

Research article

The language and meaning of media memes from a semiotic perspective

El lenguaje y el significado de los memes mediáticos desde una perspectiva semiótica

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Abstract

Introduction: Memes have become a key resource for communication, making it possible to disseminate information quickly and to reach a young audience in search of specific content. This study analyses the effectiveness of memes in communication. **Methodology:** A quantitative and exploratory approach was used, with the technique of direct observation. Information was recorded through a form applied to a sample of 302 memes, analysing the visual elements, the message and the social, cultural or political context of each one. **Results:** The results show that memes generate active participation, and their effectiveness in communication depends on the relevance of the current context. Memes that reflect users' experiences have a greater impact. **Discussion:** The analysis reveals that memes are a powerful digital communication tool, leveraging both visual and linguistic content to connect with a broad and diverse audience on platforms such as TikTok, Instagram and WhatsApp. **Conclusions:** Memes are effective at communicating messages interactively, and their impact depends on the context and user experience.

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Key words: Memes; humour; “viralisation”; social networks; Facebook; Instagram; Tiktok; semiotics.

Resumen

Introducción: Los memes se han convertido en un recurso clave para la comunicación, permitiendo difundir información de manera rápida y llegar a un público joven en busca de contenido específico. Este estudio analiza la eficacia de los memes en la comunicación.

Metodología: Se utilizó un enfoque cuantitativo y exploratorio, con la técnica de observación directa. Se registró información a través de una ficha aplicada a una muestra de 302 memes, analizando los elementos visuales, el mensaje y el contexto social, cultural o político de cada uno. **Resultados:** Los resultados muestran que los memes generan participación activa, y su eficacia en la comunicación depende de la relevancia del contexto actual. Los memes que reflejan las experiencias y vivencias de los usuarios tienen un mayor impacto. **Discusión:** El análisis revela que los memes son una herramienta poderosa de comunicación digital, que aprovecha tanto el contenido visual como lingüístico para conectar con una audiencia amplia y diversa en plataformas como TikTok, Instagram y WhatsApp. **Conclusiones:** Los memes son efectivos para comunicar mensajes de forma interactiva, y su impacto depende del contexto y la experiencia de los usuarios.

Palabras clave: Memes; humor; viralización; redes sociales; *Facebook; Instagram; Tiktok*; semiótica.

1. Introduction

With the invention of smartphones, social networks grew exponentially. After these, mobile applications and information consumption took over screens at a dizzying pace. As a result, communication accelerated at rates never seen before. The improvement in mobile devices, accompanied by the implementation of cameras, made it possible to create and share images and videos without limits. What were the reactions? Networks increased their potential; devices increased their capabilities and users increased their images. For their part, “communicologists” tried to keep pace and study the phenomena without fully matching the speed of developments.

Very little research has been done on the exercise of communication in general and the creation of images in particular. Memes are complex messages addressed to a mass audience, the characteristics of which are often overlooked. This is why we concentrate on this research to:

- Know which social networks memes circulate on.
- Find out what kind of characters are featured in memes.
- What themes are observed in the memes.
- Thus, the research questions arise:
- What are the networks on which memes are shared?
- Which characters appear most frequently in memes?
- What topics do the memes address?

1.1 Memes

The meme, as a short format, is loaded with irony, exaggeration and messages, which makes it effective for the transmission and “viralisation” of content. It emerges as a relevant object of study due to its critical and humorous nature, and its significant impact on social networks such as *Facebook*, *X* and *Instagram*. The “viralisation” of these messages, accompanied by images, not only provides entertainment for users, but also serves as a vehicle for the transmission of culture between generations.

The concept of meme, introduced by Richard Dawkins in (1976) cited by Robles (2019), describes it as “a cultural unit that is shared and transmitted through generations, similar to genes in a biological sense” (Lonnberg et al., 2020, p. 1). This first introduction has served as the basis for numerous subsequent articles and texts that have attempted to explain this Internet phenomenon.

Over time, the concept of the meme has evolved significantly since its introduction. In the digital realm, memes have become a powerful medium for communication, social criticism and the expression of ideas. Through social networks, these cultural units spread rapidly, reaching thousands of people in a matter of hours and adapting to contextual events. The interdisciplinary field from which memes can be understood includes anthropology, sociology, psychology, communication and the various fields to which memes refer.

