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coordinadores

Aida María de Vicente Domínguez

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MEMES, TEAMS AND OTHER THEMES: A CLASSIFICATION OF ONLINE MEMETIC CULTURE

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ABSTRACT

The phenomenon of memes as a new way of communicating through images is evolving towards increasingly sophisticated forms of communication. This work is based on the compilation of different memes and on the preceding literature in order to propose a classification of them through their study. These categories define the communicative culture of a society at a given time and are based on aspects such as age, gender, cultural and socioeconomic level, as well as the type of online platforms on which they are disseminated. The classification presented in this paper comprises 5 categories: historical, original, edited or editable, community-specific and cross-edited. This study demonstrates the need to broaden the vision of memes beyond the chaotic and disorganised sphere in which they are currently understood, which will allow us to find common threads that will enable more specific research to be carried out.

KEYWORDS

Meme; classification; virality; digital communication; images.

1. INTRODUCTION AND OBJECTIVES

The word meme has been used both in academic and mainstream circles since its coining by Richard Dawkins in 1978. He defined memes as ‘small cultural units of transmission, analogous to genes, that spread from person to person by copying or imitation’ (Shifman, 2014b). This was an important creation as the term was invented to refer exclusively to items reproduced by imitation, ideas and culture, rather than genetically (Dawkins, 1978). This is important as it allowed for the inclusion of every part of cultural media and inexplicit social cues: melodies, catchphrases, fashion trends, images, advertisements, etc. They are all different types of memes, engraved in the culture of those who created them.

There are classically two controversies regarding cultural memes: virality and ‘who’s the boss’ (Shifman, 2014b). The first one considers memes to be like a virus, transmitted through the cultural equivalent of sneezes (‘Hey! Look at this amazing skirt I found!’), which act like a virus infecting innocent people’s minds without their consent. The second, ‘who’s the boss’ analogy that we have borrowed from Shifman’s 2014 book *Memes in internet culture* refers to human agency in consuming such memes, and whether humans act as actors or vectors in their transmission. These controversies have been long argued and are not the focus of this work, as the study of the morality and righteousness of the existence of memes in the online sphere is not the goal of our work.

Internet meme (a) A group of digital content units sharing common characteristics of content, form, and/or stance. For instance—photos featuring funny cats with captions share a topic (cats), form (photo + caption), and stance (humor). (b) These units are created with awareness of each other—the person posting the “cat with caption” image builds on the previous cats in the series. (c) These units are circulated, imitated, and/or transformed via the Internet by many users. Internet memes are multiparticipant creative expressions through which cultural and political identities are communicated and negotiated (Shifman, 2014b, p. 188).

An Internet meme is, therefore, a piece of shared culture that is created, shared, changed or understood on the internet, by internet users, but which does not necessarily live exclusively on the internet. There is no one defining line for what constitutes a meme, but their categorizations, understandings, forms, stances, and topics can be used to connect one to another (Wiggins & Bowers, 2014).

We aim to find a classification that seems to have avoided academia for too long, that honors both the process, the users’ intent and the history of the memes that emerge from the memescape, searching through online spheres, the meaning of virality, our own circles and the memes that have created our own understanding of memetic culture in an online society that uses memes as weaponized and self-aware cultural capital (Nissenbaum & Shifman, 2017). Through this classification

we believe that we will be able to find a thread connecting all existing memes, even as our own research has proved that the link between Internet meme knowledge and possible variables is not simple nor easily identified and depends highly on many personal, communal, and social factors, such as age, socioeconomic level, sex, social media and platform usage and community membership. A categorization that can fit every meme in every circumstance is essential for the future study of such phenomena, which has proven to evolved quickly and grow out of previous categorizations faster than researchers can create them (Shifman, 2014b).

The landscape that houses the creation and sharing of memes is seemingly chaotic and decentralized, yet the work for their existence is intensely coordinative and it requires a pervasive mimicry (Knobel & Lankshear, 2007; Nissenbaum & Shifman, 2017; Wiggins & Bowers, 2014) provided by the social network structure that creates a competition for user attention (Weng, Flammini, Vespignani, & Menczer, 2012). It is the mix of all of these factors which leads to the creation of memes, with broad diversity in virality, lifetime, and user activity.

Memes do not exist in a vacuum: the inter-correspondence between different online communities, users’ intercommunal existence and the shared value of the creation of a meme further expands the pool from which to choose from.

