Proposal for Emoji: QR code

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1. Identification

Proposed Emoji Name: QR code
CLDR Short Name: qr code

1.1 Keywords

scan, scanning, mobile, link, payment, authentication, ticket, matrix code, barcode

1.2 Emoji Category and Subcategory

Category: symbols
Subcategory: other symbol

2. Images


(B&W, 18x18 px)


(B&W, 72x72 px)


(Color, 18x18 px)


(Color, 72x72 px)

A simplified, non-scannable representation of a QR code. The internal pattern has been intentionally abstracted to ensure clear recognition at emoji sizes while preserving the visual characteristics making QR codes immediately identifiable worldwide.

The artwork contains no encoded information, cannot be scanned, and is intended solely to represent the concept of a QR code as an emoji without reproducing any functional or proprietary implementation.

2.1 Image Rights and Permissions

The example emoji images included in this proposal were created exclusively for this submission by a commissioned designer, with all intellectual property rights assigned to the submitter under a work-for-hire agreement.

The submitted artwork is:

- original work;
- intentionally non-scannable;
- free of encoded data;
- not derived from any existing QR code or dataset; and
- free of logos, branding, trademarks, or proprietary visual content.

The submitter grants the Unicode Consortium a non-exclusive, irrevocable, perpetual, worldwide, royalty-free license to use, modify, and distribute the submitted artwork for the purposes of evaluating, documenting, and, if accepted, implementing the proposed emoji.

3. Selection Factors - Inclusion

3.1 Multiple Meanings

The proposed QR code emoji carries both a literal meaning and a broader communicative function.

Literally, it represents a QR code as a scannable object used to access digital content - in contexts such as payments, authentication, ticketing, transportation, public services, retail, hospitality, healthcare, education, and device pairing, and explicitly referenced in everyday communication.

Beyond the object itself, the emoji can signal the presence of a scannable access point or an interaction requiring scanning, functioning as shorthand for actions like "scan to access", "scan for details", or "scan to proceed."

More broadly, it can indicate that access to information depends on a specific action or tool - much as 🔑 (key) represents access or 🔗 (link) represents connection. The QR code emoji conveys the idea of content that is not immediately visible but requires a specific interaction to unlock.

Unlike most machine-readable symbols, the QR code is explicitly used in everyday language, making it both a physical object and a widely understood instruction to scan.

3.2 Use in sequences

The QR code emoji works effectively in sequences, such as:

- Ticket with QR code
  🎟️ 
- Pay with QR code
  💳 
- App/Download via QR code
  📲 
- Menu via QR code
  🍽️ 
- Identity verification
  🪪 
- Parcel tracking
  📦 
- QR code scanned successfully
  

In each case, the QR code emoji contributes a specific, irreplaceable meaning: it signals that access occurs via scanning - something no other emoji currently conveys in an effective manner, as demonstrated in the following section.

3.3 Breaks new ground

Yes – the proposed emoji breaks new ground: no existing emoji represents a scannable visual code as a communicative object. The proposed QR code emoji introduces a concept that no existing emoji or sequence adequately captures: a visual code that people recognize, name, and interact with in everyday life.

Related emoji represent adjacent but distinct concepts - 📷 a camera, 📱 a mobile device, 🔗 a link; none depicts the QR code itself as a recognizable symbol. Sequences such as 📱🔗, 📷👇, or 📱👇 are similarly ambiguous: they may suggest using a phone, taking a photo, or following a link, but none consistently conveys the specific concept of a QR code.

This gap is reflected in everyday language. As will be shown in Section 3.5, expressions such as "scan the QR code" appear across all mentioned domains of modern life - referring to a specific, universally recognized object for which no emoji currently exists.

Unlike most physical objects in the emoji set, a QR code also functions as an instruction; encountering one typically implies an expected action: scan to access information; complete a transaction; verify your identity; continue a workflow. The proposed emoji therefore captures

both a physical symbol and an established communicative concept, filling a semantic gap rather than duplicating an existing one.

3.4 Distinctiveness

The QR code's defining characteristics - the square structure with three prominent corner markers - create a distinctive appearance that can be identified even at typical emoji resolutions. Unlike arbitrary pixel patterns, these features provide a stable visual identity that distinguishes QR codes from other symbols or abstract graphics.

To ensure clarity at small sizes, the proposed design intentionally simplifies the internal pattern while preserving the structural elements that users immediately associate with QR codes.

As a result, the proposed QR code emoji is unlikely to be confused with existing emoji or generic pixel patterns. Like many detailed emoji, it relies on visual abstraction rather than complete visual fidelity while preserving all necessary characteristics.

3.5 Usage Level Evidence

The following data demonstrates the widespread global presence and sustained relevance of QR codes across digital and physical contexts.

This evidence also shows how deeply embedded QR codes are in everyday communication: queries such as "scan the QR code" indicate that QR codes are not only recognized as objects but are actively referenced in language as instructions and interaction points.

This dual role - both as a physical symbol and a communicative element - underscores their function in guiding user behavior, enabling access, and facilitating interaction between people, services, and information, thus supporting their suitability for representation as an emoji.

Google Search Results Overview

	"qr-code"	**"elephant"**	**"scan-qr-code"**	**"scan-the-qr-code"**
Google Search	1,190,000,000	251,000,000	24,300,000	151,000,000
Google Video S.	29,900,000	40,700,000	998,000	3,860,000

3.5.1 Google Search Evidence

These results demonstrate the widespread use of QR-related terminology in everyday language. Action-oriented phrases such as "scan the QR code" reflect common real-world instructions used across public, commercial, and social realms.