In 2012, “The Social Media Reader” by Michael Mandiberg was published. Within this book, the chapter entitled “The Language of Internet Memes” aims to “discuss internet memes (...) that are popular and recognisable but lack a rigorous description of their vocabulary” (Davison, 2012, p. 120). The vocabulary of memes is intrinsically related to culture. Davison emphasises how memes not only transmit humour, but also constitute formats that enable social and political critiques, inviting us to explore their cultural and social impact in the digital age.

In 2013, Carlos Castaño published his article “Defining and Characterizing the Concept of Internet Memes”, in which he highlights the limited amount of research in this field. Castaño (2013, p. 83) states: “Finding a formal definition of Internet meme is not easy”. These units of culture, says the author, contain meaning.

An example is the article “Memes as political entertainment. Reception, uses and results”, whose objective is to “contribute to the understanding of this type of content and its implications for political communication” (Echeverría & González, 2019, p. 1), focusing on the political sphere and the implication of memes in this context.

In Ecuador, research is limited. One of the studies is “El humor gráfico en tiempos de coronavirus: Análisis de los memes publicados en Ecuador entre marzo y mayo de 2020” in the journal *Ibérica de Sistemas y Tecnologías de Información* (Carpio, et al. 2020). Research works can be seen as theses from various universities. These include “Memes as a satirical manifestation of public opinion in Ecuadorian politics: a study of the 'Rayo Correizador' case” (Alvarado, 2018) and “Communication and identity: communicational analysis of Crudo Ecuador memes as a representation of Ecuadorian identity” (Rosero, 2015). These studies address specific themes and examine the influence of memes on the Ecuadorian population.

1.2 Fundamentals of Semiotics

The concept of “semiotics” can be understood from two main approaches related to the study of signs, developed by two leading figures in the field of semiology: Ferdinand de Saussure in Europe and Charles Sanders Peirce in North America. Both propose similar ideas that allow us to understand the analysis of symbols. Saussure leads the European perspective, defining semiotics as “a science that studies the life of signs within social life” (Saussure, 1945, p. 39). Its objective is to teach what signs are and what are the laws that govern them. Furthermore, he introduces the term semiology, derived from the Greek *sēmeîon*, meaning “sign”, suggesting that this study could be based on social psychology.

For Flores (2021) semiotics is the discipline that studies signs and systems of meaning in human societies. It focuses on how humans create and understand symbols and signs, ranging from words and images to gestures and sounds. Peirce emphasises the importance of semiotics in logic, considering the sign as “a triadic and pragmatic entity” (Barroso, 2008, p. 8). Within the pragmatist current to which Peirce belongs, the sign is equated with the reality of the human being in relation to the world, thus providing an explanation and interpretation of knowledge. For De Morentin (2020) the linguistic sign is composed of a signifier (the form of the sign) and a 'signified' (the idea it represents), including symbols, icons and indices.

On the other hand, the sign is the essential foundation of semiotic analysis and must be examined from its most basic forms in order to achieve a complete understanding. When any object, whether physical or abstract in our reality, is given a name, it becomes a sign that deserves to be studied. According to Zecchetto (2002, p. 74), the sign functions as a symbolic representation of reality that is generated in our mind. Therefore, it is valid to affirm that both the thought and the idea are also signs, since they represent another perceived entity, whether internal, external or even created by our imagination.

1.3. The sign and symbols

For visual semiotics, the structure of the sign presents specific configurations that allow us to understand its components and to carry out a deeper analysis of the message that is intended to be communicated through images.

According to De Morentin (2001, p. 4), the visual sign is defined as a proposal of optical perception, considered as a representation destined to configure a form that will be evaluated by the observer. In this sense, both visual elements and language are linked to the arbitrariness of the representation offered at a given moment, created by a sender and received by a receiver. Both will encode and decode the image according to the mental constructs they have of the message; but above all by the language mastered by the sender and receiver. According to De Morentin (2001, p. 5), our ability to interpret certain types of images implies the presence of specific symbolic processes in our visual systems.

Peirce (1974) classifies the sign in relation to itself, a categorisation that can be used to explain the visual elements of an image, the meaning attributed and the interpretation that can be inferred. According to Zecchetto et al. (2013), this classification is divided into three subcategories based on qualities, the normal and the existent. However, De Morentin (2001) establishes a correlation between these concepts and visual representations.

For semiotics, symbols possess a representation that is not limited to it self, but acquires a social or cultural meaning (Cendejas and González 2023). In memes, this criterion can be interpreted

as indicating that the whole is more than the sum of its parts; that is, the lexical-visual conjunction surpasses individual meanings.

