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PRESENTS

# EMOJI NATION

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## **SUMMARY**

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Popularized by new technologies, pure products of the 21st century, emojis are displayed everywhere. Born in Japan over 20 years ago, they are omnipresent in our everyday conversations, on all our screens.

They are believed to be harmless, but if you scratch under their pop and colorful fluorescent varnish, they suggest a much more complex world, symbolic of the contemporary web.

Both reflection of the impact of these little yellow men on language and diving into the heart of the powerful "Unicode Consortium" which decides on their existence, our film tries to understand the techniques of GAFAM to make us accept an ever smoother world. ...

## **STATEMENT OF INTENT**

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Born in the heart of the Kawaiï and manga cultures in Japan in 1999 and popularized by new technologies, they are today more than 3000, and their number doesn't stop increasing. With their seductive pop aesthetic, these little signs are perfect for communicating differently in our ultra-connected lives and they are changing our linguistic behaviors.

Naive, harmless, pop and funny, yes but not only...

**EMOJI-NATION is a fun investigation into the hidden face of emojis in an increasingly standardized web.**

**Our series give voice to linguists, philosophers, millennials, thinkers, engineers, members of the Unicode Consortium, activists and emoji users, like you and me.**

## **Episode 1: Everyone Wants Their Emoji**

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In 2020, no one can escape these little symbols. Over 5 billion are sent every day via social media alone! Of 176 small pictograms born in Japan over 20 years ago, they have surpassed the 3000 symbol mark. 3019 precisely in 2020! Their Japanese creator Shiketaka Kurita, aka the inventor of the very first emojis, still can't believe it!

This language without words (according to the formula of New York Magazine) crosses language barriers. "A bit like a tower of Babel 2.0 which would unite all countries and all people in a one and only means of communication. "

Besides, their playground is not confined to our keyboards. Emojis have infused the worlds of art, literature, music, fashion, journalism since the 2000s. Even if some have different meanings from one country to another and if double meanings are legion. Whole books have even been translated into emojis: the Bible, Alice in Wonderland or Moby Dick renamed Emoji Dick.

Jeremy Burge, a 35-year-old British geek is the creator of Emojipédia <https://emojipedia.org/>: a kind of Larousse 2.0 founded in 2013. Emojipedia is a bit like the Wikipedia of emojis. It's very well done! The 3019 symbols are classified there.

In recent years, everyone wants their emoji, whether to claim an identity, a minority, their country or their favorite food...

But how is a new emoji born?

At the origin of births in the Emoji galaxy: lobbyists and citizen petitions. So, Saudi Arabia lobbied for the "veil" emoji and the Assembly of Corsica released a budget of € 53,000 in 2019 for its "Corsica flag"!!

Behind the scenes and on social media, these lobbyists are putting pressure on the global entity that decides ALONE about the birth of a new emoji: the Unicode Consortium.

## **Episode 2: in the heart of emoji-Valley**

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If they were born in Japan more than 20 years ago, it was not the land of the rising sun that allowed them to take over all of our screens.

The history of the Consortium begins in January 1991, when the World Wide Web is still in its infancy. It's a chaos between exchanges of computer texts on the planet. There are too many encoding systems depending on equipment and countries. However, languages must be unified to allow computer science texts to be exchanged on a global scale. It was then that the word processing giants Xerox, IBM and Apple decided to create the Unicode Consortium.

Whenever we type or read a message on our keyboard, we use the Unicode standard. Each symbol, letter or character sent corresponds to a number in the Unicode standard. The smiley "Death of laughter" has for number Unicode U + 1F602 and for entity html & # 12514. Unicode is therefore the universal encoding of all languages, ONE of the major computer revolutions of the last century.

At the end of 1999, the members of the Unicode Consortium discovered the pixelated Japanese messaging invented by a certain Shigetaka Kurita and the very first emojis. They seized it and - even if the engineers of the Consortium found the symbols too gimmicky - the marketing and communication services of the internet giants forced the Unicode Consortium to take over the management of these pictograms. In 2011 and 2013, the first set of emojis was found on iPhone keyboards and then Android. This is when the integration of emojis in Western keyboards boosted sales...

To file an emoji and perfect your digital communication, the Unicode website explains the procedure.

- Submission of an application file via the Consortium website.
- If your application is successful: final presentation to members of the Technical Committee of the Consortium in Silicon Valley. The process is long (up to 2 years!) and regulated. Forget logos, brands, advertising, celebrities, gods or historic buildings. Be inclusive, and simple.
- 70 new emojis are validated each year.
- Limiting the number of emojis is first justified for technical reasons. They take up a lot of space in phone memory and the emoji has to represent something that is replicable on a small scale.
- No proposal is ever approved on the first try. The American association "Emojination" founded in 2015 in New York, campaigns for "emojis by the people and for the people". Led by an American journalist who self-proclaimed "emoji-activist". The veil emoji, dumpling, DNA, broccoli are under her belt... and soon an interracial family emoji.