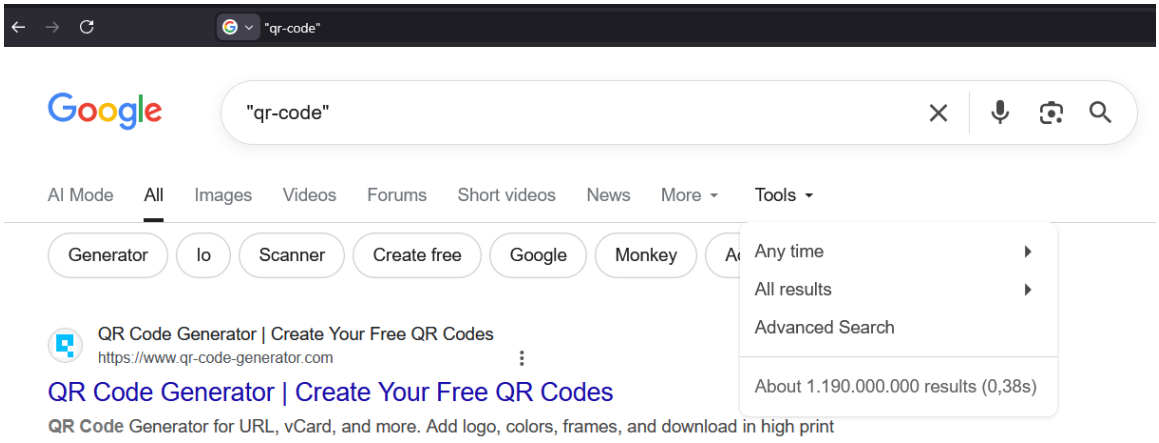

Figure 1: General search results for "qr-code" (1.2 billion), screenshot taken 2026-04-08

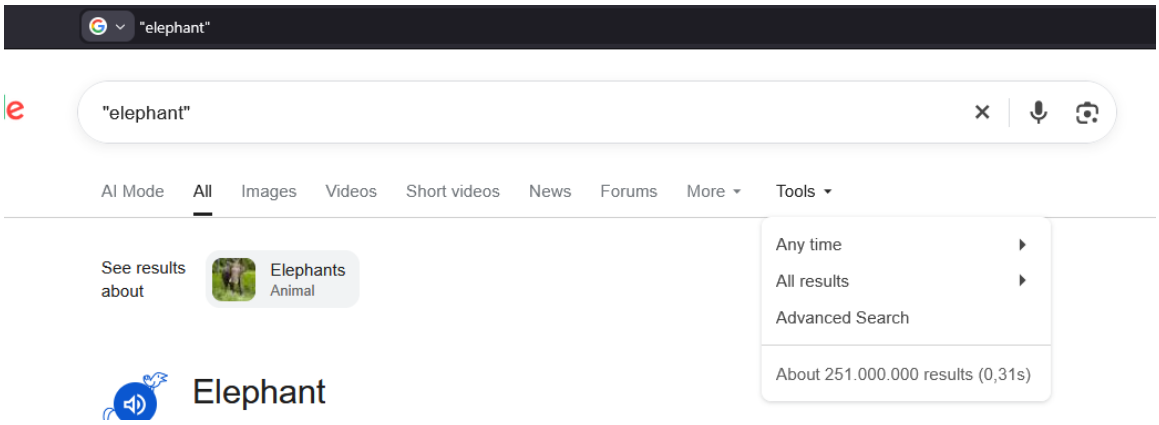

Figure 2: General search results for "elephant" in comparison, screenshot taken 2026-07-20

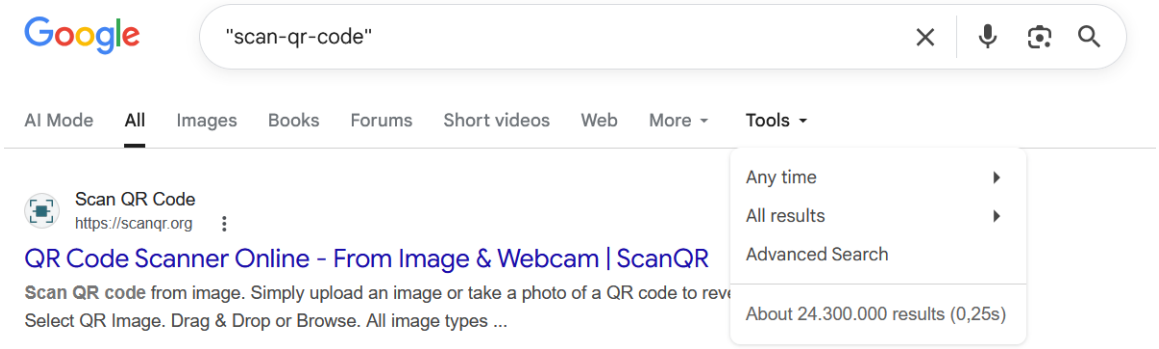

Figure 3: General search results for "scan-qr-code" (24 million), screenshot taken 2026-04-08

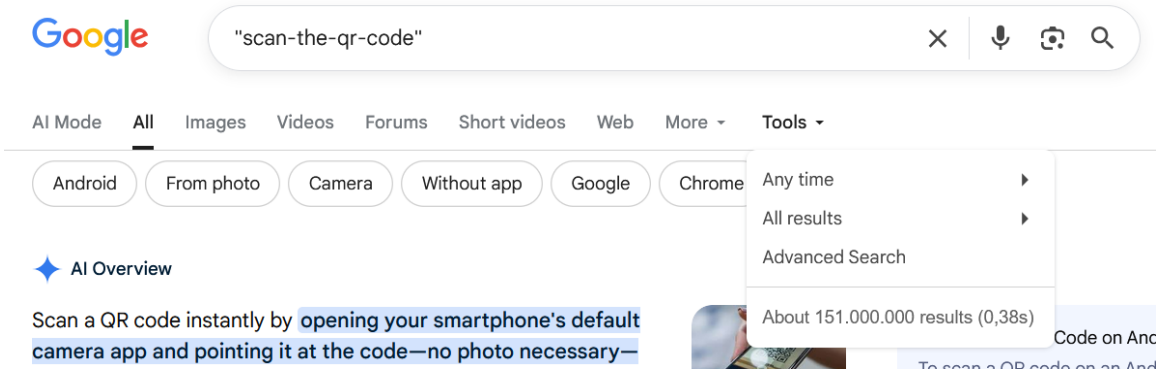

Figure 4: General search results for "scan-the-qr-code" (151 million), screenshot taken 2026-04-08

3.5.2 Google Video Search Evidence

Video search results further highlight the practical and communicative role of QR codes, showing real-world scenarios where users are instructed to scan codes in multiple contexts.

