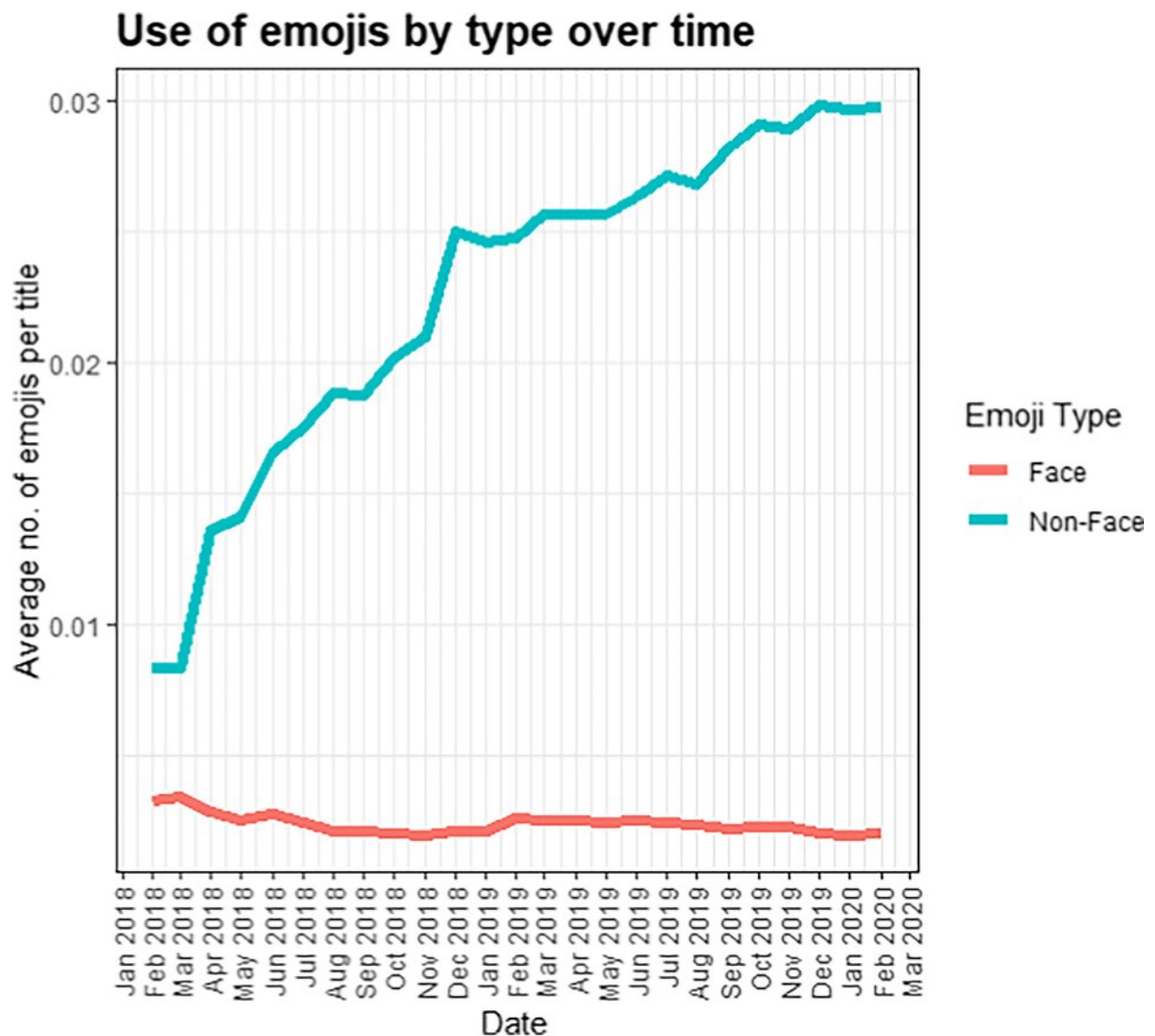


# Why using too many emojis to substitute words can harm your chances online

April 5 2023



Credit: *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science* (2023). DOI: 10.1007/s11747-022-00917-z

Sad face news for heavy emoji users.

If you want to sell something online—say some nights at your Airbnb, or your old couch on Facebook Marketplace—you might assume a heavy sprinkling of emojis will help you stand out from the pack. You may even substitute some [words](#) with emojis to save space.

But the findings of a new study by researchers at Monash University's Business School show that less is definitely more when it comes to using the cute icons.

The paper, which studied [emoji](#) use across more than 195,000 Airbnb listings in the U.S., is the first to look specifically at the effects of "non-face emojis" in marketing communication, and offers important insights for digital marketers and other sellers. The study is published in the *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*.

"Our findings suggest that for the majority of regular users in digital marketplaces, non-face emojis are actually an effective differentiation tool in a [competitive environment](#)," lead researcher Dr. Davide Orazi said.

But—use too many to substitute words and they'll hinder, rather than help, your selling power.

Emojis such as smiley or winky faces popped up in the late 1990s to help compensate for the lack of non-verbal cues in computer-mediated communication.

"Now there are almost 3,664 registered, unique symbols," Dr. Orazi said. "About 90% of those are non-face emojis—everything from thumbs to

beers, to rainbows."

However despite these emojis being used just as frequently as their emotion-sharing counterparts, their effects from a marketing perspective are little understood, Dr. Orazi said.

To combat this, Drs Davide Orazi, Bhoomija Ranjan, and Yimin Cheng from Monash Business School looked at how Airbnb hosts, and "superhosts," used non-face emojis in their short listing titles, and whether that affected electronic word of mouth. In this case, online reviews.

In the Airbnb reviews, the researchers looked at two [different styles](#) of using emojis: complementary, where for example, the word beer is followed by a beer emoji, and substitutive, where the beer emoji replaces the text entirely.

For regular sellers, the study found using one complementary emoji can increase electronic word of mouth by about 26%, or more with multiple emojis.

But those substituting more than one word with emojis should tread carefully, because it's much harder for the brain to process and will lead to worse results, Dr. Orazi said.

For superhosts, the study recommended using a maximum of one complementary non-face emoji—if any.

"If you're a premium seller, you're expected to ooze competence. One emoji can grab attention and feel a little playful, but go beyond that and you run the risk of looking unprofessional."

Dr. Orazi said the findings could be extrapolated to other [digital](#)

[platforms](#) such as eBay, Alibaba or Upwork. The study also has policy implications for such platforms. While using symbols or emojis is still a violation according to Airbnb's content policy, many sellers still try their luck.

"We suggest that Airbnb and other e-commerce platforms that do not currently endorse the use of emojis update their content policies," he said.

"E-platforms have a history of revising their user policies when existing policies are sub-optimal. For instance, Twitter recognized the restrictions of 140-character messages and doubled it."

**More information:** Davide Christian Orazi et al, Non-face emojis in digital marketing: Effects, contingencies, and strategic recommendations, *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science* (2023). DOI: [10.1007/s11747-022-00917-z](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11747-022-00917-z)

Provided by Monash University

Citation: Why using too many emojis to substitute words can harm your chances online (2023, April 5) retrieved 7 July 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2023-04-emojis-substitute-words-chances-online.html>

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