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What Do You Meme? An Analysis of How College Students at Central Washington University Use Memes

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What do You Meme? An Analysis of How College Students

at Central Washington University Use Memes

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Honors Capstone Thesis

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Abstract

Memes have become a key part of modern living on the Internet. However, it is still unclear who is creating, sharing and interacting with memes. This study examines meme use in college students at Central Washington University while also examining the definition of a meme within the population. Data were collected via questionnaire and interviews resulting in 14 responses and 18 total interviews conducted with 6 participants. Analysis suggests that college students use memes as an important component of private conversations and to reiterate their public identities. On the other hand, meme making is not as prevalent as other types of meme use and is often not recognized as meme making by participants in this study. Additionally, participants' meme definitions were fluid and expansive but similar to definitions laid out in current literature.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Internet memes are often seen online as pictures with overlaying text for humorous intent. They have become the subject of important discussion within the field of Internet Studies and become a staple of digital living. Through internet memes, social scientists have studied digital activism and protest, general internet use in many different contexts and social interaction in digital communities (Bayerl, 2016; Tynes & Mitchell, 2014; Marcus, 2017). However, despite the accumulating studies on memes and internet use, it is still unclear who exactly is creating, sharing, and interacting with them. This is primarily because most studies observe and analyze digital items rather than using interviews or questionnaires and focus on social functions within the specific digital community studied or on larger meme processes (Davis, 2016; Gal, 2015; Nissenbaum & Shifman, 2015; Milner, 2016; Marcus, 2016).These methods are valid and informative, however, for this study, I wanted to look beyond the screen and took the larger question of use to a smaller, geographic community (college students at Central Washington University) in order to examine meme use behavior more closely. The primary

Figure 1 “Example of a Meme”

Original meme edited by Skyler Smith, image provided by Know Your Meme

question for this study is therefore, “How do CWU college students use memes?”

Studying memes in a geographical and academic population rather than a digital one allowed me to examine use in many different contexts including non-digital and interpersonal communication. Because I felt it was important to include all types of meme use in the study, both on and offline, choosing to study the college population closest to me at Central Washington University made the most sense in terms of logistics. While the decision to study this particular college population was centered on my availability and ability to work within practical bounds, it is not arbitrary to study college students’ meme use. General use of the internet has been shown to change with factors such as age, gender, race, and economic class. (O’Connell, 2018; Schradie, 2018; Tynes & Mitchell, 2014; Wang et. al., 2013; Weaver et. al., 2011). College populations in particular tend to be at higher risk for “problematic internet use” as they tend to stay online longer than initially intended due to almost unlimited access. College students use the internet socially, for entertainment, researching queries and shopping (Chen, 2012), with about 80% of students listing the internet as almost as important as air, water, food and shelter according to one study (Deatherage, et. al. 2014). Therefore, it is not unreasonable to assume that meme use is prevalent in college populations and that such populations have unique ways of using memes.

Studying memes is incredibly important. While memes may seem shallow on a surface level, memes have the capability for great impact in the real world. For example, political movements such as Greenpeace and The Yes Men used internet memes and parodies of the company Shell to protest the company’s plan to drill for oil in the Arctic; within two weeks of the movement starting, 8,800 images were created. Shell paused its plans to drill in the Arctic later in the same year (Davis, 2014). During a college protest, an image was taken of a cop

'casually' spraying student protestors. After that image circulated and was made into a meme, the cop left the police force after an investigation was launched into the incident and the head of the police department publicly apologized and resigned due to the backlash (Bayerl, 2016). Memes even have a place during epidemics with "Ebola Chan" being a significant example in 2014 during an outbreak of the homonymous disease. The meme acted as a way to counteract fear of the disease spread by the macabre 24/7 coverage that traditional media was giving the outbreak, with many thinking that the media was exaggerating its danger to those in places such as America (Marcus, 2017). Memes have also been used as an effective way to interact with college students online; a university library increased their use of memes in their social media to illustrate library resources and systems and saw a 39% increase in use of their EBSCO database as well as a significant increase in followers on their social media pages (Sagun, 2013).

The definition of the word "meme" within the literature is inconsistent. Each author writing on the subject has a slightly different definition for the term. The word 'meme' has a Greek root *mimeme* which means, "something imitated." The first modern iteration of the word was by Richard Dawkins, an evolutionary biologist, in his 1976 book entitled, *The Selfish Gene* (Marwick, 2013). This new word was coined in order to describe Dawkins' theory of mimetics; a theory positing cultural information and ideas compete to survive and perpetuate themselves, much like genes. The success of a meme depends on how successful it is at being imitated or reproduced (Blackmore, 1999). Susan Blackmore (1999) adds to this idea in her book, *Meme Machine*, to say that high level of sophisticated imitation within human groups is what makes humans different from all other species. Since Dawkins unleashed his theory of memes upon the world, the internet has adopted the term to describe one of its most successful cultural units. Those studying internet memes often begin their definition with Dawkins' initial ideas. However,

while Dawkins' definition and theory of mimetics does loosely apply to internet memes today, the purpose of this study is not to test its validity. As Alice Marwick (2013) points out, mimetic theory is controversial and viewed by many anthropologists and sociologists as being limited in its ability to describe culture due to the blurring of the biological and metaphorical. Mimetics also has a tendency to strip participants of their agency due to the virus-like description of how ideas are spread (Willmore & Hocking, 2017). While the theory does strive to explain the spread of ideas and it shares some of the vocabulary that surrounds memes, the biological foundation of the theory is not appropriate in this study as it is focused on how individuals use memes rather than the spread of memes in larger networks.

Beyond Dawkins, however, the literature is in flux with internet memes taking on many different functions and definitions. Memes have been found to function as cultural capital within the digital communities where they are produced. Within these communities, memes are used in a gatekeeping function to determine who can and cannot be a part of the community (Nissenbaum, 2017). Still others equate internet memes with viral content that has minimal variation as it travels rapidly within the internet (Marinkov, 2016) or as performative acts which serve to construct collective identities and norms (Gal 2016). According to Alice Marwick (2013), "Memes harness the participatory potential of the Internet and typify modern popular culture" (pg. 2). Memes also highlight a shift from a culture of consumption to one of production (Marwick, 2013). Production in memes highlights amateurness and often a resistance to the mainstream, copyright legislation, politics and heritage. Quality is replaced with availability as poor image quality, modification of a basic format and sarcastic cultural commentary take the forefront in many memes (Marinkov, 2016). This means that memes are also a method of expression that exemplify many cultural processes and sentiments within larger groups (Jenkins,

2014). Because of this ability to express ideas, memes also function as a very effective means of cultural transmission (Sagun, 2013; Wang et. al., 2015). Still more researchers describe a meme as not just a single item but as memetic systems (Wiggins, 2014). Even beyond that, memes can be associated with post-modern aesthetics and Ronald Carter's linguistic theories on everyday conversation and creativity (Willmore & Hocking, 2017).

Clearly, the concrete definition of a meme is still being determined within the literature. However, two comprehensive definitions from the literature originate with Limor Shifman and Ryan Milner. Their definitions have been the comparative baseline for my own data.

Limor Shifman (2014) in her book, *Memes in Digital Culture*, defines internet memes as:

> …(a) a group of digital items sharing common characteristics of content, form, and/or stance which (b) were created with awareness of each other and (c) were circulated, imitated, and/or transformed via the Internet by many users. (pg. 41)

Shifman makes a distinction between viral content and memetic content; memetic content is imitated and reassembled, then shared, whereas viral content is simply shared. Memes themselves are not just one entity but are "idea complexes." Shifman does use the theory of mimetics quite heavily in her definition but uses it to describe idea dissemination through memes and does not rely on biological metaphors or strip meme users of their agency and participation.

The second definition comes from Ryan Milner (2016). In his book *The World Made Meme*, he agrees with Shifman in many respects, but adds details such as the fact that internet memes can be pictures, puns, hashtags, YouTube videos, catchphrases, songs, stock photos, and recordings of physical performances. His definition also emphasizes intertextuality, imitation/transformation and self-awareness which he calls the "mimetic tapestry." This mimetic

tapestry relies on public conversations and social processes that individuals tie to themselves through memes. So, in Milner's definition, a meme is a small part of a larger entity that is present on the internet.

Together these create a comprehensive definition that I have used as a comparative base for data collected in this study. However, considering the instability of the definition of a meme in current literature, I did not think it responsible to operationalize any definition fully when collecting my own data. So, rather than only using this combined definition while collecting my data on meme use, the question, "What is a meme to CWU college students?" became the secondary purpose of this study.

It is important to note that I, the researcher, am a part of the population I am studying and that I knew most of the participants engaged in this study before and after the study as friends and peers in different areas of life. This means that my views and data collected are unavoidably biased despite my best efforts to remain objective. Being a part of this population could have affected the questions I asked my participants, the assumptions I made about what certain words might have meant or what behaviors looked like as described during interviews as well as the categories and relationships I created between datum. While this does not mean that the data I collected over the course of this study is unusable, it is important to keep my bias in mind while examining the results of this study.

Chapter 2: Methodology

Methodology for this project was built on the idea of applying traditional, ie. non-digital, anthropological methods to a non-traditional, digital subject: meme use in college students and their definition of a meme. Data was collected primarily through a 13-question survey, traditional interviews and a short pile-sorting/meme-gathering activity. These were all conducted virtually through Zoom until COVID-19 regulations allowed for in-person interviews. The point of having data collected mostly through interviews and one-on-one activities rather than a digital observation/participant observation methodology was to be able to confirm the participants I was working with as well as examine use in individuals rather than larger digital groups and in contexts beyond just the digital.

