Mobile Marketing Trends
Winning App 💖 (& 💸) With Emojis
We set out to discover how deep the world’s obsession with emojis runs. We love sending them in texts to friends, using them in work Slacks, adding a little pizazz to our social media posts, and on and on. But can adding some emoji flair to your mobile push notifications make a difference in user engagement?

Read on for the most comprehensive emoji data gathered to-date.

Between Jan. 1st and Dec. 31st, 2016, Leanplum and App Annie analyzed close to 5,000 push notification campaigns, encompassing more than 2.6 billion individual push notifications across both iOS and Android users. Our analysis focused on the impact of both usage and engagement.
What Are Emojis 😊?

“Emoji” comes from the Japanese words for picture (絵) and character (文字). It was invented in 1998 by Shigetaka Kurita, who dreamed up the original set of 176 emojis to convey emotions and thoughts in a visual manner.

The original set looked like this:

Today, there are a total of 1,851 emojis used around the world. Emojis have become so popular that there’s even a World Emoji Day, celebrated on July 17 each year.
Fast-forward to (almost) present-day. We tracked the year-over-year increase of emoji usage in push notifications. From 2015 to 2016, usage rose 163 percent. On top of that, the library of emojis that marketers tapped into also increased, by 108 percent.

This makes sense, considering hundreds of new emojis were added last year. The list of new emojis includes some of our all-time favorites, like the rainbow flag, a David Bowie tribute, and new options for genders, races, and diverse family representation. 😎 🌈 ⭐️
The Most Popular Emojis in Push Notifications

We studied the most popular emojis used by different app verticals, such as retail, dating, and games. Not surprisingly, gaming apps more heavily feature emojis in push notifications than other verticals do. After all, when your app is created for entertainment, mobile teams should have fun with their marketing push notifications.

Retail apps
... tend to use emojis that showcase the money shoppers save on sales.

Dating apps
... veer towards representations of activities, like karaoke, drinking, and eating.

Mobile games
... use emojis to focus on holiday themes, like Halloween and Christmas.
So ... Do Emojis Increase Push Notification Engagement?

When we analyzed the open rates of push notifications that contained emojis, versus push notifications that did not contain emojis, there was a definite increase.

Push notifications without emojis saw a 2.44 percent open rate. Push notifications with emojis saw a 4.51 percent open rate.
That’s an 85 percent increase in open rates, indicating that emojis are a powerful tool for app engagement.
The Psychology Behind Emojis 😊

Why do emojis increase open rates so drastically? For one, emojis are great for conveying tones, facial expressions, and emotions. When you have a conversation with a friend IRL, it’s easy to express sarcasm. But on the internet, it’s a little harder.

According to scientists, when a person sees an emoji in a message, their brain lights up the same way as when they see a human face. The brain recognizes emojis as nonverbal information, and are therefore processed as emotions. Emojis have the power to change the mood of the reader.

If an app sends 😊, 😍, or 😂 in a push notification, it will spark the warm-and-fuzzies in whoever reads it. Naturally, more people will want to click on something that makes them feel good.
The Emoji Difference on iOS 😊 vs. Android 😊

To understand the differences between platforms, we analyzed the open rates of push notifications that contained emojis on both iOS and Android. iOS push notifications with emojis are opened at a rate 50 percent higher. Android push notifications with emojis are opened at a rate 135 percent higher. 🌡️⏰✨

Both platforms see an increase in engagement due to emojis. But Android — which generally has a higher open rate than iOS regardless — benefits even more. Our theory: because Android push notifications stick around in the notification tray longer, users have more time to see the emoji and open.
Now that we know that using even one emoji in your push notifications can increase opens, let’s examine whether emojis have a direct impact on a call-to-action within an app.

**Mobilityware** is a mobile gaming company that develops addictive card and casino hits. It ran a push notification A/B test to understand the impact of emojis in its messaging campaigns.

The push notification offered players the chance to collect bonus chips as a re-engagement strategy. The A/B test was simple: the variant included an emoji and the control did not. The test went out to 100 percent of their users.

The results? In the variant — the push notification that contained an emoji — Mobilityware experienced a nine percent increase in users who clicked to claim their prize. The test indicated to Mobilityware that emojis directly lead to an increase in conversions.
More Emojis, More 😍?