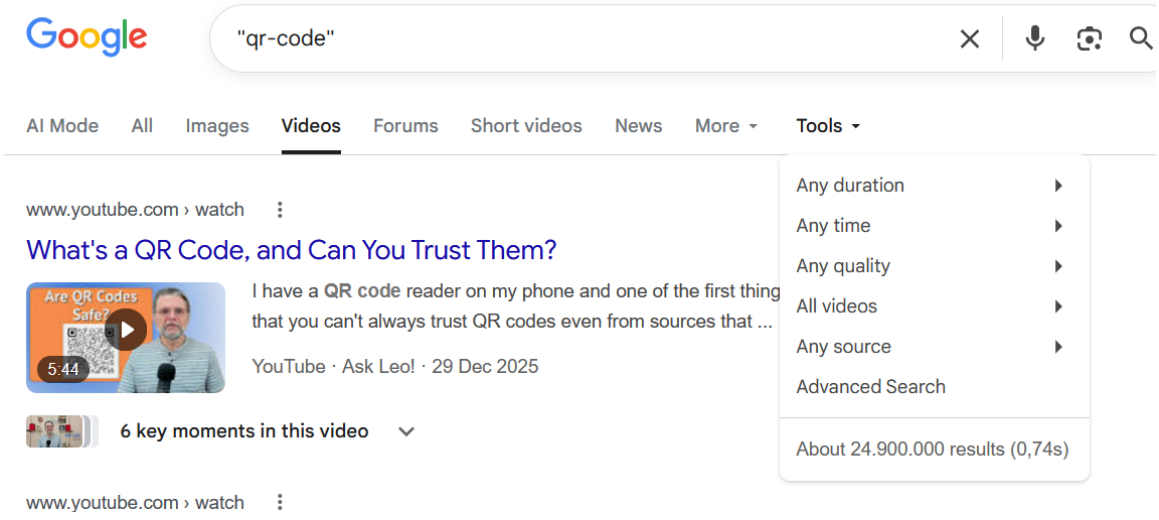

Figure 5: Video search results for "qr-code" (25 million), screenshot taken 2026-04-08

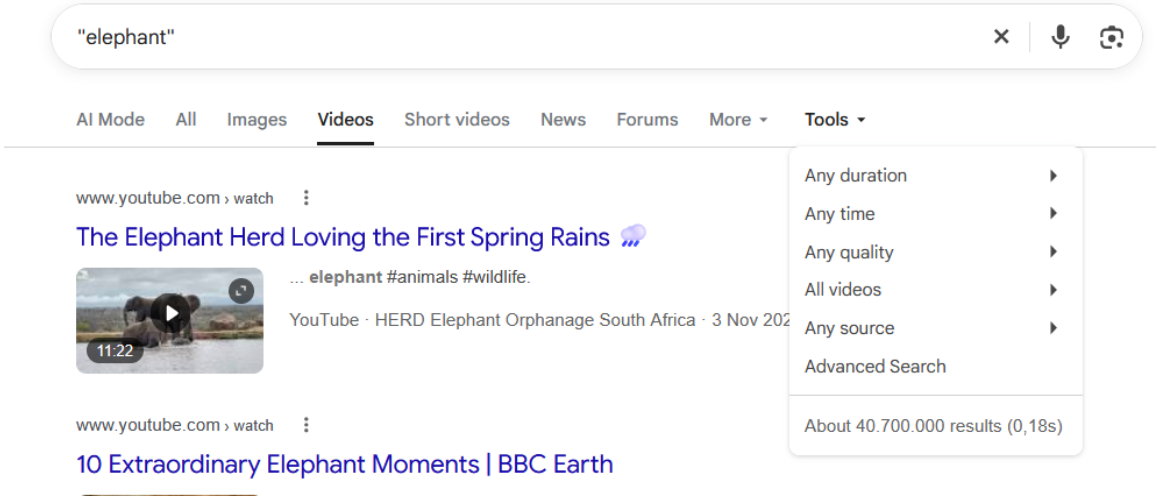

Figure 6: Video search results for "elephant" in comparison, screenshot taken 2026-07-20

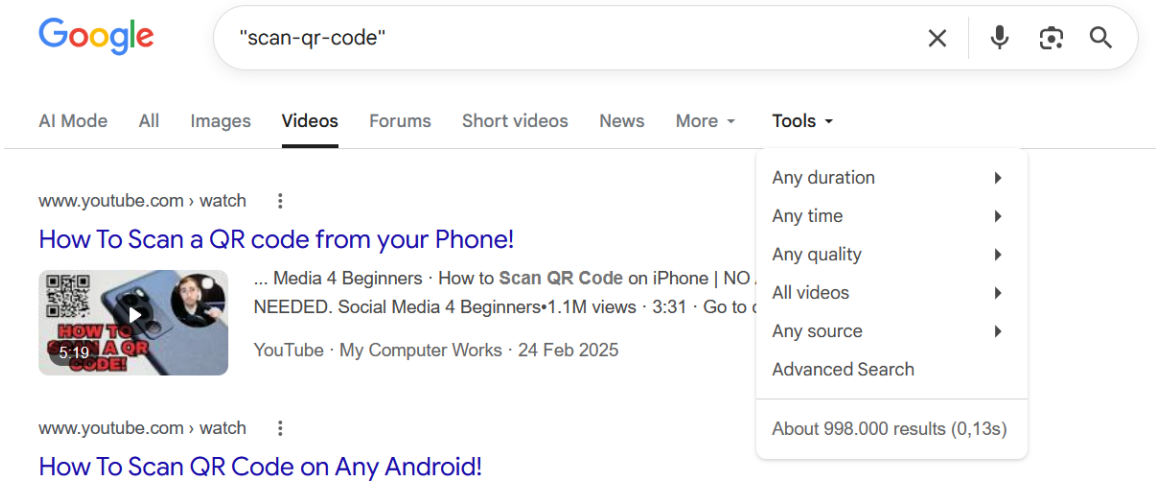

Figure 7: Video search results for "scan-qr-code" (1 million), screenshot taken 2026-04-08

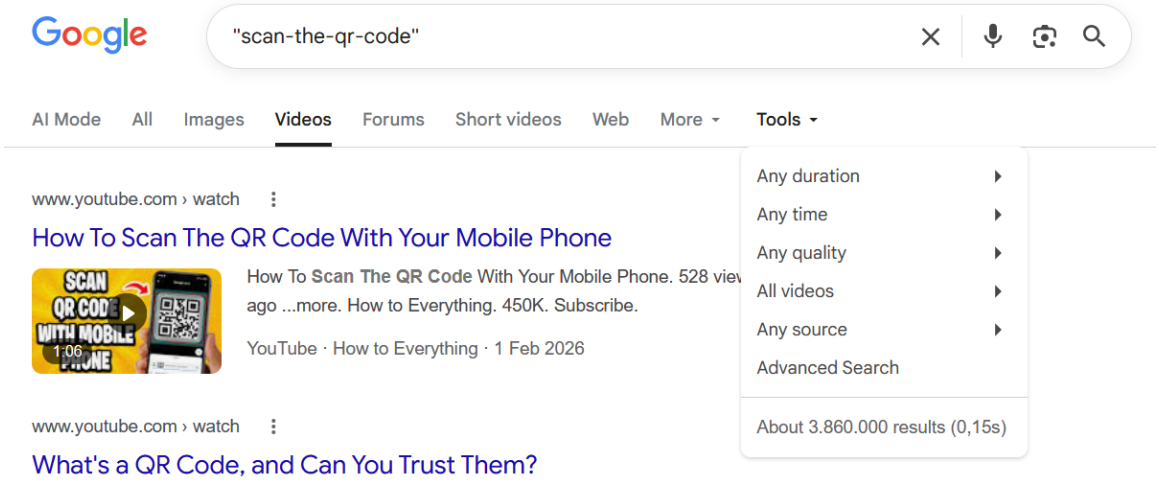

Figure 8: Video search results for "scan-the-qr-code" (3.9 million), screenshot taken 2026-04-08