1.4 The rhetoric of the image

To carry out an accurate analysis of an image, it is essential to consider that “images are polysemic, that is, they can have multiple meanings: they possess a signifying chain, but their meanings are fluid and the observer can select some and leave out others” (Zecchetto et al., 2013, p. 183). Therefore, when examining an image, it is necessary to contemplate the various elements that compose it.

From the perspective of visual semiotics, the notion has been incorporated that meanings can be arbitrary, as they depend on who is interpreting. According to Zecchetto (2013), an image can be interpreted in multiple ways, and the choice of interpretation falls on with subject who decodes it, influenced also by the context in which it is found.

The rhetoric of the image implies the analysis of signs as independent elements; but at the same time, as components of a chain of meaning. In this sense, the study must attend to the linguistic, coded visual and non-decoded visual message.

The decoding of visual rhetoric faces at least three moments of interpretation: immediate, medium and a complete final. In the first view, only the main elements (of greater size or visual relevance and the text without reading it in its entirety) are observed. The medium reading analyses the text/image set by comparing it with the memory file. In the case of memes, there is a comparison with other texts and the same image or with the same texts and different images. The final reading is a response to the complete syntagm, of which the observer assumes the meaning and the signifier.

1.5 Semiotics of language

Semiotics of language is a branch of semiotics that focuses specifically on the study of how language functions as a system of signs and how these signs create meaning (Moreno, 2022). In this context, language is understood in a broad sense, encompassing both verbal language (words, sentences, texts) and non-verbal language (gestures, facial expressions, tone of voice). This discipline analyses the relationship between linguistic signs (words and sentences) and what they represent, examining how speakers and listeners interpret and use language in communication (Mendez., 2022).

Abu, et al (2024) refer to the definition of semiotics as the study of the creation of meaning-making in different systems including image, music and gesture and how signs combine to produce meaning.

Two key aspects of the semiotics of language are signifier and signified, in the ideas of Ferdinand de Saussure, this concept refers to the relationship between the “signifier” (the physical form of the sign, such as sounds or written marks) and the “meaning” (the idea or concept that the sign represents). The semiotics of language explores how these two parts come together to form linguistic signs that convey meaning (Lampis, 2020). Semiotics of language provides a framework for understanding how language creates and conveys meaning, considering the arbitrary nature of linguistic signs and how they are used in real communicative contexts.

1.6 Evolution of the meme

Memes are graphic images that contain information about various aspects of reality, whether social, political, economic, sports, among others. It is this capacity for adaptation that has allowed them to gain ground on social platforms, where they have begun to expand into other areas such as advertising, being used to capture the attention of users on social aspects.

However, these satirical resources were not always like this. In the beginning, they were presented as pre-established drawings that conveyed messages about the daily activities of homogeneous groups with shared interests. They also depicted seemingly irrelevant or absurd situations, designed to provoke laughter in their viewers.

According to Ruiz (2018, p. 5), the dissemination of memes is due both to their medium and to the changes and modifications that users make during their reproduction. These changes are frequent, significant and deliberate, evidencing a clear intention of adaptation and reuse on the part of those who share them.

Memes continue to expand despite not evolving much. Since their appearance as simple, static, low-resolution drawings, these formats have evolved into complex content that incorporates photos, text and videos. Memes are pieces of communication like all images, in this element there is a satirical charge but they provide information about an event that has an impact on society, their evolution has demonstrated the human need to seek new forms of expression and a way of accepting the globality of groups that can be made up of similar tastes, experiences and opinions.

Memes, due to their ability to adapt, can take different forms to express the message, and this diversity is reflected in social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram. However, the basic structure of memes consists of an image and a text that gives context to the accompanying graphic; to understand it, it must be read as a whole.

(...) the types of images are born from easily modified moulds that are available to users and that have become the known and adopted language for the elaboration of these pieces due to their easy compositional and typographic intervention. (Rodríguez, 2018, p. 53).

1.7 The “viralisation” of memes on the internet

On the networks there are many memes, pages in charge of creating, editing and publishing these cultural units, but not all of them enjoy the same popularity, because some themes are more attractive than others, or they are represented in a better way that transmits the message more clearly than other visual expressions.

