Research Brief

1. Angela Watercutter and Emma Grey Ellis. (2018, October 30). Everything You Ever Wanted To Know About Memes. Retrieved from <https://www.wired.com/story/guide-memes/>

“Today, denizens of the internet think of memes as jokes passed across social media in the form of image macros (those pictures of babies or cats or whatever with bold black-and-white words on them), hashtags (the thing you amended to what you just wrote on Twitter), GIFs (usually of a celebrity, reality star, or drag queen reacting to what you just wrote on Twitter), or videos (that Rick Astley video people used to send you).”

“Memes, then, have evolved into something much different than what Dawkins originally envisioned, and that evolution happened fast, shape-shifting from goofy animal images on 4chan to tools used for political gain and back again.”

How have memes evolved since being coined by Richard Dawkins in 1976?

How are memes used today in ways that aren’t strictly for entertainment?

2. Castañeda, J. C. (2017). Memes of misinformation: Federal spending: Unraveling the controversial, socio-economic and political issues behind those annoying social media memes. Wilmington, DE: Vernon Press.

“In a world filled with “post-truth” politics (Wang, 2016), data and information have taken a back seat to pomp and circumstance. False statistic and fake news spread like wildfire on social media.”

“Objective facts seem less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief, especially when shared in open social media mass markets.”

How are memes used to spread misinformation on social media?

Why are memes so dangerous for spreading fake news?

3. Castaño Díaz, Carlos Mauricio. (2013). Defining and characterizing the concept of Internet Meme. *CES Psicología, 6*(2), 82-104. Retrieved March 27, 2019, from <http://www.scielo.org.co/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S2011-30802013000200007&lng=en&tlng=en>.

“In addition, Dawkins defines meme based on the notion of replicator (applied to culture). A replicator is a biological or chemical singularity of indivisible proportions. This "molecule" acts as a template, and has the capacity of creating copies of itself.”

“The cognitive scientist Dan Sperber understands meme as a synonym of cultural replicators (based on the definition provided by Dawkins), defined by the author in terms of representations. It explains the replicators have a representational basis, they are symbols and associations in the human mind. What is more, there are two main kinds of representations highlighted by the author: the mental representations, which are internal to the subject, such as beliefs; and the public representations, which are external to the subject, such as paintings (Sperber, 1996, p. 24).”

How have researchers agreed and disagreed on how to define a meme?

What are some ways that we can scientifically analyze memes and how they spread?

4. Dawkins, R. (1989). *The selfish gene: Richard Dawkins*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

“We need a name for the new replicator, a noun that conveys the idea of a unit of cultural transmission, or a unit of imitation. 'Mímeme' comes from a suitable Greek root, but I want a monosyllable that sounds a bit like 'gene'. I hope my classicist friends will forgive me if I abbreviate mimeme to meme.”

“Some examples of memes are tunes, ideas, catch-phrases, clothes fashions, ways of making pots or of building arches. Just as genes propagate themselves in the gene pool by leaping from body to body via sperms or eggs, so memes propagate themselves in the meme pool by leaping from brain to brain via a process which, in the broad sense, can be called imitation.”

Where did the word ‘meme’ come from?

How were memes originally defined by Richard Dawkins?

5. Mims, C. (2013, June 28). Why you'll share this story: The new science of memes. Retrieved from <https://qz.com/98677/why-youll-share-this-story-the-new-science-of-memes/>

“Thus, memes could have seasonal patterns, or even follow the anxieties and fads of the day, as suggested by trends in the news. Or perhaps memes that remind you of one another do well because they feed off one another’s attention. Just as genres emerge in music, literature and art, so too in internet memes.”

“Among these successful memes, an interesting phenomenon emerges. Those that hit an above-average peak of popularity at some point in their life were less likely, overall, to ultimately break the “success” threshold. Memes that were shared more consistently over time, rather than a great deal all at once, were more likely to ultimately rack up enough points.”

What makes a meme popular/viral vs an ‘unsuccessful’ meme?

What makes a meme stay popular over a long period vs. being just a flash in the pan?