
DEFINING INTERNET MEMES

A core problem of memetics, maybe *the* core quandary, is the exact meaning of the term “meme.” As mentioned above, Dawkins’s initial definition was quite ambiguous: he referred to a meme as “a unit of cultural transmission, or a unit of imitation.” His set of meme examples spanned ideas (God), texts (nursery rhymes and jokes), and practices (Christian rituals). Ever since, the study of memes has been subject to disputes centering on the mind-body or genotype–phenotype dichotomy, yielding three positions regarding the nature of memes: mentalist driven, behavior driven, and inclusive.

Mentalist-driven memetics, advocated by leading scholars in the field such as Dawkins himself (in his 1982 clarification of the theory), Daniel Dennett, and Aaron Lynch, is based on the differentiation between memes and meme vehicles. According to this school of thought, memes are ideas or pieces of information that reside in the

brain. They are not simple ideas such as *red*, *round*, or *cold*, but complex ones such as ideas of the alphabet, chess, or impressionism.¹ In order to be passed along from one person to another, memes are “loaded” on various vehicles: images, texts, artifacts, or rituals. According to this view, those observable meme vehicles are equivalent to phenotype—the visible manifestation of genes. In other words, memes are idea complexes and meme vehicles are their tangible expressions.

By contrast, *behavior-driven memetics* sees memes as behaviors and artifacts rather than ideas.² In the behaviorist model, the meme vehicle and the meme itself are inseparable: the meme has no existence outside the events, practices, and texts in which it appears; that is, it is always experienced as encoded information. Moreover, this approach claims that if memes were indeed only abstract units of information, it would be impossible to disassociate them from their manifestation in the outside world. Defining memes as concrete units enables their evolution and diffusion to be studied empirically. This brand of memetics is closely related to the scholarly approach known as “diffusion studies.” Many studies in this rich tradition focus on the diffusion of “innovations,” occasionally adopting the term “meme” and the general memetic framework. However, diffusion studies tend to cling to narrow definitions of memes, thus overlooking the concept’s complexity and richness. In particular, this tradition tends to look at

the diffused units as stable, well-defined entities with clear boundaries.

Whereas members of the mentalist- and behavior-driven schools see memes as either ideas or practices, what I tag as the *inclusive memetic approach*, represented by Susan Blackmore in *The Meme Machine*, uses the term “in-discriminately to refer to memetic information in any of its many forms; including ideas, the brain structures that initiate those ideas, the behaviors these brain structures produce, and their versions in books, recipes, maps and written music” (p. 66); that is, any type of information that can be copied by imitation should be called a meme. But this inclusive approach may lack analytical power, as it assembles very different elements under its large conceptual tent.

Reassessing these standpoints, I suggest a different approach to defining memes. This suggestion is based on two rather simple principles: (a) looking at diffused units as incorporating several *memetic dimensions*—namely, several aspects that people may imitate; and (b) understanding memes not as single entities that propagate well, but as *groups of content units* with common characteristics. I will soon demonstrate how these two principles produce a workable definition of Internet memes.

Going back to Dawkins’s original idea—that memes are units of imitation—I find it useful to isolate three dimensions of cultural items that people can potentially

imitate: content, form, and stance.³ The first dimension relates mainly to the *content* of a specific text, referencing to both the ideas and the ideologies conveyed by it. The second dimension relates to *form*: this is the physical incarnation of the message, perceived through our senses. It includes both visual/audible dimensions specific to certain texts and the more complex genre-related patterns organizing them (such as lipsynch or animation). While ideas and their expression have been widely discussed in relation to memes the third dimension is presented here for the first time. This dimension—which relates to the information memes convey about their own communication—is labeled here as *stance*. I use “stance” to depict the ways in which addressers position themselves in relation to the text, its linguistic codes, the addressees, and other potential speakers. As with form and content, stance is potentially memetic; when re-creating a text, users can decide to imitate a certain position that they find appealing or use an utterly different discursive orientation.