That some memes “succeed” is not that they are “mechanically obligated to transmit a cultural replicator” (Miltner, 2018, p. 414). Like genes or viruses, but that they are emotionally resonant. People share memes, “make them triumph”, “when they feel moved by a part of them: fear, anger, joy and laughter are motivators of memetic circulation” (Galip, 2024, p.20). Therefore, memes reflect social, political and cultural realities and discourses.

For content to go viral, it must meet certain factors that allow the audience to recognise it as important to be shared with their network of friends on digital platforms.

Large-scale dissemination is only one of its essential features, since replicability is coupled with the ability to adapt and modify. The latter is possible thanks to new digital platforms, which make it easier for users to be not only consumers of information, but also producers of it. This indicates that, in addition to its rapid distribution, the nature of a meme lies in the possibility of being reworked countless times by as many users as they decide. (Echeverría & González, 2019, p. 4).

The greater the capacity for replication, the more the meme will be used in wider contexts, which will increase the audience that shares this content. However, while this ability to adapt to different environments and situations could be one of the most important factors in the “viralisation” of memes, there are others that also influence it.

1.8 Basic elements of memes

Just as general images have a structure, the construction of memes has its own basis linked to the above basic elements. Formed mostly on the basis of a white plane, the meme is divided into two, a text section that contextualises the image and the image itself (Figure 1).

Figure 1.

Models of memes



Source: Internet memes and communication in digital social networks. A look from design. Rodríguez (2018).

The basic design of memes provides a standardisation for their development, that is, the understanding of their content will be easy to read given the structuring it provides on all platforms where it is found, and therefore the message will be understood by a greater number of people, achieving its “viralisation”. “This form of standardisation could be catalogued as the heart of internet memes and the seed that has allowed the exponential production of these pieces” (Rodríguez, 2018, p. 58).

We can see that regardless of the type of graphic we are dealing with, the elements are universal and therefore a significant part of the study to understand the complexity of this object; hence the importance of dividing an image into its most basic parts, explaining perception as studied by Gestalt as well as its relevance in interpretation.

2. Methodology

We have focused on exploring how memes generate participation and the impact of their visual and linguistic content on social networks. The methodology used is quantitative and

exploratory, using observation through platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, X, TikTok, WhatsApp, among others.

To record the information, a data collection form was designed to capture the message transmitted through images and text. This form is made up of 19 key questions, which include aspects such as: signifier, meaning, theme of the meme, origin of the meme, type of meme, as well as the medium or social network through which it was disseminated. The description of the visual element present in the meme, the interpretation of the message conveyed and the description of the social, cultural or political context in which the meme originated are analysed. It also considers the most frequent uses of memes, such as in politics, artists, popular icons, athletes, among others.

The analysis of memes was carried out between May 2023 and January 2024, with a sample of 302 cases. This study offers a detailed view of the dynamics of memes and their relevance in today's digital environment.

3. Results

After the data collection process was completed, the results were grouped to distinguish trends and criteria of memes.

General data

Table 1.

Platforms for the dissemination of memes

Broadcast media	Frequency	Percentage
Facebook	156	51,66
Instagram	89	29,47
TikTok	19	6,29
X	22	7,28
WhatsApp	16	5,30
Total	302	100,00

Source: Results of the semiotic analysis of media memes. Own elaboration (2024).

Facebook outperforms social networks as a medium for the dissemination of memes, as shown in table 1. This platform proves to be the preferred platform for the publication of memes. Unlike TikTok and X, the participation of TikTok and X is minimal; between the two platforms they reach a small percentage (13.57%), however, each platform offers a unique approach. TikTok with its short and creative video content, and X with its microblogging format. WhatsApp has the lowest frequency and percentage of meme dissemination compared to the platforms analysed. Despite this, its use for sharing memes in groups and private chats suggests significant reach within closed communities, complementing public dissemination on other platforms. To maximise the impact and reach of memes, it is necessary to focus on platforms such as Facebook and Instagram, within any dissemination strategy due to their high frequency and percentage of use, as Ruiz (2018) points out, the dissemination and proliferation of memes is significantly due to the changes and modifications that users make to them to expand their dissemination and reproduction.

Table 2

Sources from which memes originate

Origin of the meme	Frequency	Percentage
Cartoons / Sitcoms	54	17,88
Films	34	11,26
TV programmes	19	6,29
Art works	8	2,65
Others	187	61,92
Total	302	100,00

Source: Results of the semiotic analysis of media memes. Own elaboration (2024).