If the "veil" emoji divided Internet users, it immediately appealed to the eleven members of the Consortium: representatives of GAFAM but not only.

Eight representatives of multinational Yankee (Adobe, Facebook, Apple, Microsoft, Google, Oracle, IBM, Netflix) the Germans of SAP, the Chinese Huawei and the government of Oman and its Ministry of Religious Affairs... who paid US \$ 21,000 to have the right to vote during the Technical Committees in which the emojis are chosen. Therefore these 11 representatives control EVERYTHING. It's like at the UN.

There are other members (institutional) who pay less, and individual members like us who are entitled to a nice membership card for \$ 75.

These little pictograms we thought to be naive, funny and anecdotal are therefore also the fruit of governments thinking, and of engineers and marketing experts from the largest digital companies.

### **Episode 3: A New Language?**

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Gretchen McCulloch is a Canadian linguist. For her, even though the emoji is of a universal character, it is not a language. First, it's written, not spoken. A language remains a more complex system, with verbs and words. According to her, "we have been using images for a long time to enrich a written conversation, hieroglyphs, manuscripts decoration in the Middle Ages with illuminations, but what is new is that we know how to communicate in writing instantly with an image just a click away. It's the first time in human history. The novelty is the speed with which we now share our written conversations. Never seen before!

For Gretchen McCulloch, it is also a way of creating emphasis. When they want to do a whole song and dance, people no longer use words but gestures and emotions which extend their bodies virtually. It's a kind of return to simplified body language that calls less for reflection and more for emotion, like a new punctuation.

It is fun, practical, but maybe (too) simple and too controlled?

Because behind these little signs, how can't we see the shadow of Georges Orwell's newspeak in his 1984 novel.

Newspeak is quite simple as a concept: the French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rosier specialist in Orwell enlightens us "the more we decrease the number of words in a language, the more we decrease the number of concepts with which we reflect, and the less people are able to think and the more they reason with affect. So, poor mastery of a language makes subjects easily manipulated by the mass media." This lexical and syntactic simplification of the language with symbols makes any critical thought difficult, if not impossible, continues Jean-Jacques Rosier.

All manipulated? Lobotomized? Would using emojis at the expense of words jeopardize our cognitive and linguistic functions? We know that hyper connectivity via screens influences our affect and our psychic life and that real telephone conversations are on the way out: many millennials far prefer to communicate with texts and emojis. It allows you to transmit emotions but also to hide your current mental state behind a symbol.

However, many symbols exist far from the official CU channels. On twitter, on free software platforms where "personalized emojis" prevail, symbols to personalize yourself or stickers and other bitmojis on snapchat... Far from imposing on other countries global graphic codes, Japan encourages development of "local" emojis. Elsewhere artists create their own symbols and disseminate them...Is it the beginning of a resistance?

## **Players:**

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**Jeremy Burge** (GREAT BRITAIN): Founder of Emojipedia, Vice-President of the Emoji Sub-Committee of the Unicode Consortium

**Jennifer 8 Lee** (USA): Journalist, Emoji-activist co-founder of Emojination and Vice- President of the Emoji Sub-Committee of the Unicode Consortium

**Rayouf Alhumedhi** (GERMANY): Austrian student, originally from Saudi Arabia, behind the sailing emoji at age 15

**Mark Davis** (SWITZERLAND): Co-founder and President of the Unicode Consortium

**Shigetaka Kurita** (JAPAN): Developer / Designer of the very first set of Japanese emojis in 1999

**Mélissa Thermidor, Amanda Hickman, Dylan Sherry** (GREAT BRITAIN-UNITED STATES): behind an emoji proposal in progress: the interracial family emoji

## **Thinkers:**

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**Gretchen McCulloch** (USA): Linguist, Journalist at WIRED and Author of Because Internet: Understanding the New Rules of Language

**Stéphane Bortzmeyer** (FRANCE): IT expert in standardization, Member of the IETF and Author of the book Cyberstructure: Internet a political space

**Keith Winstein** (UNITED STATES): Researcher, Computer scientist, Professor specializing in networks and encoding at Stanford University

**Sherry Turkle** (UNITED STATES): Researcher in social science and psychiatrist at M.I.T., Author of Alone Together: More and more technologies, less and less human relations

**Evgeny Morozov** (UNITED STATES): Researcher, Writer, Author of The Net Delusion: The Dark Side of Internet Freedom

**Jean-Jacques Rosat** (FRANCE): Philosopher specializing in George Orwell.



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