

Proposal for Emoji: LATIN CORNBREAD

AREPA, GORDITA, PUPUSA

To: Unicode Consortium.

Submitted by: Sebastian Delmont of Emojination; Lumen Bigott.

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Version 2: updates to Images, Introduction and Image Distinctiveness

CLDR Short Name: LATIN CORNBREAD

CLDR Keywords: AREPA, PUPUSA, GORDITA

Sort Location: category “food-prepared”, after BURRITO, before STUFFED FLATBREAD

Reference Emoji: Food - HAMBURGER



Credit: Lumen Bigott. Free for use in conjunction with this proposal

Abstract

This proposal requests the addition of LATIN CORNBREAD to the Unicode Emoji Library, representing specific cornbread variations such as AREPA in Colombia and Venezuela, PUPUSA in El Salvador and Honduras, and GORDITA in Mexico.

Introduction

Corn-based foods are popular Central America and South America. Many countries in the region have developed the concept of a small round bread, about 4 inches in diameter and half an inch thick. In Colombia and Venezuela, it's known as an “arepa”¹ and it's consumed both by itself or split in half and eaten as a sandwich with a large variety of fillings. In El Salvador and Honduras it's known as “pupusa”² and it's often prepared with a small portion of filling placed inside before cooking. And in Mexico the concept is known as a “gordita”³ and it's prepared by either baking or frying.

¹ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arepa>

² <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pupusa>

³ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gordita>

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All three variations share an approximate shape and general look that can be called “latin cornbread”, in contrast with the United States concept of cornbread in Southern Cuisine that tends towards larger dishes with a spongy texture, or similarly shaped breads made with wheat or other flours that have different color or texture.

These five countries share a population of more than 223 million inhabitants⁴, led by Mexico with 126 million, Colombia with 50 million, Venezuela with 32 million, Honduras with 9 million and El Salvador with 6 million. A large number of these 223 million consume cornbreads every day. Often accompanying breakfast, lunch and dinner.



Image used with permission from Caracas Arepa Bar

In terms of Internet penetration⁵, as of 2017 Venezuela has about 19 million users (60%), Mexico has 76 million (59%), Colombia has over 28 million (58%), Honduras has under 3 million (30%) and El Salvador has under 2 million (29%). Adding to about 128 million users.

And while 15 years ago you would have been hard pressed to find an arepa or a pupusa outside of their countries of origin, thanks to migration patterns from Central America to the United States, and particularly from Venezuela out into the entire world, it is now common to find an “arepera” restaurant in every large metropolis and even many small towns.

In 2001 there was a single restaurant serving arepas in New York City, but in 2018 there are more than 20 restaurants⁶ listing them in their menus, and often serving nothing else; and another 20 restaurants⁷ serving Salvadorian pupusas. This adds millions more people regularly exposed to arepas, pupusas and gorditas all over the world, regardless of country of residence.

Given the significance this type of food has for a large number of people, we think it would be a worthwhile addition to the Unicode Emoji set.

⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_and_dependencies_by_population

⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_number_of_Internet_users

⁶ <https://foursquare.com/explore?mode=url&nearGeoid=72057594043056517&q=arepa>

⁷ <https://foursquare.com/explore?mode=url&nearGeoid=72057594043056517&q=pupusa>

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Venezuelan Arepas

Steven Depolo [CC BY 2.0] via [Wikimedia Commons](#)



Colombian Arepas on the grill

Juan Fernando Cepeda Gorrón [CC BY-NC-ND 2.0] via [Flickr](#)



Salvadorian Pupusas

Jess Lander [CC BY 2.0] via [Wikimedia Commons](#)



Mexican Gorditas

Jazz Guy [CC BY-NC-ND 2.0] via [Flickr](#)

Selection Factors – Inclusion

A. - Compatibility

There is currently no representation of an arepa, pupusa or gordita on major digital platforms.

