

ALMA MATER STUDIORUM - UNIVERSITÀ di BOLOGNA

SCUOLA DI LINGUE E LETTERATURE, TRADUZIONE E
INTERPRETAZIONE
SEDE DI FORLÌ

CORSO di LAUREA IN

MEDIAZIONE LINGUISTICA INTERCULTURALE (Classe L-12)

ELABORATO FINALE

MEMES INSIDE AND OUTSIDE

THE INTERNET

HOW DIGITAL ENTERTAINMENT MIRRORS

THE HUMAN PSYCHE

CANDIDATO

Sara Natsuki Pavani

RELATORE

Anthony Dion Mitzel

Anno Accademico 2016/2017

Secondo Appello

Index

1. Introduzione.....	3
2. How do memes work?.....	6
2.1 Meme categories	6
2.2 Virality elements	7
2.3 What makes memes viral?.....	9
3. Meme genres.....	12
4. Memes and society: the effects on human brain...20	
5. Conclusion.....	22
6. Bibliography.....	23
7. Web sources.....	23
8. Sitography.....	24

Introduzione

“Hey, check out this meme, it’s a good one.”

How many times do we hear this line in a day? Probably more than once. It all depends on our age and the social environment we are living in, and the amount of time we spend on the Internet. The picture with the funny caption that people laugh at while scrolling their phone, however, is just the tip of an iceberg that is much older than one would think. The roots of the word *meme* go back to Richard Dawkins’ book *The Selfish Gene* (1976) as definition of a unit of cultural transmission analogous to the gene in biological evolution. It is a shortening (modeled on the word ‘gene’) of the Ancient Greek word *mimeme* (pronounced [mí:mɛ:ma]), which means “imitated thing”.

Richard Dawkins an ethologist and evolutionary biologist that, starting from Darwin’s evolutionary theory, hypothesized that humans evolved their minds by copying information and behaviors that could be labelled as “winning” in their society, the same way animals did for thousands of years with their genes in order to survive. He stated that anything that could be transmitted from mind to mind is a meme. Language is the first example of meme, as well as any kind of behavior, like fashion or eating habits. What is interesting is that the process of imitation does not happen on individuals’ purpose, in fact, it is as unconscious as genetic replication. Memes are, therefore, “replicators” of the mind. (Dawkins, 1976:191).

As he explains in his book,

Just as genes propagate themselves in the gene pool by leaping from body to body via sperms or eggs, so memes propagate themselves in the meme pool by leaping from brain to brain via a process which, in the broad sense, can be called imitation. (Dawkins, 1976:192).

Dawkins looks at the elements that could potentially grant memes a high survival value within a large “meme pool” (1976:192). By considering the meme of God, he shows how the survival of a meme itself is deeply linked with its psychological appeal: he comes to define this ‘high survival value’ as an ‘infective power’.

The expression ‘infective power’ is indeed the key to the second concept we will need to analyze in order to understand memes: the concept of virus. Virus as a means of meme replication was introduced in Richard Brodie’s book *Virus of the mind: the revolutionary new science of the meme and how it can help you* in 1996, in the author’s attempt to give evolutionary psychology a new key of studying human behavior. Brodie asks himself if we as humans are just allowing natural selection to evolve us randomly, without regard for our happiness, satisfaction or spirit, or if we are consciously picking a direction in our evolution.

The answer, he affirms, lies in the middle: we cannot avoid “catching” mind viruses, aka memes, but we can choose which ones we want to be influenced by. As memes spread through diverse modes of communication (computer, radio, television, newspaper, conversation, books etc.), we are constantly bombarded with ideas.

This is where the main topic of this essay comes in: the Internet memes.

An Internet meme is an activity, concept, catchphrase or piece of media which spreads, often as mimicry or for humorous purposes, from person to person via the Internet. (Schubert, 2003)

Starting from Dawkins’ notion that memes are not always copied and transmitted perfectly, rather they are often modified with other ideas generating new, more efficient replicators than their predecessors, Professor Limor Shifman carried out a study on *Memes in digital culture* to find the memes characterized by the “high survival value” Dawkins talked about.

This essay will therefore be divided into three main parts: the first will focus on analyzing the meme categories and elements that make

Internet memes go viral, in order to find a “spreading pattern” (Weng, Menczer, Ahn, 2013:1). Secondly, some of the major, globally spreading memes will be examined through the prism of spreading factors; finally, the assessment will focus on the role that memes play in today’s society and the effects they have on human psyche.