According to Rodríguez (2018), memes are pieces or images that arise from simple or easy to modify models and are available to users, who classify them into various categories. This agrees with the data found in table 2, which shows a great diversity in the origin of memes, with a significant majority classified in the category of others. Cartoons and sitcoms, along with films, are a source of inspiration for many generations who find memes visually attractive content. Although less present, television programmes and artwork are not commonly used for meme making. This may be due to low cultural penetration or the specific nature of the artistic content, which cannot always be translated into a meme format. Galip (2024) indicates that it is the users who make memes successful, due to the constant circulation they can achieve. fear, anger, joy and laughter are motivators of memetic circulation.

Table 3

Social networks vs. origin of the meme

	Cartoons / Sitcoms	Others	Films	TV programmes	Artworks
Facebook	29	90	20	12	5
Instagram	18	58	10	1	2
Tik Tok		12	3	4	
X	5	14	1	1	1
WhatsApp	2	13		1	
Total	54	187	34	19	8

Source: Results of the semiotic analysis of media memes. Own elaboration (2024).

Facebook is the platform considered the leader in the dissemination of memes, showing great diversity in the origin of memes. The “other” category presents the highest percentage of posts, indicating that users tend to share content in the case of memes from a variety of unspecified sources. On Instagram, it is the name type category itself that is the most represented, the rest of the categories do not have a representative value for users to choose from when sharing this type of content. The rest of the platforms such as TikTok, X and WhatsApp have a low representation in each of the categories found, this may be due to the fact that TikTok is focused much more on the generation and publication of short videos, while X's main function is to make content and messages known in a brief form, and WhatsApp focuses on the reception and generation of messages, serving as a channel between the sender and the receiver. In addition, WhatsApp offers the possibility of sharing stickers or animated images in GIF format, which personalise interpersonal or group communication.

Table 4*Celebrity vs. social media use*

	Facebook	Instagram	Tik Tok	Twitter	WhatsApp
Artists	11	6	7	2	0
Athletes	4	2	1	2	3
Popular icons	49	22	4	7	1
Others	86	56	4	3	9
Politicians	6	3	3	8	3
Total	156	89	19	22	16

Source: Results of the semiotic analysis of media memes. Own elaboration (2024).

When analysing the correlation between the use of memes referencing famous figures such as: artists, athletes, popular icons, others and politicians against the social networks with the largest reach in recent years, it is observed that Facebook dominates the dissemination of memes in all categories, especially in “others” with 86 mentions and “popular icons” with 49. This indicates that the most popular social platform since 2004 is the preferred platform for publishing a wide range of meme content. On the other hand, Instagram also shows a high frequency in the “other” category: 56. TikTok, although is not a favourite for this type of content, as its niche is in another type of format, stands out with a low frequency, this is because its focus and entertainment is in the audiovisual areas. X, on the other hand, has a notable representation in “political” 8, which underlines its role as a platform for discussions and content related to current events and politics. While WhatsApp, although the least used, shows a relatively balanced distribution, which the researchers say is due to the fact that it shares its content in a more private and personalised context. The data indicates that while Facebook and Instagram dominate and diversify in the dissemination of celebrity memes, each platform has a specific profile that reflects its user base and the type of content preferred on each social network.

Table 5*Meme themes and characters*

	Artists	Athletes	Popular icons	Others	Politicians
Humor	22	11	74	139	14
Ideological	1			3	5
Marketing	1	0	4	2	0
Motivational	2	0	0	6	0
Others		1	5	8	4
Total	26	12	83	158	23

Source: Results of the semiotic analysis of media memes. Own elaboration (2024).

When analysing table 5 of the distribution of memes according to their content and reference to famous figures, a clear preference for humour memes can be observed, which dominate in all categories of famous figures. Popular icons lead this trend with 74 humorous memes, followed by the category “others” with 139 humorous memes, which represents that the use of humour is a universal and effective tool for “viralisation”, regardless of the figure reflected. While, the wider the participation and replication, the more meme will reach wider contexts, which will increase the audience that shares this content. Large-scale dissemination is only one

of its essential features, since replicability is coupled with the ability to adapt and modify (Echeverría & González, 2019). Continuing with the analysis, we can observe that memes of artists also have a strong presence in humorous memes, which can be attributed to their high visibility and cultural relevance. Meanwhile, ideological memes, although less frequent, have a significant representation among politicians and others, highlighting the use of political figures to convey ideological messages. Marketing memes, although limited, show a notable reference to popular icons, indicating that brands use recognisable figures to enhance the effectiveness of their campaigns. Motivational memes have a moderate presence in the "other" category and a lower presence in "popular icons, athletes and artists, reflecting their use to inspire and motivate users through exemplary figures. The data indicate that while humour is the predominant content across all figures, each category of meme and celebrity figure has specific characteristics that reflect their strategic use in the digital community.

