



# Emoji... or eNOji?

What science says about subject lines



or





**Hello. We're Phrasee.**

We help global brands  
*say it better.*

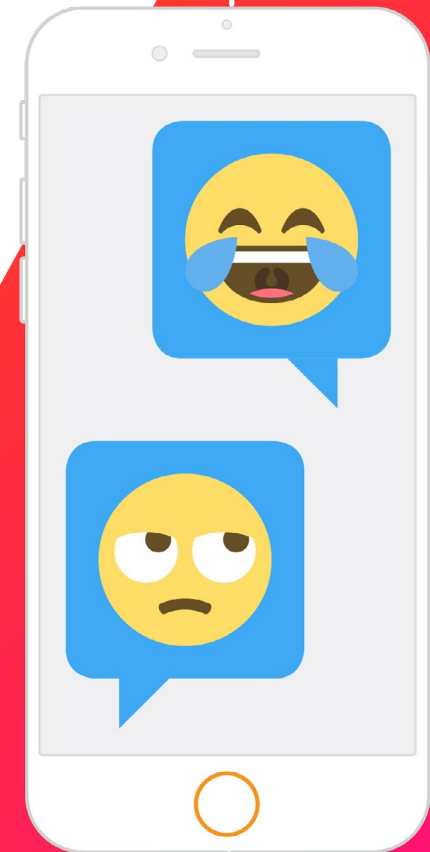
# The history of the emoji

Way back in 2015, The Oxford English Dictionary named “Laughing Face with Tears of Joy” as its “word of the year”. While many academics and linguists objected, citing the limitations of digital communication as the downfall of the once mighty English language, their complaints fell on deaf ears.

Why? Because the good folks at The Oxford English Dictionary recognized **two simple truths** that the academics did not:

**Truth #1:** The widespread adoption of digital technology has altered the way people communicate forever.

**Truth #2:** Truth #1 is neither a good thing nor a bad thing. **It's just the way it is.**



# The emoji and marketing

While the emoji is by no means the only way the digital age has changed the way people write, it is certainly a powerful symbol to illustrate how modern linguistics have changed.

Here in the marketing realm, where the language that brands use can have a huge effect on revenue, such linguistic changes can have far-reaching and important ramifications. Understanding what these ramifications are, and how they impact the way consumers interact with brands, is essential. It is (or at least should be) a key driver for any brand's marketing strategy.

For all those reasons and more, Phrasee decided to conduct some research to take a deeper look at how the inclusion of emojis in marketing language impact its performance at scale.



## Phun Phact:

*An 1862 New York Times transcript of an Abraham Lincoln speech contains the phrase: “(applause and laughter ;)”. This may or may not have been a typo, but marks the first ever appearance of the “winky face” emoticon.*

# The emoji test



To determine how extensive emoji use is in the email marketing field, and more specifically in marketing email subject lines, Phrasee analyzed **2 million unique** English language email subject lines sent worldwide in the past 12 months.

## These were our findings:



2 million unique subject lines



5% incorporated at least one emoji



1,600 different emojis used



100 most common made up 66%

## The top 20 emojis:

- |    |    |    |    |
|----|----|----|----|
| 1  | ★  | 11 | ✨  |
| 2  | ✈️ | 12 | 😍  |
| 3  | ❤️ | 13 | 🎉  |
| 4  | ❤️ | 14 | ➡️ |
| 5  | 😊  | 15 | ⚡  |
| 6  | ☀️ | 16 | ❄️ |
| 7  | ✓  | 17 | 🕒  |
| 8  | ✉️ | 18 | Ⓝ  |
| 9  | 🔥  | 19 | ★  |
| 10 | 📦  | 20 | ⓔ  |

# The emoji test

In conducting our research, we looked to answer three simple questions:

- 1 What is usage like for emojis in subject lines?
- 2 Do subject lines with emojis in them perform better than those without?
- 3 Do emojis grab attention in the inbox?

One aspect of marketing language that Phrasee specializes in optimizing is email subject lines. Luckily for us (and you), the humble email subject line offers a fertile ground for experimenting on how emojis affect marketing language performance.

So that's exactly where we started.