One of the concerns I had conducting this study was protecting my participants. Due to the nature of the internet and my lack of experience, I was concerned that I would not be able to protect my participants sufficiently if I did an entirely digital study. Using traditional anthropological methods allowed me to bypass this concern. Another reason I benefited from using traditional methods in my study is that there were no identified meme using groups that were specific to current CWU undergraduate students or where I could confirm that participants were a part of my study population. There was one meme page that was a possibility; however, the administrator of the page declined to participate in the study. A digital meme group was suggested to me, but the participants there were almost exclusively alumni of CWU and not current undergraduates. There was also a CWU department that created a, “meme of the week” digital form where my recruitment materials were attached; however, this did not bring in many, if any, participants.

Because I was unable to identify any digital groups and pages that were eligible or willing to participate, participant observation data is notably lacking in this study. Using traditional methodology and the fact that my study ran during COVID-19 (blocking many on-campus meme behaviors that may have taken place normally) also blocked my ability to do participant observation. If I had a chance to do this project again, I would have my participants re-create key use moments, create a digital group where participants could share memes and meme stories as well as their thoughts on memes and I would also observe scrolling sessions of participants. I hope to implement these ideas in future research.

Population

All participants had to be 18 or older and be a current CWU undergraduate student.

Recruitment

In order to recruit students online, the digital survey for the study was sent out to CWU classes, departments, one meme Facebook group, one meme page run by a CWU student, a CWU department form where students could submit a meme of the week and on my own personal social media pages; places where a large portion of the target population was present. This was done through CWU's Outlook email system, Canvas messaging and Facebook and Instagram. Before I sent out recruitment materials or had links to recruitment materials on digital platforms, I made sure to gain the permissions of department secretaries and chairs, professors of classes, and administrators of digital forms and spaces. It was explicitly stated in all spaces that no reward or compensation could be given for participating in the study, including extra credit within a class.

Recruitment materials included a written introductory message about myself and the study, an informed consent form and a link to a recording of myself introducing the study. The

informed consent form was not signed before participating in the survey but was there as an in-depth document about the study. The informed consent form was built into the survey which is where participants would agree to it. Having it available before participating, I believe, allowed participants to truly determine if they wanted to participate. All of the information in the informed consent form was also summarized in the introductory message. At the end of the survey participants were asked if they wanted to participate in further research activities and if so to leave their CWU contact information and their name. I would then contact them to schedule an initial interview, a pile sorting activity and one final interview. In this way, the survey served as recruitment for the interviews and pile sorting activities.

Data Collection Methods

Data was collected through an initial digital survey containing an informed consent form and 13 questions. These questions were in long answer and multiple-choice format. No questions were required to be answered except those pertaining to informed consent and eligibility for the study. Responders could move back and forth between questions at will.

Interviews took place after the survey and were semi-structured with changes being made based on growing knowledge of the interviewee. Interviews lasted no longer than an hour. Each interviewee participated in a three-interview series. The first interview was the most comprehensive and structured. The second interview was a pile sorting activity where the interviewee spent about ten minutes saving memes from the place they said they saw memes the most. After the ten-minute period had passed, the interviewee sent the memes to me, often using Facebook messenger or Outlook, and I put them into a shared document or used messaging reaction functions, if in-person, where the interviewee categorized the memes into three categories. Memes sorted using messaging reaction functions were then put into a Word or

Publisher document for overview. Shared documents were also either Publisher or Word files. Documents were shared either via link, or if that did not work, the document was shared via the screen-sharing function in Zoom. Interviewees sorted memes into the following categories: if they liked the meme, if they did not like the meme and if they felt neutral about the meme/if it was not a meme. Unfortunately, this data did not produce very suitable insights and is not presented here as a part of this thesis. In the third interview, questions from the first interview were revisited to see if answers were consistent and new questions based on information in the two previous interviews were added.

Interview techniques used were largely taken from texts introduced to me through core methodology classes such as *The Ethnographic Interview* (1979) by James Spradley and *Field Notes: A Guided Journal for Doing Anthropology* (2017) by Luis Vivanco and more broadly in regards to methodology from Sarah Pink's (et. al.) *Digital Ethnography: Principles and Practice* (2016).

Changes, Challenges and Adaptations Due to COVID-19

Upon initial HSRC approval of this project, all data collection methods were to be done in-person with recruitment taking place at a table in the on-campus Student Union and Recreation Center (commonly known as SURC within the community). However, due to COVID-19 and the subsequent move to exclusively virtual class modality, my opportunities for recruitment and participant observation were severely limited and I was forced to adjust the way I conducted interviews and pile sorting activities. This adjustment took the form of reworking my recruitment and data collection methods to a virtual medium and adjusting my HSRC approval appropriately. All recruitment materials were digitized and sent using virtual means. The survey was moved onto Qualtrics instead of paper and all interviews were conducted and

recorded using Zoom until regulations allowed for in-person interviews; interviews were then recorded using a Homder Digital Voice Recorder and transcribed using Microsoft Streams as well as Descript and edited manually as needed for clarity and accuracy.

COVID-19 also affected, like many others, my mental health and productivity. Due to high levels of stress and anxiety, my ability to do comparative analysis and adjust the study reflexively while gathering data as well as my ability to recruit participants to my study was hampered. This presented itself in wondering who was appropriate to ask to participate, not following up with emails that had no initial response and not getting consistent work accomplished.

Data Collected

Data collected includes 14 eligible responses and six ineligible responses from the survey as well as 12 interviews and six pile sorting activities conducted with six interviewees. All interviewees finished the full series of interviews and the pile sorting activity.

Analysis

All quantitative analysis and visualization was completed using Excel. Qualitative analysis was completed using grounded theory with open themes with techniques coming largely from *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* (Glaser, Strauss 1967) and *The SAGE Handbook of Grounded Theory* (Ed. Bryant, Antony, Kathy Charmaz 2007). The analytic process started by transcribing and coding interviews and long text answers from the survey, then taking codes and transforming them into memos which were then categorized and then further categorized into larger ‘umbrella’ categories. Qualitative results were diagrammed and visualized using Canva.com.

Data Collection and Analysis Tools

Digital Qualtrics Survey

Zoom

Microsoft Streams

Descript

Homder Digital Voice Recorder

Excel

Facebook Messenger (pile sorting activity)

Word (pile sorting activity)

Facebook and Instagram

Outlook

Canvas

Canva.com (graphics and diagrams)

Publisher (pile sorting activity)

Chapter 3: Presentation of Data

These data presented here are the result of one year of data collection and over two years of work. In total, I gathered 14 eligible responses to a digital Qualtrics survey with 13 questions and conducted 12 semi-structured interviews and six pile-sorting activities with six participants recruited using the survey. The data from the pile-sorting activity was discarded due to irrelevancy. All quantitative answers were analyzed and visualized using Excel and all long-text answers from the survey as well as the interviews were analyzed using grounded theory with open themes. Transcription of interviews was made possible with the assistance of such programs as Descript and Microsoft Streams and the transcript was manually edited by me for clarity and accuracy. In total, 29 categories emerged from the data with four larger categories organizing them (see Table 1). These primary categories are ***Definition**, **Use/Explicit**,* ***Interaction/Implicit*** and ***Personal/History***. Each participant that engaged with the study was over 18 years old and a current undergraduate student at Central Washington University at the time of data collection.

Table 1 Primary Categories and Subcategories				
Primary Category	***Definition***	***Use/Explicit***	***Interaction/Implicit***	***Personal/History***
Subcategory	*Emotions*	*Participating*	*Media + Sites*	*Life of a College Student*
	…Are Memes	*After Meme Making*	*Beyond the Meme*	*First Interactions*
	Meme Material	*Meme Language*	*Community*	*Meme Likes and Dislikes*
	Memes Are/Are Not	*Memes in Conversation*	*Information Currency*	*Memes Through Time*
		Memes in Dating	*Information Flow*	
		Meme Purchases	*Corporatization*	
		Meme Making	*Interpreting*	
		In Real Life	*Logics*	
		Sharing	*Meme Culture*	
			Memes in Feed	
			Memes in School	
			People Making Memes	
			Who Uses Memes	

Table listing four primary categories and twenty-nine subcategories from qualitative analysis

Information About Participants/Data Bias

As previously described in the methodology section, all participants were recruited by sending materials to CWU classes, departments and my own social media pages. These materials included an introductory message, link to an introductory YouTube video created by me, an informed consent form and a link to the digital Qualtrics survey that was the initial form of engagement and data collection for participants. At the end of the survey participants were asked if they were interested in doing further research activities such as interviews and pile-sorting activities. At the beginning of the survey the participants' eligibility and informed consent form was confirmed. No demographic data besides this was collected in the survey. During interviews, informed consent confirmation as well as permissions to record and transcribe the interview were obtained from participants, however, demographic data was also collected this data being age, year in college, gender and major of the participant. If this study were to be done over again, I would also collect demographic data in the survey.

According to demographic data collected from six different interview participants, four out of the six participants were working towards one BA or BS in Anthropology while two

participants had non-Anthropology related majors, namely being Food Science and Nutrition, and a double major in Graphic Design and Spanish. Double majors present in concurrence with Anthropology were Biology and History. This information is important as the memes that participants saw and interacted with depended upon the participant's interests, as demonstrated through the primary category ***Interaction/Implicit***, subcategory *Memes In-Feed* and in the primary category ***Personal/History***, subcategory *Meme Likes/Dislikes*. While many of the participants had very different interests when it came to media interaction, this lack of diversity in academic interest has the potential to bias the data presented here.

Other important demographic information includes age range, participants were 20–24, and gender, four interview participants identified as female, one identified as male and one identified as questioning. The age range is not incongruous to traditional college undergraduate students, however, there is also a bias introduced in gender with most participants identifying as female. In future, to remedy this bias, I hope to pull from a larger and more diverse pool of participants. I believe it would also be valuable to examine meme use through the lens of gender, academic interest and age.

