The meme phenomenon in the creative strategy of Netflix Spain on Twitter

El fenómeno del meme en la estrategia creativa de Netflix España en Twitter

O fenômeno do meme na estratégia criativa da Netflix Espanha no Twitter

Isidoro Arroyo-Almaraz
Full profesor
(Rey Juan Carlos University)
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4000-5167
España

Richard Díaz-Molina
Account manager
(The Com Agency)
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7453-9549
España

Abstract

The objective of this study is to determine what creative use Netflix Spain makes of audience-capturing memes to promote its contents on Twitter, chosen for its public nature, broad-ranging influence and growing reach. The main objective is to evaluate whether the memes lead to a level of engagement that makes their contents go viral. The specific objectives are: to measure the level of attraction that shared memes generate compared with other resources published by Netflix Spain on its Twitter account (@NetflixES), to analyse which formats and contents result in the most retweets, likes and replies, and to identify for which communication goals the memes are used. The study uses a mixed quantitative and qualitative methodology, with a sample of 112 memes from 307 publications from the fourth quarter of 2019. Findings: memes result in the third-biggest form of attraction after emoticons and weblinks; there is no direct connection between the most frequently used formats (visual text, image macro and video clip) and the most interactive formats (graphic, collage and video clip). Memes are published with the goal of promoting the Netflix brand and its catalogue as well as to generate discussion among users. It is concluded that memes are a preferred form of communication in the creative strategy of Netflix Spain. They are a highly powerful form of attraction that creates emotional ties between the Netflix platform and its users.

Keywords: *Creative strategy; Meme; Netflix; Viralization; Engagement; Twitter*

Resumen

El objeto de estudio es conocer el uso creativo que Netflix España hace de los memes para atraer a su audiencia para promocionar sus contenidos en Twitter, *elegida por su naturaleza pública, amplia influencia, y creciente capacidad de alcance. El objetivo principal es evaluar si los memes establecen engagement que viralice los contenidos. Los objetivos específicos son: medir el grado de atracción que los memes compartidos generan en comparación con otros recursos publicados por Netflix España en su cuenta de* Twitter *(@NetflixES), analizar qué formatos y contenidos presentan mayores reenvíos, me gusta, y respuestas, e identificar los objetivos de comunicación para los que se emplean los memes. Se usa una metodología mixta cuantitativa y cualitativa con una muestra de 112 memes de 307 publicaciones del cuarto trimestre de 2019. Como resultados: los*

memes muestran el tercer mayor grado de atracción tras emoticonos y enlace en redes; no hay una correspondencia directa entre los formatos más usados: texto visual, imagen macro y clip de video, y los formatos con mayores niveles de interacción: gráfico, collage, y clip de video. Los memes se publican con el objetivo comunicativo de promocionar la marca Netflix, la oferta del catálogo, y establecer conversaciones con los usuarios. Se concluye que los memes son una forma preferente de comunicación en su estrategia creativa, capaz de establecer una atracción muy poderosa a través de la creación de vínculos emocionales entre la plataforma Netflix y sus usuarios.

Palabras clave: *Estrategia creativa; Meme; Netflix; Viralización; Engagement;* Twitter

Resumo

Estudou o uso criativo de memes que a plataforma audiovisual Netflix Espanha utiliza para atrair a sua audiência para promover o seu conteúdo no Twitter. *Memes são um fenómeno que a Netflix usa amplamente através do* Twitter *devido à sua natureza pública, ampla influência e alcance crescente. O principal objetivo é avaliar se os memes estabelecem engagement que viraliza o conteúdo. O objetivo está dividido em: a medição do grau de atração gerado pelos memes compartilhados em comparação com outros recursos publicados pela Netflix Espanha na sua conta no* Twitter *(@NetflixES); a análise de quais formatos e conteúdos apresentam maior grau de encaminhamento, likes, resposta e identifique os objetivos da comunicação para quem usa memes. É usada uma metodologia mista: quantitativa e qualitative com uma amostra de 112 memes de 307 postagens do quarto trimestre de 2019.. Como resultado: os memes mudam o terceiro maior atrativo dos emoticons e o networking; não há correspondência direta entre os formatos mais utilizados: texto visual, macroimagem e videoclipe e os formatos com maior nível de interação: gráfico, colagem e videoclipe. Os memes são publicados com o propósito comunicativo de divulgação da marca Netflix, oferta do catálogo e iniciar conversas com usuários. Conclui-se que os memes são uma forma preferencial de comunicação na sua estratégia criativa, capaz de estabelecer uma atração muito poderosa através da criação de laços emocionais entre a plataforma Netflix e os seus usuários.*

Palavras chave: *Estratégia criativa; Meme; Netflix; Viralização; Comprometimento;* Twitter

Translation by **Chris Eugene Carter**

1. Introduction

Internet memes are becoming an increasingly relevant part of digital communication on social media. Memes are a complex semiotic and rhetorical reality. According to Shifman, cited by Ruiz-Martínez (2018, p. 996), 'they contribute to shaping the public discourse and serve to define and reflect states of opinion'. Aside from being used just for fun, they also contribute to political discussions. According to Ruiz-Martínez (2018), the growth and popularity of movements such as the 15-M Movement or Podemos can be explained in part by the creation and distribution of Internet memes. The latest electoral processes that took place in Spain have led to the proliferation of numerous memes. Ultimately, as Milner (2012) points out, memes are a type of cultural capital that shape many of the characteristics of digital communication. Cultural capital means that with this type of communication we create the forcefulness with which we want to bring a discourse across, we raise awareness of various social realities, we gain a certain authority and we are a medium for political debate. It also means that this type of communication is shared by a large number of people as well as being created and reformulated by people themselves.