Since I use stance in this context as a very broad category, I wish to clarify it by breaking it into three subdimensions, drawing on concepts from discourse and media studies: (1) *participation structures*—which delineate who is entitled to participate and how, as described by Susan Phillips; (2) *keying*—the tone and style of communication, as conceptualized by Erving Goffman and further developed by Shoshanna Blum-Kulka and her colleagues; and

(3) *communicative functions*, used according to the typology suggested by Roman Jakobson. Jakobson identified six fundamental functions of human communication: (a) referential communication, which is oriented toward the context, or the “outside world”; (b) emotive, oriented toward the addresser and his or her emotions; (c) conative, oriented toward the addressee and available paths of actions (e.g., imperatives); (d) phatic, which serves to establish, prolong, or discontinue communication; (e) metalingual, which is used to establish mutual agreement on the code (for example, a definition); and (f) poetic, focusing on the aesthetic or artistic beauty of the construction of the message itself.⁴

In addition to this three-dimensional breakdown, I suggest that for *Internet memes*—which are often based on an extensive and swift mutation rate—it may be useful to turn Dawkins’s definition on its head by looking at memes not as single ideas or formulas that propagate well, but as *groups* of content items. Combining these two principles, I define an Internet meme as:

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

This revised definition may help us in providing more nuanced accounts of the meanings and possible implications of Internet memes. To demonstrate its applicability and utility, I will now take a closer look at three memes: “Leave Britney Alone,” “It Gets Better,” and the “Pepper-Spraying Cop.”

Leave Britney (and the Pepper-Spraying Cop?) Alone, It Doesn't Get Better

On September 10, 2007, a young gay blogger and actor named Chris Crocker uploaded a YouTube video in which he reacted to the harsh criticism that followed pop star Britney Spears's lackluster performance on the MTV Music Video Awards. Crying and shouting throughout most of the clip, Crocker implored his viewers to “Leave Britney Alone”:

And how fucking dare anyone out there make fun
of Britney, after all she's been through! She lost
her aunt, she went through a divorce, she had two
fucking kids, her husband turned out to be a user,
a cheater, and now she's going through a custody
battle. All you people care about is readers and
making money off of her. SHE'S A HUMAN! [...] Her
song is called “give me more” for a reason because
all you people want is MORE, MORE, MORE,

MORE! LEAVE HER ALONE! You're lucky she even performed for you BASTARDS! LEAVE BRITNEY ALONE! [...] Leave Britney Spears alone right NOW!

The video gained over two million views within twenty-four hours, and many more in the following days and months. The Crocker sensation was reported on various mainstream media platforms and generated worldwide attention. The video soon spawned a stream of derivatives: mimicry-based clips (in which known actors and ordinary users impersonated Crocker) as well as remix-based clips (in which music, graphic elements, or dubbing were re-edited with the original).

In exploring “Leave Britney Alone” as a meme, we need to examine the distribution of the original video, but perhaps more importantly, we should investigate the structure and meaning of this video's *new variations*. People may *share* a certain video with others for many different reasons (which I will explore in chapter 6), but when they create their *own versions* of it, they inevitably reveal their personal interpretations. Thinking of Internet memes as trinities of content, form, and stance requires that we determine whether the imitator embraces or rejects each of these memetic dimensions. In what follows, I will implement this strategy to evaluate the ways in which Crocker's video was transformed in the course of its memetic diffusion.

Crocker's 2007 video is a complex amalgam of ideas, textual practices, and communicative strategies. Our starting point is the video's content, namely, the ideas and ideologies that it conveys. The text includes, among other things, facts about Britney Spears's life (for example, her two children) and the castigation of people criticizing fallen celebrities. More broadly, in this and other videos, Crocker wishes to convey the message that being gay and effeminate is a legitimate practice. In terms of form, or textual construction, the video's layout features one talking head, filmed in close-up and in one-shot and situated in front of a white cloth. It further features repetitions of certain phrases, raised voice pitch, tears, and distraught hair-hand gestures. The most complex dimension in Crocker's video relates to stance. Regarding the subdimension of *participation structure*, the video, by virtue of its existence, reminds the viewer that a gay, overtly effeminate individual is openly expressing his opinion in the public sphere. Keying, as noted above, is the tone, or modality, of the internal framing of discursive events as formed by their participants. People can key their communication as funny, ironic, mocking, pretend, or serious. In the case of "Leave Britney Alone," Crocker keys his utterances as extremely serious and as ultra-emotional—sometimes so serious that, at a remove, it can even appear comical and ambiguously parodic. While some commentators questioned the sincerity of the video, Crocker insisted it was utterly genuine. In