What is a Meme to CWU College Students?

Although the definition of a meme to CWU college students is not the primary research question for this study, it is important to answer this question first in order to understand what the participants of this study mean when they say they are using a meme.

The category that describes participants' definition the most is ***Definition***. Within this primary category are the subcategories *Meme Material, Memes Are/Are Not..., ...Are Memes* and *Emotions*. From these categories emerged the summary definition:

> Memes must be visually interpreted with the exception of some verbal references. Memes can be brought into real life or be records of real-life actions but must be on the internet; almost any digital item can be a meme. Memes provoke emotion and thought which guide how people react to them and how they use them. Context playing and understanding of meme context is often essential to a meme.

This definition did not emerge immediately. Most participants at first described memes as a different type of joke that consisted of an image and a caption or sometimes a video. As interviews continued, more exceptions were revealed, details added, and the initial definition expanded. The figures below (see Table 2) illustrate the initial words participants used to describe memes in response to the survey question "How would you define what an internet meme is?" and then the overall progression of the meme definition throughout the study (see Figure 1).

Table 2 Word Descriptors of a Meme			
From Survey Question, "How would you define what an internet meme is?			
Word	***Number of Times Used***	***Word***	***Number of Times Used***
image	*9*	*Comedic*	*1*
Meme creates context/context required to understand meme	*8*	*Ironic*	*1*
text/caption	*5*	*Entertainment*	*1*
joke	*4*	*Happy*	*1*
satire	*2*	*makes you laugh*	*1*
trend(y)	*2*	*Topical*	*1*
video	*2*	*Statement*	*1*
GIF/VINE	*1*	*well known by a group of people*	*1*
goofy	*1*	*connect groups*	*1*
funny	*1*	*Propaganda*	*1*
humorous	*1*	*relates to specific demographic*	*1*
totally relatable	*1*	*Sad*	*1*
form of communication	*1*	*Unsettling*	*1*

Table listing meme word descriptors and frequency in response to survey

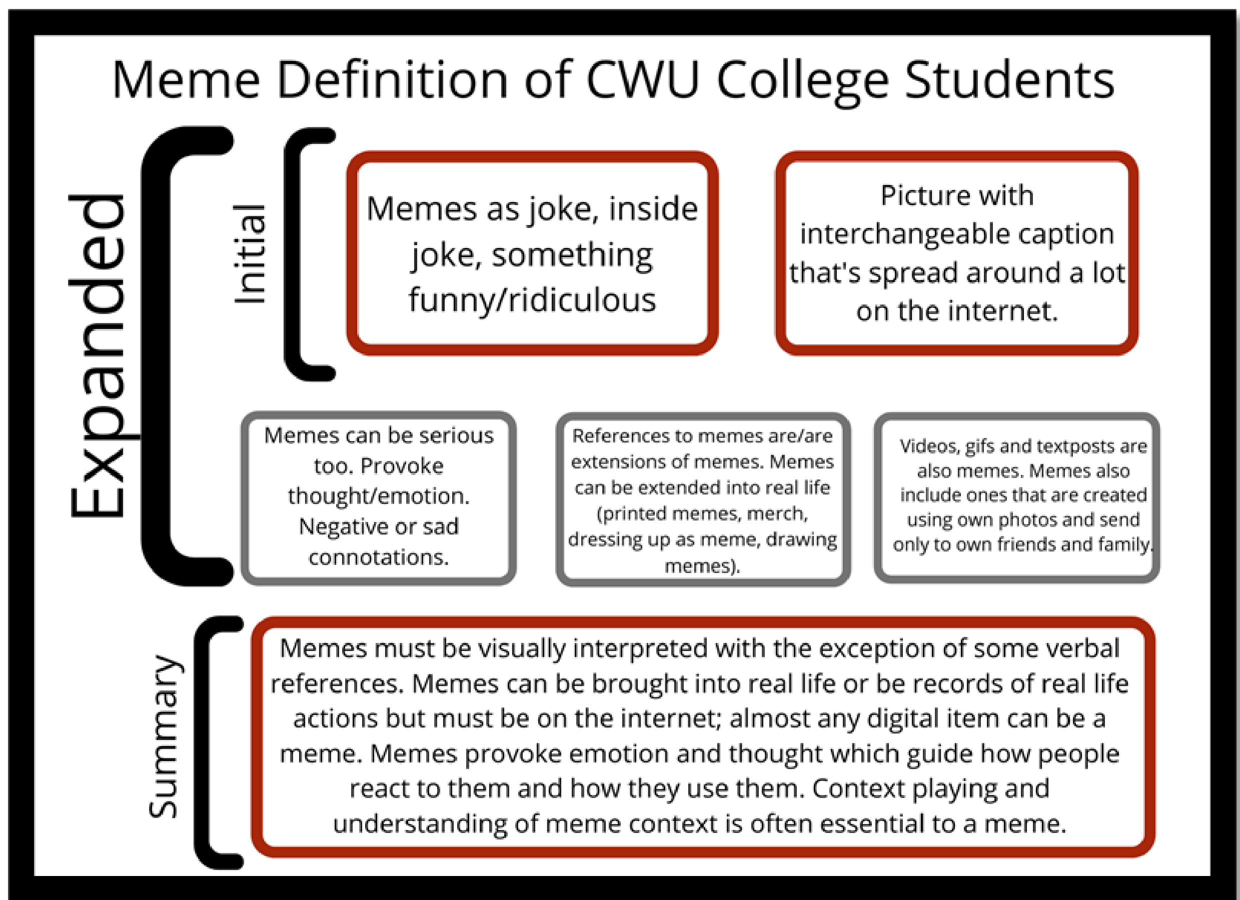


Figure 1 Progression of meme definition as well as summary of final definition

The subcategory *Meme Material* describes the elements that a standard image meme has. These elements include caption/phrase/text/contextual message and a picture/photo/image. These meme elements can be sourced on social media pages that share one frame of a certain kind of show, film, or other media without a caption (otherwise known as frame per media pages), news stories/propaganda (these two are commonly mentioned together by participants), and twitter feeds. Nearly anything on the internet is considered available for meme material, but things outside of the internet can also become a meme such as actions that are "meme-ified" from real life as well as real events. Every image has meme potential, but they must also convey an emotion that is applicable to many contexts and have a wide appeal.

However, as shown in the summary definition and the subcategory *Memes Are/Are Not...*, memes are not just images with captions accompanying them. References to a meme, which can be many things and can exist in real life, are also considered memes by participants. According to them, a reference to a meme is simply a way to extend the meme and is therefore still considered to be a part of the meme. Things that are not memes include people (although many branded individuals can be used in memes such as YouTuber PewDiePie) repeated phrases (with exception as the words “pog” and “copium” were offered as meme examples) and videos (especially short videos such as GIFs). In this category, memes are also required to be present and/or created on the internet and are considered trendy for only 1–6 months, but memes are also described as many other things. To participants, memes were a source of entertainment, they were attention grabbing and a place for expression and they functioned like jokes. As a couple of participants put it, “An internet meme is like an inside joke within the internet.” In this category, memes were described as having to be widely shared or known by a large group of people. However, this is different in other categories such as in the ***Use/Explicit*** primary category and *Meme Making* and *After Meme Making* subcategories where memes made by the participants themselves and sent only to their friends and family and in private groups were still considered memes. These memes often referenced larger meme conversations and formats, but not always. The definition continues to expand and include more and more unexpected things in different subcategories. In fact, if the last two categories were the only ones examined, the summary definition of participants would be very basic and very similar to the one that participants gave at the start of the study, however, in the subcategories *Emotions* and *...Are Memes* the definition is widely expanded. Just as the participants of this study described, the definition of memes is fluid.

In the *Emotions* category, another major feature of memes is described, mainly, that memes must provoke emotion or thought. Indeed, some participants posited that an interactor with memes had to have some sort of emotional or nostalgic connection to a meme in order to understand it. Memes could not elicit strong reactions however, especially negative ones. The rule was that a meme had to be neutral or positive feeling and if that was not the case, sad memes and memes that made interactors feel deeply uncomfortable do exist, "...it's just sad and it's just like reading the news." When describing how they reacted to political memes, many of them said that these were not memes that made them laugh most of the time, instead they made them think, feel neutral or concerned. Other memes often helped them relieve stress or give a sense of comfort. This is in line with the previous subcategory where memes were described as a source of entertainment and expression.

The *...Are Memes* subcategory served mostly to hold memes that were given as examples in conversation as well as to identify meme types. Some meme types that expanded the definition of this study include Challenge/Hashtag memes, Political Memes, Mental Health Memes, Word Memes, Sad Memes, Anti-Jokes, Cursed Images/Random Memes, Basic/Traditional Memes and General Memes. Challenge/Hashtag memes expanded the definition by allowing text/verbal hashtags and real-life actions done for different challenges to be included in the meme family. Political and Mental Health Memes expanded the definition of memes from being visual jokes to also describing memes as informative, negative, dark and divisive. Political Memes were also described as propaganda and satire while Mental Health Memes could be potentially harmful or trivializing if done incorrectly. Political Memes were also described as boring, old and lacking creativity. These memes also targeted political opposites as described in the primary category ***Interaction/Implicit*** subcategory *Information Flow*. Sad, Word and Anti-joke Memes also

expanded the definition in a similar way, describing memes as something other than a visual joke. Sad Memes exist but are disliked. Word Memes can be slang, word play or certain kinds of meme words like “pog” and “copium.” Anti-jokes are like jokes without the punchline that fail to be funny but are funny because of that failure. Cursed Images/Random Memes included the visual element but removed the need for a caption as the hallmark of this type of meme is an image without context. The image used in a Cursed Images/Random meme is usually simple and poor quality. Finally, Basic/Traditional and General Memes are memes that my participants were typically describing at first and throughout the study when giving examples of memes. Both types generally follow an image and caption format, but Basic/Traditional memes are typically older with examples being Rage Comics or memes like Grumpy Cat. General Memes are defined by their subject matter. These memes typically focus on widely relatable topics such as the news, school and parents, things that almost anyone in America can relate to. While these last two types of memes did not necessarily expand the definition of this study, they did describe what participants were thinking of in the beginning when they described a much lighter definition of memes.