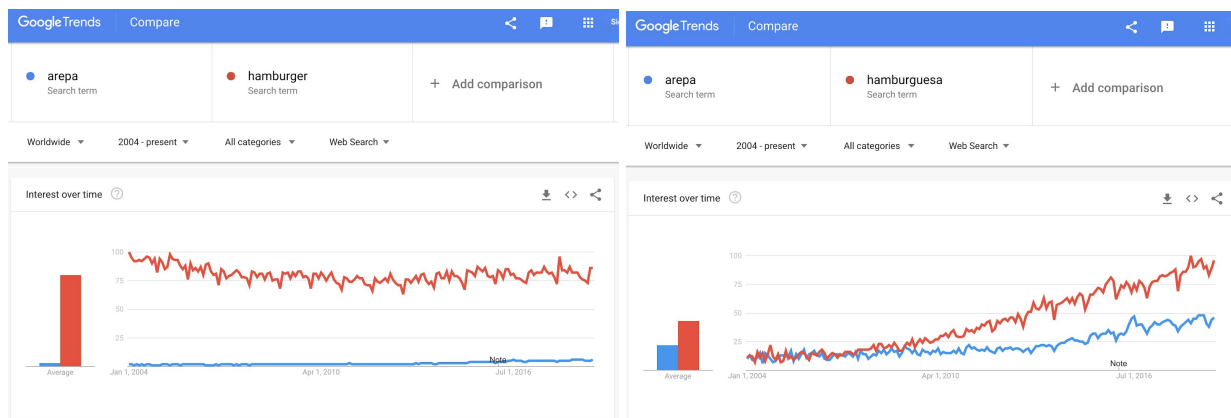
They are represented in a number of additional “sticker packs” available on platforms like iMessage, WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger, but we have no evidence of usage.

B. - Expected usage level

B.1. - Frequency

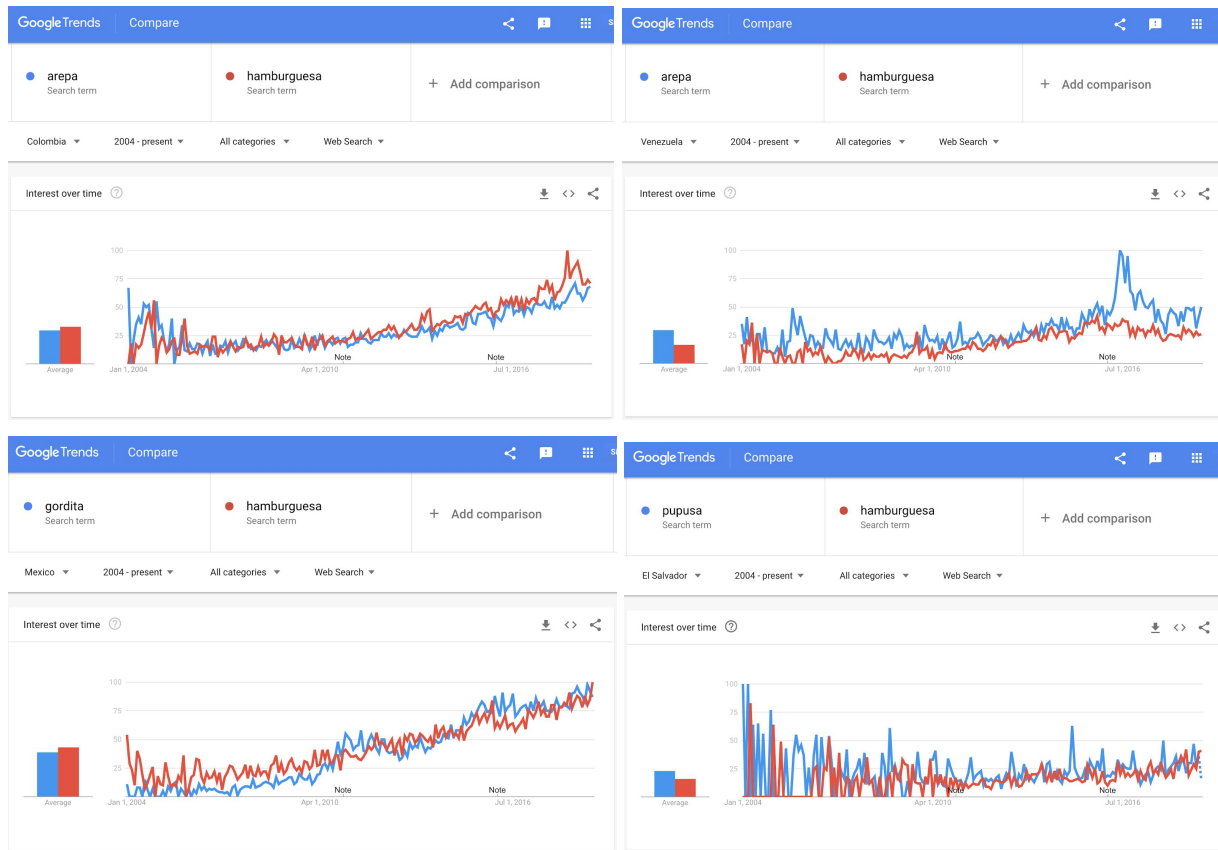
In Colombia and Venezuela, arepas are a daily food staple. It's as common as toast for breakfast, a hamburger for lunch, or a sandwich for dinner. Most people consume it almost every day, often multiple times a day. Pupusas in El Salvador or Gorditas in Mexico are not consumed as frequently but are definitely a very common dish.