relation to the communication functions defined by Jakobson, of the six described above, the most prominent are the referential (Crocker provides us with facts about Britney's life); the conative (viewers are implored to change their behavior); and above all, the emotive, as this video is all about the addresser and his emotional state. In addition, a contextual examination of this video may lead to the identification of a certain phatic function to it. "Leave Britney Alone" is one of a stream of videos uploaded by Crocker on his YouTube channel. Through these frequent feeds, Crocker aspires to maintain the communicative path between himself, his budding acting career, and his faithful YouTube (and MySpace) viewers.⁵

So far, I have charted the memetic dimensions embedded in Crocker's initial video. The question to be addressed now is: Which of these dimensions was imitated with accuracy by Internet users in their derivatives, and which were altered? In other words, which of these dimensions succeeded in the competitive meme selection process? Since it is virtually impossible to track and examine all of this meme's versions, I compiled a sample of twenty highly viewed derivative videos. To create the sample, two queries were used in YouTube's internal search engine: the string "Leave Britney Alone," and the words "leave," "alone," and "Crocker." I then sorted the results according to their view count, and selected the twenty most-viewed videos (above 100,000) in which people imitate Crocker. Analyzing them

targets both the ideological and communicative aspects of the original meme.

Crocker's message about the legitimacy of being an overtly effeminate homosexual is lampooned in many of the videos. For instance, the comedian Seth Green, in a heavily viewed parody, shouts and "implores" the audience to leave Chris Crocker alone, pausing occasionally to fix his black eyeliner: "You have not spent a mile walking in his sneakers, or, platform pumps ... I don't know what he wears ... BUT I BET IT'S STYLISH!" Other clips mock a battery of pop stars and celebrities. In videos such as "Leave Justin Bieber Alone" or "Leave Rebecca Black Alone," the presenters mock Crocker's outcry to pity celebrities by publicly bashing them. Such clips represent a radical alternation of the original video's stance, particularly its *keying* (the tone and style of communication). User-generated derivatives abandon Crocker's overtly emotional performance in favor of a cynical and ironic one. No one says what he or she means in these videos. When a speaker pleads with his audiences to "leave Michael Jackson alone" because he "loves his monkey," it is quite clear that the words spoken are not those meant. Curiously enough, the vast majority of the sampled videos employ common ironic keying: these videos are more similar to *each other* than to Crocker's original.

My analysis so far yields a complex web of imitations and nemetic dimensions. While users emulate the forms

manifested in Crocker's video, they imitate the other targets to construct opposing memes at the content-stance dimensions. In other words, the process of imitation combines overt copying and reversing aspects of the original event. It may be that the most powerful communication-oriented meme spread by users in this process is ironic communication: communication that veers from a definite commitment to one's uttered words, using language in a playful and non-obliging way.

In a recent work using the three-dimensional meme model, Noam Gal examined the role of memetic practices in Internet-based collective identity formation.⁶ She focused on a participatory YouTube campaign entitled "It Gets Better," produced as a response to vast media coverage of gay teen suicide in the United States as a result of homophobic bullying. Gal analyzed this stream of videos as a meme; people create new versions in response to the former ones, preserving and altering various aspects. Through this practice of partial citation, a distinct discursive arena is constituted, shaped by an ongoing negotiation over its norms and conventions. To investigate the construction of identity through the aggregation of sporadic acts of imitation and deviation, Gal analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively 200 campaign videos. In terms of content, she found that campaign videos tend to describe both the problems of gay teens and their solutions as associated with the private domain. In relation to stance, she found

that the majority of protagonists are white, young, able-bodied American men, constituting a typical hegemonic structure of participation, despite the relative absence of formal gatekeepers from the medium. With regard to form, she found that one mise-en-scène—of a protagonist(s) seated in front of a camera—dominates the corpus. This differentiation between content, form, and stance allowed Gal to identify various modes of compliance and subversion in this campaign: whereas in some videos the rather conservative content was paired with a subversive stance (as in the case of a Puerto Rican woman praising Jesus), in others, radical assertions were packed in professional formats that “blocked” further participation.