Now that the definition of this study has been described, it is time to compare the definition to Ryan Milner’s and Limor Shifman’s definitions in order to compare to the current literatures’ thinking. Here are their definitions again: Limor Shifman (2014) in *Memes in Digital Culture*

> …(a) a group of digital items sharing common characteristics of content, form, and/or stance which (b) were created with awareness of each other and (c) were circulated, imitated, and/or transformed via the Internet by many users (pg. 41).

Ryan Milner's definition (2016) posits that internet memes can be pictures, puns, hashtags, YouTube videos, catchphrases, songs, stock photos, and recordings of physical performances and highlights intertextuality, imitation/transformation and self-awareness which he calls the "mimetic tapestry."

Overall, there are many similarities among the three definitions. The most important similarities among the definitions are that memes can be almost any digital item, memes are a part of larger conversations, presence on the internet is required and that context is a large part of what makes a meme. The most unique aspect of participants' definition is that memes could also be brought into real life and that memes had certain rules around emotional provocation and connection. While there were certain exceptions to this, mainly in Milner's definition allowing recordings of physical recordings in his meme definition, participants were much more expansive, including verbal and imitative references and more. The issue of spread was also a matter of exception as participants did eventually allow for memes to be spread in small, private circles, just like Milner, Shifman required a large spread of the meme in order for it to be given the name. Something that was omitted from participants' definition was that memes had to have similar characteristics, although this may have been assumed. These differences and similarities are illustrated in the figure below (see Table 3). Altogether, the definition of a meme for CWU college students is expansive and unique with many important characteristics applied to memes.

Table 3 Analysis of CWU Participants and Shifman/Milner Definitions			
Present in All	***Present in Just CWU Participants***	***Present Only in Shifman/Milner***	***Notes/Exceptions***
Almost any digital item can be a meme	*Memes can be in real life in the form of references and other "meme-able" actions and events.*	*Memes must have similar characteristics. This may have been assumed in participants' definition.*	*Milner did mention that recordings of physical performances could be memes, but participants were much more expansive.*
Memes are part of larger conversations	*Participants required that memes provoke emotion or thought that became the guide for reaction and use of the meme.*		*Memes did not have to be spread widely in Milner or participants' definitions but were required in Shifman.*
Memes are used socially			
Presence on the internet required (implied in Shifman's and Milner's definitions but expressly stated in participants')			
Context, or intertextuality in Shifman and Milner, is a key part of a meme.			

Table analyzing differences and similarities among Ryan Milner's, Limor Shifman's and participants' meme definitions.

How do CWU College Students Use Memes?

As stated before, 29 categories emerged from the data with four primary categories organizing them. These primary categories are ***Definition, Use/Explicit, Interaction/Implicit*** and ***Personal/History***. The ***Definition*** category informed the last section of this paper, but the primary category that is most applicable to answering the main research question of this study, "How do CWU college students use memes?", is ***Use/Explicit***. There are, however, many interesting and notable phenomena that are important to include in the ***Interaction/Implicit*** and ***Personal/History*** primary categories.

The Difference Between Interaction and Use

While analyzing the collected data, two primary behaviors surrounding memes emerged. One was a passive, internal and implicit behavior, which I called Interaction and the other required deliberate action, outward sharing and explicit declarations, which I called Use. Another feature of Interaction is that it may not include others known whereas with use, because of the deliberate action required, the behavior includes others known most of the time. This is how I divided the behaviors. Interaction must happen before use. Examples of Interaction include viewing memes, reacting to memes, saving memes to a personal device, and searching for information about memes. This can also happen in real life when a person observes a printed-out meme or meme used by a professor in lecture or hears or reacts to a meme reference in conversation. Using memes to filter information on the internet is also considered a part of Interaction. Although the verb for filtering is "using" memes, the experience is internal and implicit so is a part of the Interaction category. Interaction also includes rules and logics for how memes are used or interacted with as these are implicit ideas guiding behavior. Examples of Use would be referencing, sharing or creating/altering a meme. This also includes dressing up as a

meme, drawing or printing out a meme, participating in online challenges and saying a meme phrase in conversation. Principally, the person is spreading the meme in some way. The differences between interaction and use are illustrated in Figure 2. While this division of meme behavior is not perfect by any means, it was adequate for this study in order to separate meme behaviors for analysis. A study with a larger pool of participants and more time to examine the data would be needed to solidify this division.

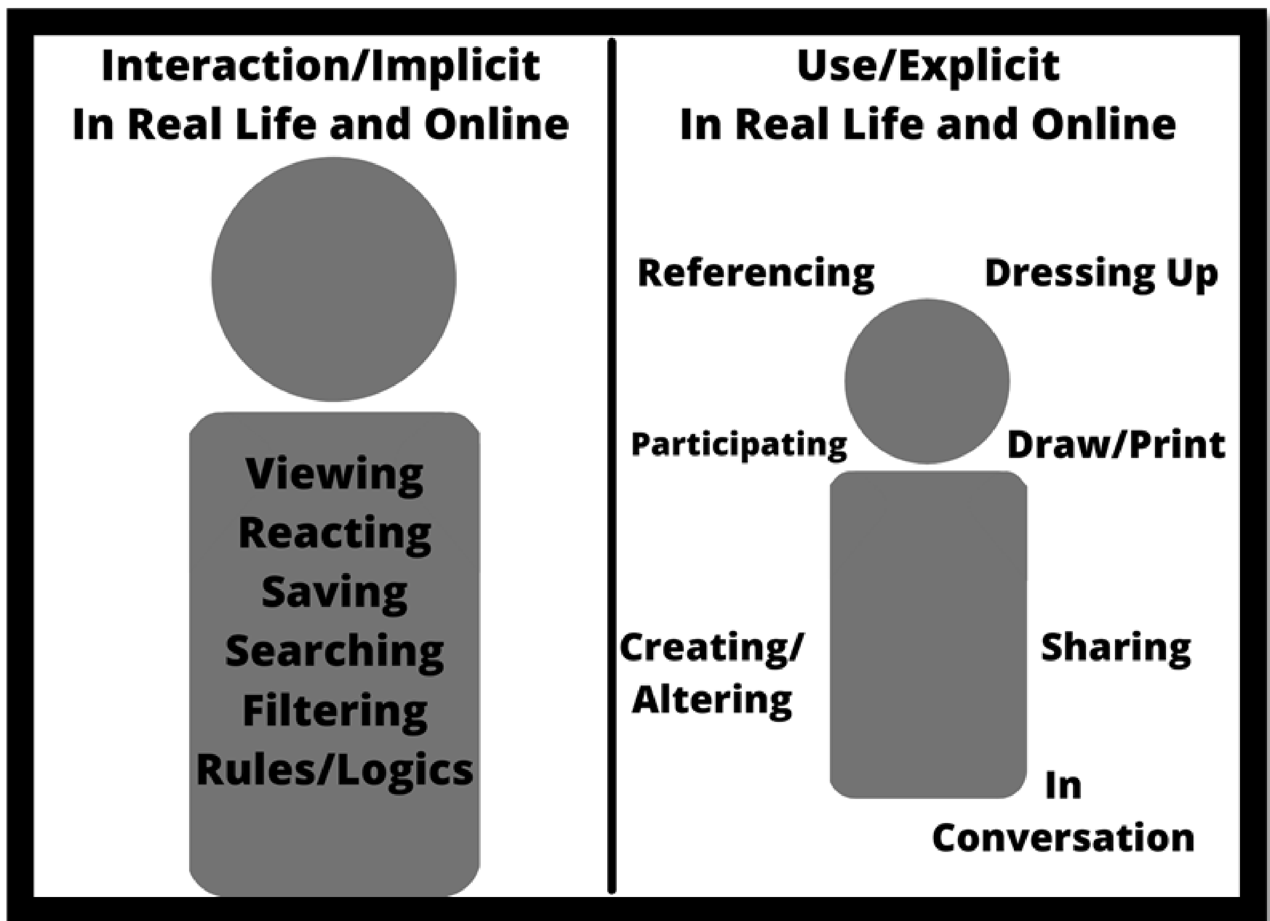


Figure 2 Interaction vs. Use illustration

Primary Use/Explicit Category

The subcategories that are listed in the ***Use/Explicit*** primary category are *Memes in Conversation, Meme Language, Meme Purchases, Sharing, In Real Life, Participating, Memes*

in Dating, Meme Making and *After Meme Making*. The subcategories most relevant to this study are *Sharing, Memes in Conversation, Meme Language* and *Meme Making* as these were the primary use behaviors that participants described. Other interesting subcategories include *In Real Life, Meme Purchases, Participating* and *Memes in Dating.*

Sharing is a behavior where a meme is spread, but not altered. This is demonstrated in the Sharing subcategory where participants describe their sharing habits. According to the survey, most participants shared memes at least once weekly with 43% (rounded to whole number) sharing at this frequency (see Figure 3). These memes, according to the six interviewees, were sent mostly to close family and friends in order to relate to them and build relationships. Among those groups senders would try to send memes that they knew would make the receiver laugh or that the receiver would understand. One interviewee reported an interesting sharing behavior described as “Spamming”. Spamming is a way to get attention as a greeting or even to slip into a conversation held entirely in memes. It typically is one person sharing one meme over and over again in quick succession or many different types of memes. I believe that this behavior is worth more exploration. Generally, when sharing memes, participants would avoid sharing political, dark, non-funny or insulting memes unless they were using those memes to start a conversation or ask a question among friends and family and reiterate their stance on a subject in more public spheres such as their personal social media pages. When sharing such dark or political memes, participants may share the meme even if they do not agree with its content and provide more information in their self-created captions. The hesitancy to share these more negative memes on their social media pages was because the interviewees that had reported sharing negative memes said that no matter what caption they themselves might have added, their followers may assume that a negative meme reflected their own stance.