3.5.3 Google Trends Evidence

The sustained and increasing search interest over time indicates that QR codes are not only widely recognized, but remain relevant in day-to-day life, particularly with the growth of mobile-based services and contactless technologies.

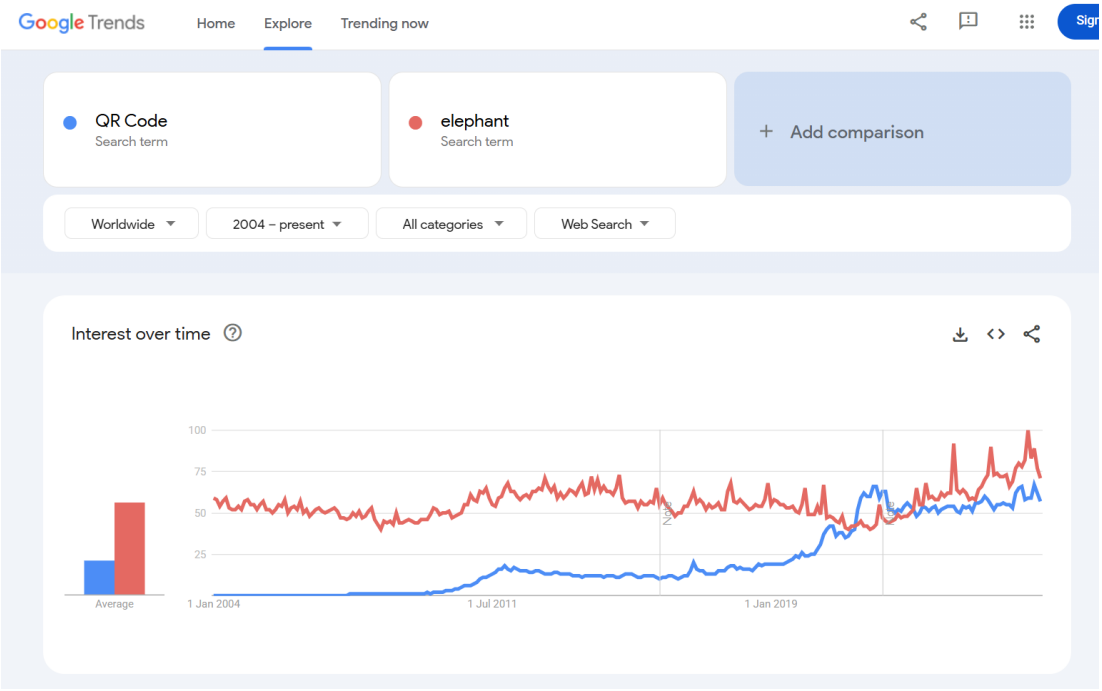

Figure 9: Google Trends for Web Searches of "QR code" and "elephant" since 2004, screenshot taken 2026-04-08

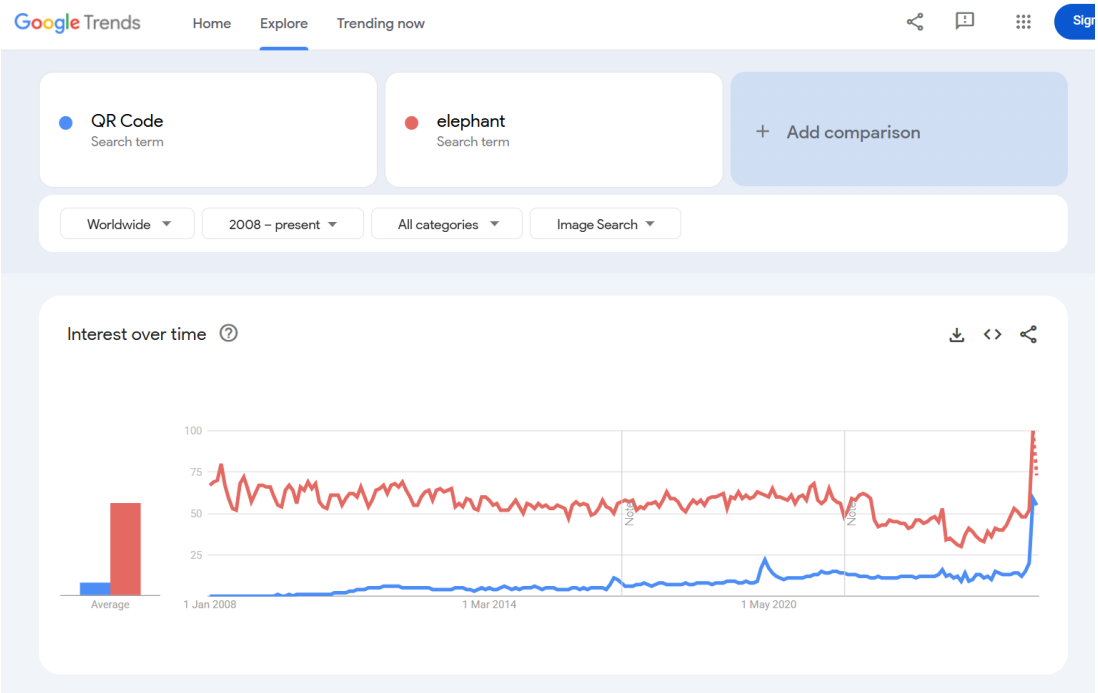

Figure 10: Google Trends for Image Searches of "QR code" and "elephant" since 2008, screenshot taken 2026-04-08

3.5.4 Google Books Ngram Viewer Evidence

The increased presence of the term "QR code" in published literature reflects its long-standing integration into technical, commercial, and public discourse.