So far I have demonstrated the utility of the threefold meme typology through video-based examples. I wish to further illustrate its applicability to other formats, such as image and text. To this end, I’ll briefly look into the recent example of the “Pepper-Spraying Cop” meme. On November 18, 2011, students from the University of California, Davis, gathered as part of the Occupy Wall Street protest. When they refused police orders to evacuate the area, two officers reacted by pepper-spraying a row of still-sitting students directly in their faces. Shortly after the incident, videos documenting it were uploaded to YouTube, generating uproar against the excessive use of force by American police officers. A photograph in which one of the officers, John Pike, was shown spraying the students quickly

evolved into an Internet meme. Users Photoshopped the “Pepper-Spraying Cop” into an endless array of contexts, spanning historical, artistic, and pop-culture-oriented backgrounds.

The plethora of images constituting the “Pepper-Spraying Cop” meme can be analyzed through the model of content, form, and stance. Such an exercise reveals that while most versions share a similar Photoshop-based form, they vary greatly in terms of content. Content-wise, I identified two main groups of meme versions. The first focuses on political contexts: Pike is shown pepper-spraying iconic American symbols such as George Washington crossing the Delaware, the former US presidents on Mount Rushmore, and the Constitution itself, as well as freedom fighters across the globe (in Tiananmen Square, for example). These political versions share a clear idea, namely that the officer brutally violated the basic values of justice and freedom as represented by the protestors. A second group of user-generated images is pop-culture-oriented. In these versions, Pike is pepper-spraying icons such as Snoopy and Marilyn Monroe, as well as a battery of stars identified with other Internet memes, such as “Little Baby Panda” and “Keyboard Cat.” Such pop-culture-oriented meme versions are often open to multiple interpretations. In one case, in which Pike is portrayed as spraying Rebecca Black—a widely scorned teen singer and Internet phenomenon—the original meaning of the photo as criticism of Pike

seems to be almost reversed. This differentiation between two types of memetic content can be further associated with stance alternations. For example, the utterly serious keying of the original photograph has been transformed in the process of memetic uptake, which involves explicit playfulness. However, if the keying of politically oriented versions is mainly sardonic, the predominant tone in the pop-culture-oriented ones is amused and humorous.

The analysis of the "Pepper-Spraying Cop" meme according to the three memetic dimensions reveals that, in contrast to the unified uptake pattern characterizing "Leave Britney Alone," other memes might encompass a more divergent mode of diffusion and evolution. Tracing the ways in which they diffuse may prove that the ostensibly chaotic World Wide Web may in fact follow more organized cultural trajectories than meet the eye.

The differentiation between memetic dimensions may also advance our ability to draw borders between Internet memes. If we think of Internet memes as groups of interconnected content units that share common characteristics, we may further posit that such shared features may include content, form, and stance, and various combinations thereof. Therefore, the definition of a certain meme's scope may rely on the dimension through which

Figure 6 The "Pepper-Spraying Cop" meme. Sources: (top) <http://www.tumblr.com/tagged/louise-macabitas> (photo credit: Louise Macabitas); (middle and lower) <http://www.uproxx.com/webculture/>.

it is examined. For instance, if our prism is that of content, or ideas, we may argue that the same content can be expressed in a video, a text, or a Photoshop image. In this case, what we define as a particular “Internet meme” will incorporate different forms. Alternatively, we may identify memetic formats, such as image macros or lip synch, that are used for conveying various ideas. I will return to this distinction in the seventh chapter, in which I will define *genres of Internet memes* as intersections between specific themes and formats.

The closest neighbor of the meme concept in both popular and academic discourse is “viral.” While many people use the terms interchangeably, I would like to highlight the difference between them. In a recent article, Jeff Hemsley and Robert Mason provide a comprehensive definition of “virality.” They describe it as “a word-of-mouth-like cascade diffusion process wherein a message is actively forwarded from one person to other, within and between multiple weakly linked personal networks, resulting in a rapid increase in the number of people who are exposed to the message.”¹ The three key attributes of virality, according to these authors, are (1) a person-to-person mode of diffusion; (2) great speed, which is enhanced by social media platforms; and (3) broad reach, which is achieved by bridging multiple networks. Hemsley and Mason, like other scholars researching virality, identify it as a certain diffusion process in which a *specific item* propagates in a

certain way. This item is often tagged as a “viral video,” “viral ad,” or “viral photo.”