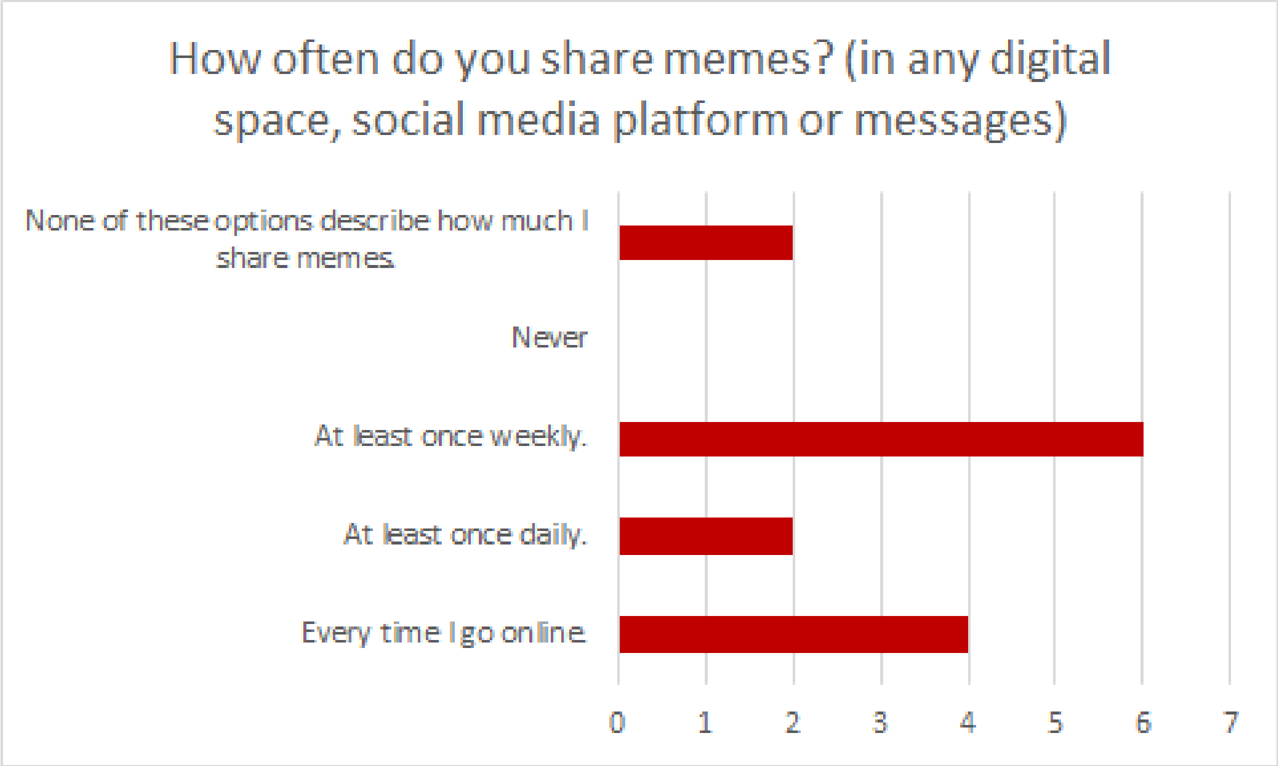


Figure 3 Sharing frequency of survey participants

The subcategory *Meme Language* describes memes as language. Just like language, memes require trial and error and time to learn how to use through repeated exposure and use. This subcategory is closely related to Sharing as it describes how memes can be used to communicate an individual's thoughts, have discussions, relate to others and use as icebreakers. This is also similar to the Spamming sharing behavior. Despite the many communicative functions which memes had to participants, many interviewees also described memes as only surface level communication that did not contain any real information. This subcategory is also closely related to the subcategory *Memes in Conversation*.

Memes in Conversation describes how memes and meme references enter everyday conversations both digitally and in real life. In digital conversations, participants described avoiding the use of memes that were unknown to them, were insulting or that they did not like.

They generally tried to use positive, relatable memes that could speak to the shared experiences of those holding the conversation. Memes might also take on the role of a greeting, joke, or a way to remember a shared experience. According to the subcategory *Beyond the Meme* in the primary category ***Interaction/Implicit*** also states that memes are often used to ask questions in conversation as well. Memes in digital conversation can be shared using a link or sending an image or by typing phrases from memes. In real life conversations, meme use is mostly referencing memes or saying meme phrases. As described in the summary definition of this study, references are considered to be a part of the meme family, however, in this subcategory more characteristics are added to references. Unlike the original meme, a reference cannot be shared or go viral. This might be due to the lack of a visual element as most references are a spoken phrase from a meme or an imitation of a meme through facial expressions or movement shown in the referenced meme. Other reference or use behavior in a real-life conversation include drawing the meme, playing an audio clip or searching the meme on a conversation holder's phone and showing others who are participating in the conversation.

Meme creation, described in the subcategory *Meme Making*, is one of the most fascinating subcategories in this study. According to the survey responses, 15% of survey respondents created memes. 13 of the 14 survey participants responded to this question on the survey with two participants responding with "No" and 11 responding "Yes". There was also an "I don't know" option that was not selected. This is compared in the figures below (see Figure 4 and 5) with the data from the six interviewees where four out of the six interviewees mentioned that they created memes or had created memes before. There is clearly an increase of meme creation between the two data sets. I will admit that the question in the survey should have included an explicit reference to the past, since that is also something I was interested in and not

only the current creation of memes. This could account for the increase, however, some of the interviewees that had selected “No” in the survey but admitted to creating memes currently did list specific reasons for the difference in their responses. These reasons are described in the ***Interaction/Implicit*** primary category in the subcategory *People Making Memes* as well as the reasons those who consistently denied making memes did not make memes. Those who denied making memes at first but admitted to creating them later stated that this was because they were not creating traditional memes. Traditional memes were described in the primary category Definition in the subcategory *...Are Memes* as being an image with caption that are typically older with examples being rage comics and Grumpy Cat. It is also possible that meme creation was denied because the interviewee did not think that they fit their own idea of what a meme creator was and because they did not share their self-created memes to public places. Those who consistently denied creating memes said that they did not create memes because they did not know how, feared misunderstandings and negative reactions to their memes, were worried about being repetitive and did not think that they were creative or funny enough to create memes. In contrast, when participants described what they thought people who created memes were like, they described them as people who were very up to date with memes and current events, were naturally funny and knew the full context of the subjects of their memes. This reveals the assumption of “the meme maker” that many of the interviewees had in their heads.

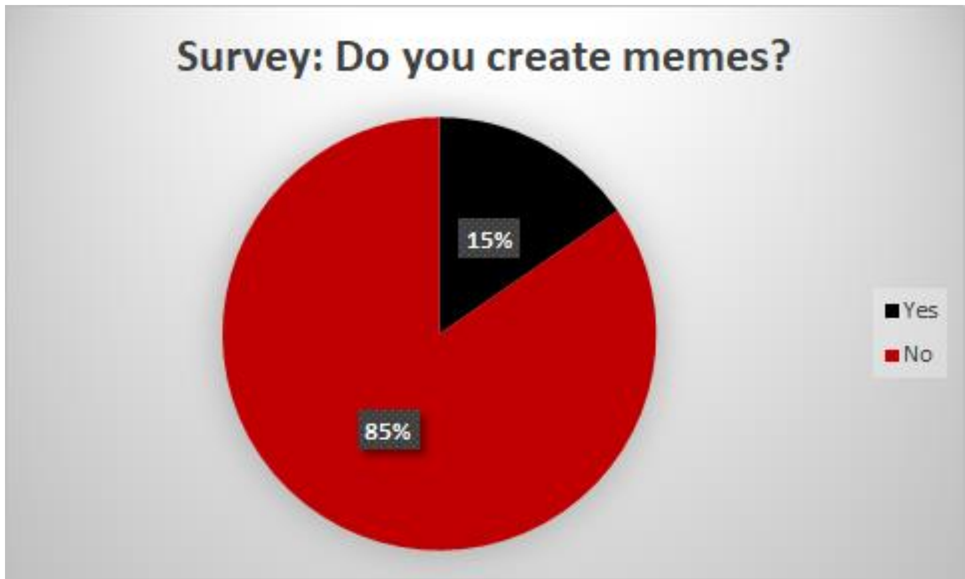
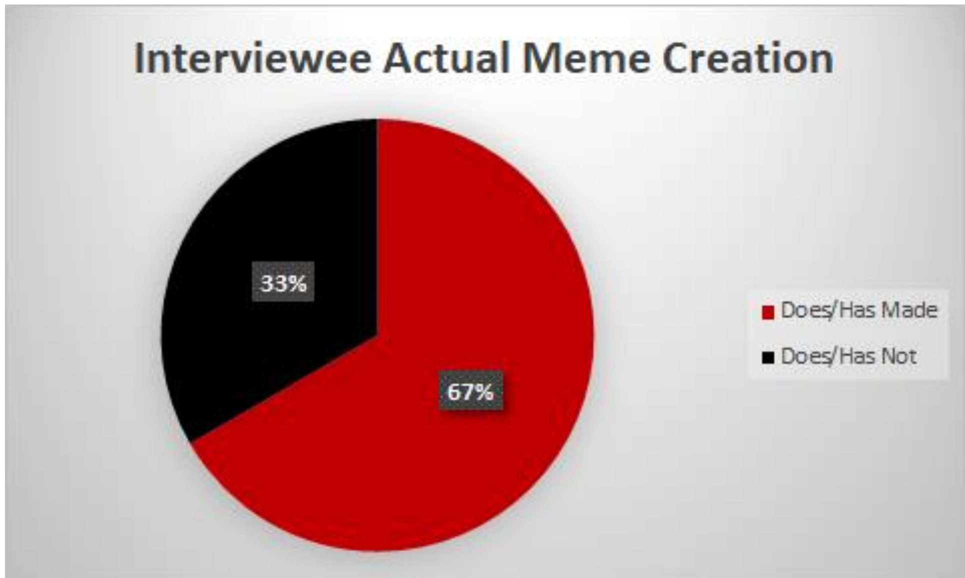