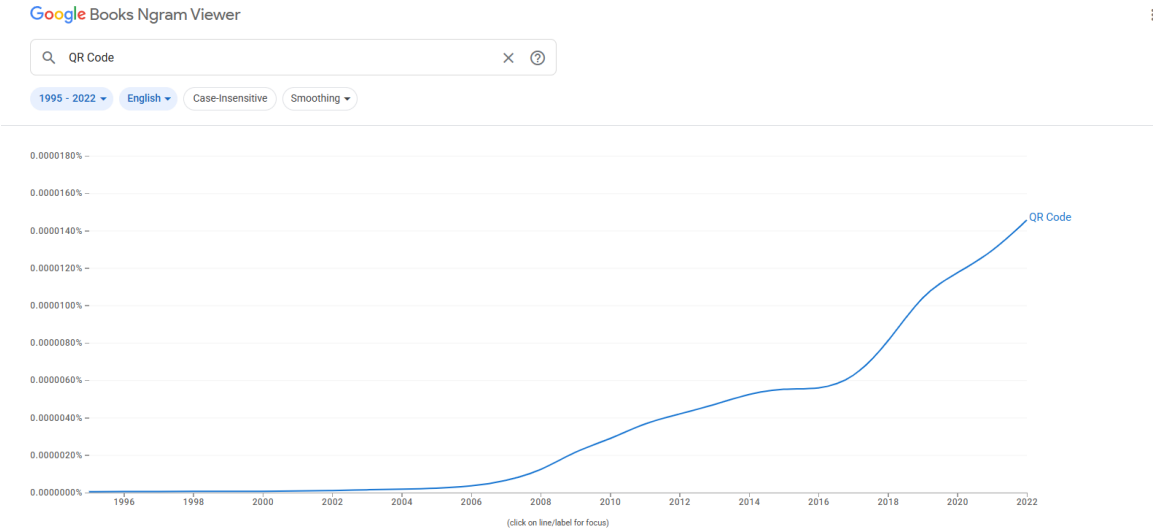

Figure 11: Google Books Ngram view for "QR code" 1995 – 2022, screenshot taken 2026-04-08

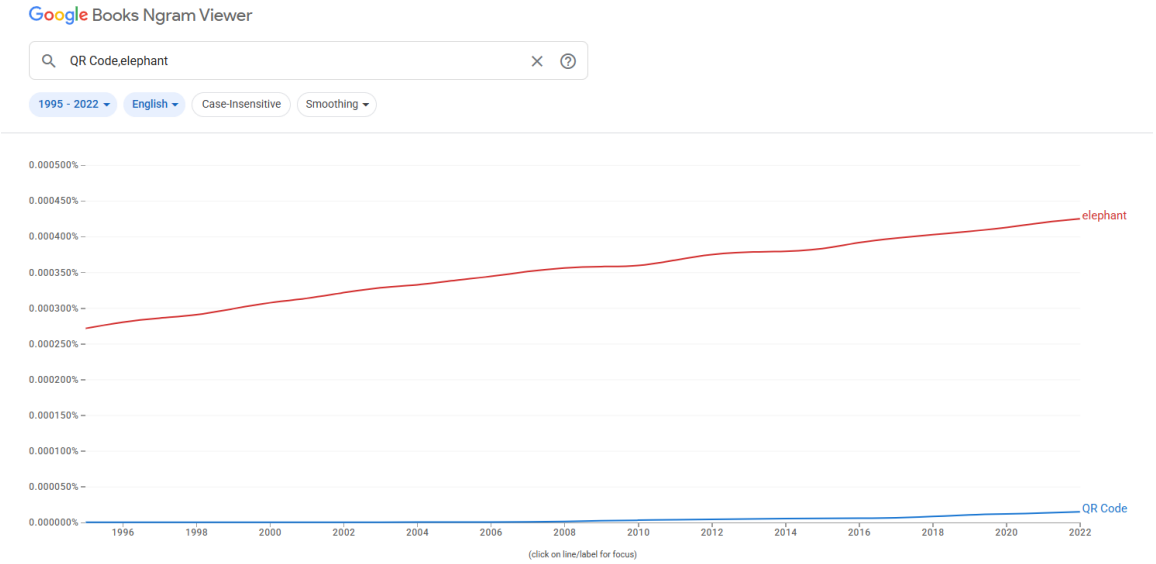

Figure 12: Google Books Ngram view for "QR code" from 1995 – 2022, compared to "elephant", screenshot taken 2026-04-08

3.5.5 Public Usage Examples

QR codes are widely used in communication between institutions and individuals, often serving as direct interaction points in workflows such as identity verification, payments, and access to services, for example:

- WhatsApp uses QR codes for device linking (https://web.whatsapp.com/)

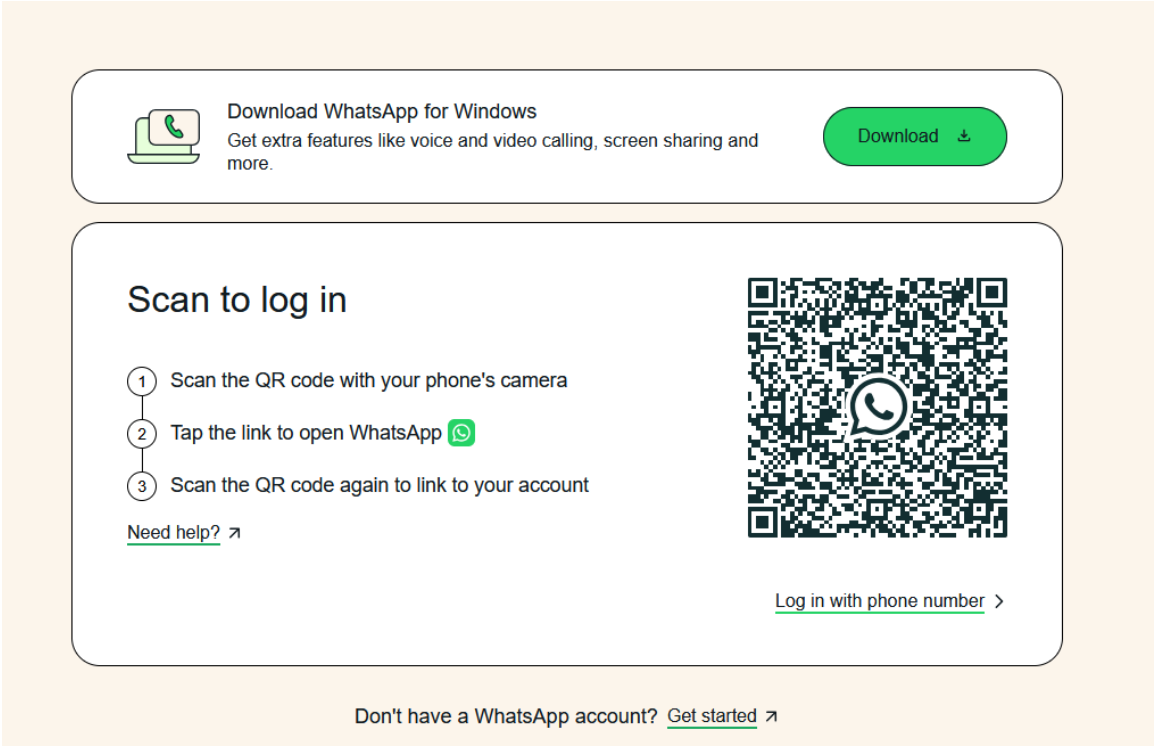

Figure 13: WhatsApp device linking, screenshot taken 2026-04-10

- Federal Government of the Republic of Austria uses QR codes in official identity workflows, e.g. the connection of a user device with the ID Austria App (https://www.id-austria.gv.at/de/hilfe/hilfe-zur-app-ida/app-verknuepfen - only available in German). Additionally, official IDs can be saved as QR codes in the ID Austria App.

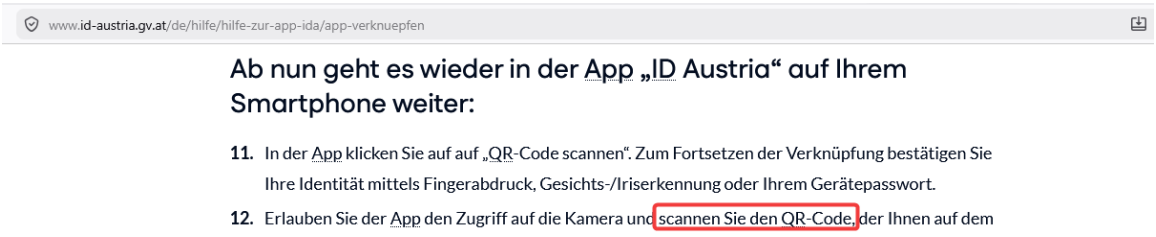

Figure 14: ID Austria device linking (German), screenshot taken 2026-04-10

- State Government of Indiana (USA) uses QR codes on its website: https://www.in.gov/core/qr_code.html

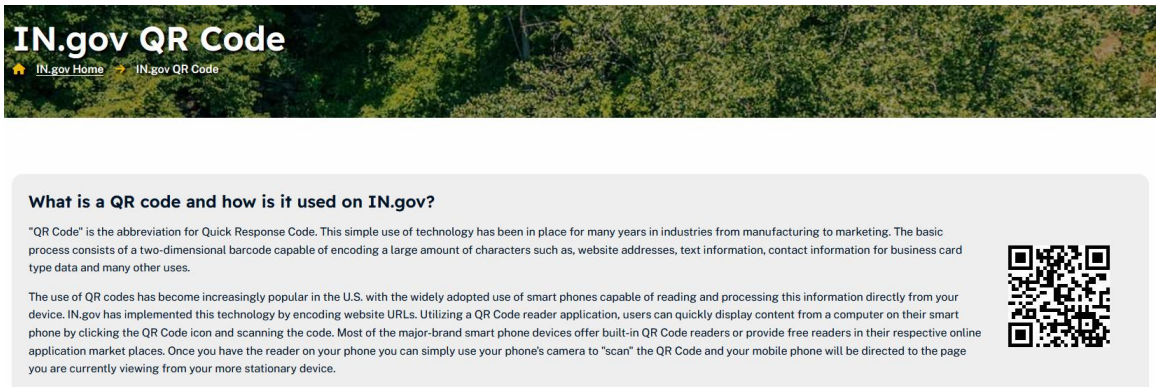

Figure 15: QR code usage at www.in.gov, screenshot taken 2026-04-10

- Federal Government of the Republic of India issues the "Aadhaar Card", imprinting it with a QR code to show the holder's information (https://uidai.gov.in/en/)

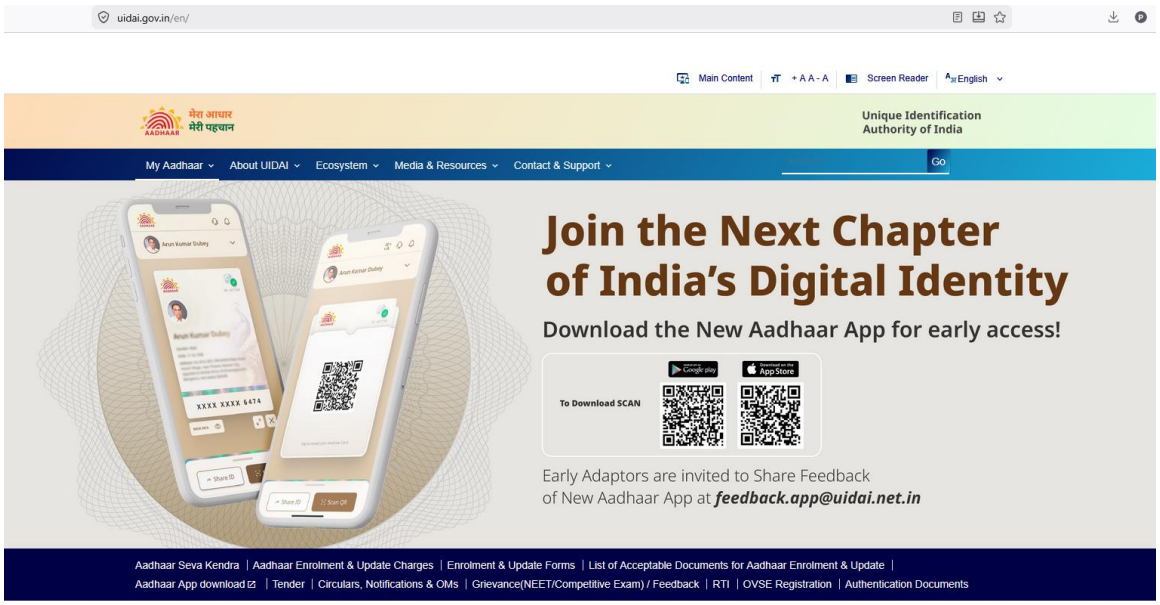

Figure 16: Indian Aadhaar Card using QR codes, screenshot taken 2026-04-10

- State Government of New South Wales (Australia) currently trials QR codes for IDs like driver's licenses and personal IDs to be scanned by authorities to check an ID's authenticity of the Digital Photo Card (https://www.service.nsw.gov.au/nsw-digital-photo-card/card-checkers).

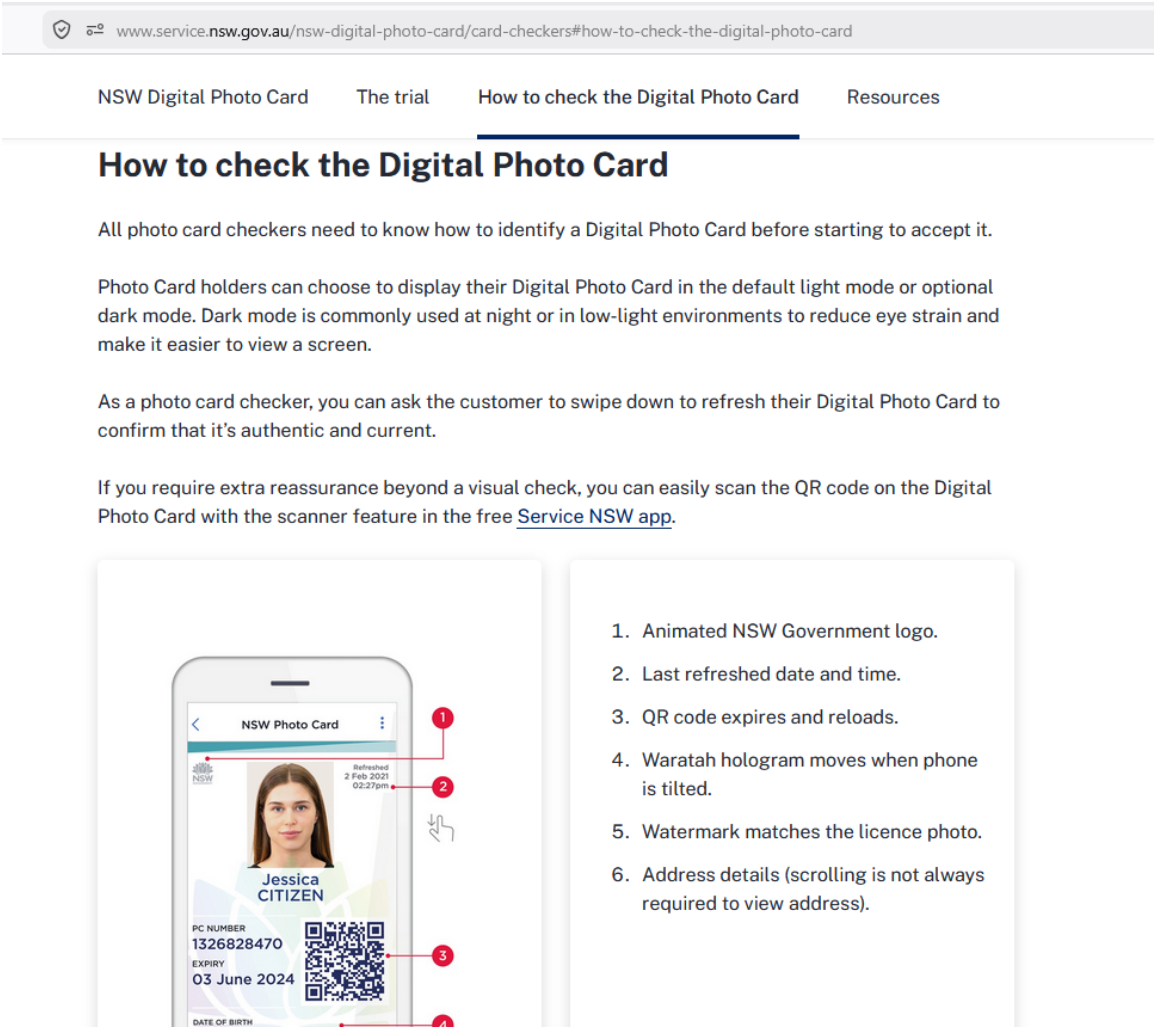

Figure 17: QR code on IDs in New South Wales, screenshot taken 2026-04-10

- National Directorate General of Traffic (Spain) utilizes QR codes in their miDGT-App (https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.dgt.midgt&pli=1) to verify digital car papers and driver's licenses.

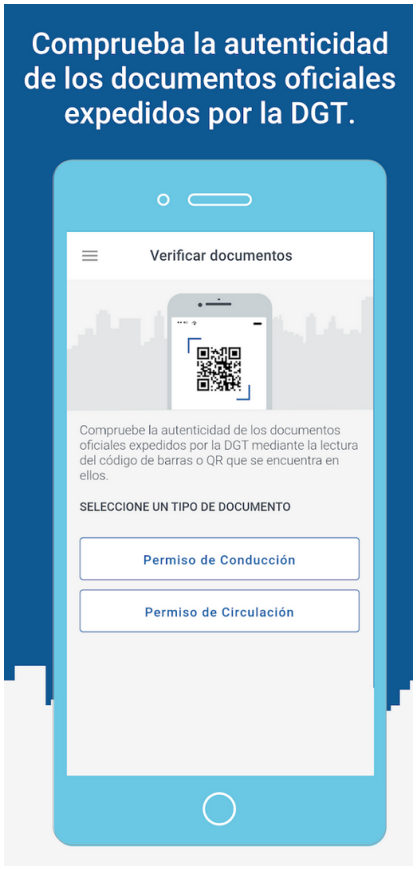

Figure 18: QR code in miDGT-App, screenshot taken 2026-04-10

3.5.6 Evidence of usage in communication

The defining characteristic of the QR code is not merely its technical adoption, but its integration into everyday language. Expressions such as "scan the QR code," "use the QR code," or "show the QR code" are used without explanation across the already established domains of QR Code usage - and, as shown throughout Section 3.5, consistently return tens to hundreds of millions of search results.

Despite this linguistic presence, no emoji currently represents the QR code or the concept of scan-based interaction; users rely almost exclusively on text. Emoji sequences such as 📱🔗, 📷👇, or 📱👇 remain ambiguous substitutes, at best implying phone use, photography, or a link - never the specific, universally understood concept of a QR code.

Summed up, the evidence shows not only widespread adoption of QR codes, but their evolution into a distinct communicative concept that currently has no equivalent emoji representation.

3.6 Completeness

Not applicable: the proposed QR code emoji does not belong to a broader emoji category or set of symbols that would require completion.