# The methodology



To answer these questions, Phrasee conducted a test (because testing is awesome) with a large ecommerce site. The site (which also happens to be a Phrasee client) had a large mailing list (5,000,000+ subscribers), and had agreed to allow us to test out emoji effectiveness on **470,000** of their subscribers.

**The email marketing performance metric most closely associated with subjects lines is an email campaign's open rate.**

Over the next several weeks, we conducted daily tests on our sample group and closely monitored the results.

Five different subject lines were tested each day on a group of 94,000 subscribers. The group of 94,000 subscribers was split into five groups - each being sent an email with exactly the same subject line, but 50% receiving a subject line incorporating an emoji (our sample) and 50% not including an emoji (our control).

It was all very scientific, and with sample groups and control groups this large, the data collected was reliable and largely free of random variance.

## Phun Phact:

*The word “emoji” is just as Japanese as it sounds. It’s taken from the Japanese words “e” (“picture”) and “moji” (“character”).*

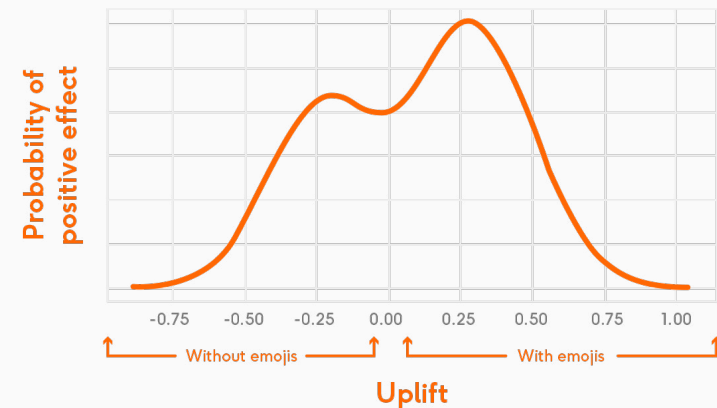
# The results

Our extensive scientific experiment into the effectiveness of emojis in email subject lines was... inconclusive.

We were unable to statistically verify that adding an emoji to a subject line will always increase or decrease the open rates that a subject line generates. However, that's not to say that we didn't learn anything, or that any brand or email marketer wouldn't benefit greatly from looking at the data we collected.

In 60% of the tests we ran during the course of this experiment, the subject line which included an emoji outperformed the same subject line minus the emoji.

This data suggests that emojis do indeed help with subject line performance more often than they hurt it.



## Phun Phact:

*“Emoticons”, graphic illustrations formed using keyboard characters, first appeared on the typewriter scene as far back as the 1800s.*



# The key takeaway no. 1

For any brand's audience, testing and retesting the language elements used in email subject lines is essential to increasing engagement in the form of email opens.

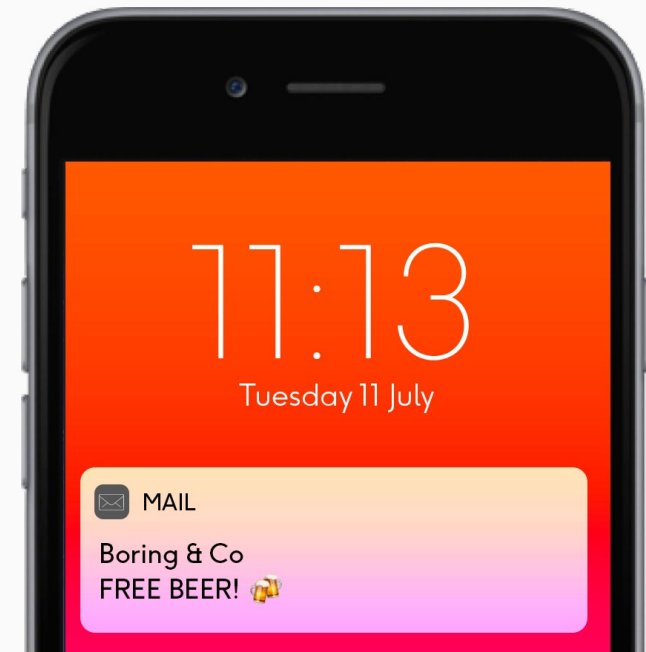
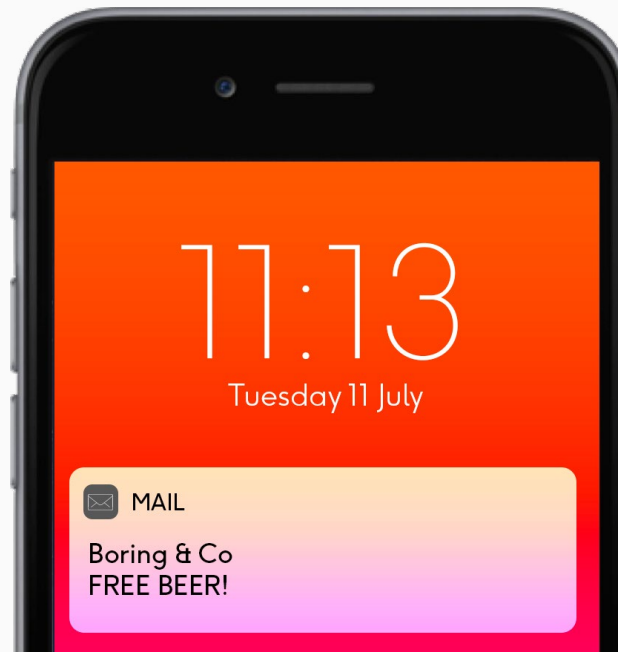
If you'd like to find out more about the benefit of testing different language properties in your marketing copy, calculate your language score with Phrasee's free tool: [phrasee.co/language-calculator](https://phrasee.co/language-calculator)

It is important to note that what emojis really do is **amplify a subject line's message**. Incorporating an emoji will make a bad subject line worse, and a good subject line better.

The images on the right present a hypothetical example of where a company has lied about an offer of free beer, with the intention of increasing email open rates.

This is a bad subject line. It's bad because it's **MISLEADING AND DISHONEST**. Let's see what happens when we add in an emoji...

Now it's **MISLEADING AND DISHONEST... WITH A BEER EMOJI**. The emoji has done absolutely nothing to make the subject line better.



# The key takeaway no. 2

Emoji or no emoji, it is still essential to start off with a good subject line.



Anticipating which subject lines are “good” subject lines is entirely subjective. Different audiences will respond in different ways to different subject lines, and the linguistic variables involved in any subject line are legion.

This is why a subject line that performs well this week will often fall flat the next. Testing and retesting email subject lines on an ongoing basis is the only true path to success.

**An example of how the performance of a similar subject line changes over time:**

Date	Subject line	Open rate
27/02/2019	Dive into our savings ...	11.87%
22/04/2019	Dive into our savings.	9.22%
21/05/2019	🌟 Dive into our savings!	8.54%

## Phun Phact:

*1982 marked the first appearance of the “smiley face” :- ) and “frowny face” :-( emoticons. These remained in common use throughout the 80s and 90 and still appear in digital communications to this day.*

# Including emojis in your email subject lines could drive more opens and clicks for your email marketing programme.

**There's only one way to be sure: test them out.**

Just remember: how emojis affect the performance of your email subject lines is only one of the many things every brand should be testing on an ongoing basis.

Every audience will respond differently to language. Figuring out how to construct the subject line language that your brand's audience responds to is the surest way to increase your email open rates, but keep in mind that staying on brand should be a top priority as well. Not every language element will be a fit for every brand.

Once you've determined which new language elements you'd like to try out, it's time to split test!

Why? Because using different language properties in marketing copy plus effective split testing equals better customer engagement.

Here are some things to try:

Words all in caps

Your name is all over our sale! Last CHANCE to get an extra 20% off

Hashtags

#Trending—there's no ignoring our #1 trending item!

Emojis and their placement:

 Picture-perfect properties from £157!

Plus, loads more stuff – because there are millions of ways to write the same subject line.

Want to know more? Learn about which performance metric matters most!

# Want to find out how Phrasee can help your email marketing?

Book a demo



(415) 941-2420  
+44 (0)20 8870 6968  
awesome@phrasee.co  
www.twitter.com/phrasee  
www.linkedin.com/company/phrasee