The following Google Trends data (captured on February 6th 2019) shows first a comparison between “arepa” and “hamburger” worldwide, where “hamburger” seems to be about 15 to 18 times more popular. However, comparing the word in spanish, “hamburguesa”, results in a factor closer to only 2 times for the reference emoji.

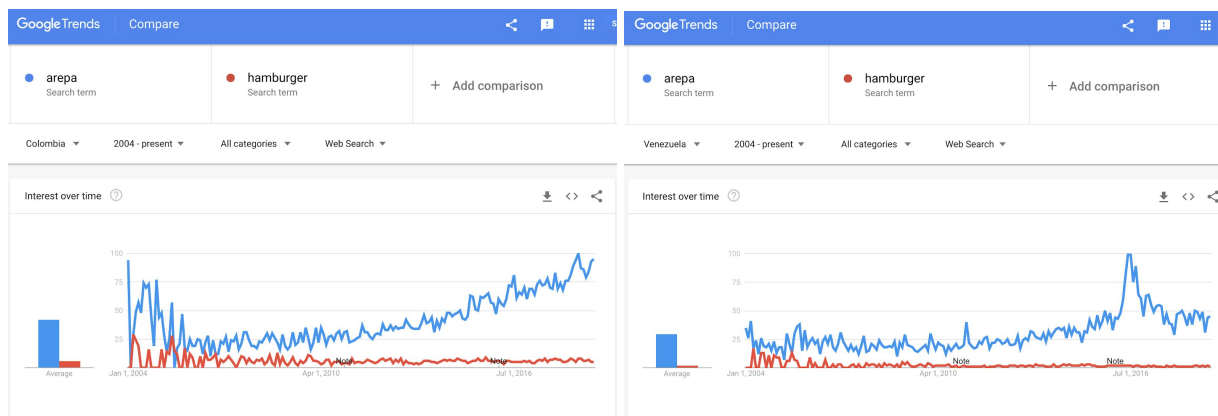


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If we limit the comparison to the specific countries where these dishes are consumed, the proportion is just about even.

