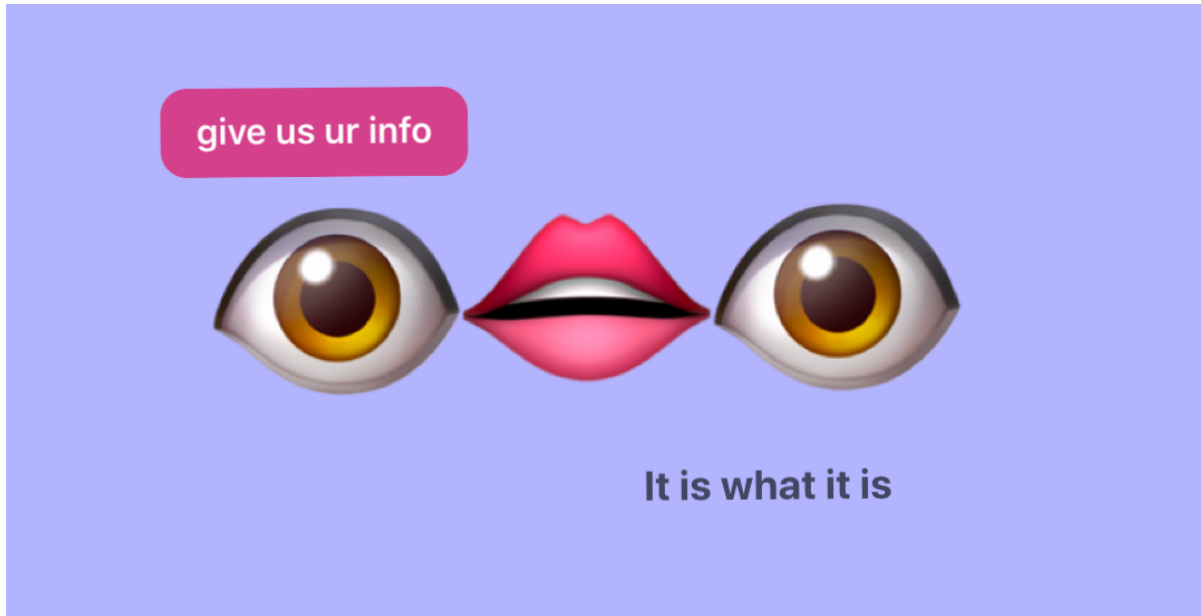


What does 🙄 mean? Well...

Josh Constine

4-5 minutes



That moment you're left speechless, confused, unsettled. Unsure what you just saw, unsure what to do next. But there's no denying what happened. It is what it is.

The eye mouth eye emoji set is a modern 🙄 for more trying times, devoid of the same gleeful acquiescence. 😞 is too resigned and sour. 🙄 means you feel helpless amidst the chaotic realities unfolding around us, but there is no escape. When someone or something is just too much, and you're just left thinking "well, this is awkward".

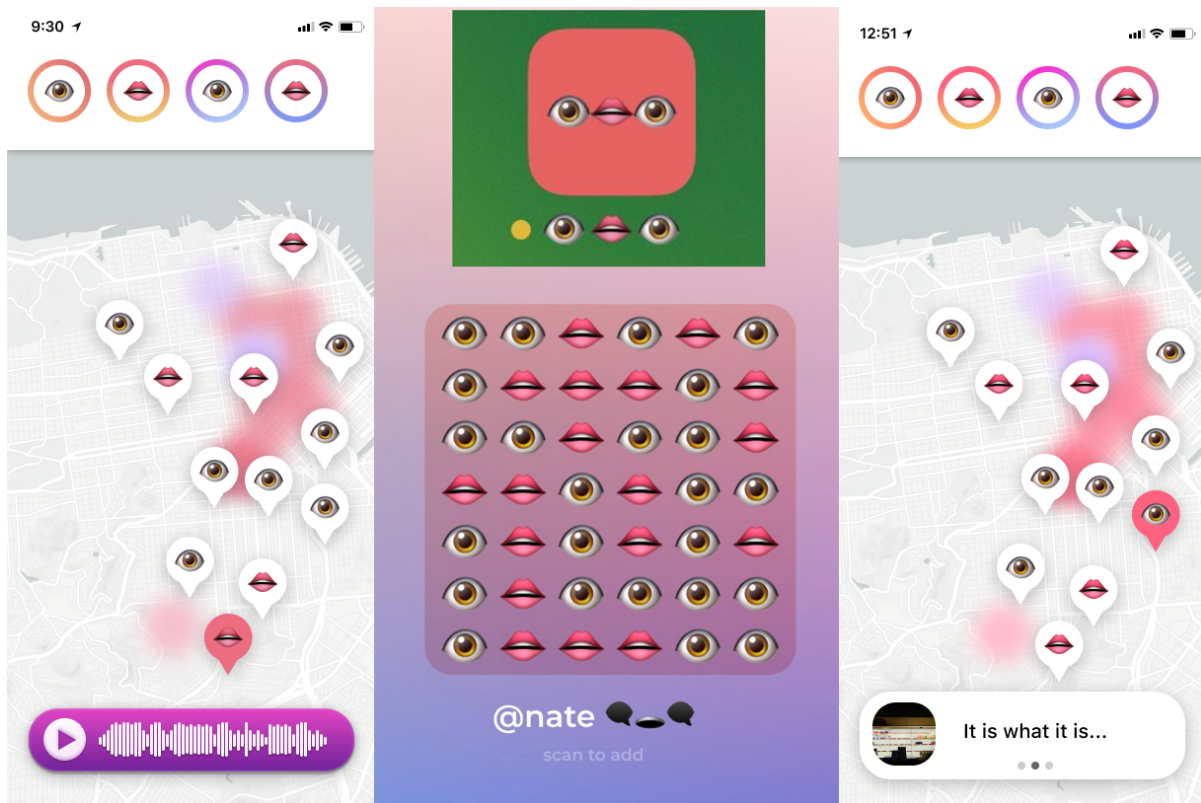
The emojis popped [up](#) last year on YouTube. It was defined in Urban Dictionary in February as meaning shock or surprise. An "it is what it is" [audio](#) went viral on TikTok. And the emoji recently began circulating on social media as a catch-all response to bearing witness to the absurd. But then...

....exploded onto [Twitter](#). An enterprising app developer seized the phrase, set up a cryptic landing page at [🙄.fm](#) asking you to "give us ur info", and urged the curious to share it and add the emoji to their display name. It is was it is... is an app? Maybe?

It's either the latest in a wave of buzzy new startups like Clubhouse that exist solely in limited private beta, or an epic parody of them. FOMO about what's inside leads investors and early adopters to crave TestFlight invitations to the glorious unknown. People won't shut up about this stuff, either intrigued or offended by the temporary exclusivity. The void created by shelter-in place-orders let these apps and jokes feed on our collective boredom and [the quarantine user loan](#).

When I tried to interview the shadowy figure behind its Twitter account, it merely responded "It is what it is. that's all." But from the screenshots it's tweeted and hints from early users, my highly unverified guess is that it lets people share your voice and imagery to a map and Stories-like bar that you can serendipitously tap through.

But that could be a clever diversion. It also may just be an enormous inside joke by "Design Twitter" to expose how thirsty we all are for something new.



This is the latest evolution of [the rise of the Stepchickens](#) that I covered on this newsletter, which saw influencers build cults of fans that copied their profile pics to spread their comedic gospel. App Stores are clogged and we've grown blind to traditional marketing. But 🗨️👄🗨️ has leveraged an army of confidants to turn Twitter names into billboards and bewildering teasers into a hype cycle no tiny startup could afford.

If there's no actual app, and instead merely a call to further spread the intrigue, it just proves the marketing savvy of the team behind it and gullibility of everyone else. Hell, with all the email addresses it's collecting, this could become a startup if it isn't one. But simply being a cheeky move to drive donations to charities that it [tweeted](#) throughout the day would be a happy enough ending.

Then it became something bigger

[Update: At 7pm tonight, the [site](#) presented links to donate to [Loveland Foundation](#), [The Innocence Project](#) or [The Okra Project](#), and then upload your receipt to "see what it is." You should donate to them. Go do that.

Then at 9pm, they [revealed](#) the true story. A joke amongst a diverse group of friends became an accidental cultural moment for 20K people, an examination of exclusivity culture, and raised \$110K for these racial justice philanthropies. They

WHAT IT REALLY IS

JUNE 26TH, 2020

You're probably wondering what this is. Well, it started off as just what it is.

A group of us changed our Twitter names to include "👁️💋👁️" because we thought it was a funny trend from TikTok. People started noticing the change on their timelines, noting the creepiness of the emojis in particular. For a brief period of time, everyone who added the emojis to their name was added to a giant Twitter group conversation. From there, things unfolded.

What started out as a meme in our small group chat grew bigger than we ever imagined. So we thought about how to make use of the hype cycle we'd stumbled upon. But honestly, we didn't have to think too hard: in this moment, there's pretty much no greater issue to amplify than the systemic racism and anti-Blackness much of the world is only beginning to wake up to. We're excited that we could use our newfound platform to drive action towards a few causes that are doing important work towards racial justice: **Loveland Foundation Therapy Fund, The Okra Project, The Innocence Project**, and others.

"We're a [diverse](#), ragtag group of young technologists tired of the status quo tech industry, and thought that we could make the industry think a bit more about its actions."

They earned the internet's attention, and harnessed it for good. I'd call that a success, so [hire](#) them and [donate](#).]

We crave the sense of affiliation stripped from our lives by isolation, and a break from home life's monotony. In this moment, what could have been more tempting than a secret society behind a locked door — a mystery that leaves you 👁️💋👁️

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