Semiotic analysis of the signifier and meaning of memes

Figure 2

Examples of Ecuadorian political memes. "Like when they set up an impeachment trial and end up throwing you out"



Source: Memes Facebook platform.

Figure 3

Examples of Ecuadorian political memes. "Guillermo Lasso next to a grave"



Source: Memes Facebook platform.

Figure 4

Examples of Ecuadorian political memes. “As the world sees Ecuador / As it really is”



Source: Memes Facebook platform.

Figure 5

Examples of Ecuadorian political memes. “Adobe 2023, generative infill”



Source: Memes Facebook platform.

The media memes analysed represent a diversity of signifiers and contexts that reflect both everyday situations and political and cultural events. First, memes such as “A candidate warming up to run a race” or “Guillermo Lasso next to a grave” use political figures. These memes take advantage of viewers' common knowledge of politics to generate humour or criticism. Similarly, “Assemblyman on thinking before sleeping” and “Assemblymen, former President Rafael Correa and Jaime Nebot complaining about cross-death” use well-known public figures to dramatise or satirise their concerns and reactions to political events.

On the other hand, memes such as “Viviana Veloz with a clown face” and “A piece of news, when it can be true or true” use visual and textual humour to ridicule or question the seriousness of certain figures or events. The use of recognisable characters, as in Erik Killmonger with the phrase “it's gorgeous”, highlights the ability of memes to interpret iconic scenes from popular culture and adapt them to current contexts or situations.

In addition, many memes explore everyday and universal themes, such as “a couple resting in bed on their backs, and a woman returning to see her husband”, reflecting personal relationship dynamics, or “a dog wondering how he is going to pay off the debt” that owes to the bank”, thus addressing common financial concerns in a humorous way.

The use of iconic visual elements and film people highlight the influence of film culture in the creation of memes. These elements allow meme creators to use familiar references to convey emotions or complex situations in an efficient and above all attractive way.

Likewise, memes that use animated characters or recognisable figures, such as “Dory calm and Nemo's dad angry” or “Mario Bros in a new movie”, demonstrate the ability of memes to use nostalgia and cultural familiarity to attract audiences. These memes not only entertain, but also offer social and cultural commentary, using humour and satire to address serious or trivial topics.

The analysed memes demonstrate a rich interconnectedness of signifiers ranging from politics to everyday life, popular culture to humour. Each meme uses visual and contextual elements to communicate messages that resonate with the audience's shared experience, highlighting the versatility and communicative power of memes in today's media environment.

On the other hand, an analysis of the meaning of memes was also carried out. This analysis describes a wide range of situations, emotions, and the political and social contexts reflected in their content. The interpretation of each meme reflects how images and text are used to convey specific messages, often using irony, sarcasm and humour.

For example, the meme “Mr. Almeida made a fool of himself trying to make himself look poor with a low-figure salary” criticises the incongruence between a politician's statements and the economic reality of the majority of the population. On the relational and personal level, memes such as “she thinks he thinks he thinks about another woman, he thinks he's going to eat like Almeida” demonstrate the misunderstandings that often exist in relationships, using humour to highlight the difference between people's concerns. Memes that reference public figures, such as “Guillermo Lasso entering the National Assembly” and “Assembly members and ex-presidents complaining about cross-death”, make use of recent political events to create humorous and critical content. This allows viewers to participate in a broader social conversation, using humour to create conversation and comment on political or national events.

On the other hand, there are also memes that generate or represent absurd situations to generate humour. For example, “a sad cat with a beer in its paw while being served alcohol” and “a cardboard box in different scenes doing exercise and the last scene looking at a safe”. These memes play with incongruity and expectations, creating situations that are funny precisely because they are unexpected or illogical.