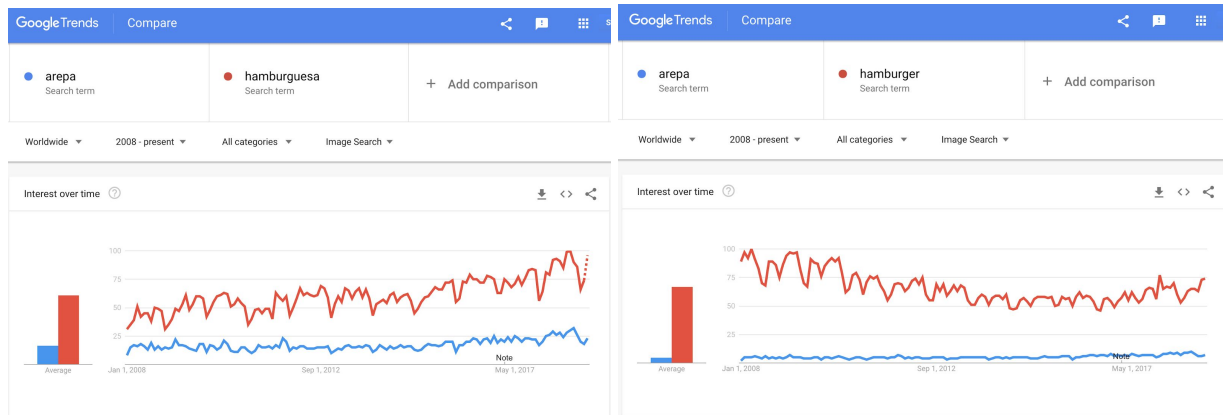


In Colombia and Venezuela, searches for the english term “hamburger” are eclipsed by “arepa”.

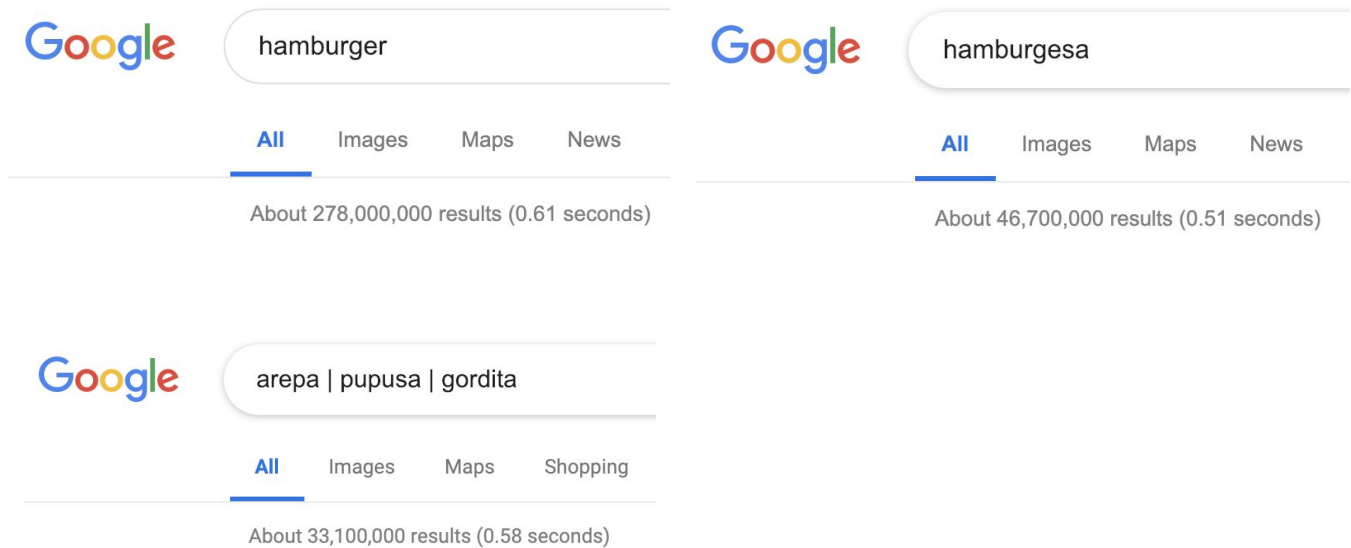


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For image searches, the results for “hamburger” vs “arepa” show a factor of about 10 times more queries. Where as in spanish the factor is only about 3 times.

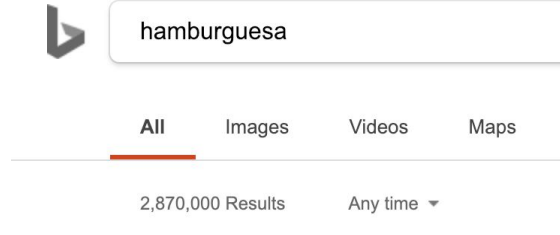
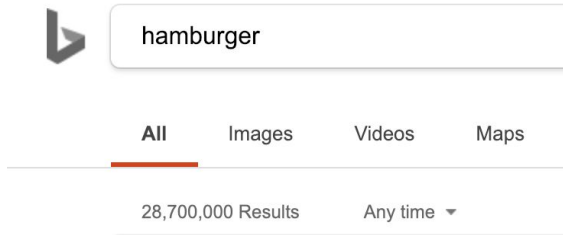


In terms of search results, the reference emoji “hamburger” has a significant advantage, in both english and spanish. But “arepa” still shows almost 5 million results, and “pupusa” has 1.6 million.