Figure 4 Survey data (percentages) on meme creation



Figures 5 Interviewee data (percentages) on meme creation

Those who created memes had similar processes and used similar tools and materials. Generally, the creation of a meme by this study's participants could be described in three main steps: Meme-able event/action, Process and Distribute/reaction. Meme making would often be triggered spontaneously by taking a photo of an embarrassing event or perfectly timed moment. Meme making could also start with an event where the maker would then Google an appropriate

picture to turn into a meme, however, most participants described using their own personal photos. The picture is then edited to enhance the most “meme-able” parts. This would be done by zooming in and cropping on certain parts of the picture, usually the expression of the subject in the photo. This was often done using messaging functions, for example, the Snapchat sticker function that allows the user to crop their own pictures to use as re-usable digital stickers. Participants also added captions to their photos during the editing process. There are other editing possibilities that were not described by participants, but can be assumed to be used in other situations such as the use of filters, image editing programs and drawing functions, however, these were not described in this study. In some cases described by participants, they would skip the editing process altogether and send their unedited photos to their intended receivers, following sharing behaviors as described in the subcategory Sharing. Sometimes the receivers of these meme photos would add their own captions to the photos by replying to the message containing the photo (see Figure 6 for an illustration of the meme creation process).

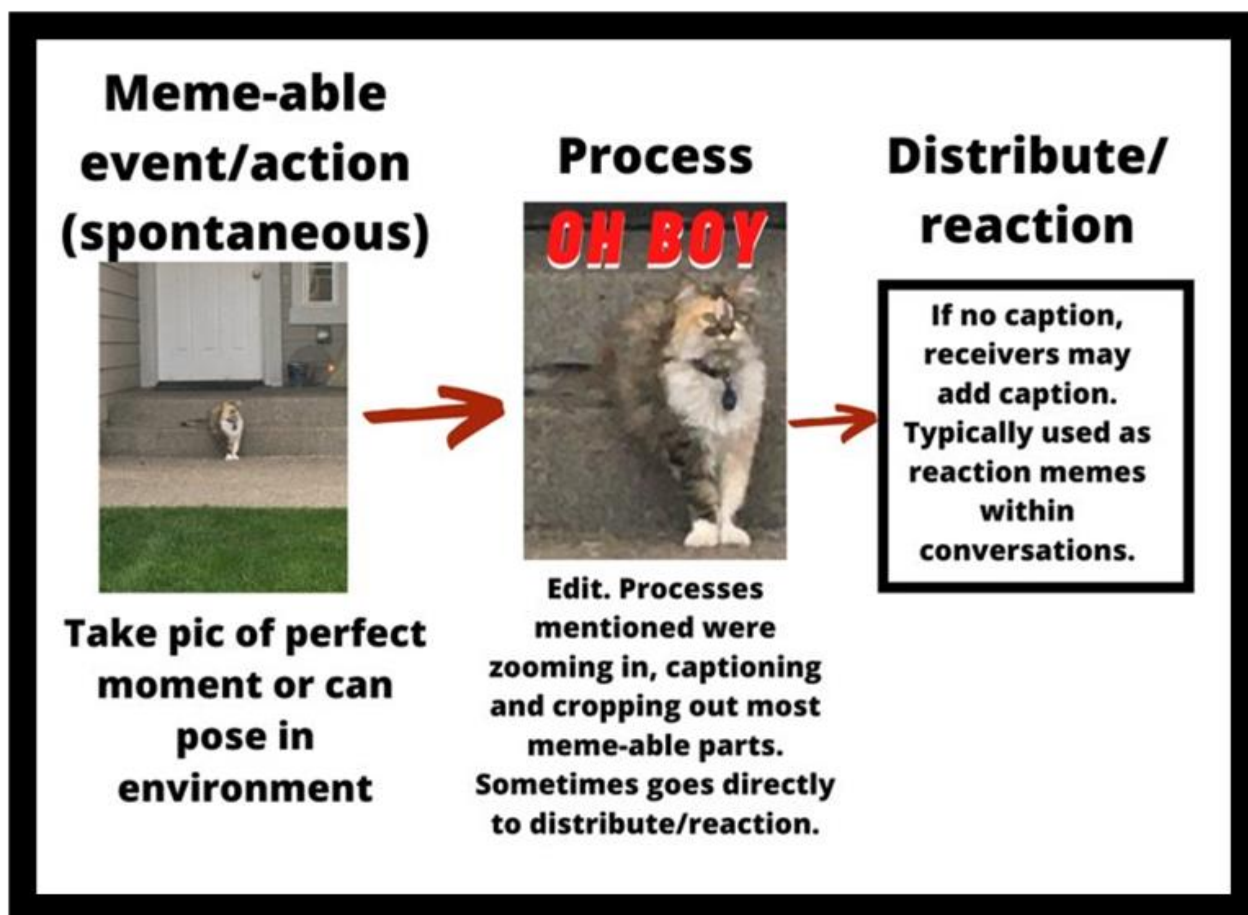


Figure 6 How to make a meme like a CWU undergraduate student

In the subcategory *After Meme Making*, sharing and use behaviors for self-made memes are described in more detail. Those who created memes did not share their memes to public places and instead shared their memes to friends and in private groups on Facebook in comments. These memes were used as reaction pictures.

The remaining subcategories in ***Use/Explicit*** are *Meme Purchases, In Real Life, Participating* and *Memes in Dating*. One of the more interesting subcategories among these is *In Real Life*. This subcategory describes how memes can be used in real life. The subcategory is rather small and simply confirms that memes can be used and exist in real life. Examples of real-life meme use and existence include dressing up as memes for Halloween, speaking meme

phrases, pointing out real life behavior that reminds participants of memes, drawing memes and printing memes out. Participants described their reactions to memes in real life as positive. Some participants mentioned that they had seen printed-out memes on professor doors on the CWU campus, in student campaigns and even describing themselves as drawing memes on department whiteboards.

Memes in Dating is an outlier subcategory where one of the interviewees described using the meme phrase "Hello there," as a greeting to potential dates, quoting from the Star Wars character Obi Wan Kenobi. The meme is completed if the receiver responds with "General Kenobi" which is quoting the Star Wars character General Grievous. This particular interviewee was interested in women and said that if the woman started the conversations there were usually no memes. Most women would also not complete the meme. In the opinion of the interviewee, using the meme was fun and could only benefit them and not hurt them.

The *Meme Purchases* subcategory is closely related to the *Corporatization* subcategory in the ***Interaction/Implicit*** primary category. This subcategory describes how and why participants would make meme purchases whereas the *Corporatization* subcategory describes opinions about the monetization and corporatization of memes. A meme item that would be purchasable includes games such as *What Do You Meme?* as well as t-shirt and accessory items with meme references on them. Reasons for buying meme items included: if it was part of their own style, if it was funny or positive and if it was related to a piece of media that they were nostalgic about or that they watched as a child. Participants would not buy a meme item if it was too expensive and because memes, according to participants, do not age well and can get repetitive, especially games based on memes. This would make a purchased meme item out of date relatively quickly.

In the *Participating* subcategory it is explained why participants would or would not participant in online challenges, which according to the summarized definition for this study are a type of meme. Out of the six participants, only one actively engaged in online challenges, two had engaged in online challenges in the past through school activities and three did not engage in online challenges and viewed participating as “cringe.” Participants believed individuals that participated in challenges would do so because they were bored, however, most participants held the belief that those without influence on social media participating in challenges was fruitless. Participants did approve of individuals with influence participating in online challenges, especially if they donated money to the cause associated with the challenge. The ALS challenge (source) was often given as an example. A benefit of doing online challenges for those without influence was that it allowed those who were very introverted to participate comfortably.

Primary Interaction/Implicit Category

There are many important behaviors and guiding logics in this primary category, however the most interesting and relevant to this study are *Who Uses Memes, Logics, Meme Culture, Information Flow, Beyond the Meme* and *Memes in Feed*. Additional subcategories that are not as relevant include *Community, Information Currency, People Making Memes* (already described in the previous section), *Corporatization, Interpreting* and *Memes in School*. The description and analysis in this primary category will be brief as studying meme interaction is not the primary focus of this study.

The *Who Uses Memes* subcategory describes that if a person uses the internet, they use memes. Because of this, the only people who do not use memes would be those who are or were sheltered growing up, are older or “...prefer to keep things very real.” This quote relates to the belief held by many of the interviewees that memes were surface level communication or

inadequate in some way when it came to communicating ideas. Those who would want to keep "things very real" would want to avoid memes in order to preserve valuable communication. Participants also posited that those who used memes were divided in their behavior surrounding memes by age, time investment into interacting with memes (this could also be connected to interaction with meme culture, described in the subcategory of the same name), whether or not they created memes, if they shared memes or not and if they interacted with politically correct or politically incorrect memes. These differences in use would be very valuable to research in the future.