Memes have become more popular over the years and are increasingly searched on Google. This upward trend can be seen for the period of February 2012 to March 2020 using the application Google Trends.
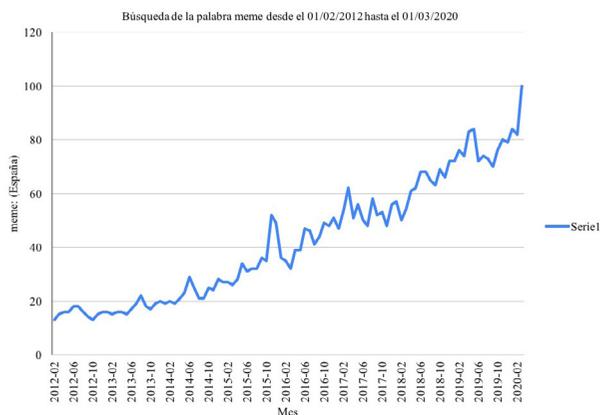
Graphic 1: *Growing usage of the word 'meme' from 1 February 2012 to 16 March 2020. Source: Google Trends.*

Chans (2018) argues that users wish to share memes due to their strong ability to convey attitudes, emotions and situations. Given that citizens spend more and more time on social media and that this phenomenon has become a native element of people's jargon, it is unsurprising that Netflix wants to use social media to draw in an audience. According to the portal Puro Marketing (2017, 10 May), brands want to publish content on social media that not only helps them to establish a presence there, but also improves their connection and bonding with consumers. They have to give their audiences what these expect to find in this environment.

With this in mind, the objective of the present study is to determine how Netflix uses memes and makes them part of its creative strategy on Twitter.

Other studies, such as that by Martín-Quevedo, Fernández-Gómez and Segado-Boj (2019), have already done this for the social network Instagram by comparing two markets, the United States and Spain, in November 2017. However, given that their results pointed up big differences between Netflix's Instagram accounts for each of these markets, we have chosen to look at Spain only in order to discuss our results in the light of those from previous studies of Spanish content.

1.1. Origin of the concept of the meme

Richard Dawkins coined the term 'meme' in 1976 on the analogy of 'gene', but with reference to memory. Memes were proposed to be the cultural equivalent of biological genes, and to explain differences with other species as a differentiating fact responsible for evolution (Dawkins, 2004) or, according to Torres (2015), as one of several elements.

It was proposed that memes organise themselves as cultural units with the ability to pass themselves on and survive in a given social ecosystem, and that, just like genes, they undergo mutations and combine with other memes. According to this theory, memes therefore are ideas, fashions, religions, idioms, sayings or ways of thinking that, like viruses, seem to multiply and spread from mind to mind in our cultural life.

Dawkins (1976, 2004) identifies three characteristics that underlie the concept of the meme: longevity (they have staying power), fecundity (they are capable of

reproducing) and copy-fidelity (they stay faithful to the original, given that they undergo change during replication and mutate constantly).

Pérez, Aguilar and Guillermo (2014, p. 81), expounding Dawkins (1976), suggest that 'memes are a sensory unit that can replicate both transversally (across geographically dispersed groups that are linked by communication and that exist more or less concurrently in time) and longitudinally (across various generations in time)'.

This replication happens for psychosocial reasons and takes place when different persons repeatedly use the meme. It then becomes part of the collective imagination of a given culture.

Two general tendencies can be identified in the study of the communicative aspect of memes: the instrumental-objective approach and the mentalist approach. The mentalist approach, taken by Dawkins himself (1976), takes an intangible perspective to memes; the instrumental-objective approach sees them as an observable, tangible phenomenon and underscores their tangible manifestations. Methodologically and following Pérez, Aguilar and Guillermo (2014, p. 84), Internet memes as cultural units can express themselves as objects of concrete observation that can exist in the minds of social users who share the memes.

1.2. Theoretical delimitation of the Internet meme

This original concept has adapted to the new communicative and social context, having become an indispensable tool for users of the online world and of social media in particular. Davidson (2012, p. 122) describes the Internet meme as a cultural unit that typically takes the form of a joke or is comical in nature and that becomes influential through digital transmission. It could be an image, a song or a video. The description identifies the core qualities of the Internet meme: it is a cultural unit (which intends to communicate something), it almost always has a humorous tone and it is shared online. Its online distribution enhances its ability to go viral, as long as its content has a rhetorical relationship with the social reality it aims to represent. Lankshear and Knobel (2007, p. 224), referring to these new forms of literacy, point out that these are forms that are socially recognised

and that generate, communicate and negotiate meaningful content using codified texts within participative contexts. Consequently, they are concrete ideological discourses that have a specific take on the world and that are spread by specific social or institutional groups. The reference points are expressed by way of shared meanings within these groups; as such, the meme acquires a specific purpose. Its success lies in finding the ideal references in connection with the intended context for the meme. 'These allusions to certain subcultures, techniques and etiquettes create a balance between the norm or convention and possible deviations from it (Ruiz-Martínez, 2018, p. 1001). This essentially rhetorical contrast is addressed by El Groupe µ (1993), which describes the convention as a systematic type of change that is applied to the message in its entirety, requiring a predictable, repeated structure that enhances foreseeability, which in terms makes the meme recognisable and cohesive as it is being spread.