2. How do memes work?

2.1 Meme categories

In order to understand how Internet memes go viral, it is necessary to first describe the different categories all memes belong to, according to the distinction that Brodie makes in his book, to understand how they work on human psyche:

Distinction-memes are all the concepts humans use to label everything that is around them (Brodie, 1996:19). Starting from giving a name to a piece of land and calling it a 'state' to defining humans themselves as 'humans', everything is just a meme created by them to define reality. People make first contact with this kind of meme when they learn their first language.

Strategy-memes are beliefs about cause and effect, therefore they affect human behavior triggering a chain of events that often results in spreading a similar strategy-meme to another mind (Brodie, 1996:21). Even before society, family starts unconsciously shaping individuals' strategy-memes from the moment of their birth, giving its own template. It is not easy, yet fundamental to understand the strategy-memes one is programmed with, in order to firstly deactivate those memes (in the case they do not match one's purposes in life), and subsequently choose actively which strategies to follow using one's own full brainpower.

Association-memes link two or more memes in the human mind, often mixing more than one sense, as the smell of something and a memory. It is the advertisers' favorite type of meme because it is straightforward and easy to manipulate. The example of association-meme advertisement that Brodie gives are the "Sexy men and Diet Coke" or "Sexy women and beer" ones (Brodie, 1996:25). This particular kind of meme needs no rational

element to spread, because it pushes the so called ‘buttons’ of human basic instinct: danger, food and sex.

2.2 Virality elements

At this point, a question would arise: “How are these psychological effects connected to such a specific phenomenon as Internet memes?”.

In order to answer the question, it will be necessary to first describe the elements that make memes go viral, according to Shifman. The author devotes one chapter of her book to what makes contents viral, making a list of “six Ps” (Shifman, 2014:66).

Brodie’s meme categories and button-pushing process will help explain Shifman’s list of elements from a deeper psychological point of view.

1) Positivity (and Humour):

The centrality of positivity in contents shared by Internet users is in line with the centrality of humorous content in viral processes.

Since users share for both social and self-presentation purposes, they prefer spreading content that makes others feel good and at the same time reflects on themselves as upbeat and entertaining. (2014:66)

2) Provocation of high-arousal emotions:

Feelings that can be labelled as “highly-arousing” can be both positive and negative: surprise, happiness, anger or anxiety, as they activate people to do something, whereas feelings of sadness were found to be “deactivating”.

3) Packaging:

“[...] *clear and simple* news stories spread better than complex ones.” (2014:68). This could be explained in the following way: there is a high

chance that people spending time on the Internet and sharing memes are not willing to be mentally engaged in that exact moment. This is why offering a simple story, which could involve a simple problem, would allow users to find a simple solution, instantly gratifying them without much effort.

4) Prestige:

The chances for a piece to be spread are strictly connected with how famous is the person that is sharing the content.

5) Positioning:

The right positioning of a piece plays a crucial role in spreading, because several parts of the Internet cannot be reached without the right connections. “Hubs” and “bridges”, for example, are people with a high number of connections in their networks and they must be borne in mind as main targets for spreading.

6) Participation:

Participation, apart from being an element for virality, is fundamental to make content memetic. When users feel encouraged to take action the replication process is triggered, and instead of simply sharing the content, users create their own new version.

At this point a distinction between what is meant with “viral” and “memetic” has to be made. According to Shifman, a *viral* is “a single cultural unit (formulated in words, image or video) that is spread by multiple agents and is viewed by many millions.” and it “may or may not have derivatives” (2014:57), whereas a *meme* has always many different versions of the original content.

This distinction can be explained by analyzing a type of content that is widely shared on Internet platforms: Tumblr threads.

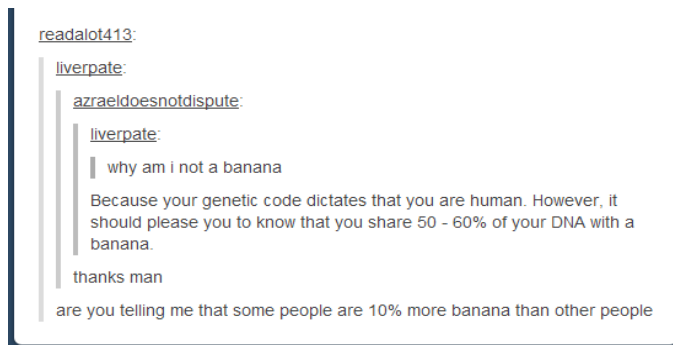


Figure 1, Tumblr post (2013). Retrieved from:

http://www.funnyjunk.com/funny_pictures/4794434/Bananana/

The elements that make discussions such as the one in the picture go viral are often in common with that of memes; however, a forum thread like the one mentioned above is considered “funny” for the spontaneity of the discussion, and any subsequent editing by users would alter its essence. Therefore, the discussion can only be shared as it is, without allowing users to leave their personal mark and making it a meme.