Meme Culture describes a somewhat nebulous concept that many of the interviewees referred to during interviews. The idea of meme culture is something that should be researched further in order to determine if it can be defined separately from meme behaviors and unique cultures in digital communities, as that is how the interviewees in this study were referring to meme culture, even if it was not explicitly stated. In short, interviewees described meme culture as consisting of individuals making memes as well as their communities. These individuals had mutual experiences and memes that were easily recognizable among the community. Other memes that were important to meme culture included chaotic jokes, underground memes (also known as relatively unknown memes indicating a greater time investment required) and meme merchandise. The subcategory *Information Currency* is closely related to the *Meme Culture* subcategory. This subcategory describes a potential pre-requisite required to interact in meme culture referred to as internet knowledge. Internet knowledge is acquired through spending enough time on the internet to recognize many memes, topics and events throughout time and be able to make connections between them. Having internet knowledge allows the holder of such knowledge to understand current memes, laugh at more memes and know how to use memes

properly. Additional features of meme culture include the sites and memes that are applicable to this culture as well as knowledge of the history of memes and the mechanics that allow for the production and spread of memes. A possible nuance or aspect of meme culture could also be how memes function in community, which is the name of another subcategory. Again, the idea that memes are universal jokes with the internet is posited in this subcategory, but it is elaborated to specify that these inside jokes are understood depending on the individual's knowledge base, groups they are a part of and the interests they have. To individuals within specific groups, the memes relevant to them are instantly recognizable. Memes within groups help the members of the group to relate to each other and connect them to larger meanings. This is especially true in fandoms and in groups divided by language and groups based on shared interests.

For the interviewees of this study, interacting with memes is not an active process. The subcategory *Memes In-Feed* describes how memes appear in their day to day-time spent on the internet. In this category, interviewees said that memes simply showed up in their feed, even if they were not subscribed to meme pages. Four out of the six interviewees did subscribe to meme pages based on their own interests. The most active part of interacting with memes is when an interviewee feels that the memes they are seeing are "stale" and go and search for new meme accounts to follow. According to survey data, memes are mostly encountered on social media sites such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter (see Figure 7). While interacting with memes, interviewees are also interpreting them. The subcategory with the name *Interpreting* lays this out in more detail.

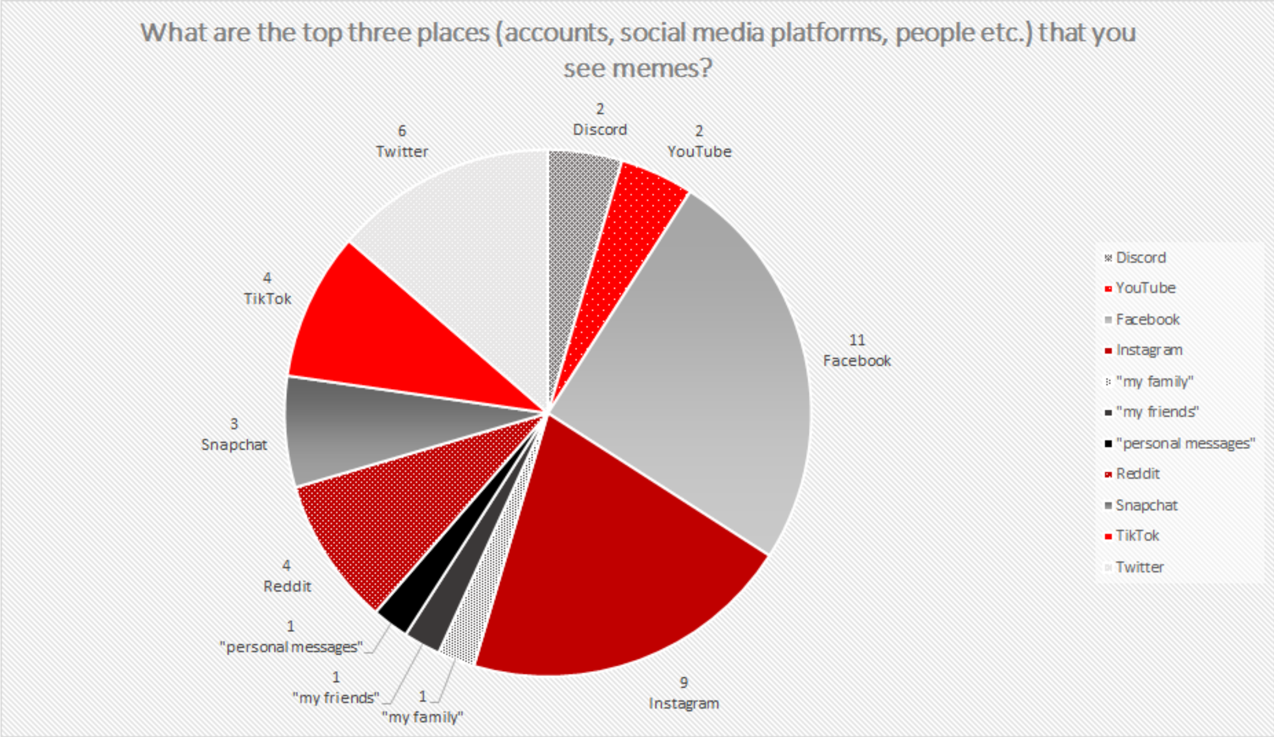


Figure 7 Survey data illustrating where study participants found memes

When interpreting memes, according to the *Interpreting* subcategory, interviewees assumed that a shared meme represented the sharer's own opinion or stance on the topic presented. According to interviewees, there are special considerations to keep in mind when interpreting memes, especially serious ones. Firstly, it can be hard to digest serious memes, especially in quick succession, but when serious memes are encountered it is important for the meme to be respectful to the subject and be laughing with the subject (which can be a person or group) and not at the subject. The intention behind the creation of a meme is especially important when determining if the meme is being respectful to its subject. Intention is also important in the *Logics* category which describes the importance of memes being accurate to the facts, especially when referring to politics. This is an intention that should be a part of all memes, however, the subcategory also posits that it is part of the life of a meme for it to lose its original intentions and

meaning, especially as relates to the context playing aspect of the meme definition for this population.

Other important features of the *Logics* subcategory are that memes should not be explained. Interviewees related that explaining a meme ruins it, much like explaining a joke would ruin the joke. It could also be connected to the subcategory *Information Currency* where it was described that internet knowledge was needed in order to properly use and understand memes. Having this explained may be a sort of cheating behavior. Another rule surrounding memes is that people are not allowed to take credit for (or steal) a meme or copy a meme. This behavior would be considered rude and is coupled with the idea that meme creators should cite their material used. However, in practice, it was assumed by interviewees that those who have meme accounts participate in stealing or copying behavior. Interviewees themselves are not that upset by stealing or copying behavior.

Related to the idea that memes should be accurate, especially pertaining to politics, as described in the *Logics* subcategory, is the opinion that many of the interviewees expressed which is cynicism towards traditional media, especially news. According to the subcategory Information Flow, social media was the main source of news for participants and memes were used to filter which news interviewees researched further. The survey data shows that most participants will verify the information they see in memes with seven answering “Yes” they do look for more information about memes or verify information in a meme after seeing it and four answering “No”. The three other participants in the survey either selected the “I Don’t Know” option or simply did not answer (See figure 8). Using memes as a filter for news was described as a way to save time sifting through articles. It was assumed that any major or important events would make their way into memes. Memes also offer an alternative and lighter perspective to the

news which interviewees preferred. Interviewees also saw memes used in activism and thought this was a good thing as memes can spread information very fast, are quicker to read than articles and are able to be seen more widely.

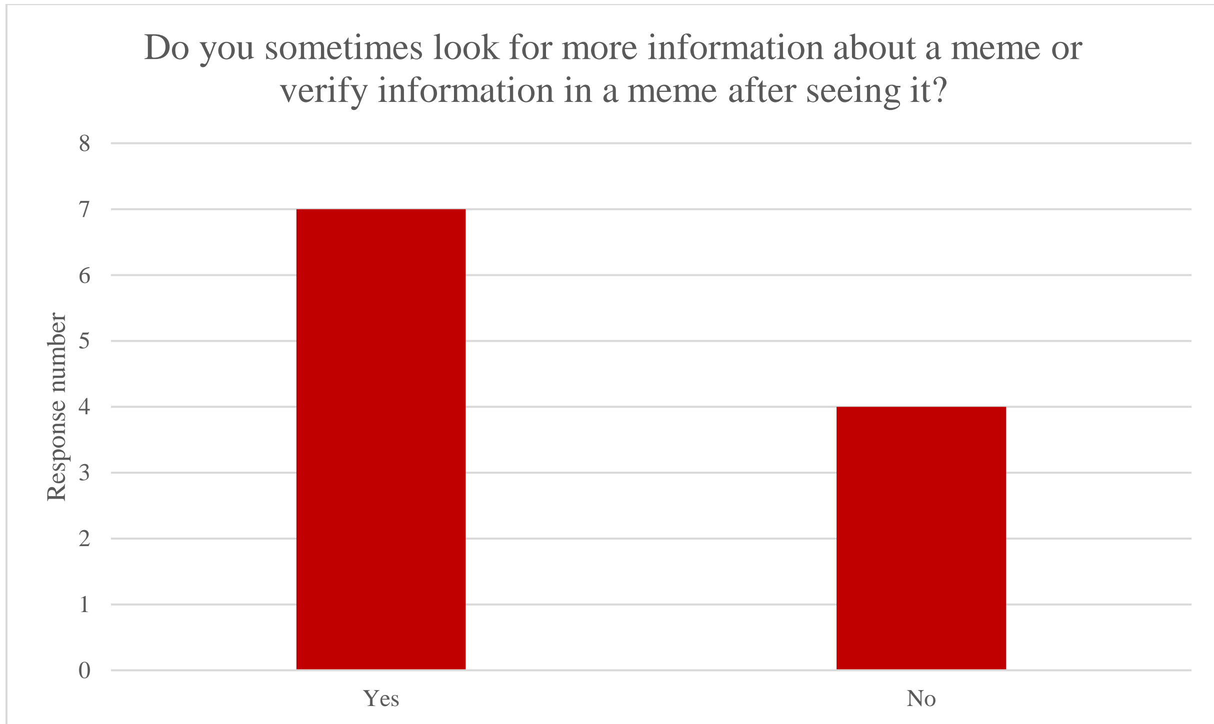


Figure 8 Survey data on verification of information in memes

Interviewees may use memes to choose what to research in the news, but they also will search for and about memes they see in their feeds as described in the subcategory *Beyond the Meme*. This will occur if an individual wants to share a meme with others or to research background information to understand a meme that the individual has not seen previously. Researching a meme will only happen if the individual has seen the meme several times and still does not understand it or if the meme is related to a topic or media that the individual is already familiar with or that looks interesting to them. Other times a meme will be researched is if it is a political meme or if the individual is bored. Researching memes does not happen very often,