3.7 Compatibility

Not applicable: no equivalent QR Code symbol exists in any legacy emoji set or character encoding that would justify inclusion on compatibility grounds.

4. Selection Factors - Exclusion

4.1 Already representable

The concept of a QR code cannot be adequately represented by any existing emoji or combination of emoji. Related emoji represent devices, actions, or abstract concepts and not the visual object of a scannable code itself.

A QR code is a specific, widely recognized visual entity that conveys meaning through appearance alone; as established in Section 3.3, no existing emoji or sequence reproduces or approximates this visual identity. The proposed emoji therefore addresses a semantic concept currently absent from the repertoire of emoji.

4.2 Overly Specific

Although the QR Code emoji represents a particular type of two-dimensional matrix barcode, the QR code has become the overwhelmingly predominant form of scan-based visual interaction in everyday life.

The proposal does not distinguish between versions, technical specifications, or implementation variants; it represents the concept users commonly identify simply as "QR code" and the connected interactions - a broadly applicable communicative concept rather than a narrow technical specialization. The proposed QR code emoji is therefore not overly specific.

4.3 Open-ended

The proposed QR code emoji does not introduce an open-ended class requiring systematic expansion. Other machine-readable formats - Barcode, Data Matrix, Aztec code, PDF417 - remain largely invisible technical standards, rarely known or named in everyday language. The QR code, by contrast, has become a distinct communicative concept: expressions such as "scan the QR code" are widely understood without explanation and refer to a specific visual object, not to two-dimensional barcodes in general.

The Google Trends comparison in **Fig. 17** reflects this distinction: public interest in "QR code" is consistently many times greater than in other machine-readable formats, underscoring its unique communicative role. Encoding a QR code emoji would therefore not create pressure to encode other barcode formats, which do not occupy an equivalent semantic role.

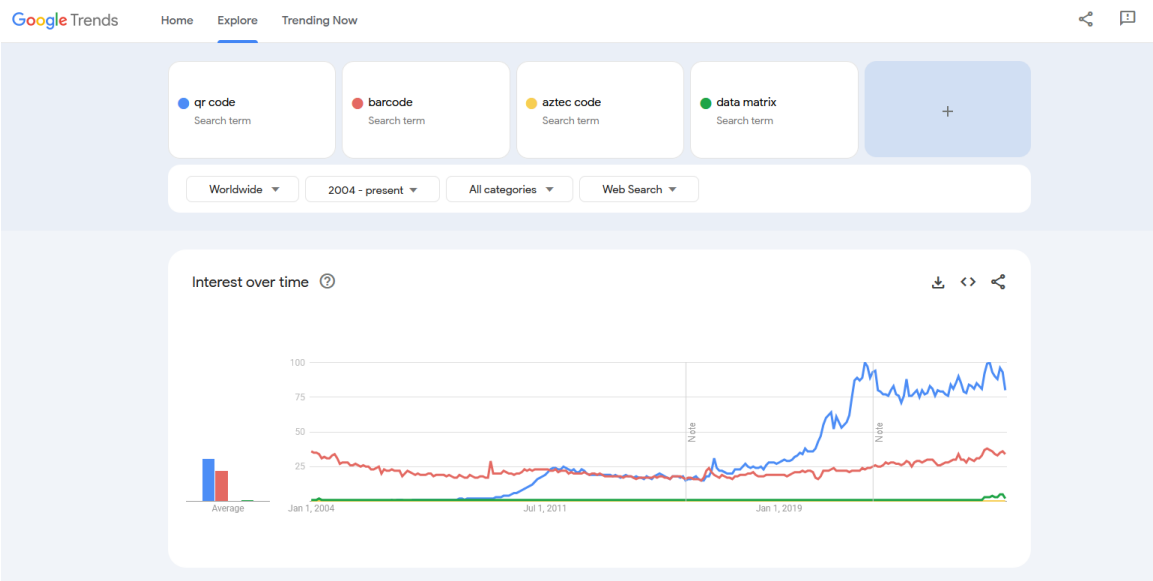

Figure 19: Google Trends Comparison between multiple 2D barcode types, screenshot taken 2026-04-13

4.4 Transient

QR codes are certainly no transient or fad-based phenomenon: Introduced in 1994, they have been in continuous and growing use for over three decades - particularly with the rise of smartphones - and have become a stable component of global digital infrastructure, widely used in all kinds of day-to-day services.

Google Trends data confirms sustained and increasing global interest in the term "QR code" over years rather than a short-lived spike, reflecting its long-term relevance.

4.5 Faulty comparison

This proposal is not justified by comparison to existing emoji, nor by arguing that a QR code emoji is similar to, or more important than, any current emoji. Comparisons to existing emoji (such as 📷 camera or 🔗 link) appear solely to clarify conceptual differences and explain why the concept is not already represented.

The proposal stands on its own merits - supported by the evidence provided throughout the previous sections.

4.6 Logos, Brands, Trademarks, UI icons, Signage

The proposed QR code emoji is an abstract, non-scannable representation of the general concept of a QR code - not a specific product, logo, or commercial design - and reproduces no encoded information, proprietary artwork, branded implementation, or functional QR code.

While the term "QR Code" indeed is a registered trademark of DENSO WAVE INCORPORATED in several jurisdictions, this registration applies solely to the word itself in specific commercial contexts. According to DENSO WAVE's own public guidance, the QR Code pattern (image) may be used freely, without license or fee, and no trademark notice is required when only the visual code - not the term - is displayed. [1]

The proposed emoji represents the generic visual concept, not DENSO WAVE's brand, product, or proprietary artwork, and is therefore comparable to other genericized technical terms (e.g., "escalator") that refer to a widely used concept rather than a specific commercial source.

4.6.1 UI icons

A QR code is a physical symbol that exists independently of software interfaces. Software applications may display QR codes, but the symbol itself is not a UI control - it is an external object intended for scanning.

4.6.2 Signage

A QR code is not a standardized regulatory or wayfinding sign whose meaning depends on location or placement. As demonstrated, it may appear in informational environments of everyday life, but its meaning does not derive from context or placement.

Instead, a QR code is a distinct visual object, directly referenced and recognized in communication - its inclusion as an emoji reflects that role, and not a place in any signage system.

5. Proposed Unicode Properties

Emoji Presentation: Yes
Emoji Modifier Base: No
Directionality: Neutral

[1] Source: DENSO WAVE INCORPORATED, "FAQ," QRcode.com, accessed 2026-07-15, https://www.qrcode.com/en/faq.html - Question: Is there a fee for using QR Code?