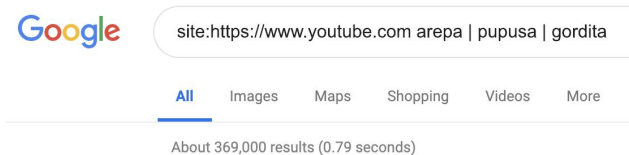
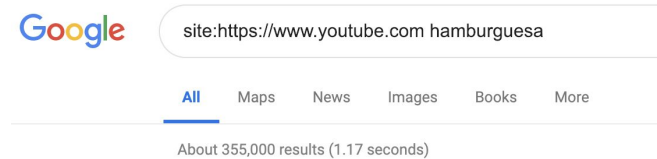
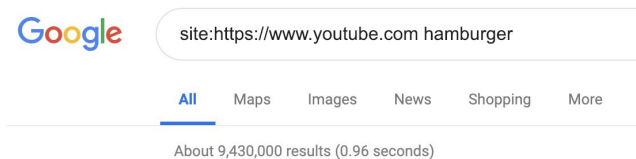


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Bing searches shows about 10 times more results for “hamburger” than the combination of “arepa”, “pupusa” and ”gordita”, but the spanish word for “hamburguer” has only half the number of results than the cornbreads.

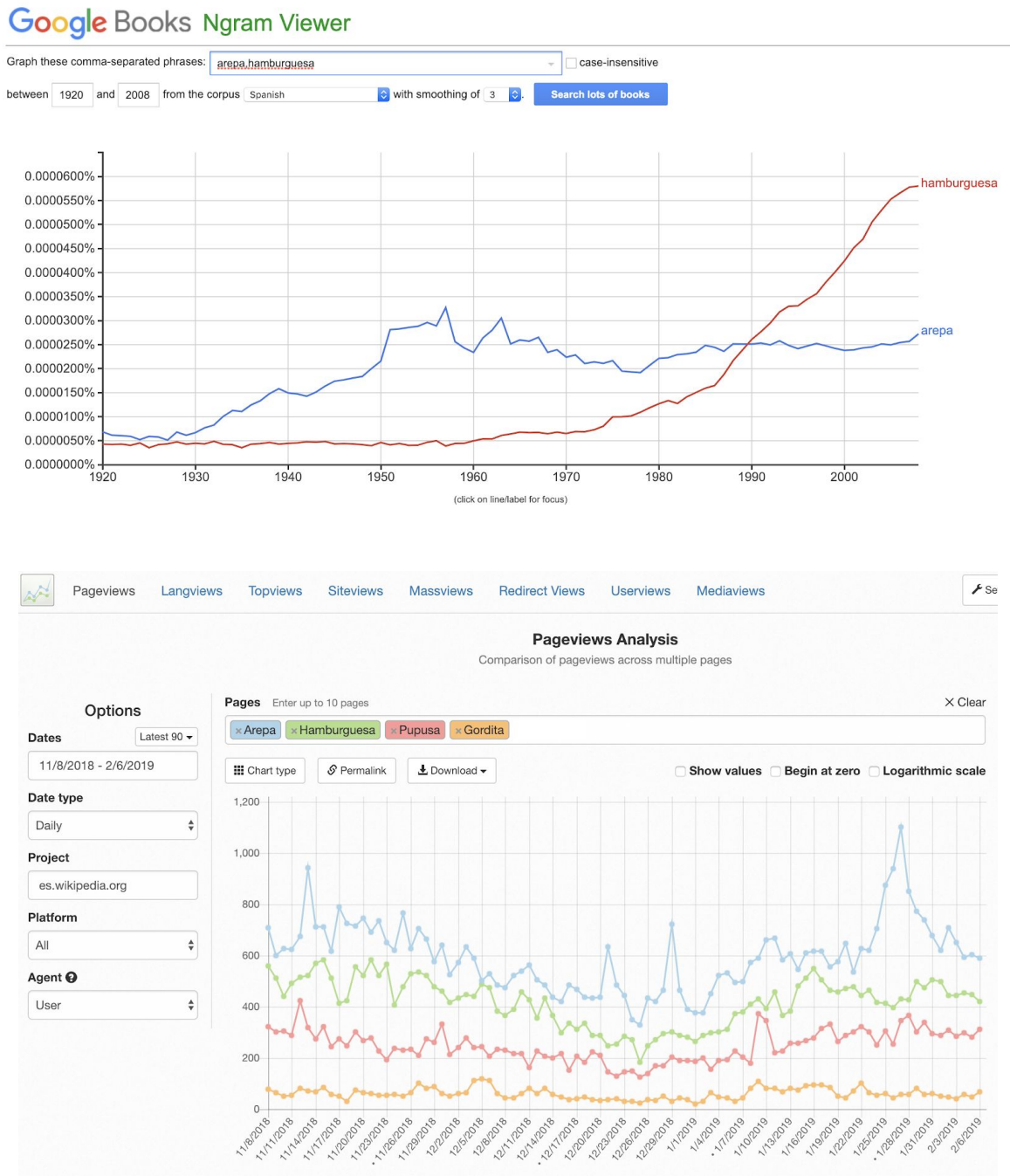


YouTube searches shows a factor of about 25 times more results for “hamburger”, but a comparable number for “hamburguesa” in spanish.



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Other data sources also show “arepa” and “hamburguesa” to be at a comparable level of use in spanish worldwide.



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B.2. - Multiple usages

The LATIN CORNBREAD emoji can be used in specific contexts to also represent:

- Other breads of similar shapes, specially when used for sandwiches. For example: English muffins, “Roujiamo” (肉夹馍) in Northern China, “Tortillas” in Panamá, “Salpores” in El Salvador, or “Macheteadas” in Honduras.
- In conjunction with other food-related emojis to represent specific CORNBREAD sandwiches with different fillings, such as “Cheese and Beef Arepa” or “Pork Gordita”.