In fig. 1 we see a perfect example of this: understanding this tweet would be impossible without proper background knowledge, as we have mentioned before, but it is also important to not the meme convergence of such an image. Da vinky is a reference to a viral video that had been memed itself during the time this tweet was posted; the woman shown in the image is Alexa Demie, whose age has been a point of contempt and the memes and jokes about her seemingly nonaging appearance while being a lot older than it would suggest, and this supports the idea of an old Mona Lisa, while the man badly edited into the image is Robert Pattinson, whose appearance in the original image has been constantly memed and re-edited into other viral content.



Fig. 1. Example of meme layering. Source: lily, 2020

The background knowledge of what this picture signifies is key to understanding the joke, but what is more important here is the symbiotic relationship between the memes that is shown: three memes coming together to create one bigger, grander meme. The gatekeeping possibilities increase with every layer added, but the way content can be reused and reutilized in new memes is of note.

It is also important to note that the medium which creates these memes is extremely relevant not only to their virality, but also to their format and the way previous meme ideas are reused. Different platforms may create grounds for different type of content, but those who will enjoy it exist cross-platform as well. Original popular platforms such as Desmotivaciones.es (in Spain) or the now dead Vine create content that long outlasts them that is so integral to the meme culture of those who consume that even years after that content was created it is referenced in a daily way. 'This has Vine energy', for example, is a phrase very commonly seen across all social media, particularly TikTok, which has a similar format to the deceased Vine (Martinez, 2020), and it refers to the content that reminds users of what would have been posted in that old platform. Both users and creators may have moved on from the original platform (many popular Vine stars moved to YouTube or Instagram, and more recently to TikTok), but no one ever forgets where they came from.

The adaptability of memes out of their context is certainly not surprising, as we have already mentioned that there is something they all share, but it is still of note that such regurgitation can exist with no regard for the original creator to simply gain virality: a meme can only be popular if it has already appealed to many audiences (Jenkins, Ford, & Green, 2013; Milner, 2016; Segev, Nissenbaum, Stolerio, & Shifman, 2015). Users who have never used platforms like Reddit, for example, can still receive the cultural capital that comes from understanding a viral post or knowing a reference (Liberat & van den Berg, 2019) because there are entire accounts on Instagram or Twitter dedicated to reposting viral content. This is why we can talk about the Internet as a whole instead of having to focus on a specific social media: if it exists on the Internet, it will have found its way everywhere.

Previous academic work has focused on meme qualities, considering versatility, which in turn determines scalability, opportunities for expansion as seen in the study of meme 'fecundity' by Knobel and Lankshear (2007), and 'fungibility' by Lewis (2012) and Milner (2016) who identified these qualities as necessary to successful memes. Some attempts at classifications enacted by other authors have historically been limited to a certain type or blueprint for memes (Beskow et al., 2020; Ross & Rivers, 2019), limited in their thematic scope (Beskow et al., 2020) or have simply become outdated (Shifman, 2014b). There have been previous studies of the life cycle of the content until it becomes meme (Wiggins & Bowers, 2014), but there is to this date no classification about the types of memes currently in existence that is broad enough to allow all memes to be categorized by it while still drawing similarities not only between memes of the same category but also the categories themselves. That is the goal of this work.

There are many genres of memes that our classification includes, but we are not defining genres, but categories. This is an important distinction as a meme is the broader, umbrella term for most reproduced online content, with only a limited connection to virality. Shitposts, defined by Abdul (2021) as 'senseless messages to confuse, entertain, or anger'; reaction images, defined as meme images that signify a particular emotion or phrase used to react to other posts or events; icons, defined by Dahmen, Mielczarek, and Morrison (2019) as 'select images have become part of our collective visual consciousness'; deep fried memes, defined by Matalon (2019) as 'images that are ironically and intentionally overedited, often to the point of near incoherence and surrealism'; and a long list of other genre of memes are all categorized in our classification, regardless of genre. This allows for a broader, more applicable general classification that will hopefully outlast previous attempts.

Davison (2012) separates a meme into three components: manifestation, the observable part of the meme phenomenon; behavior, which creates the manifestation and is the action taken by an individual in service of the meme; and ideal, the concept or idea conveyed. We believe that any classification should take every meme dimension into consideration, and therefore believe that such classification should thus include four things:

- a) A long lasting, historically accurate range of memetic content. It will be applicable to all existing and future memes, meme genres, and templates in any platform for sharing, creating, or enjoy memetic content.
- b) Connection between all existing and future memes, meme genres, and templates in any platform for sharing, creating, or enjoy memetic content by recognizing similar patterns.
- c) Separation of the process, meaning, templates and formats for sharing, creating, and enjoying memetic content in any platform for such designed.
- d) An acknowledgement of memetic culture history and the human factor, as well as recognition of the different types of enjoyment available for different users, communities, and humors.

Why is such a classification necessary in the first place? Memes are often still considered to be wild and uncontrolled, without recognizing the inherent community value created by those seemingly random memes (Knobel & Lankshear, 2007). Shifman (2014b) defined a list of meme genres based on the idea that 'different meme genres involve different levels of literacy: some can be understood (and created) by almost anyone, whereas others require detailed knowledge about a digital meme subculture' (p. 101), thus organizing memes by the level of literacy they required; yet her classification of genres has already become outdated: flash

mobs, for example, are a genre of meme that is no longer being expanded, at least at a rate significant enough to be a category of its own.

We believe that there is a need for a classification that will not be outdated yet will allow for the understanding of both a meme's life cycle, the way it was created, the way it is consumed, and the intent behind its creation, sharing, and even consumption. We believe that who can understand a meme is not the main requirement that a classification must require, as that would inherently create flaws due to the extremely prominent online communities, as well as group together memes that we believe have followed a different path.

Memes that can only be enjoyed by a group of people in the knowing cannot be a category of its own, as every meme would fit in that category: it is impossible to create a meme that does not reference anything at all, or else it would not be cultural capital. It is less about the number of people it reaches and more about the reason for its creation. There is an audience for everything, as long as the meme can find it: the success social media cross-posting and the difference in virality across different platforms proves this.

2. METHODOLOGY

Our field work includes eleven months (from June 1st, 2020 to April 30th, 2021) of Internet surfing where we have studied and analyzed meme trends, memes on the rise and those who have resurfaced to be able to study and analyze them in the context provided in this work. This is not an analysis of all memes created in this period, nor a particularly thorough listing of them. Community memeing gatekeeping causes any sample to be highly biased, so this one is particularly biased to our own presence online. We do not claim that the examples of memes used are the only nor even the best representation of memes as a whole, but they do not need to be: as previously mentioned, all memes are different, yet they are all the same. We have chosen enough examples for the analysis to be broad and applicable to these memes in particular, but the nature of the meme itself will allow for exported applicability.

The memes we have chosen from all of the results of our field work are what we believe to be the best representation of where memes originate, where they go, how they evolve and how they die, should they. They are in no way a thorough list of all or even the most viral memes during our chosen period of time, but they are the best examples of the exportable characteristic applicable to all meme genres.

The 'I wish I was at home/They don't know' meme is a variant of the 2009 image macro that was uploaded to the humor site Sad and Useles where fig. 2 appears for the first time. This image became viral after on November 28th, 2020 a twitter

user posted the first known edited version of the image with 'they don't know' as a header, and on later days the meme was replicated multiple times by different accounts on different social media, firstly expressing feelings of inadequacy and later on evolving to other formats like fig. 3.



Fig. 2. Original 'I wish I was at home/They don't know' meme. Source: Unknown.

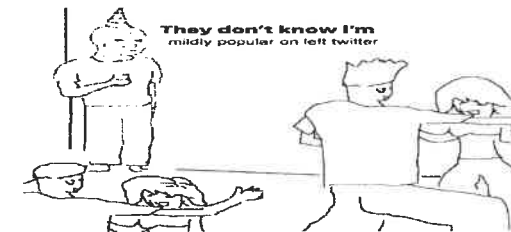


Fig. 3. Edited 'I wish I was at home/They don't know'. Source: anna!!!!, 2020

'*Sam va lentín*' is a Spanish meme format with a play on the words 'San Valentín' (Valentine's Day) and *Sam va lentín* (Sam walks slowly) over an image of the characters Sam and Frodo from the movie franchise *The Lord of the Rings* (fig. 4). The first usage of this phrase can be found on Twitter in 2011 (López, 2011), but the meme, whose image author is unknown, has become a staple every February 14th, with multiple variations being tweeted every year, including with other meme formats, mixed media, mixed fandom, and mixed memes.



Fig. 4. Original 'Sam va lentín' meme. Source: unknown.

Similar to 'Sam va lentín', as they are both reoccurring in a schedule, we have identified the 'Jason Derulo MET fall' meme, where every year since the original tweet, now deleted (Old Miami, 2015), the same picture of a man resembling Jason Darulo falling down a staircase at the Cannes Film Festival is tweeted during the MET Gala by different users, as well as some edited versions of it (fig. 5). The 'walking into the new year positive energy' meme also follows this yearly recurrence.



Fig. 5. Example of an edited 'Jason Derulo MET fall' meme. Source: New York Times bestselling AUTHOR JONNY SUN, 2020.

Loss, also known as CADbortion, Loss.jpg and || || || _, is one of the most interesting memes to be found in the memescape (fig. 6). It originated from the 2008 video game-themed webcomic series Ctrl+Alt+Del (Buckley, 2008), in which the ending was unexpectedly (and according to readers unsuccessfully) dramatic, clashing with the tonal of the comic, and therefore causing it to be mocked online and even on TV shows such as Futurama (Fedman, 2015). || || || _ refers to the structure of the panels, and this structure has been replicated constantly online in the 13 years since its first posting, including by the author himself.

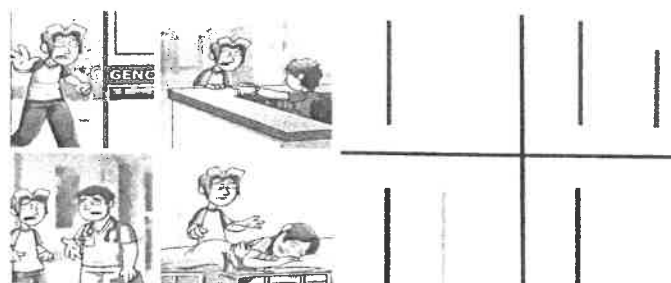


Fig 6. Original loss.jpg meme, as well as the structured replicated in posterior memes. Source: Buckley, 2008.

Furthermore, we have meme templates that were created from a screenshot of a TV show and then edited to fit any box that the users wished them to. The 'Sue Sylvester' meme where the *Glee* character says, 'I'm going to create an environment that is so toxic' (fig. 8) has received this treatment, as well as the 'gopissgirl' meme (fig. 7) (Wood, 2020) that became popular early 2020, by taking an image from the popular TV Show Gossip Girl and changing the letters of the title of the show to make it spell other things.



Fig. 7. Original gopissgirl meme. Source: Wood, 2020.



Fig. 8. Original Sue Sylvester meme. Source: Falchuk et al., 2009.

Our field work includes eleven months (from June 1st, 2020 to April 30th, 2021) of Internet surfing where we have studied and analyzed meme trends, memes on the rise and those who have resurfaced to be able to study and analyze them in the context provided in this work. This is not an analysis of all memes created in this period, nor a particularly thorough listing of them. Community memeing gatekeeping causes any sample to be highly biased, so this one is particularly biased to our own presence online. We do not claim that the examples of memes used are the only nor even the best representation of memes as a whole, but they do not need to be as previously mentioned, all memes are different, yet they are

all the same. We have chosen enough examples for the analysis to be broad and applicable to these memes, but the nature of the meme itself will allow for exported applicability.

3. RESULTS

As previously mentioned, there is a lack of a classification of memetypes that acknowledges their history and the intent behind them, and so our work has focused on creating one. Many academic works have limited their analysis only to the 'normie', now classical meme format of 'top text' and 'bottom text' (Beskow et al., 2020; Ross & Rivers, 2019), but our goal is to create a simple classification that will allow for the categorization of every meme and sub meme.

Before describing such classification, it is important to remember that a meme refers both to a single unit of content (one image, one video) and to the larger scheme that that image fits into: of memes, as cultural, information are relational entities to that which surrounds them (environment and communities, other memes, language, and language barriers, etc.), memes should be thought of as systems. And so we use the word meme to refer to the system, i.e. the combination of the idea and every single meme-unit, while using meme-unit to refer to a single instance in which the idea of the meme has been used, and grand meme to refer to the idea of the meme, the pattern, the blueprint, the concept on which the existence of the meme relies on (Cannizzaro, 2016). 'Son are you winning' is a grand meme encompassing every image that relies on the format, template, and knowledge of them to exist. This classification refers to both, as the characteristics they fulfill can be similar, but not necessarily the same. The difference between meme, grand meme and meme-unit is extremely relevant for this classification.

The classification described in this work is not exclusive: one meme, both grand and single-unit, can fit multiple categories. The historical aspect to this classification demands that categories are not exclusive amongst themselves, as development and the process of meme evolution is not lineal and can, should and must be intertwined with other concepts and processes. The categories we have identified are, therefore, as follows:

Historical. 'Loss.jpg', 'Tranquilovsky', and 'Sam va lentín' fit into this category, as well as the grand meme for 'top text, bottom text'.

Originals. The unedited image for 'I wish I was at home/They don't know', 'son, are you winning', and 'debimbofication' fit here, along with any meme-units for 'top text, bottom text'. There is one single meme-unit for every grand meme that can exist in this category.

Edited. Any edited images for 'I wish I was at home/They don't know', 'son, are you winning', and 'debimbofication' fit here. There can be multiple meme-units of a single grand meme existing in this category.

Community-specific. The original 'Sue Sylvester' screenshot meme-unit fits into this category.

Crossover editions. The meme-unit found in fig. 2 fits this category.

Historical memes

'Historical memes' refers to existing grand memes and meme-units that have existed on the memescape for a period long enough to allow for a repopularizing. These memes have existed, altered or unaltered, for a period of time and have managed to somehow not die out, becoming as Literat and van den Berg (2019) would define, a 'good inversion'. These memes are staples in the memescape, they are referenced on a regular basis and to create new forms of content. Memes that are popular at a particular time of the year (like 'Nos acabamos de quedar sin cena' or 'Sam va lentín') fit into this category, along with memes that have existed and relived. This is particularly important because when considering that a decrease in meme popularity is attributed to competition for a finite user attention (Weng et al., 2012), yet these memes have managed to remain not only popular but relevant through an exponential speed in meme creation.



Figs. 9 y 10. Historical / Classic memes. Source: Unknown.

This category is meant to define 'classics' that have managed to outlive their original format, being introduced into newly created meme templates. Memes based on the images of Kermit or Spongebob are known to be 'stable' memes, for

example, as they manage to be continuously used throughout time (Literat & van den Berg, 2019).

Original memes

The term 'original memes' refers to the single meme-unit that further on becomes a template for a grand meme to allow for the creation of other meme-units. This original meme can be an image, a video, a particular voice intonation, etc.; so long as it is the original, first posted version of the content that has later on been memeified. Fig. 7 and fig. 8 fit into this category, as single meme-units.

This category is meant to separate the consumption of meme-units created under a bigger, already existing grand meme and meme-units that created the existing grand meme. 'Loss.jpg', in fig. 6, is the original meme-unit of the 'Loss' meme, which became so popular as a parody in 4chan that moderators began banning people who opened new threads about it.

Edited memes

'Edited memes' is a term referring to the meme or meme-units that utilize an existing meme or meme-unit as template for new content creation. These edited memes can be both meme-units, as the single content created from an existing meme or meme-unit, and memes themselves, by making a meme only exist and evolve through new edits of the original meme-unit. These have been called meme instances by R. M. Milner (2013), who defines them as 'a particular implementation of the meme template that follows its pattern but adds new details that extend its meaning'. Fig. 3 is an edited meme as a meme-unit, but the 'I wish I was at home/ They don't know' meme is also an edited meme, as its format required edits and alterations for its evolution.

It is important to note that the term 'edited' does not necessarily refer exclusively to images or videos, but to any alterations made with the goal of making new content. The usage of an existing meme-unit, like 'I'm Jared, I'm 19, and I never fucking learned how to read', and altering it to 'I wish I was Jared, 19' fits the edited meme format, as it utilized and changes an original grand meme or meme-unit (in this case both are one and the same) to create new content.

Community-specific memes

The term 'community-specific memes' refers to the grand memes or meme-units that are created from and by online communities. These memes can be edited and either remain within their community or become mainstream and create more meme-units outside of the speck of population that utilized the original.

This is a particularly interesting category because most existing memes are eventually edited to fit the narratives of different online communities. However, community-specific grand memes or meme-units are specifically created by communities and their virality or cross-community sharing allows them to make the jump to a bigger public. The 'Sue Sylvester' original meme-unit fits this category, as it was originally utilized by fans of the TV Show *Glee*, where the screenshot is originally from, and it was then co-opted by other publics, including other online communities themselves.

Crossover editions

'Crossover editions' refers to meme-units that mix meme formats or multiple grand memes. We can think of this category as a crossover between multiple existing memes, where knowledge of all memes references is necessary for the understanding of the newly created meme-unit. Although there can be an infinite number of crossover edition meme-units, they can never become a grand meme. Fig. 11 shows a user creating a crossover edition by utilizing the historical grand meme 'Sam va lentín' with the template from an existing community meme, this time using a screenshot from the Marvel movie *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*.



Fig. 11. Example of the usage of an existing meme-unit as a template for a grand-meme, that is coincidentally a historical meme as well. Source: El Geek furioso de la Literatura, 2021.

Categorization of examples

The memes mentioned in this work are many and varied, as we have seen, yet there is a similar concept sewed into all of them. All of the memes here presented, that we believe are a good representation of the general memescape, have followed a similar path of content creation, content editing, and viralization, not necessarily in that order, that we have tried to honor in our classification. The annex to this job separate memes, grand memes and meme-units in a way that allows us to easily exemplify all of our classifications, but we will further expand their different characteristics to allow for a better representation of each category.

In historical memes, mentioned in this work we find 'Trollface' (annex I.1.1.A), 'top text, bottom text' (annex I. 1.1.B), 'dat boi' (annex I.1.1.C), 'Sam va lentin' (annex I.1.1.D), 'Jason Derulo MET fall' (annex I.1.1.E), 'Loss.jpg' (annex I.1.1.F), 'Nos acabamos de quedar sin cena' (annex I.1.1.G), 'debimbofication' (annex I.1.1.H), and Spongebob memes (annex I.1.1.I). Some on this list make a yearly ('Sam va lentin', 'Jason Derulo MET fall', 'Nos acabamos de quedar sin cena'), or timed ('Tranquilovsky') return, while some are historical because have existed in the memescape for over ten years ('Loss.jpg', 'top text, bottom text', 'dat boi', 'debimbofication'). They have sprouted multiple spin-offs, and can be considered a 'granddaddy of memes' (Fedlman, 2015). Yearly returning grand memes are considered historical memes not only because of their age, but because they are meme history that has remained in the minds of internet users not only long enough to make a return but are a prominent enough memory to be repeatedly used after long periods of not spurring new meme-units. The original meme-units for all of these memes can also be considered historical.

The original memes mentioned in this work are all of the original meme-units for the historical memes previously mentioned (except the Spongebob memes, which can only have the Spongebob jTV show as an original meme-unit), as well as the original video for the 'I'm Jared, I'm 19' meme, the original TikTok video for the 'da vinky' meme, the now unfindable original meme-unit using the 'top text, bottom text' format, the original 'Bernie Mittens' picture (annex I.1.2.A and annex I.1.2.B), the original Robert Pattinson photograph that sprouted his editing in different locations meme (annex I.1.2.C), the original 'debimbofication' meme (annex I.1.2.D), or the original tweet for 'Nos acabamos de quedar sin cena' (annex I.1.2.E).

Every meme mentioned in this work is also an edited meme, as edition and alteration is essential for a meme to be one (Wiggins & Bowers, 2014). However, it is important to differentiate whether a meme is edited as a meme-unit, or whether the nature of the grand meme requires alteration for its existence. For example, the 'Sue Sylvester' meme was originally used without alterations, as shown in fig. 8, but later meme-units under the grand 'Sue Sylvester' meme were indeed edited. However, for the 'I wish I was at home/They don't know' meme, it was originally

memeified and viralized with edits (fig. 2), which means that the mere nature of the grand meme required editing or alteration to exists. While every meme is edited, not all require it to exist.

Community memes mentioned in this work include the 'Sue Sylvester' meme, the 'gopissgirl' meme, 'Sam va lentin' and *Spongebob* memes. These were all media characters, TV shows or movies that were later on memeified, either parts of them or them as a whole (like with *Spongebob* memes).

The crossover editions found in this work are shown in annex I.1.2.

Any other meme that requires classification can be fit into either of these five categories, probably in more than one. Further analysis of more existing memes should take memes, grand memes, and meme-units into consideration before fitting each of them into their corresponding categories.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Even the concept of meme and their existence has been in disputed in the academic realm, with sides questioning both the biological and social approach that previous research has taken. In this work we have focused on a historical, social analysis of the memescape to understand community creation, gatekeeping, and the life cycle of what we now understand as cultural capital.

We have proven a need to expand our view of what online memes are beyond the unorganized, chaotic sphere that the memescape has been understood as for so long and focus on finding linking threads that will allow for more specific research. Research like the ones carried by Burgess (2008), Literat and van den Berg (2019), Shifman (2014a), Nissenbaum and Shifman (2017), Gal et al. (2015), Szablewicz (2014), or Miltner (2014), have done essential work in categorizing, analyzing and understanding either a particular meme, community, or genre, but research that can be inclusive of the bigger picture is the next logical step, as memes evolve into more and more sophisticated forms of communication.

Our classification includes five categories that allow us to take into consideration not only the process through which memes, grand memes, and meme-units are created, but also the communities and interactions that they include. Defining meme as the compilation of both ideas and singular meme usage, grand memes as the general concept and idea carried by a group of meme instances, and meme-units as the singular use of a meme idea to create one unit of content; we established historical, original, edited, community and crossover editions as the categories through which every meme can be classified. Non-exclusivity amongst categories allows for a broader classification that both connects and separates memes, and that will hopefully outlast previous attempts.

The main issue we have run into with this work is the problem of credit. Much like with artists and their work, memes are created and spread with little thought to the original creator. While studying the morality of potential earnings made by meme pages or uncredited content sharing is out of the realm of our work, it is a potential problem that many internet users have faced, and it makes our job infinitely more difficult, as the original usage of a meme is potentially lost forever through uncredited usage.

However, while Internet memes typically lack attribution (Davison, 2012), this is as much by choice as it is chance, as some users go to extreme lengths such as removing user data from the original meme or purposely using anonymous sites (like 4chan, which not only allows for anonymity but forces it by not allowing the creation of user accounts or even usernames (Literat & van den Berg, 2019)). Once these memes make the jump to other types of media, through the already discussed cross-platforming, crediting the original is almost impossible, as noted by a Twitter user, as shown in fig. 14. Finding the original source of this tweet is impossible, however, as the reposted version that we came across does not credit them and the original Tweet seems to have been deleted.

This is where the website Know Your Meme is relevant. Founded in 2008 and published by 'Literally Media, Ltd, Know your meme' is a database researching memes and Internet phenomena, where content is often submitted by users but is then reviewed by research staff who credit authors when possible, considered a reputable source and used often in academic research (Matalon, 2019; Shifman, 2012). As far as we are aware, this is the only place online where meme creators are credited, and memes thoroughly explained. This website is valuable not only in its quest to proper citations, but also its ability to explain memes to those who may be unaware or 'out of the loop', contributing to closing the memetic culture age gap and hampering gatekeeping.

When content makes the jump from creation to meme, it is important to consider where author credit is due and where the meme has become its own. Memes like the 'Jason Derulo MET fall', 'Loss' or 'Sam va lentín' inherently lack credit because their status as recurrent means that those who consume them are aware that the person sharing them is not the creator. Regularly seeing such memes is the reason they are funny. However, the usage of memes like 'son, are you winning, 'I wish I was at home/They don't know' or the 'yes, honey' implies that the creator is using an existing template created by someone else to express their own ideas, it's their own take. These takes can be very similar (sometimes even the same, as shown in annex 1.4.) but such a genre of memeing implies ownership of the idea and the message of the meme, if not of the template. If memes are considered signs, then meme systems are sign systems, and so 'copying' a meme format is no longer copying, as it is merely a growth of memetic culture. The creation of new memes is therefore translating the original intent into a new meme adapted to a new audience and the known community it addresses, not copying (Cannizzaro, 2016).

The difference between implied credit and implied ownership is an important one, and Internet users take it seriously. Stolen content, like tweets, tends to be recognized and called out on the tweets themselves (Patkar, 2015), while the usage of an existing meme template will be understood as implicit credit to the original, with implicit ownership of the particular meme-unit to the user who originally shared it.

Through issues of content crediting and digital divide, memes have become the one thread that connects every community, minority, and user on the online sphere, as sharing of information now becomes easier and more accessible than ever. Understanding new phenomena is the work that research is meant for, and the challenges presented by the velocity of meme creation, sharing, and expansion will only make for more interesting social research in the future.

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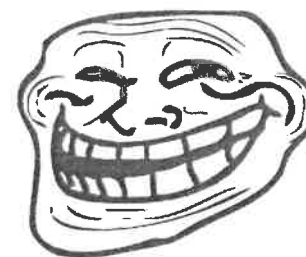
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6. ANNEX

1.1. Historical memes

A) Original 'Trollface' illustration. Source: Whyne, 2008.



B) Examples of 'top text, bottom text'. Source: unknown.



C) Original 'dat boi' meme. Source: Unknown.

here come dat boi!!!!!!

o shit waddup!



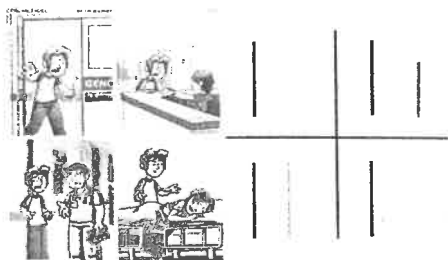
D) Original 'Sam va lentín' meme. Source unknown.



E) Example of 'Jason Derulo MET fall' meme. Source: New York Times bestselling AUTHOR JONNY SUN, 2020.



F) Original loss.jpg meme, as well as the structured replicated in posterior memes. Source: Buckley, 2008.



G) Original 'Nos acabamos de quedar sin cena' meme. Source: Odilas, 2015



H) Original 'debimbofication' picture. Source: sortimid, 2017



I) First known use of the mocking Spongebob meme with alternating capital letters. Source: lexy, 2017.



1.2. Original memes

This part will include any relevant images relating to the 'Bernie mittens' meme, as mentioned in section 2.4. of the main body of work.

A) Original 'Bernie Mittens' picture, inspiration for later edited memes.



B) Example of usage of the 'Bernie mittens' meme format. Source: Mary Kelly, RN MotherF'er CEN,CCRN, 2021



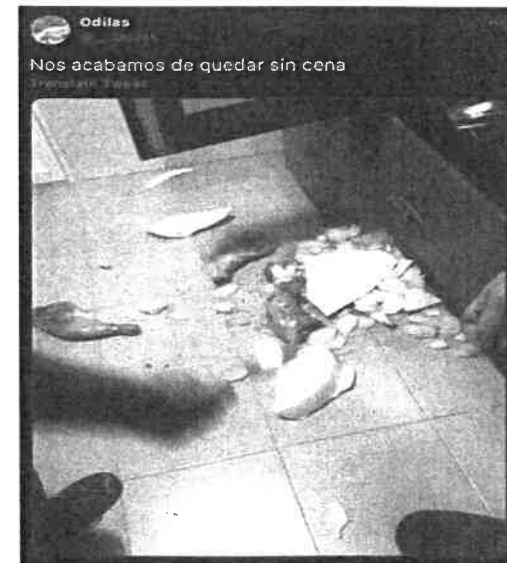
C) Original Robert Pattison picture, inspiration for fig. 1 in main body of work. Source: Ainsworth, 2020.



D) First known use of the mocking Spongebob meme with alternating capital letters. Source: lexy, 2017.



E) Original 'Nos acabamos de quedar sin cena' meme. Source: Odilas, 2015

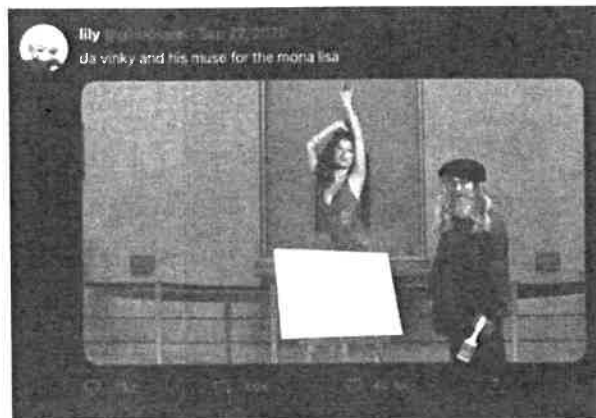


1.3. Crossover editions

A) Example of the usage of an existing meme-unit as a template for a grand-meme, that is coincidentally a historical meme as well. Source: El Geek furioso de la Literatura, 2021.



B) Example of meme layering. Source: lily, 2020



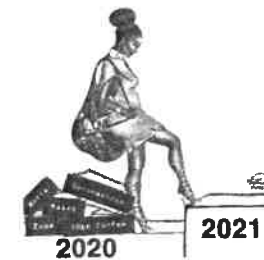
C) Dat boi boi meme in a crossover edition with a Kermit meme. Source: unknown.



D) Example of the 'I wish I was at home/They don't know' meme as a crossover edition, edited with a popular image to represent Plato's cavern metaphor. Source: Alex, 2020



E) Example of the the 'walking into the new year positive energy' meme. Source: unknown.



1.4. Examples relate to the 'son are you winning' meme

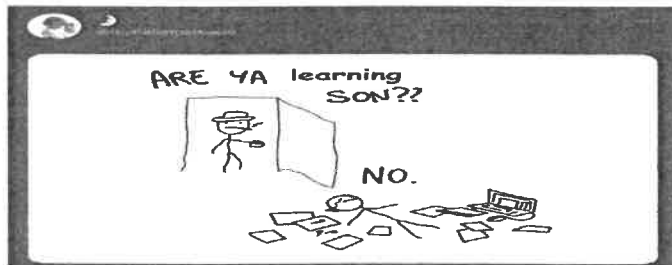
A) Example of the 'son are you winning' meme. Source: Lumberzack, 2020



B) Original meme-unit from A), both examples of the 'son are you winning' meme.
Source: adam, 2020



C) Example of the 'son are you winning meme'. Source: [Unicode emoji, half moon], 2020



D) Example of the 'son are you winning' meme, with the same message as fig. 3, although this one seems like a coincidental copy instead of a blatant one, unlike figures 1 and 2. Source: R x O (taylor's version), 2020