In the cultural and entertainment sphere, memes such as “Erik Killmonger with the phrase is gorgeous” and “two images from a movie franchise with Top Gun” use cinematic references to connect with audiences. These memes leverage shared knowledge of certain scenes and

characters to create a sense of community and understanding among viewers. Some memes address deeper, more emotional themes, such as “a girl with Korean ancestry with very pronounced ears and a dishevelled appearance” that may reflect fatigue and stress. The memes analysed offer a window into the concerns, criticisms and humour of contemporary society. Through cleverly combined images and text, these memes manage to communicate complex messages in an accessible and entertaining way, allowing internet users to reflect on their surroundings while having fun.

4. Discussion

The analysis of the results of the dissemination of memes on social networks reveals that Facebook is consolidated as the predominant platform for the publication of memes, significantly surpassing other social networks. As shown in Table 1, Facebook demonstrates higher penetration and usage, indicating its preference among users for the dissemination of this type of content. In contrast, TikTok and X (formerly Twitter) show a minimal combined share of 13.57%. Although these platforms have different approaches to audiences with their type of content. WhatsApp has the lowest frequency and percentage of meme dissemination; but its use in groups and private chat suggests significant reach in closed communities, complementing public dissemination on other platforms.

The meme shows significant diversity in its origin, with most falling into the “other” category. The category of cartoons and animated series, along with films, are popular sources of memes due to their visual appeal. In contrast, television programmes and artwork are less frequent in meme creation, which may be due to their low cultural penetration or the inherent nature of their artistic content, which is not easily adaptable to the meme style.

Facebook, being the leading platform for the dissemination of memes, presents a wide diversity in the origin of memes. The "other" category accounts for the largest percentage of posts, suggesting that users tend to share content from a variety of unspecified sources. These results show total freedom when creating memes. Although their origins are based on social circumstances (sports, politics, events), creators use whatever resources they have available in terms of images and text. Instagram follows a similar trend, although with less representation in the other categories. Platforms such as TikTok, X and WhatsApp have a low representation in each category, due to their specific content type, private messaging, microblogging or short videos in vertical format.

The analysis of the correlation between the use of memes referencing famous figures and social networks shows that Facebook dominates in all categories, especially in "others" and "popular icons". This shows that this platform is the preferred platform for the dissemination of memes. Instagram also has a significant representation in the “other” category. Although its niche is not meme exposure, Tiktok does maintain representation in its audiovisual content. X's platform maintains a significant representation in the political category, highlighting its role as an ideal platform for the exposure and discussion of current events.

Humour is revealed as a universal and effective tool for the “viralisation” of content. Table 5 shows a clear preference for this type of content, with humorous memes having greater penetration in all the categories of famous figures. It is also worth highlighting the presence of the category of artists in the types of memes, as they maintain a significant representativeness, which may be due to their high visibility or cultural relevance.

The media memes used represent a rich interconnection of meanings and contexts ranging from everyday situations to political and cultural events. This type of content uses public

figures, politicians, artists or well-known personalities to generate humour or criticism, sometimes addressing personal, economic, social or financial issues, but always in a humorous way. Memes manage to communicate complex messages in an accessible and entertaining way by combining images and text in an ingenious way, allowing users and internet users to reflect on their surroundings while being entertained. This type of content seeks through their way of communicating or entertaining, memes seek to convey specific messages, often in an ironic, sarcastic or humorous way.

5. Conclusions

Memes continue being popular pieces of communication in which users express their opinions on different social events that may include economics, politics, show business, sports or unexpected events. They are a form of opinion previously exclusive to cartoons and now available to the entire community.

Creating a meme has become a simple activity mediated by the use of free and intuitive applications, available to any user. The result will always be a short, yet thoughtful message; tinged by an aesthetic that is easy to assimilate. These characteristics mean that the meme is quickly consumed and replicated by users. In general, we can say that memes do not require many resources in terms of the space they occupy in the memory of electronic devices, which allows them to be saved and shared without fear of being rejected for technical reasons.

Given that the great majority of memes are based on a humorous discourse and that humour reduces everyday stress, they are quickly reproduced. In this sense, it is necessary to remember that human beings like to laugh and also to be the ones who provoke joy among their peers.

The expansion or modernisation of social networks does not guarantee the proliferation of memes. The multiplication of replicas is more marked by the characteristics of the networks and the age ranges of their users, as well as by the dynamics of the meme itself, that is, the topic is current, the image is attractive and easy to consume, and the text is short and simple.

The nature of memes makes them easily viral; however, few achieve long-term notoriety and are remembered as elements of cultural reference. Therefore, memes do fulfil the description of conveying messages efficiently, but not in the long term. A meme lasts as long as it takes for a new topic and meme to emerge.

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