The deviation is described as a localised, surprising alteration of the norm, which reduces the meme's foreseeability and gives it lasting impact, freshness and communicative usefulness for the Internet users. Shifman (2014, p. 100) talks of different levels of literacy: some can be understood (and created) by almost anyone, while others require detailed knowledge of a meme subculture. Appropriating and spreading memes anonymously, then, involves not only the imitation or appropriation and the mixing of content, but also knowing how to share the content. The phenomenon of the meme cannot be studied without looking at communities of users. It is this community that has the ability to convert content into a meme and that can give us information about which content generates engagement. Just having the image macro format, for example, does not make content liable to be shared.

According to Davidson (2012), for a meme to be successful it must be communicable as well as easy to configure. The first characteristic refers to its reach: many more people share it; the second implies a direct proportionality with time: the more people take it over, the more uses and meanings it can be given so that the meme persists and does not go out of fashion. This constant mutation has led authors such as Shifman (2014) to study memes not as isolated units but as groups that have a number of shared characteristics. They are not just isolated or closed objects, but also open elements that change in small ways over the course of being repeated.

Memes can also be characterised as strongly intertextual elements that connect with each other by way of their own replication. Because of this characteristic the meme acquires new contexts and meanings, and its information becomes more diverse. In this way memes lodge themselves in the collective imagination, weaving a web of references by which they can be identified. These references are often related to mass culture as distributed by Internet users. Because memes are intertextual elements, they not only reproduce through being cited or referenced, but their content also relates an idea or story with an element of popular culture, fitting in with the collective imagination a user must be part of to be able to understand it.

It is not easy to be initiated into understanding memes, given that they are encoded as complicated jargon in the eyes of those who venture for the first time into the process of sharing and creating this type of elements. One of the semiotic structures most often repeated by Internet memes is the one that has become known as the image macro, a static image accompanied by a text. However, a given item will not inevitably be shared just because it has a specific format. Also, to cite Ruiz-Martínez (2018, p. 1011): 'this text is sometimes divided in two: a protasis or clause at the top of the image and an apodosis at the bottom that serves as a conclusion, refutation or paradox'.

This structure reproduces a common semiotic framework that is essential to comprehension: the images need a stereotyped emotion that is considered funny, they need a humorous tone or they need to show a snapshot of an action being carried out by a person, animal or thing in an amusing context.

These images become containers of emotions and connotations with a very powerful persuasive and visual charge.

2. Material and Methods

We analysed memes on the social medium of Twitter in view of the social influence it has because of its public nature and capacity for growth. Also, as per Fernández-Gómez and Martín-Quevedo (2018 a, p. 1,293-94), Twitter 'is the most widely used social network for the consumption of television content as a second screen

and for reaching and monitoring audiences'. In addition, 'elements that surprise are more attractive for making content go viral. And humour helps content go viral'.

In order to define the objective of the study – determining how Netflix uses memes and implements them in its creative strategy on Twitter – we formulated a number of questions:

- Q-1. Which memes are the most widely used and generate the most engagement in relation to their content and format?

- Q-2. Which are the principal formats and contents used for creating memes?

- Q-3. What is the most common communication objective in the use of memes?

2.1. Objectives

The main objective, to evaluate whether memes lead to engagement that causes their content to go viral, was subdivided into the following objectives:

- 0-1. Determining the level of engagement of memes in relation to other resources Netflix uses for its Twitter account (@NetflixES).

- 0-2. Determining the formats and contents of the memes that are most widely used and that generate the most engagement on the Twitter account of Netflix (@NetflixES).

- 0-3. Identifying the communication objectives in the use of memes.

2.2. Hypothesis

The following hypotheses were formulated based on user experience on Twitter:

- H-1. Tweets that contain a meme create greater engagement than those that do not.

- H-2. The image macro is a more frequently used format than the video clip.

- H-3. Promotion of the Netflix brand is the main communication objective in the use of memes.

2.3. Methodology

Content analysis was carried out to review the memes included in tweets published by the Netflix Spain account (@NetflixES). This produces quantitative and/or qualitative data from which a number of inferences can be drawn based on selected variables (Krippendorff, 1990, p. 11).

2.4. The sample

The analysis focused on the tweets Netflix published in the fourth quarter of 2019. All tweets originally published by the company were analysed, as well as the retweets, likes and replies they generated. The sample consisted of 307 tweets from the account @NetflixES, in which 112 memes were identified through content analysis.

This sample made it possible to infer the audience response to the memes published in that year; that is, their level of engagement in relation to other communication tools used on Twitter, as well as the characteristics of the memes in terms of their format and content. At the time of the study Netflix had one million followers and had published approximately 16,400 tweets since creating its account in April 2015.

2.5. Procedure

The analysis took place in three phases:

Phase 1. Determining the level of engagement memes generate in relation to the other resources Netflix Spain uses on its Twitter account (objective 1). To this end, the resources used in the tweet and the number of interactions these generated are identified, using the classification by Fernández-Gómez and Martín-Quevedo (2018 a, p. 1,293) as a reference. Their classification is as follows:

- Social media links to other posts by the platform, or tweets that refer to another person's posts so as to embed these in the content.

- Link to own website that redirects users to the content.

- External link intended to show content other than that of Netflix on Twitter or on its website.

- Image: including, as per Linares (2015), images of news in the media, advertising posters, premieres or previews, all aimed at promoting own content.

- Video: including trailers or teasers, 'making of' or 'behind the scenes' videos, videos of news in the media and videos of premieres or previews.