- In Venezuela, a score of 0 in any sporting event is called an “arepa”. More specifically, a Baseball inning in which a team fails to score a run.
- In Colombia, “arepa” is also a term to denote “luck,” so for example, when something happens out of sheer luck it’s said to be an “arepazo.”
- In Colombia, when you change your mind, it’s said you “flipped the arepa.”

B.3. - Use in sequences

While the LATIN CORNBREAD emoji will be used along with other emojis in meaningful sequences, we don’t foresee the need to represent those with their own emoji because they would be very hard to distinguish between each other and would have reduced usage.

B.4. - Breaking new ground

We believe the proposed LATIN CORNBREAD emoji would allow the representation of a very specific yet popular type of food in several Latin American cultures in a way that is just not possible today. The closest analog would be BREAD but it’s too generic to be meaningful.

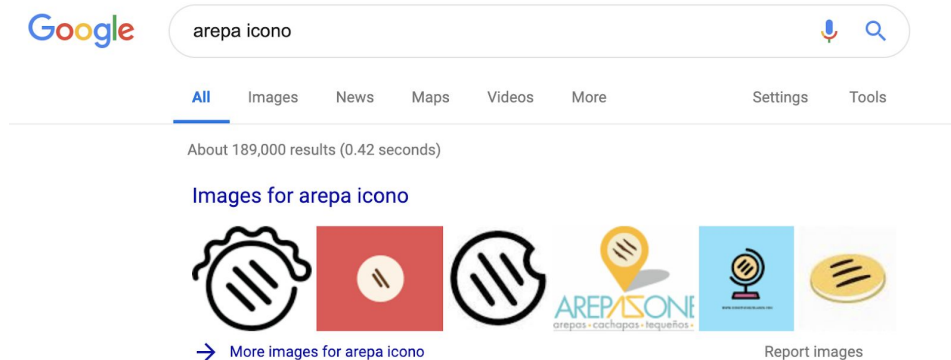
C. - Image distinctiveness

All three different LATIN CORNBREAD styles intended to be covered by this emoji share a circular shape, a light yellow or brown color and some kind of burnt marks.

