

Proposal for Llama Emoji

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Credit: Aphelanda Messer

Abstract

This proposal requests the inclusion of a new emoji: LLAMA/ALPACA, a group of animals with visual and cultural significance around the world. LLAMA and ALPACA have cultural legacy in South America, a region which is underrepresented in the emoji set, to the point where they are highlighted on multiple South American flags. They also have recent cultural resonance in China, as LLAMA is one of the animals offered in Sina Weibo “emoji” images, as well as WeChat stickers.

Because llamas share common visual and historical characteristics with its cousins, this proposal also recommends that while we use the shorthand LLAMA in this proposal, we are actually referring to the four species within the lamini tribe: LLAMA, ALPACA, VICUNA, and GUANACO.

Introduction

The tall, blithe and affable llama as we know it today is a domesticated species (*Lama glama*) that lives primarily along the Andes mountain range in South America. However, most people also use the term “llama” to refer to its three biological cousins (alpacas, vicuñas, guanacos), with whom the llama shares biological and historical roots. Together, these four species make up the lamini tribe, who have lived a storied history up and down the Americas.



A Moche bottle representation of llamas. Photo by Wikipedia user Pattych (CC BY-SA 3.0).

The llama’s ancestors originated in North America roughly 40 million years ago, only migrating to South America about three million years ago. While the last ice age drove them away to extinction in North America, the remaining llamas in South America evolved into the species that we know and love today. During this time, people began domesticating llamas and alpacas, and they became important symbols for people as far back as 100 AD. Most notably, llamas became important symbols in Incan culture: as the multicolored deity Urcuchillay, and as part of the Incan myth “The Llama Herder Who Courted a Daughter of the Sun.”¹

More recently, llamas, alpacas, and vicuñas have been prominently featured on the coat of arms and national flags of both Bolivia and Peru since 1825. In the Quechua city of Cuzco in Peru, there are, to this day, still two traditional, annual festivals dedicated to llamas: the Llama’s Ch’allay, and the Llama’s T’inkay.²

¹ Haase, Donald. “The Greenwood Encyclopedia of Folktales and Fairy Tales [3 Volumes].” Greenwood, 2007.

² 26 Crazy Facts A Peruvian Wants You To Know About Llamas:
<http://xpatnation.com/crazy-facts-about-the-peruvian-llama/>



The coat of arms of Bolivia and Peru, which sport a llama and a vicuña, respectively.

Yet llamas are far from an animal of the past. As of 2007, there are over seven million of them in South America, and the population of llamas and alpacas population has bloomed to 158,000 and 100,000 in North America. While llamas are finding new life in the US as companions and pets (and even as therapy animals)³, alpacas are being bred for their fleece, which is being used as a high-quality alternative to wool and cashmere. US online retailer Zappos, for example, is so enamored with llamas and alpacas that they make regular appearances at company celebrations (and weddings!), and have been crowned as the company's unofficial mascot.⁴

In popular culture too, llamas and alpacas are a constant source of joy and entertainment. For example, Disney blockbuster "The Emperor's New Groove" (released in 2000) starred a human-turned-llama, Incan emperor, and there's a line of highly sought-after, alpaca plush toys called Alpacasso in Japan.⁵ In fact, alpacas have become so adored that there's now an alpaca-petting cafe in Taiwan.⁶ On top of all this, llamas and alpacas are thriving in the internet age – as the "ola k ase" llama



DVD box art for Disney's "The Emperor's New Groove."

³ "The Llama Is In": <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/07/04/garden/the-llama-is-in.html>

⁴ Meet Marley: The Zappos CEO's Resident Alpaca
<http://modernfarmer.com/2015/09/tony-hsieh-zappos-marley-alpaca/>

⁵ "The Story behind Those Adorable Alpacas You Keep Seeing at Conventions":
<http://overmental.com/content/adorable-alpacas-keep-seeing-conventions-15192>

⁶ "Oia Cafe Taipei – Drink Tea With The Cutest Alpacas Roaming Around You":
<http://www.ladyironchef.com/2016/09/oia-cafe-alpaca-taipei/>

meme in the Spanish-language sphere,⁷ and as the “grass mud horse” meme in Greater China.⁸

Names

(Suggested short name and keywords, as in the [Emoji List](#)).

- llama
- llama | alpaca | vicuna | vicuña | guanaco | lamini

Selection Factors Inclusion

A. Compatibility

The alpaca emoji appears as part of the default emoji set on Sina Weibo, China’s premier microblogging service, which has 313 million active monthly users as of February 2017 (for comparison, Twitter has 319 million active monthly users).⁹



Screenshot from Sina Weibo web interface showing the “草泥马” alpaca emoji. Aqua blue highlight ours. Retrieved June 21, 2017.