- Hashtag: represented by the hash symbol (#), which according to Martínez-Rolán and Piñeiro-Otero (2015) functions as a hyperlink that ties the social conversation generated on Twitter to a specific theme.

- Emoticons: predesigned images, mostly of facial expressions, inserted into electronic messages.

This stage also involves an analysis of the level of engagement of tweets that contain memes compared to tweets that do not, defined by De Aguilera, Baños and Ramírez (2015) as the intrinsic force that leads the user to make decisions related to the brand and that guides the user's behaviour. According to the Advertising Research Foundation (2007), cited by González-Bernal (2016, p. 786): 'the foremost requirement for generating consumer engagement is the emotional opening. According to this logic, engagement is based on the emotions felt by users, which in turn reinforce their thoughts and ultimately lead to a change in behaviour or to certain decisions'.

With reference to the social network that is Twitter, the level of engagement can be compared to the 'degree to which the user interacts with the brand' (Del Pino-Silva, 2017, p. 47) as expressed by the indicators of retweets, likes and replies. In addition, the interaction coefficient was calculated which, according to Martínez-Rolán and Piñeiro-Otero (2017, p. 65), 'is the result of dividing the total number of interactions (retweets, likes and replies) by the number of followers of the output-generating user. This constitutes a value index for analysing the virality of content'. That is to say, the level of virality produced synthetically by this indicator was used to measure the level of engagement with the published contents among users of this network.

MONOGRAPH

The @NetflixES account had 1,050,312 followers at the time of recording the data. Afterwards, the number of times each tweet contained the aforementioned resources was counted, to which were added the interaction rates generated by each resource (total interactions for each resource). These two values (total interactions for each resource and number of times each resource was repeated) were divided among each other to obtain the average interaction rate per tweet for each resource.

Phase 2. Determining which meme formats and contents generate the most use and engagement with the @NetflixES Twitter account (objective 2). To this end, a content analysis of the following variables was carried out (Martínez-Rolán and Piñeiro-Otero, 2015, p. 150):

1. The manifestation: 'is the materialisation of the meme in itself, that is, its external phenomenon'. The following formats used for the memes were analysed:

    - Visual text: A type of image that can be assigned more than one meaning, as a result of which it can be configured in different ways. The key to this is in the text, which is the element that defines the image. Each person interprets an image in accordance with the mental framework he or she uses to decode all of its components.

    - Image macro: in this format, the function of the image is not to illustrate and reduce the text that accompanies it; instead, the image 'amplifies it and unlocks its meaning by way of a paradox' (Ruiz-Martínez, 2018, p. 1,014). In other words, the image macro provides the text with cultural frameworks and an entire collective imagination. Generally speaking, such images are accompanied by a superimposed text or a text in a black box.

    - Photo collage: Photos are inserted that make reference to content on the platform; the photo and the content form a single message.

    - Graphic. A concrete message is put across schematically through shapes, symbols or emoticons.

- Table. A framework is produced that provides information from the various contents.

- Screenshot. Specific shots from the series, film or documentary are used.

- To round out the study, in addition to all of these formats the analysis included another category in which different memes could be grouped:

- Video clips showing fragments of the contents published by the brand.

2. Behaviour: The various actions users perform to keep the meme in circulation; i.e., sharing it 'as is' or altering the image in various ways. Two types of variables were formulated.

- Image alteration: whether its formal aspects were encoded with editing software.

- Integration of text with the image: this increases the possibilities for reconfiguring the original content of the image in question. The following subvariables were identified for its encoding:

- Original text

- Paraphrases the meme

- No text

- Identical to the original

3. Aim, which is the concept underlying the meme (Ruiz-Martínez, 2018, p. 1001). Two variables were formulated for this aspect:

- Communication objective: followed by the Netflix account

- Topic: to this end the memes were tagged based on their formal aspects; elements such as hashtags and other textual elements were also taken into account to configure their meaning.

Phase 3. Identifying which communication objectives are pursued by use of the meme (objective 3). To this end, the data collected under the rubric of 'aim' in the previous phase were analysed according to the model proposed by Fernández-Gómez and Martín-Quevedo (2018 b), which catalogues the tweets published by the Netflix account according to the objectives they pursue. These objectives

are described by Del Pino-Silva (2017), who condenses them into six points in order to fit them into the communication strategies used for the promotion of audiovisual products:

- Promotion of the Netflix brand, which includes tweets with the following objectives:

- Providing information about news or services offered by the platform, such as the dates of upcoming premieres or the announcement of events.

- Greeting or appealing to followers with informal messages and a humorous tone so as to reach them better.

- Launching messages that directly promote the Netflix brand, containing for example the hashtag #SoloEnNetflix or referring to series marathons.

- Promoting the audiovisual content of the catalogue: messages providing information or aimed to promote Netflix series, films and documentaries.

- Starting a conversation with users: inviting them to participate in discussions, to respond to a question or to reply to tweets posted by followers themselves.

- Sharing alternative content: messages that are unrelated to the brand and deal with an external topical issue.

- Suggesting competitions, games or quizzes to followers: the brand invites them to participate, aiming to get more followers and to increase its visibility.

- Inviting followers to take part in surveys in order to know their opinion about a given theme using Twitter's survey tool.
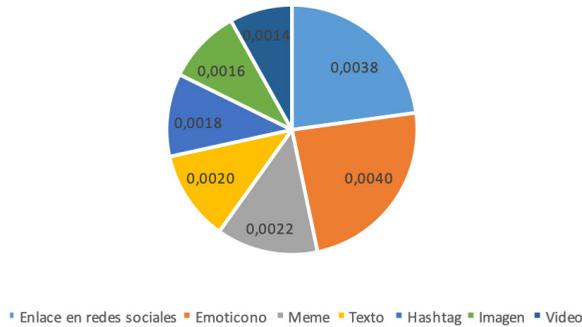
3. Results

3.1. Analysis of Phase 1

A review was carried out of the 307 original tweets published by the account @NetflixES, which shed light on the platform's use of memes and its interaction with the audience. Following this, the data yielded by the resource analysis were examined.

Resource	DEGREE OF USE			DEGREE OF ENGAGEMENT	
	Number of times each tweet used the resource	Percentage of use	Total interactions	Average number of interactions per resource	Interaction coefficient
Social media link	15	3%	60533	4036	0,0038
Emoticon	22	4%	92903	4223	0,0040
Meme	112	24%	260074	2322	0,0022
Text	294	16%	608560	2070	0,0020
Hashtag	74	16%	140535	1899	0,0018
Image	154	33%	261715	1699	0,0016
Video	93	20%	133007	1430	0,0014

Table 1: *Degree of use and engagement for each resource used by Netflix Spain on Twitter. (Authors, 2020). Source: Prepared by the authors.*

Following a review of the 307 tweets, we found – as shown in table 1 – that the most used resource is the image, used in 33% of the cases and repeated 154 times, followed by memes (24%, repeated 112 times) and hashtags (16%, repeated 74 times).

With regard to the level of engagement generated by the tweets among followers of Netflix, however, we see that tweets containing an emoticon come first, with an interaction coefficient of 0.0040. This means that for each publication that included an emoticon we counted an average of 4,223 interactions. These tweets are followed by the link on social media, with a coefficient of 0.0038 and an average of 4,036 interactions per posting and, thirdly, by the meme, with an interaction coefficient of 0.0022 and an average of 2,322 interactions.

0,0014
0,0016
0,0018
0,0020
0,0022
0,0038
0,0040

▪ Enlace en redes sociales ▪ Emoticono ▪ Meme ▪ Texto ▪ Hashtag ▪ Imagen ▪ Video

Graphic 2: Interaction coefficient for each resource. Source: prepared by the authors.

3.2. Analysis of Phase 2

A total of 112 memes were found, making them the second-most used resource by the streaming platform. For the purpose of a detailed analysis of the level of use and engagement, the study looked at the three aforementioned differential aspects: manifestation, behaviour and aim of the meme. Each of these aspects in turn included previously encoded subvariables. The collected data are summarised in table 2, which seeks to analyse the manifestation of the 112 analysed memes.

			DEGREE OF USE		*DEGREE OF ENGAGEMENT*		
			Number of posts	% of use	Total interactions	Average interactions	Average interaction coefficient
Analysis of the meme's manifestation	Format	Screenshot	4	3%	8941	2235	0,0021
		Photo collage	8	7%	19284	2410,5	0,0023
		Photo	0	0%	0	0	0,0000
		Graphic	4	4%	33351	8337,75	0,0079
		Infographic	0	0%	0	0	0,0000
		Table	2	2%	1749	875	0,0008
		Visual text	47	42%	100669	2142	0,0020
		Image macro	35	31%	71414	2040	0,0019
		Video clip	12	11%	27782	2315	0,0022

			DEGREE OF USE		DEGREE OF ENGAGEMENT		
			Number of posts	% of use	Total interactions	Average interactions	Average interaction coefficient
Analysis of the meme's behaviour	Image alteration	Yes	15	13%	13097	873	0,0008
		No	97	87%	249112	2568	0,0024
	Integration of text in the image	Identical	0	0	0	0	0,0000
		Original	96	86%	230169	2398	0,0023
		Paraphrases the meme	16	14%	32040	2003	0,0019
		No text	0		0	0	0,0000
Analysis of the meme's aim	Communication objective	Promoting the Netflix brand	64	57%	157856	2467	0,0023
		Promoting the audiovisual content of the catalogue	39	35%	67787	1738	0,0017
		Initiating conversation among users	9	8%	22649	2517	0,0024
		Sharing alternative content	0	0%	0	0	0,0000
		Suggesting competitions, games or quizzes to followers	0	0%	0	0	0,0000
	Topic of the meme	Opposite behaviour from what was expected	10	9%	24018	2402	0,0023
		Defining an emotion/ behaviour/ situation	86	77%	24018	2450	0,0023
		Reference to elements from series	16	14%	27520	1720	0,0016

Table 2: *Analysis of the degree of use and engagement of memes from Netflix Spain on Twitter (Díaz-Molina and Arroyo-Almaraz, I. (2020). Source: Prepared by the authors.*

MONOGRAPH

Regarding the variable of formats, we see that the most used format is the visual text, used in 42% of the cases (47 publications). Their preponderance suggests that the platform makes use of a number of highly stereotyped arrangements of image and text. The text here is ultimately that which gives meaning to the image and provides a reference framework for it. The second-most used format is the image macro, present in 31% of the memes (35 publications), while the third-most used format is the video clip, used in 11% of the cases (12 publications). All of the formats were characterised by including images or video fragments from the platform's series, films and documentaries. They were published, moreover, with messages that emulate the communicative dynamics of the audience on this platform.

The format that reached the highest level of engagement, however, was the graphic, with an interaction coefficient of 0.0079 (an average of 8,837.75 interactions per post), followed by the photo collage, with a coefficient of 0.0023 (an average of 2,410.5 interactions), and the video clip, with a coefficient of 0.0022 (an average of 2,315 interactions). The symbolism used by the graphics to express a concrete idea and connect emotionally with the audience was characterised by its originality and led to greater interaction with the content among followers.
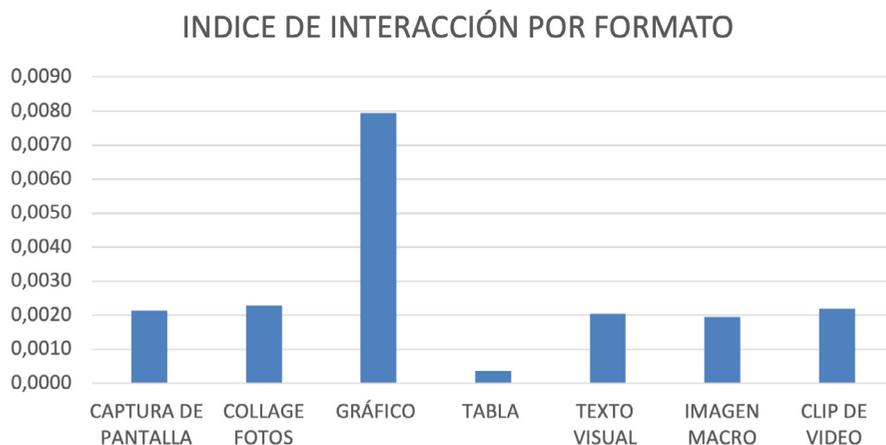
Graphic 3: *Interaction coefficient per format. Source: prepared by the authors.*

With regard to the level of use of alteration techniques, we find that for the great majority of publications alterations made with editing programs were not effective. This applied to 87% (97 publications), whereas in 13% of the cases (15 publications) compositional aspects were in some way altered with programs such as Photoshop. This confirms the deliberate way in which Netflix goes about showing original content, selecting images strategically and choosing easily identifiable images.

With regard to the level of engagement, images that had been altered in some way had an interaction coefficient of 0.0008 (an average of 873 interactions), whereas images that had not been altered had an interaction coefficient of 0.0024 (an average of 2,568 interactions). We see that users interacted more with images that were not altered.

Integration of text in the image

The following subvariables were identified: original text, paraphrases meme, identical to the original, and no text. Only two of these categories were used, however: original text and paraphrases meme.

Original text was used in 86% of the cases (96 publications) whereas 14% (16 publications) simply paraphrased memes that were not original using discursive structures, such as 'I… + I also…' or '-At the start of the decade… + At the end of the decade'.

The level of engagement was directly related to the level of use, given that the memes that included an original text obtained a higher interaction coefficient than memes that paraphrased one. Memes with an original text obtained 2,398 interactions, whereas memes that were simply adapted to a predesigned discursive structure obtained 2,003 interactions.

For their part, images accompanying the text became the central element of the meme. However, when this text paraphrased another meme it became an element that anchored it to the graphic content. As noted by Shifman (2014), this unity refers back to the constellations of previous memes, which makes them recognisable to all users. In this view the memes become unbounded components that undergo small changes to their structure.
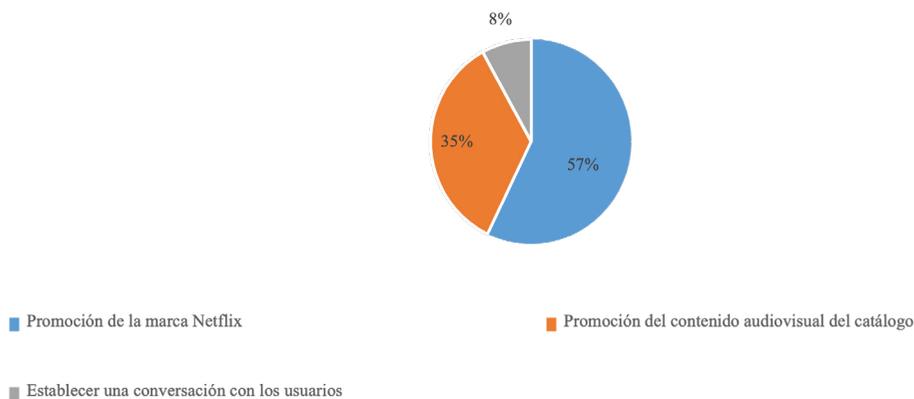
3.3. Analysis of Phase 3

The two variables of the meme's communication objective were analysed: the objective of Netflix and the meme's topic.

The objective of Netflix

Promotion of the Netflix brand was the foremost objective of 57% of the memes (64 publications). These memes were characterised by a message with a humorous or informal tone that made reference to the brand, or by aspects that identified the followers in an emotional way. The insights of the audience and the idiom used became the central element with which the attention of the audience was drawn.

This was followed by the promotion of the catalogue's audiovisual content, at 35% (39 publications), for which various resources were used: hashtags, the text or the image itself.

Lastly, there is the objective of conversations with the user, at 8% (9 publications). We note the absence of memes intended to suggest competitions or games, or memes intended to promote alternative content and to invite the audience to take part in questionnaires.

8%

35%

57%

■ Promoción de la marca Netflix ■ Promoción del contenido audiovisual del catálogo

■ Establecer una conversación con los usuarios

Graphic 4: *Degree of use of the communication objectives Source: prepared by the authors.*

With regard to the level of engagement, values were inverted compared to the level of use, given that the least used communication objectives obtained the highest interaction coefficients. Starting a conversation with the user generated an interaction coefficient of 0.0024 (an average of 2,517 interactions per tweet). This concerned posts that initiate a discussion or directly invite users to share their opinion. The effort made by the platform to mobilise the audience resulted in a greater number of interactions.

Topics

In the first place, in 77% of the cases, memes were used to define an emotion, behaviour or situation (86 publications). The memes were designed principally to appeal directly to the emotions or behaviours of the public, as well as to emotions or behaviours with which they identify. In the words of Ruiz-Martínez (2018, p. 2,012): 'a basic semiotic characteristic is created in order for the meme to be understood: a highly expressive face (human or animal), clearly (and stereotypically) expressing an emotion (confusion, disgust, hilarity, horror), almost always ridiculous or laughable'.

In the second place, at 14% (16 publications), there were those memes that refer to elements from series. In these cases, rather than referring to the viewer, the meme took as its central aspect elements related to Netflix content and framed these in a discursive structure that imitated a meme.

Thirdly, at 9% (10 publications), there were those memes referencing a behaviour that was contrary to what would be expected. This topic is expressed strongly through the figure of speech of the paradox, expressed as a highly symbolic image. The image encapsulates a complete iconic universe that rounds out its meaning and has a humorous effect.

As shown in Table 2, in terms of the level of engagement we found that the highest interaction coefficient (at 0.0023, an average of 2,450 interactions) was obtained by memes that expressed an emotion, behaviour or situation. These were followed closely (at 0.0022, an average of 2,402 interactions) by memes reflecting

MONOGRAPH

a behaviour that was contrary to what was expected. Lastly, there were those memes that referred to elements from the series, with a coefficient of 0.0016 (an average of 1,720 interactions). It follows that memes that appeal directly to emotions or behaviours are likely to have a greater interaction index than memes that simply refer to elements of the content created by Netflix.
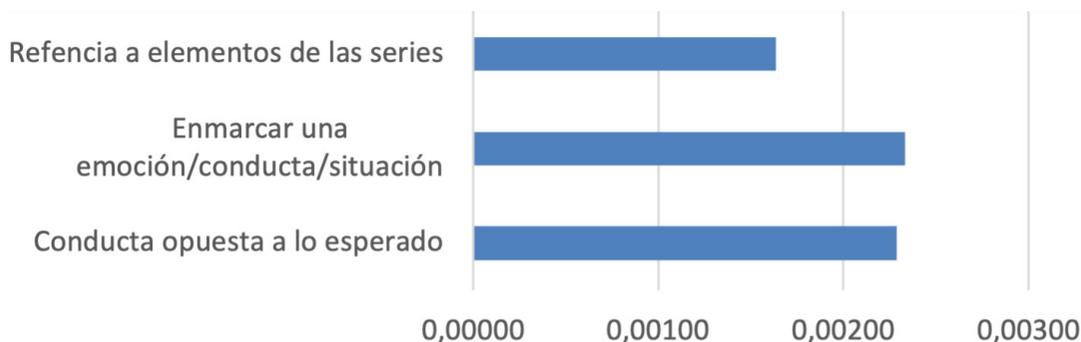
Graphic 5: *Interaction coefficient of the memes' topics. Source: prepared by the authors.*

4. Discussion

As a general conclusion, we find that numerous images and videos are used strategically to communicate various ideas with the goal of drawing the attention of the audience. Memes have a more informal presence than other promotional content on the Internet. They combine content promotion with an emotional bond with consumers, a union that makes use of an iconic universe contained in the images through the characters that appear in them, the situations they are shown in or the emotions they express.

Keeping in mind the general objective of the study that analysed the role of memes in the creative strategy of Netflix, we can confirm that this is a prominently used tool in its communication activities on social media, which however is complemented by other, more traditional content such as trailers or advertising posters.

With regard to the initial hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1 was not confirmed, given that tweets that included an emoticon (an average of 4,223 interactions) or those that had a tweet embedded as an internal link (an average of 4,036 interactions) elicited more interactions than did tweets that contained a meme (an average of 2,322 interactions). This is due to the fact that the emoticons are used both in informative messages and in more informal messages. Also, embedded tweets are a tool Netflix uses to make reference to famous persons, fitting in with the reference framework of the target audience.

Hypothesis 2 was confirmed: 31% of the memes used an image macro and 11% used a video clip. Image macros have more memetic possibilities than video clips, given that image macros use images of relatable persons or situations that provide meaning to the accompanying text, which is always of a paradoxical or incongruous nature. Furthermore, the structure in itself gives rise to a variety of configurations based on the sender's requirements.

Hypothesis 3 was confirmed, given that we can infer that audiovisual content was used in 57% of the publications. This touches on one of the main characteristics of the memes: their being structured as informal, humorous messages that use the insights of their target audience to relate to this audience.

Comparing our results with those of previous studies, we discussed the importance of the emotional bond and the behaviour of memes in different social media.

The results previously found by Giraldo-Cuéllar and Ospina Echeverri (2020), which related specifically to the Spanish series La Casa de Papel, were confirmed: memes benefit the brand, enhancing the engagement of the audience and creating a powerful emotional bond. This is due to the memes' contents being closely linked with the brand's communicative intentions regarding the production, dissemination and consumption of the series.

Our results also confirm the results obtained by Doñate-Ventura (2020) for the particular case of the series Paquita Salas, which also owes its success to emotional bonds created through humour and nostalgia.

Further, the present study corroborates some of the data from the study by Martín-Quevedo, Fernández-Gómez and Segado-Boj (2019), which concluded with reference to Instagram that humour and a positive tone correlated with greater user engagement.

Future studies should broaden the analysis to include the various social media used by Netflix in its creative strategy for Spain, and should compare their various uses within this strategy to examine how memes work in each of these media. They should also broaden the sample, taking into account that the rate at which Netflix contributes publications to the various social networks increases year by year.

References

Chans, F. (21 de diciembre de 2018). *Meme marketing: la apuesta viral que es tendencia entre las marcas*, at http://bit.ly/3gTcBlR

Davidson, P. (2012). *The Language of Internet Memes*. En M. Mandiberg. (Ed.), The Social Media Reader (pp.120-134). New York: Newsroom of the University of New York.

Dawkins, R.(1976). *El Gen Egoísta*. Barcelona, Spain: Salvat Editores, S.A.

Dawkins, R. (2004). *A devil's chaplain: Reflections on hope, lies, science, and love*. Houghton Boston-New York: Mifflin Harcourt Company.

De Aguilera, J., Baños-González, M. & Ramírez-Perdiguero, J. (2015). Branded entertainment: Los contenidos de entretenimiento como herramienta de comunicación de marketing. Un estudio de su situación actual en España. *Revista Latina de Comunicación Social*, 70, pp. 519-538. DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.4185/RLCS-2015-1057

Del Pino-Silva, J. (2017). E*strategias de Comunicación Aplicadas a La Promoción de Productos Audiovisuales. El Caso de Netflix En Twitter* (undergraduate thesis). Sevilla: Universidad de Sevilla.

Díaz-Molina & Arroyo-Almaraz, I. (2020). D*atos El fenómeno del meme en la estrategia creativa de Netflix España*. Open Science Framework, at https://osf.io/82rzu/.

Doñate-Ventura, J. (2020). Paquita Salas en Netflix.Un análisis de la cultura pop española. En: *Comunicación y diversidad. Selección de comunicaciones del*

VII Congreso Internacional de la Asociación Española de Investigación de la Comunicación (AE-IC), 28-30 de octubre, pp. 247-254. Valencia: El Profesional de la Información SL.

Fernández-Gómez, E.; Martín-Quevedo, J. (2018 a). La Estrategia de Engagement de Netflix España en Twitter. *El profesional de la información, 6*(27), pp.1292-1302. DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.3145/epi.2018.nov.12

Fernández-Gómez, E.; Martín-Quevedo, J. (2018 b). Connecting with audiences in new markets: Netflix *Twitter* strategy in Spain. *Journal of Media Business Studies, 2*(15), pp.127–146. DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/16522354.2018.1481711

Giraldo Cuéllar, J.S.; Ospina Echeverri, J.P. (2020) Análisis del Uso táctico del Meme en la Estrategia Publicitaria de Netflix para la Tercera Temporada de la Serie La Casa de Papel, at https://red.uao.edu.co/bitstream/10614/12371/6/T09221.pdf

González-Bernal, M. I. (2016). Hacia la comprensión del engagement de las audiencias de televisión, modelo conceptual multidimensional desde la comunicación. *Palabra Clave 19*(3), 769-809. DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.5294/pacla.2016.19.3.5

Groupe μ (1993). *Tratado del signo visual*. Madrid: Cátedra.

Krippendorff, K. (1990). *Metodología de análisis de contenido. Teoría y práctica*. Barcelona: Paidós.

Herbera, J.; Linares, R.; Neira, E. (Coord) (2015). *Marketing cinematográfico. Cómo promocionar una película en el entorno digital*. Barcelona: Editorial UOC.

Lankshear, C. & Knobel M. (2007) Researching New Literacies: Web 2.0 practices and insider perspectives. *E–Learning 3*(4), pp.224-240. DOI: https://doi.org/10.2304/elea.2007.4.3.224

Martín-Quevedo, J.; Fernández-Góme & E.;Segado-Boj, F (2019) How to Engage with Younger Users on Instagram: A Comparative Analysis of HBO and Netflix in the Spanish and US Markets, *International Journal on Media Management*, 21:2, 67-87. DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14241277.2019.1585355

Martínez-Rolán, L. X.; Piñeiro-Otero, T. (2015). Los memes en el discurso de los partidos políticos en Twitter: análisis del Debate sobre el Estado de la Nación de 2015. *Communication & Society, 29*(1), pp.145-160. DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.15581/003.29.1.sp.145-160

MONOGRAPH

Martínez-Rolán, L. X.; Piñeiro-Otero, T.(2017). El uso de los memes en la conversación política 2.0. Una aproximación a una movilización efímera. *Revista Prisma Social*, 18, pp.55-84. En http://bit.ly/2KdnEKt

Milner, R. M. (2012). *The World Made Meme: Discourse and Identity in Participatory Media*. Kansas: Faculty of the University of Kansas

Puro Marketing (2017, 10 de mayo) *Meme marketing: Cuando las marcas y empresas intentan hablar en viral*, at http://bit.ly/3gQNAHI

Pérez, G.; Aguilar, A. & Guillermo, M.E. (2014). *El meme en Internet. Usos sociales, reinterpretación y significados, a partir de Harlem Shake*. CDMX, México: Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana.

Ruiz-Martinez, J. M.(2018). Una aproximación retórica a los memes de Internet. *Revista Signa*, 27, pp.995-1021. DOI: https://doi.org/10.5944/signa.vol27.2018.21856

Shifman, L. (2014) *Memes in Digital Culture* (edit.). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press

Torres, A. (2015, 30 de julio). *La génesis del meme*, at http://bit.ly/2K91xF7