The main difference between Internet memes and virals thus relates to variability: whereas the viral comprises *a single cultural unit* (such as a video, photo, or joke) that propagates in many copies, an Internet meme is *always a collection of texts*. You can identify a single video and say “This is a viral video” without referring to any other text, but this would not make much sense when describing an Internet meme. A single video is not an Internet meme but *part of a meme*—one manifestation of a group of texts that together can be described as the meme. Going back to “Leave Britney Alone,” I would argue that Chris Crocker’s video can be defined as a viral video that became a memetic video only with the emergence of its derivatives.² As elaborated in chapter 3, the “Leave Britney Alone” meme is composed of many videos. In a narrow, technical sense, both viral and memetic videos can be seen as adhering to Dawkins’s idea of memes in that they spread gradually from person to person. However, memetic content is closer to the original idea of the meme as a living and changing entity that is *incorporated in the body and mind of its hosts.*

But this straightforward differentiation fails to capture the complex relationship between memes and virals. In pursuit of a more nuanced distinction, I put forward two assertions. First, we should think of the viral and the

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memetic as two ends of a dynamic spectrum rather than as a binary dichotomy. In fact, purely viral content probably does not exist—once a photo, or a video, reaches a certain degree of popularity on the Web, you can bet that someone, somewhere, will alter it. Moreover, there is a strong temporal element lurking here: many memetic videos started off as viral ones. Thus, if we think of the viral and the memetic as two ends of a dynamic spectrum, a more accurate differentiation would be threefold: (1) a *viral*: a single cultural unit (formulated in words, image or video) that is spread by multiple agents and is viewed by many millions. A “viral” may or may not have derivatives (see, for example, the Kony 2012 campaign, <http://invisiblchildren.com/kony/>, or the Evian Roller Babies, <http://youtu.be/XQcVIIWpwGs>); (2) a *founder-based meme*: an Internet meme that is sparked by a specific (often viral) text, video, or photo (such as “The Situation Room” or the “Pepper-Spraying Cop”). The “founding” unit is followed by many versions, each viewed by fewer people; and (3) an *egalitarian meme*: comprising many versions that seem to have evolved simultaneously without a clear founding text. As I will elaborate in chapter 7, egalitarian memes are often based on a certain formula or genre. Such memes are characterized by a more even popularity distribution between the various versions. Rage comics, LOLCats, and “Hitler’s Downfall Parodies” would be examples of this category.

Table 1 Virals, founder-based, and egalitarian memes.

	Viral	One*	Many	Founder-based meme	Egalitarian meme
Number of versions					
Distribution of popularity				Millions of viewers of initial video	One (often viral) clip/photo that initiated the meme is by far the most popular
Focus of derivatives					People relate to a specific photo or video
User involvement				Meta-comments	Modifying the text
Examples	Evian Roller Babies	“Leave Britney Alone”		Evian Roller Babies	Modifying the text

*When a viral generates many derivatives it can also be described as memetic.

My second assertion is that we should think of Internet memes and virals as different modes of engagement rather than as passive versus active formulations. Although it could be argued that viral diffusion is a more passive mode of communication than memetic imitation, I assert that both viral and memetic content involve engaged communication, albeit associated with different

engagement levels. In the case of the viral, the communication may involve personalized meta-comments (for example, “Don’t try this at home”), whereas memetic content invites modifications of the text itself.

While Internet memes and virals are similar in many respects, until now these concepts have been used in different ways in academic research. This split may stem from their association with two antithetic framings of communication—*communication as transmission* and *communication as ritual*. Articulated by James Carey in his book *Communication as Culture* (1989), this distinction provides fertile ground for mapping the new meme–viral scholarly landscape. The “transmission” standpoint likens the movement of goods or people in space to the spread of information through mass media. According to this view, communication is mainly a process of imparting information in the hope of augmenting the spread and effect of messages as they travel in space. To communicate effectively, on this view, is to “get your message through” to the masses quickly and without disturbances. By contrast, what Carey calls the “ritual” model defines communication not as the act of imparting information but as the construction and representation of shared beliefs. It highlights the sharedness of values, symbols, and cultural sensibilities that embody what people see as their communities. According to this view, the “message” in communication is not a unit whose reach and effect are easily

traceable, but an ongoing process in which identities and senses of belonging are continually constricted.