Our users engage with push notifications on a much higher level when they contain emoji. Not only do users open messages with emoji more often, but they’re more likely to execute the call-to-action which, for us, provided a lift in engagement metrics like DAU and DAU/MAU. With Leanplum, sending emoji in push is quick and painless.

Alex Tarrand, Mobilityware
Emoji engagement extends beyond push notifications, to other forms of messaging. Canva is a drag-and-drop design app that helps anyone make beautiful graphics. It ran a messaging A/B test that pitted emojis against images. Half its audience received an in-app message with text and an emoji; the other half with text and an image.

The results? The emoji variant outperformed the image version by nine percent.
Understanding how users respond to content is an important part of building a healthy relationship with them. In a recent A/B test, we learned that including emojis with plain text in our in-app messaging lifts engagement more than including illustrative images. Thanks to Leanplum’s easy-to-use messaging solution and automated insights, we can effectively engage more users, with content that resonates.

Shipra Mahindra, Canva
Retaining Users

With Emojis

Another app, a popular mobile marketplace for second-hand items, ran an experiment with emoji push notifications. For US users on Android smartphones, the day two retention rate increased from 25 percent to 32 percent.

Not only do emoji-powered push notifications increase engagement and conversions, but they also encourage users to stick around after downloading. In this case, the app found that emojis led to a 28 percent boost in day two user retention. This is a huge win during a critical point in the user cycle to ensure continued app adoption.

Emojis increase retention 28%
Now that we understand the effect of emojis on engagement, we set out to examine who is impacted the most. As it turns out, millennials engage more often with emojis.

The average 13–24 year old spent 20 percent more time in apps than the average 25–44 year old, and 70 percent more time in apps than the average user over 45. If your target customer is a millennial, adding emojis to your push notifications may help bring them back to your app.
As global app store revenue has increased over the years, and there’s more at stake, mobile marketers are becoming smarter about sending messages that respond to user preferences. From personalization to emojis, sending content that resonates on an emotional level can help you drive more ROI in your apps.

In the past two years...

- App store revenue has increased 80 percent.
- Time spent in apps has increased 95 percent.
Now you understand the positive impact of emojis on your open rates — and revenue — but which emojis should you use? We have compiled the 25 emojis that have an above-average open rate.

These high-performing emojis can boost your push notification engagement and conversion rates.
Lift Your Engagement Even More

Personalize Your Content
Including personalization in the push notification, like a user’s first name, can boost opens by 4x. Other ideas include translating the language to each user’s country, mentioning an action item (like a forgotten shopping cart item), and targeting by location.

Recognize User Behavior
Messages with a purpose perform better than messages that just say hello. By recognizing user behavior — for instance, that a user listens to Frank Ocean — and sending a push notification that alerts them to his latest release, you can increase opens an astounding 9x.

Personalize Your Delivery Time
Some platforms provide an algorithm that analyzes individual app engagement and automatically sends messages when users are most likely to open. Leanplum offers app teams a way to harness this power in an easy-to-use checkbox.

Of course, it’s not only about emojis. Now that you have all this juicy emoji data at hand, here are three more easy steps you can take to ensure your push notification open rates are sky-high.
Want More?
App Annie Has It.

App Annie delivers the most trusted app data and insights for your business to succeed in the global app economy. Over 700,000 registered members rely on App Annie to better understand the app market, their businesses and the opportunities around them. The company is headquartered in San Francisco with 450 employees across 15 global offices. App Annie has received $157 million in financing from investors such as e.Ventures, Greenspring Associates, Greycroft Partners, IDG Capital Partners, Institutional Venture Partners and Sequoia Capital.

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Leanplum offers everything you need to increase app engagement and ROI. Our integrated solution delivers meaningful engagement across messaging and the in-app experience. We offer Messaging, Automation, App Editing, Personalization, A/B Testing, and Analytics, alongside a dedicated customer success team to help you with all your campaign needs.

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Our Mobile Marketing Trends arm you with the insights you need for mobile marketing success.

Breaking Barriers to Push Notification Engagement

Personalize or Bust: The Impact on App Engagement

Retention, Revealed: The Need-to-Know Facts Behind App Engagement & ROI

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