Memes

Memes didn' t start with the internet. Some linguists argue that humans have used memes to communicate for centuries. 1_____ Even if you' re not extremely online, you' ve probably participated in a meme trend, knowingly or not.

Where does the word "meme" come from?



Although it' s difficult to identify the first meme ever, the British evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins is credited with introducing the term in his 1976 book, "The Selfish Gene." In Mr. Dawkins' s original conception, a "meme" was analogous to a "phoneme," 2_____ "I would explain the concept of a meme — a self-replicating chunk of information — by asking someone about an inside joke they had with friends or an advertising jingle that' s been stuck in their head for 20 years," Professor Conrod said. "That chunk of information, the joke or the jingle, self-replicates because we humans like to share and repeat stuff. 3 _____

Humans have used memes to communicate for as long as they have used any symbolic system, Professor Conrod said. D. Andrew Price, the head of content at Memes.com, agreed. Mr. Dawkins merely "coined the term for something that' s existed literally forever," he said. 4_____

In French, the word "meme" translates to "same" and the Greek word "mimoumai" means "to imitate." In his book, Dawkins said, "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 5 _____ "It could alternatively be thought of as being related to 'memory,' or to the French word meme."

Webster' s New World College Dictionary defines a meme as "a concept, belief, or practice conceived as a unit of cultural information that may be passed on from person to person, subject to influences in a way analogous to natural selection."



Shifting the meaning of memes

Like many words in the English language, the word "meme" has undergone a semantic shift over time. In an internet-saturated world, "memes and their meanings are co-constructed by multiple users in a social context," Jennifer Nycz, an associate professor and director of undergraduate studies at Georgetown University' s Department of Linguistics, said. "This is really no different from any other process of communication or knowledge creation," she added. "It' s just especially salient in the case of memes because people explicitly construct them and then post them to the world for commentary."

The popular meme creator Saint Hoax, who has three million Instagram followers, defines a meme as a piece of media that is repurposed to deliver a cultural, social or political expression, mainly through humour. "It has the ability to capture insight in a way that is in complete alignment with the zeitgeist," Saint Hoax said.

6 _____ said Samantha Sage, co-founder and chief creative officer of Betches, a media company geared toward millennial women.



Ingredients for a good meme

Noteworthy pop culture events are breeding grounds for meme creation. In fact, this year, Instagram hired Saint Hoax to cover the Met Gala as its first-ever meme correspondent, knowing that interesting, culturally relevant content would come from the event and spread on social platforms. "Memes are basically editorial cartoons for the internet age," Saint Hoax said. "The power of a meme lies in its transmissibility and unique knack for being cross-cultural." And memes have the uncanny ability to capture a moment while distracting people from reality. 7 _____

Memes are shareable by nature. "In a world where you are scrolling through news feeds for hours a day, the meme format catches your eye, and most of them can be read and understood within seconds," said Samir Mezrahi, the deputy director of social media at BuzzFeed, who also runs Kale Salad, a meme account with nearly four million followers.

Creating and sharing memes facilitates a sense of community online while maintaining a feeling of exclusivity. "Memes bring people together through humor and can act as a catalyst for creating social or political commentary," 8 _____ "Often, memes can be quite exclusive, as only people who are familiar with the origin of the meme will understand it," Chilvers added.

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A) "A meme is just an idea that rips through the public consciousness."

B) said Kit Chilvers, the chief executive and founder of Pubity Group, a collection of social media accounts that has more than 80 million total followers.

C) Memes are widely known as conduits for cultural conversations and an opportunity to participate in internet trends.

D) When we repeat the joke, or sing the jingle, that' s an instance of the meme reproducing itself."

E) He wanted to use a monosyllable that sounded like "gene." Dawkins said,

F) Memes can also accelerate the popularity of certain forms of entertainment. "Memes now have the ability to help new TV shows or even songs gain popularity by becoming the basis of a viral trend,"

G) They encapsulate the era we are living in while also reminding us that it' s not all that serious, Lola Tash, one of the founders of the meme account My Therapist Says, said.

H) the smallest unit of sound in speech, or a "morpheme," the smallest meaningful subunit of a word, Kirby Conrod, a professor of linguistics at Swarthmore College, said.

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