⁷ “Know Your Meme: Ola K Ase”: <http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/ola-k-ase>

⁸ “A Curated History of the Grass Mud Horse Song”: <http://www.88-bar.com/2012/02/a-curated-history-of-the-grass-mud-horse-song/>

⁹ “China’s Twitter clone will soon have more users than Twitter.” <https://qz.com/918410/chinas-twitter-clone-sina-weibo-wb-will-soon-have-more-users-than-twitter-twtr/>

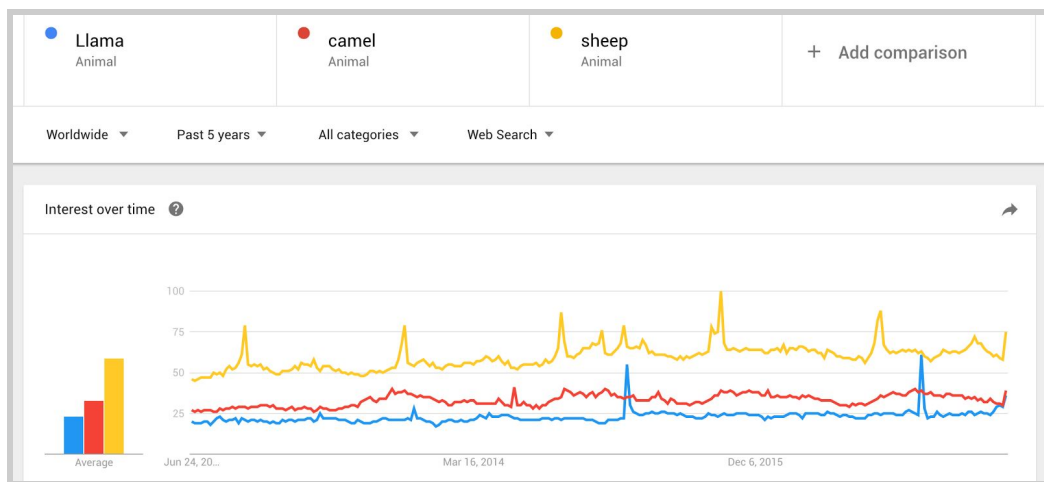
Llamas and alpacas also appear in various forms as stickers (emoji supplements) in WeChat¹⁰, Line¹¹ and Snapchat¹².

B. Expected Usage Level

Frequency

We expect that the llamas and their cousins' rich history will ensure that the emoji is frequently used and much loved by people all over the world. For example, the combined hashtagged posts on Instagram for llama and alpaca are comparable to that of camels (91%)¹³

However, its largest user base will most likely be in the countries surrounding the Andes mountain range in South America. As the screenshots below show, while llamas are still straggling worldwide within search results on Google Trends:



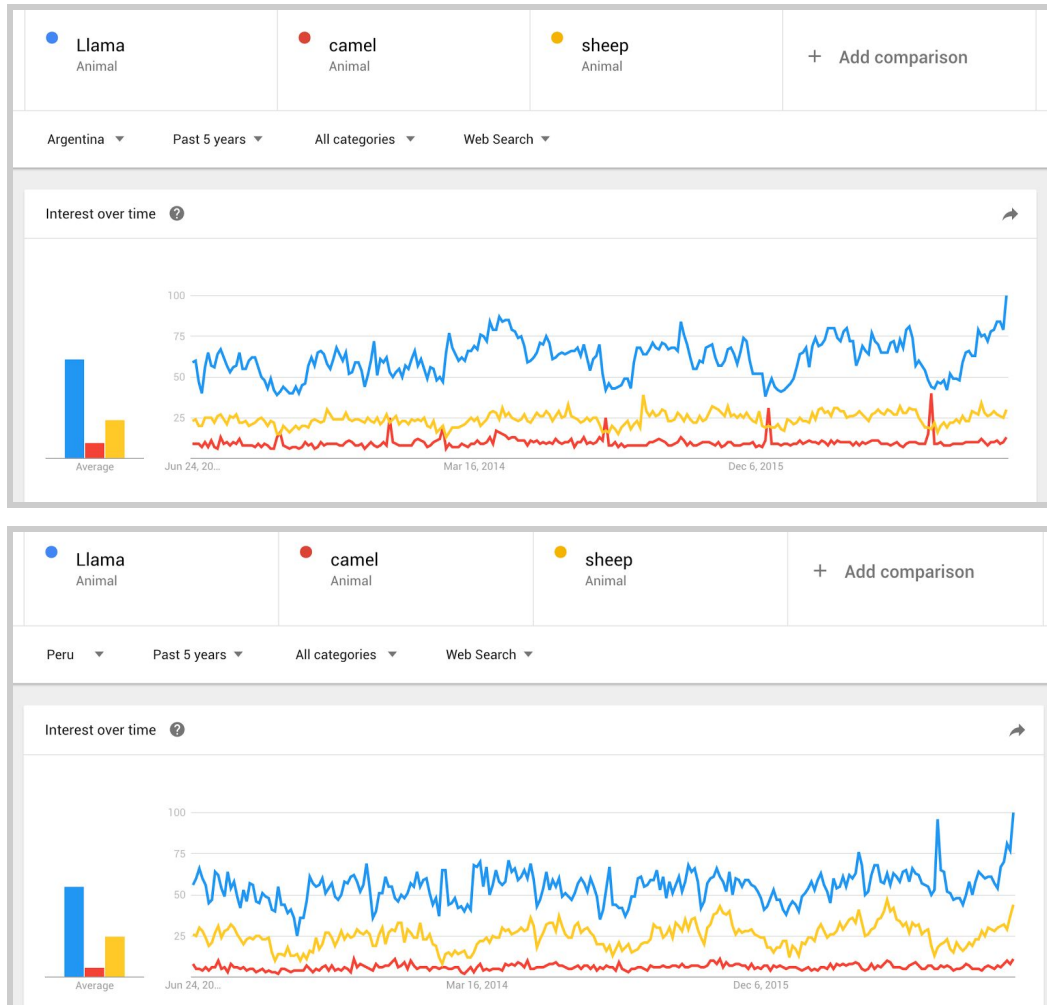
Its popularity and dominance is clear in the countries along the Andes, such as Argentina and Peru:

¹⁰ "Choco Milk Alpaca" sticker advertisement from WeChat Philippines's Facebook page. <https://www.facebook.com/WechatPH/photos/a.265438370258784.1073741828.260280494107905/478757142260238>

¹¹ Line Store search results for "alpaca" stickers. <https://store.line.me/search/en?q=alpaca>

¹² Screenshot of Snapchat's three llama stickers on a Twitter post by user @JonJeffSays: <https://twitter.com/JonJeffSays/status/715438426602864640>

¹³ Llamas and alpacas yielded 626,265 and 702,237 search results on Instagram respectively. Camels yielded 1,460,648.

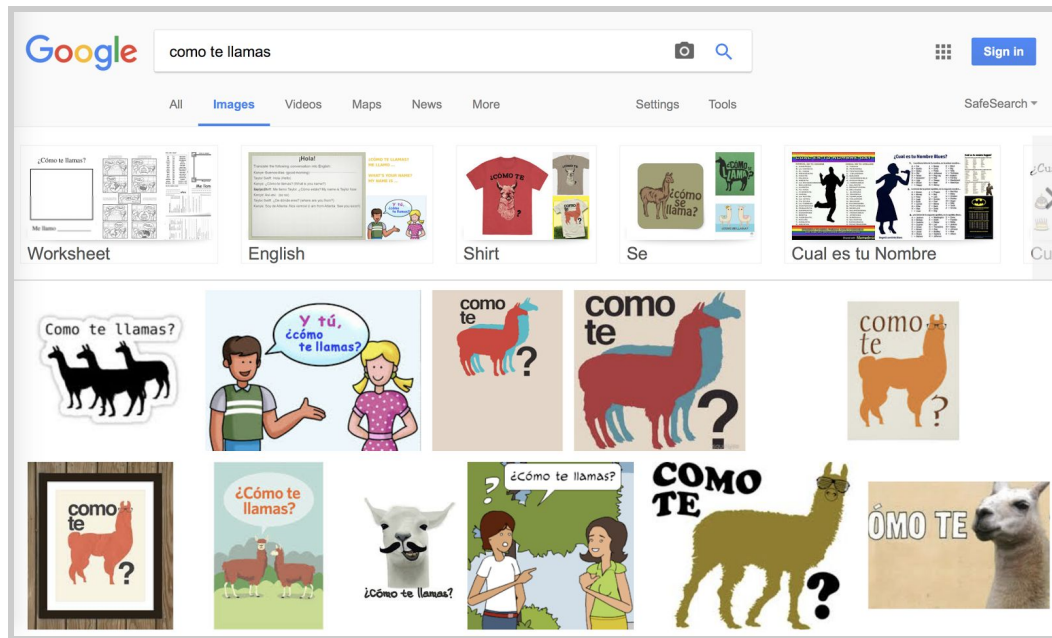


Note: We had to adjust the Google Trends results to limit “llama” to the animal because “llama” in Spanish is not only the name of the animal but also a form of the verb “to call oneself” and the noun “flame.” Results retrieved June 21, 2017.