according to interviewees, especially if they feel it could be detrimental to their mental health, if it is too much work or if they are simply not interested in the meme. Searching for memes can happen on the internet using search engines like Google, but many of the interviewees also said that they would simply ask their friends what a meme meant, despite the taboo established earlier in the *Logics* subcategory that memes should not be explained as it would be akin to explaining a joke. Researching information about memes does have a lot of benefits, however, such as understanding more jokes and fact checking information in order to avoid misinformation as well as avoiding embarrassment from improper use of memes.

The last two subcategories in ***Interaction/Implicit*** is *Corporatization* and *Memes in School. Corporatization* refers to the opinions of interviewees on the monetization of memes and memes used in institutional and professional settings. In general, interviewees said that corporations using memes was a hard thing to do correctly. Corporations who decide to take this route run the risk of being uninformed on meme use and using the memes incorrectly which could in turn be made into a meme. If done correctly, memes were considered a great form of advertising that was eye-catching and attractive to customers. Good examples of meme use by corporations included Wendy's and Arby's, especially their Twitter accounts. While corporations have the option of using memes, individuals, including students, should not mix memes in their professional and classroom settings as it makes them look unprofessional, unserious and incompetent. Despite this belief, there were many instances of memes intertwined with school experiences at CWU. These meme experiences are described in the *Memes in School* subcategory where meme experiences included talking about memes in class discussions, seeing memes on school advertising for different events and clubs, memes in lectures and introduced into discussion from professors and memes used to convey class rules. According to interviewees

not many of their professors had used memes but unless the professor had put a lot of effort into understanding proper meme use, was using recent memes or was naturally funny, professors using memes was considered “cringy” or given a pass for effort.

Primary Personal/History Category

Subcategories included in this primary category are *Life of a College Student, First Interactions, Meme Likes and Dislikes* and *Memes Through Time*. This primary category is largely unimportant to the overall study and mostly serve to validate other ideas or behaviors found in other subcategories or add detail. For example, in the *Life of a College Student* subcategory there is information about family background and mental health issues, however, this information is not complete and cannot be correlated with other subcategories. In the *Meme Likes and Dislikes* subcategory the idea that memes that the participants interacted with followed their personal interests is reinforced.

The First Interactions subcategory is interesting because it describes when each participant first encountered memes. According to the survey, most participants encountered memes when they were 11–14 with others selecting that they were 14–18. The other age ranges that were available for participants to select were 0–5, 5–10 and 18+. In interviews, stories about first interacting with memes involved recommendations from peers or teachers talking about memes in class. Other stories revolved around acquiring social media sites or becoming involved in platforms such as Facebook, YouTube and iFunny.

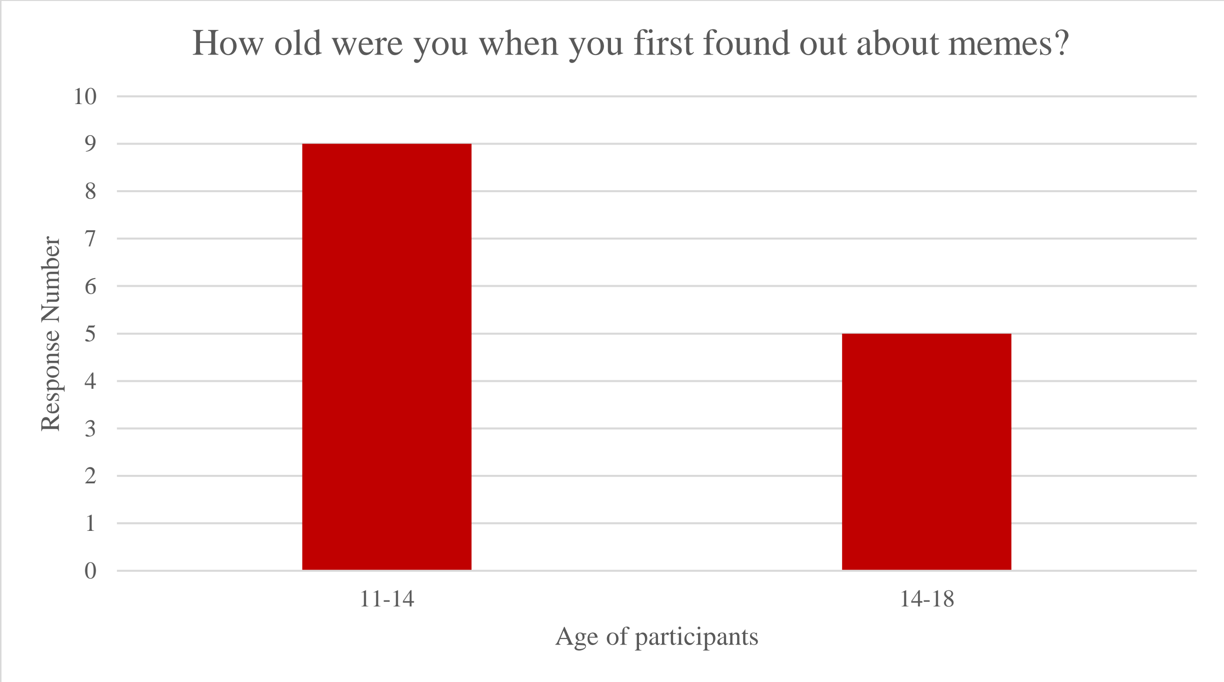


Figure 9 Survey data on how old participants were during their first interaction with memes

The *Memes Through Time* subcategory is also interesting but unsubstantiated as it describes interviewees' personal opinions on how memes have changed over time. To my knowledge, a history of memes has not yet been compiled. What participants describe, however, is that memes were at first simple images with captions with memes about school and rage comics being prevalent. Now, according to participants memes are more fluid with meme types like deep fried images being prevalent. Speculation on what came before memes included that memes started as drawings and evolve as technology evolves. The COVID-19 pandemic, according to participants has not affected their meme usage significantly, but small changes include participants being more cautious about how they use memes. The pandemic has also served to create a new type of memes called Pandemic Memes. These memes arose because the pandemic is affecting everyone, creating a new branch of inside knowledge. In general, memes have become darker during the pandemic.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

Memes are a part of everyday living. As shown by the research presented here, they appear in almost every aspect of a CWU college student's life, even outside of the internet. However, despite their importance, research is only now starting to catch up to this eclectic phenomenon. This study serves to add unique and valuable information about behaviors surrounding memes and meme use as well as to define the word "meme" within a specific context, adding to the knowledge and definitions already present in the literature.

Research questions answered in this study include, "How do CWU college students use memes?" and "What is a meme to CWU college students?" The answer to the first question can be summarized as follows: CWU college students use memes in diverse and social ways online and offline. Use is primarily spreading the meme in some explicit way as opposed to interaction which is passive and implicit behavior. Memes in the use context can strengthen relationships, highlight opinions or strengthen stances and be used as entertainment. The most important meme use behaviors were sharing which is spreading a meme without alteration and creation where students would create memes using their own personal media and sharing with friends and family as reaction memes. The second question's answer was: According to CWU college students a meme must be visually interpreted with the exception of some verbal references. A meme can be brought into real life or be a record of real-life actions but must be on the internet; almost any digital item can be a meme. A meme provokes emotion and thought which guides how people react to it and how they use it. Context playing and understanding of meme context is often essential to a meme.

This study also found unique and interesting data as pertained to interaction with memes and details about the population of studied CWU college students. Interaction behaviors that

were most intriguing as revealed by participants were meme culture and the logics and rules that were entwined with that idea as well as using memes as a filter for news information and researching about and looking up memes. The details about CWU college students were mostly inconclusive and should be fleshed out further, however, the information offered by participants about when they first started interacting with memes, mainly when they were 11 – 14 years old, were very interesting.

Overall, this study should be heavily reformed, but is worth repeating in different contexts. I believe that the traditional methods used in the study offered a unique insight to meme behaviors that allowed access to in real life and interpersonal behaviors that may have been inaccessible otherwise, however, in order to be more thorough in the future, re-enactments of digital and in real life behaviors and digital spaces for interactions between researcher and participants should be set up in order to observe and simulate more diverse behaviors in more detail. Adding this type of methodology would also help to ameliorate the lack of participant observation in this study. Another flaw in this study that should be adjusted if it was to be repeated is that demographic information should be collected in the survey and the questions should be adjusted for clarity. Aspects of this study that I think merit further study include meme creation processes, memes being used as filters for news information, meme use in everyday conversations both in real life and in digital spaces as well as memes in other, non-digital contexts such as school, work, and grouped by age.

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