2.3 What makes a meme viral?

Having these tools as a guideline it is possible to proceed with analyzing the most common factors that make content memetic.

The specific feature of memes is that anyone can create a different version starting from the same template and make their own funny contrast. The more *adaptable* the meme to a new context, the better.

In addition, the factor of being *accessible* to everyone contributes to the chances of the meme to become viral.

Being able to get a joke makes one feel part of a group, and *belonging* plays an important role when it comes to humor. As not getting a joke makes one feel unintelligent, the opposite generates a positive feeling towards the ‘accomplishment’, therefore it stimulates the acceptance that leads to spreading. This is also why inside-jokes are the most rated and shared: the belonging factor strengthens proportionally to the tightness of

the group. In fact, it could be possible to speak about *exclusivity* when jokes are particularly subtle and referred to a precise fact.

A counterpart of inside-jokes is represented by *nonsense jokes*: apparently, there would be no need of special skills to understand them, as there is no sense intended, but nonsense jokes also need a particular sensitivity to be appreciated. This is the reason why these jokes tend to be widely spread as much as inside-jokes.

From the same group of the previous two there is *irony*: like nonsense jokes yet in a more exclusive way, irony needs a certain sensitivity to be understood. Here the division between who gets the joke and who does not is clear: this is the reason why being able to understand irony is the equivalent of being identified as ‘clever’: sharing ironic content improves the user’s image.

Along with nonsense, there is *cuteness*: cute pets, particularly cats and dogs, have been ruling the Internet world for a long time. Due to the tremendous success cats have had on the Internet (see section “Animals” in Chapter 3).

Pets have another factor that make them go viral and make users willing to create memes: they belong to a ‘safe’ zone, far from any danger of political incorrectness and seriousness. ‘Political correctness’ is a concept that have become a delicate subject in the last couple of years: anyone can be offended by anything, bringing the number of universally ‘acceptable’ subjects to a really small number. In short, pets are something nobody gets offended by, in addition to being addressed to the vast range of people that love animals. A study published by *The Huffington Post* came to the conclusion that sharing cute animals on the Internet is a form of procrastination. This statement could be supported by the ‘instant gratification’ factor: sharing something everyone loves increases popularity with almost no effort, in contrast to real life where success needs to be achieved through hard work. Besides popularity, spending time sharing widely appreciated content goes back to a need of acceptance by the majority. Unlike irony, nonsense and inside-jokes, cuteness factor is not

exclusive: being cute contents one of the most shared genres on the Internet, one could conclude that inclusiveness reaches a bigger audience.

Contrast is typical of image macros: pictures representing characters with strong facial expressions overstating a normal life situation, as well as ones representing obviously tragic situations diminished with a few funny lines, tend to be shared because of the resulting funny contrast.

The *surprise* factor leads to sharing as surprise is a highly-arousing emotion: users subconsciously want to find a common ground with others by provoking in them their same emotion.

Political incorrectness: the Internet is the realm of none censorship, where anyone can express their opinion. The biggest risk for saying something that is not considered “politically correct” could be being banned from a certain forum/community. This filter-less, virtual world is in strong contrast with the real world, in which most people prefer to avoid trouble through weighing their words. This is the reason why the Internet results either in the best means to fighting any brainwashing danger and a means to attack anyone without serious consequences. Given that the contrast between reality and virtuality is what awakens the “rebel” part of each user, saying forbidden things gets incredibly funny and creative. For this reason, *stereotypes* appear in the top list of factors that make a content go viral: they are far away from the ‘politically correct’ zone and allow users to provoke others, being protected by physical distance, and push boundaries that they would not push in real life.

Each culture has its own humor developing from its own historical background. Nevertheless, some memes manage to go viral globally. There are two factors that explain this phenomenon:

1. The Internet has its own language that differs from cultural and geographic contexts.
2. Despite cultural humor, the previously cited factors seem to be inherent in human nature.

3. Meme genres

Having seen the most important aspects that influence content sharing, it is possible to proceed with the examination of some of the most popular Internet meme genres.

Image macro: it is the most common type of meme on the Internet. It consists of a template, that could be a movie frame, an advertisement picture, a drawing, a comic etc. accompanied by one or two short phrases.

Example: *Evil Kermit*

Evil Kermit consists of a template featuring a screenshot of the Muppet character Kermit the Frog talking with his nemesis Constantine that tries to convince him to perform various indulgent, lazy, selfish and unethical acts while dressed as a Sith Lord from *Star Wars*.

Elements that made *Evil Kermit* go viral:

Belonging: everybody has a dark side, however sharing it on social media has somewhat a relieving effect, as it is a common ground everyone can relate to.

Adaptability: many are the phrases that fit with this image macro as many are the dark sides of humans.

Irony: self-mockery is fundamental in order to make fun about one's own flaws that make them "evil".

me: I have to study

me: go on social media for 3 hours



Figure 2, Kermit and Constantine (2016).

Retrieved from <https://imgur.com/gallery/HoYph>

Video

Example: *This is Sparta*

“This is Sparta!” is the line Leonidas, King of Sparta, shouts against the Persian Messenger while kicking him into a well in the 2007 film *300*. This has soon become a catchphrase, appearing either as image macro, ringtone and video. In YouTube the original video has gone memetic with numerous users’ versions. One of the most famous videos is *This is Sparta last techno remix*: it features a series of GIFs taken from movies and cartoons having characters’ faces replaced with Leonidas’ screaming one and a song titled “300 This is Sparta” playing in the background.

Elements that made *This is Sparta* go viral:

Adaptability: Leonidas’ angry face has been used to replace many movie/cartoon characters’ faces and many of these new memes have become themselves famous.

Nonsense: the short, simple sentence “This is Sparta” happens to be the answer to any question with the structure “What is this X?”. Therefore, the meme spreads without saying. The more nonsensical, the funnier.

Contrast: along with nonsense, understating the seriousness of the scene by decontextualizing Leonidas’ face provokes a funny contrast.

Song

Example: *All Star* by Smash Mouth

All Star is a 1999 alternative rock song and the main theme of the movie *Shrek*. Online, it is widely known in meme communities since its first viral parody-video *Mario, you’re a plumber* came out in 2009. Since then, the number of shares on platforms has been so high that it penetrated other meme genres, such as image macros and GIFs.

Elements that made *All Star* go viral:

Adaptability: songs in general can be easily adapted by changing the lyrics; in this case, not only lyrics were changed with different words, as can be seen in a popular version of the meme that has the first word “Somebody” replaced to each word of the song.

Exclusivity: the “funny” factor is triggered only by knowing the original song, in other words, having seen the movie *Shrek* that made the song famous. This is the reason why most of young people know the song.

Nonsense: as for adaptability factor, songs hold unlimited possibilities of creating nonsensical versions, and, by analyzing the popular one-word remix of the song, it seems that this was indeed successful between users.

As stated before, the popularity of the meme allowed it to become part of other categories, such as image macros: the picture on the right portrays the *Inhaling seagull* meme template with the first lines of the song.



Figure 3, All Star seagull (2017). Retrieved from: <http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/inhaling-seagull>

At first sight, it could be just defined as “nonsense”, however, knowing both the long history of the song and the seagull meme, the “funny” factor is triggered by the surprise created by the mix of two different meme categories.

Mishearing and wrong translations: starting from the *Misheard Lyrics* phenomenon, which consisted of a misheard transcription of songs from different languages, mishearing and wrong translation memes have become popular all around the world.

Example: *Surprise, Motherf**ker* vine

Between 2012 and 2016, when short videos were easily shared on the platform Vine, misheard phrases went viral, as did the James Doakes’ line “Surprise, Motherf**ker” in the TV series *Dexter* that was interpreted by a young man saying “Some fries, motherf**ker” while holding a tray of

French fries, or “All rise, motherf**ker” dressed as priest, or “Disguise, motherf**ker” dressed as woman, and so forth.

Wrong translations are particularly interesting due to the fact that such phenomenon links more cultures within the Internet community. Take, for example, the Italian Facebook page *Zio Ematitos*, extremely popular for creating funny wrong translations between Italian and English: a sentence as “In qualunque parte del mondo me ne frego dei diritti umani”, literally meaning “No matter which part of the world I’m in, I don’t care about human rights”, was translated to “I’m nasty International”.

Elements that make misheard phrases and wrong translation go viral:

Belonging: the belonging factor is here expressed through nationality, i.e. only speaking a given language of a nation it is possible to understand translation jokes.

Exclusivity: speaking that given language alone, however, is not sufficient, for knowledge of English language is needed as well. Despite numerous Internet communities, the major, global one has English language as lingua franca, making it fundamental for being part of the biggest meme communities.

Nonsense: both in cases of mishearing and wrong translation, the nonsensical result compared to the original context creates a funny situation.

Contrast: as mentioned above in the nonsense factor, these memes are labelled as “funny” when the contrast between the original context and the modified one is strong.

Surprise: surprise often goes along with nonsense, for both mishearing and wrong translation would imply a logic explanation that is never provided.

Political incorrectness, stereotype: depending on the meme, playing with languages often results in playing with culture stereotypes by making fun of mispronunciations. Taking as example the meme series *Mexican word of the day*, e.g. “*Mushroom: When all the family gets in the car there is not mushroom left.*”, English speakers make fun of typical Mexican speakers’ accent.

Photoshop

The image-editing program released in 1990 allowed users since then to let their imagination run wild.

why these pigeons look like they
bout to drop the most fire album
of 2014



Figure 4, Rapping Pigeons (2014).

Retrieved from: <http://memecollection.net/these-pigeons-are-about-to-drop-an-album/>

Elements that make photoshop-edited pictures go viral:

Adaptability: any picture can be modified with Photoshop.

Nonsense: adding strange elements to the original image creates absurd yet incredibly realistic and funny results.

Contrast: the original and the final picture become funny as the second one acquires a totally different meaning.

Behaviour

This wide category includes activities, gestures, and performances.

Example: *Dabbing* or *Dab*

It is a “simple dance move in which a person drops the head into the bent crook of a slanted arm, often while raising the opposite arm in a parallel direction but out straight.” (“Dab (dance),” n.d.)

The move spread so widely that online there are videos of people dabbing in every context, from college graduations to royal Norwegian ceremonies; there is even a clip featuring Hillary Clinton learning to dab in *The Ellen Degeneres Show*.

Elements that made the *Dab* go viral:

Accessibility: anyone who has arms can perform this simple dance move.

Nonsense: there is no connection between the move and context it is performed in, apart from dance floor; however, as shown by the most popular videos, the more unrelated the context, the funnier.

Surprise: a feature of this move is unexpectedness. Since in most cases there are not elements suggesting that in that given context a dab is going to be performed, users are usually surprised, therefore amused.

Animals: animals that are considered to have the quality of *cuteness* have become extremely popular on the Internet as a source of entertainment.

Cats in particular have reached a massive popularity in the Internet, enough to trigger curiosity of many psychologists: a study published on June 12th by assistant professor Jessica Gall Myrick at Indiana University, found after surveying almost 7,000 people about their online habits that people who watch cat videos feel more energetic and positive after viewing online cat content. A possible reason why cats took over the Internet more than other animals, for example dogs, is provided by journalist Jack Shepherd in his article *Why the Internet loves cats - not dogs*: dogs look as they are "trying too hard", and humorous behavior in a dog would be seen as a bid for validation. Shepherd sees cats' behavior as being "[...] cool, and effortless, and devoid of any concern about what you might think about it. It is art for art's sake." (Shepherd, 2014).

Example: *NONONONO cat*

NONONONO Cat is the nickname given to Marquis, a domestic Siberian cat that gained popularity in 2011 for meowing in a way that resembles the sound of a person saying "NO NO NO NO.". The combo of "funny" and "cute" factors gave birth to an endless number of memes about the cat ranging from image macros to video and song remixes.

Elements that made *NONONONO Cat* go viral:

Cuteness: the cuteness factor is peculiar as it satisfies all the conditions to make the meme go viral alone, as seen by the previous psychological explanation.

Nonsense: among all cute animals, however, the ones that reach the highest number of shares seem to be linked, as usual, to the nonsense factor which is especially loved by Internet users. The fact that Marquis is meowing “NONONONO” against a fixed point for apparently no reason is what made the meme distinguish itself from other funny-cute cat memes.

Videogames

Example: *Super Mario*

A special mention should be made in this context to Super Mario. Probably one of the most popular icons in video games era, Super Mario was developed by Nintendo in 1981 and it has been popular for almost 40 years by now. From a memetic point, it is an interesting example as the main protagonist is an Italian plumber that speaks English with the stereotypical strong Italian accent; since the game was developed by a Japanese company, however, the character is an example of global meme, as it is known worldwide.

In *Memes in Digital Culture* Shifman analyzes memes from 2014. By comparing memes from three-four years ago to today’s ones, it can be seen how some remained evergreens, while some others have been almost completely replaced. This is the case, for example, of the whole category of the so-called *Advice animals*, a series of image macros representing animals giving life advice or meditating on philosophical issues as if they were humans. In 2017 users seem to find funnier image macros of animals struggling with animal problems, often with misspelled captions as if they were speaking; the difference lies in the fact that they do not impersonate humans anymore but they are depicted in their own nature.

Photoshops are still alive, even though they spread more as gifs, as in the case of snakes, birds and insects walking around with stylized arms and legs.

The equivalent of 2017 *Dabbing* could be the 2013 *Harlem Shake*, an extremely popular dance that went viral on the Internet in that year.

Songs are naturally evergreen; the Smash Mouth *All Star* in particular, however, maintained its position despite the changing nature of the Internet, as the "*All Star*" by *Smashmouth but every word is somebody* version was uploaded on YouTube the 23rd of November and it is still highly shared.

Animals as well are evergreen, for they address a deeper part of human psyche that does not change according to simple trends. Animal memes keep spreading through videos, songs, image macros and even misheard/wrongly "translated" cries.

By comparing Internet memes from different years, it can be concluded that the spreading pattern is determined by what users consider funny, bearing in mind that share possibilities result increased every time one can personally relate to the meme; as communities are based on common interests, tracking the number of users belonging to major online communities can help determine the current trend. However, the abovementioned factors, i.e. irony, nonsense, political incorrectness, adaptability, belonging/exclusivity, surprise and cuteness seem to be permanent within this framework.

3. Memes and society: the effects on human brain

In *Virus of the Mind* Brodie explains the key role played by memes in society. People are “programmed” with memes, either consciously or unconsciously, since their early stages of life. Education is the first mind-programming method that is being used, however, not only school and family take part in an individual’s education. Television, for example, is the fastest way to convey memes through subtle mechanisms: Brodie talks about conditioning through “repetition” (Brodie, 1996:126), i.e. bombarding an individual with the same meme until it is fully acquired, or more subtle ways as “cognitive dissonance”, that is proposing an unusual situation to the individual in order to force their brain find a rational solution, namely the meme in question.

“Creating value”, instead, is often used by advertisers to convince buyers about the positive consequences purchasing a given thing is going to have on their life. The “Trojan horse”, again, is an indirect question to suggest the target meme as a solution to a given issue.

All these mechanisms are based on the previously cited basic instinct “button pushing”, therefore addressing the instinctive part of human brain rather than the rational one. This is how according to Brodie religion and conspiracy theories have become popular in society by pushing the fear-of-unknown button that is inherent in human nature. This is the reason why the Internet community can be potentially the most dangerous means to program users with memes.

Shifman, however, presents the other side of the coin. As the Internet can be accessed by almost anyone, censorship and government control are not effective as they are on other social media. It provides thus a fertile ground to all the minorities that want to make themselves heard, for example the activists.

Taking into account both points of view, a possible solution would be the one suggested by Brodie, i.e. becoming aware of the memetic “programming” everyone is inevitably subjected to and actively choosing

the memes one prefers to be programmed with, in order to live a fulfilling life. The best way to choose such memes would be relying on one's gut instinct together with moral; the problem however arises for moral itself is the result of a memetic programming. Despite the unsolvable enigma, though, it is important to understand that the memes today's society is programmed with are the ones that survived a long memetic evolution.

If there is a memetic evolution, however, which would be the destination? In contrast to genetic evolution, memes do not seem to have the survival of species as ultimate goal (Brodie,1996:212), as animals have evolved without developing cultures as human beings did. Gene priorities compared to meme priorities show how people value qualities that make a person successful in a materialistic way, i.e. making a career, earning money, owning properties etc., versus relationship-related emotional values, such as family and friendship. "Owning" is strictly related to the concept of "power", a fundamental quality in animal world that increases the possibility to find a mate and ensure the survival of the species from the dawn of time. Emotional values, on the other hand, are related to human culture only rather than the entire animal kingdom.