Multiple usages

On top of being a symbol good-natured sociability and blithe cheerfulness, the word “llama” is also a form of the verb “to call” in Spanish and as such, the emoji would make a very handy tool for creating visual-textual puns.

For example, a Google image search for “como te llamas” (Spanish for “what is your name”) yields a variety of llama-shaped results:



C. Image Distinctiveness

Llamas, alpacas, vicuñas and guanacos all share a distinct long, upright neck; perky, pointy ears; a camel-like torso; and soft, luscious fur. These visual characteristics form a unique silhouette that's easy to recognize from afar or in miniature.

D. Completeness

Llamas would add to the animal-mammal group by being a much-needed representative of South America. Currently, the group includes multiple mammals that only exist in regions outside of South America: e.g. giraffes (Africa), koalas (Australia), and rhinoceros (Africa, Southern Asia).

E. Frequently Requested

Talk of a llama emoji surfaces from time to time on social media networks. For example, a Twitter post by @issa lamenting the lack of a llama emoji in April of 2015 was retweeted 3,386 times and liked 6,735 times.¹⁴

¹⁴ <https://twitter.com/issa/status/585916447831957504>

Furthermore, unofficial creators on Line (a popular messaging app in Japan, Thailand, Taiwan and Indonesia with 218 million+ active monthly users)¹⁵ have created 496 paid sticker sets featuring alpacas.¹⁶

Selection Factors Exclusion

F. Overly Specific

We propose creating a single emoji for the llama and its cousins (alpacas, vicuñas and guanacos) due to their shared biological roots, appearance and behaviors. This is much less specific than some of the other emojis in the animal-mammal group: there are currently two emojis for sheep (ram 🐏 and ewe 🐑) and for camels (single-hump 🐫 and two-hump 🐪).

G. Open Ended

Llamas, alpacas, vicuñas and guanacos (the lamini tribe) are unique animals without equal in the animal kingdom.

H. Already Representable

While llamas share biological roots with camels, their lack of a visually-distinct hump means that they cannot be represented by either the “camel” or “two-hump camel” emojis (🐫, 🐪 respectively). Nor would it make sense to combine other animals to represent a llama as that would erroneously imply that llamas are a crossbreed.

I. Logos, brands, UI icons, signage, specific people, deities

Llamas are an ancient species that cannot be trademarked. While there may a few small brands that use alpacas as their mascot in Japan¹⁷, there is no large, multinational “llama brand” at the time of writing.

J. Transient

Llamas and humans have co-existed peacefully since 100AD and there are no signs that the animal is endangered or that people’s love of it is in decline – if anything, there is a surging interest in llamas in the US and Canada, and they continue to be well loved in South America.

¹⁵ What You Need To Know About Line, One Of The World's Most Popular Messaging Apps <https://www.forbes.com/sites/johnkang/2016/07/14/what-you-need-to-know-about-line-messaging-app/#40d2841d59fc>

¹⁶ Line store search results for “alpaca” stickers <https://store.line.me/search/sticker/en?q=alpaca>

¹⁷ E.g. the Alpacasso line of plush toys (<http://overmental.com/content/adorable-alpacas-keep-seeing-conventions-15192>), digital illustration software FireAlpaca (<http://firealpaca.com/>).

K. Faulty Comparison

Llamas, alpacas, vicuñas and guanacos are not represented in any way by the current emoji character set.

Sort location

(Proposed sort location for the emoji in [Emoji Ordering](#))

- animal-mammal
- After goat 🐐 and before camel 🐪

Other Information

(optional)

Character Properties

The other character properties are suggested to be defined as follows.

General Category: So

Canonical Combining Class: 0

Bidirectional Class: ON

Decomposition Type: Decomposition Mapping:

Numeric Type:

Numeric Value:

Bidirectional Mirrored: N Unicode 1 Name:

ISO Comment:

Simple Uppercase Mapping: Simple Lowercase Mapping: Simple Titlecase Mapping: