex feelings and are thus achieving a new kind of **digital** intimacy. Just as we have observed a shift from voice to text, we are seeing a shift from text to images.

And, while some are already seizing this, more marketers should want in on the opportunities that lie ahead.

Like an anthropologist, **brands** need to study the **social** customs, artifacts, rituals, patterns and values of their consumers to understand (and even anticipate) their changing tastes.

Brands should deeply monitor emoji and visual language usage in order to identify opportunities for meeting and exceeding users' expectations through relevant content, tools and services.

Currently, 80% of the time a consumer spends on their smartphone is spent using four or five chat and **social** apps – in which the popularity of emoji has skyrocketed. The growth of messaging now trumps that of **social** networks.

Context is critical. With a deeper understanding of consumers' online behaviours, especially in **social** and chat apps, **brands** can discover relevant ways of connecting with their consumers via visual language tools that have yet to be envisioned.

As with any new language, intimacy builds over the course of multiple conversations as opposed to one-off campaigns. When a **brand** does decide to create stickers, for example, it should think more like a publisher and less like a campaign marketer.

Our biggest suggestion, however, is for marketers to simply walk the walk – or text the text. Stop thinking of the news and trends that you read as being just fads for young kids. You and everyone in your team, department or agency should start exploring the visual language landscape.

Prompt them to download and use **WhatsApp**, **LINE**, **WeChat**, **Snapchat** or others and learn by doing. In fact, you need to download and play with MSQRD and see how much time you can waste having fun.

It is the **digital** equivalent of using Helium to change your voice and have a good laugh.

The imperative is clear. Language is changing. Emoji, stickers, GIFs, masks and lenses are signals that a communication shift is well underway. **Brands** should pay heed to these visual tools and the platforms that facilitate their usage.

In order to communicate with their consumers and remain relevant, marketers need to know where people spend their time, how they express themselves and what tools they turn to. Now stop reading and go play.

By Rob Murray, director of research and Insights, and Emily Twomey, senior account director, at SapientNitro.

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