Cultural commentator David Brooks explains in his TED Talk *Should you live for your résumé... or for your eulogy?* how most people spend an entire life making efforts to achieve a good résumé by studying and working; after their death, however, what is written in their eulogy is never related to their materialistic accomplishments in life: relatives and friends write about their qualities in personal relationships, as being a "loving mother", or a "loyal friend". Death is one of most powerful memes fixed in the mind of humanity, and as such it reveals which priorities people really have when facing it.

This reasoning leads to the conclusion that memes in today's society have a stronger influence on human's minds than genes, and they could be labelled as the main factor that separate humans from animals. The genetic "button pushing" mechanism alone is therefore not sufficient to explain human behavior, for emotional-value memes have reached a deeper zone of the human mind.

4. Conclusion

What is known as a mere entertaining-Internet phenomenon has in fact a tremendous potential to influence society. The funny pictures most of users share while spending time on their phone are the first example of how easily a content can be transmitted from person to person, and the triggering factors that control the sharing phenomenon are linked to highly-arousing feelings as surprise and amusement. The meme genres that were analyzed here show how these two key elements have remained throughout the years, making possible to find a spreading pattern of memes based on users' reactions. Even though the concept of meme might seem new for the people that discovered it in the last decade through the Internet, the aforementioned spreading pattern is just another way to analyze the human psychology. This is evidenced by the fact that people working in the sphere of advertising have known for more than just a decade how to spread the right message in an effective way.

Introducing the memetic mechanism to the rest of the population, however, opens the floodgates to something that is not simply linked to entertainment, rather it allows to convey any kind of message in a rapid and successful way to billions of technology users: it is therefore important to raise awareness among people to help them avoid being programmed with dangerous memes. In fact, a proper use of memetic transmission would allow an efficient way to educate people. The Internet has an incredible perk of being accessible to almost everyone; in addition, being most of the users bombarded with digital memes everyday, they are repeatedly subjected to this mechanism, and the only thing they need is to understand how to make it work for their own advantage.

As an increasing number of researchers is working on this topic, the next step towards a better society will be spreading the new information-meme in order to provide everybody the means to a more conscious life.

5. Bibliography

Dawkins, R. (1976). *The Selfish Gene* (30th Anniversary edition). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Brodie, R. (1996). *Virus of the mind: the revolutionary new science of the meme and how it can help you*. London: Hay House.

Weng, L., F. Menczer and Y. Ahn. (28 August 2013) “Virality Prediction and Community Structure in Social Networks”. *Scientific Reports*, 2522, 6.

Shifman, L. (2014). *Memes in digital culture*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

6. Web sources

Gall Myrick, J. (2015). *Not-so-guilty pleasure: Viewing cat videos boosts energy and positive emotions, IU study finds*.

<http://archive.news.indiana.edu/releases/iu/2015/06/internet-cat-video-research.shtml>

Shepherd, J. (2014). *Why the Internet loves cats – not dogs*.

<https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2014/mar/16/why-internet-loves-cats-not-dogs>

Schubert, K. (2003). *Bazaar goes bizarre*.

https://usatoday30.usatoday.com/tech/news/2003-07-28-ebay-weirdness_x.htm

Brooks, D. (2014, March). *Should you live for your résumé... or your eulogy?*

https://www.ted.com/talks/david_brooks_should_you_live_for_your_resume_or_your_eulogy/transcript

The Huffington Post (2015, May). *Cat videos can give you energy and a positive attitude, study says.*

http://www.huffingtonpost.com.au/2015/06/17/cat-video-study_n_7600740.html?ir=Australia

7. Sitography

<http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/advice-animals> (Accessed 15 September 2017)

<http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/all-star> (Accessed 15 September 2017)

<http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/cultures/animals> (Accessed 17 September 2017)

<http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/evil-kermit> (Accessed 15 September 2017)

<http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/image-macros> (Accessed 15 September 2017)

<http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/nononono-cat> (Accessed 16 September 2017)

<http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/sites/photoshop> (Accessed 18 September 2017)

<http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/subcultures/super-mario> (Accessed 15 September 2017)

<http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/this-is-sparta> (Accessed 18 September 2017)

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dab_\(dance\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dab_(dance)) - [cite note-Ducey-1](#)
(Accessed 19 September 2017)