In general, the iconic representation of an Arepa has always been a circle with two or more slanted parallel lines inside. Something as simple as (/) has been used successfully as a visual representation of the concept.

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You can appreciate this in the search results for “arepa icono” shown below:



While using an isometric view, instead of just top-down, would make this emoji more distinguishable from other circular emojis such as FULL MOON and highlights the flat nature of this type of bread.

Our preference would be for an image of a single CORNBREAD, but representing multiple pieces in the same image might help distinguish it from other circular emoji.

Finally, while arepas are often depicted with different kinds of fillings, they are also consumed alone, and we prefer this simpler representation to avoid excluding some regional variations, but also to avoid confusion with the existing STUFFED FLATBREAD emoji.

D - Completeness

The LATIN CORNBREAD emoji would complement other food emoji and, in particular, bread and flour related emoji such as BAGEL, PANCAKE, HAMBURGER, PIZZA, SANDWICH, TACO, BURRITO and STUFFED FLATBREAD.

It would also help expand the range of Latin foods such as TACO, BURRITO and DUMPLING (empanada).

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E - Frequently requested

Searching for “arepa emoji” on Twitter shows a long list of tweets asking for an arepa emoji.



Often these tweets are clustered in response to new emoji announcements and the disappointment of not seeing “arepa” being included.



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An informal survey on twitter⁸ resulted in more than 7,000 likes and 3,200 retweets in less than 24 hours.



Selection Factors – Exclusion

A - Overly specific

The LATIN CORNBREAD emoji will not be any more specific than other examples in the food category, such as BAGEL or STUFFED FLATBREAD.

By proposing a single emoji to encompass AREPA, PUPUSA and GORDITA we strive to find a balance towards a more general use case.

⁸ <https://twitter.com/sd/status/1095454712604839937>

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At the same time, expanding it too far beyond these breads with a similar aspect to “all circular breads of limited thickness” would make it hard to create a distinctive image.

B - Open-ended

The LATIN CORNBREAD emoji is intended to encompass several variations of cornbreads, but it's limited to those of circular, flat shapes and small diameter and the kind of color and texture produced by grilling corn based flours, in order to ensure recognizability.

C - Already representable

Some existing emojis could be arguably used to represent cornbreads. BREAD would be the general case, but it's too different visually to be of any use. WHITE CIRCLE and YELLOW CIRCLE share the shape and general color of arepas, but they are rendered with flat or shiny textures that make them less relatable to food concepts. FULL MOON SYMBOL is actually used by some to represent arepas, but variations in color and surface details make it unreliable, and the spherical shading makes it confusing.

D - Logos, brands, UI icons, signage, specific people, deities

The proposed emoji does not represent any of these categories and it is not trademarked by any entity.

E - Transient

Arepas, pupusas and gorditas have been part of the common diet of Latin American natives since well before 1492, and judging by the surge of Arepa restaurants all over the world in the last decade, it will stay relevant for a long time.

F - Faulty comparison

This proposal is submitted on its own merits. No case is made that it should be included due, or in comparison, to other emojis.

G - Exact Images

The visual representation does not have to be exact to convey the concept. Any flat circular shape in the approximate proportion and color, and with some kind of burnt texture, would be easily recognizable.

Author Biographies

Sebastian Delmont (sd@notso.net) is a Venezuelan software developer and entrepreneur living in New York City, where he eats arepas at home several times a week. His favorite arepa is “La del Gato” from Caracas Arepa Bar.

Lumen Bigott (mail@lumenbigott.com) She is a Venezuelan designer working at Airbnb living in San Francisco, where she makes arepas at home several times a week for friends and family. Her favorite arepa is “Domino” from Qué Arepas Valencia.

Design Contributions from: Emiro Arrieta @emiroarrietag; Carlos Jiménez @unavacaverde; José “Jojo” @josperbott; Harold Nieves Díaz @ubersch; and Mattan Ingram @mattaningram.