Studies of virality tend to embrace the “transmission” model of communication. Virality-focused research—conducted mostly in the fields of marketing and political communication—focus on questions that relate to the diffusion of particular “items.” They ask how and to what degree virals spread, investigate the factors that enhance their effectiveness, and chart the power structures underpinning this process. A prevalent question in politically oriented studies is what role do blogs and other social media play in the viral process—comparing it to the role played by established mass media outlets. For instance, in chapter 8 I will survey studies led by Kevin Wallsten and by Karine Nahon and her colleagues that focus on the diffusion of political clips in the 2008 US presidential campaign, and the role that official campaigners and bloggers had in augmenting the viral process.³ In contrast, marketing-oriented studies—such as Phelps’s and Berger and Milkman’s analysis, discussed in chapter 6—tend to focus not on the processes or power structures underpinning viral diffusion but on successful strategies for viral marketing.

The handful of studies focusing on Internet memes (rather than virals) seems to be linked more strongly to Carey’s second framing of communication as ritual. Such studies reflect the notion that memetic activities play an

important role in constructing shared values in contemporary digital cultures. Treating memes as cultural building blocks, they attempt to understand people's memetic choices, as well as the meanings they ascribe to memes. The scholarship produced by Jean Burgess, Michele Knobel, Colin Lankshear, Patrick Davidson, and Ryan Milner—cited in various chapters of this book—reflects this fledgling research trajectory.

An interesting way to move forward would be to invert the ways in which we study memes and virals, looking at viral content in terms of ritual, and examining memetic content in terms of transmission. In practice, this would require the evaluation of viral videos not only in terms of success or effectiveness but also in terms of their cultural implications and role in the formation of social and political identities. By contrast, an inspection of Internet memes from a transmission standpoint would focus on success factors and diffusion patterns. Such a “transmission”-oriented approach toward Internet memes is currently apparent mostly in the fields of information and computer science. Research there tends to focus on verbal memes, such as quotes, hash tags, or catchphrases, looking into the changes they undergo and the underlying factors that influence this process—such as utterance length and the source of the quote.⁴

In sum: while the borderline between “memes” and “virals” may be fuzzy, and in fact many videos and images

are associated with both categories (by first spreading virally and then spawning numerous derivatives), it is still worth differentiating between them. In the next chapter, I will demonstrate that this distinction is especially useful when we think of the factors that motivate people to *share* content as opposed to those that augment users’ tendency to *engage with it creatively*.

- 10.1177/14614448124506). See also Nicholas John, "The Social Logics of Sharing," *Communication Review* (forthcoming).
3. Daniel Gilmore, "Another Brick in the Wall: Public Space, Visual Hegemonic Resistance, and the Physical/Digital Continuum," *Communication Theeses*, paper 91 (MA thesis, Georgia State University, 2012).
 4. Henrik Bjarneskans, Bjarne Grønnevik, and Anders Sandberg, "The Life-cycle of Memes" (1999), <http://www.aleph.se/Trans/Cultural/Memetics/memecycle.htm>.
 5. Alice Marwick and danah boyd, "I Tweet Honestly, I Tweet Passionately: Twitter Users, Context Collapse, and the Imagined Audience," *New Media and Society* 13 (2011): 96–113.
 6. For more on attention economy, see Richard A. Lanham, *The Economics of Attention: Style and Substance in the Age of Information* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).
 7. Jean Burgess, "All Your Chocolate Rain Are Belong to Us? Viral Video, YouTube, and the Dynamics of Participatory Culture," in *Video Vortex Reader: Responses to YouTube*, ed. Geert Lovink and Sabine Niederer (Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures, 2008), 101–109.

Chapter 4

1. An elaborated account of the "mentalist approach," as well as a most illuminating discussion of memes, can be found in Daniel C. Dennett, *Darwin's Dangerous Idea: Evolution and the Meanings of Life* (New York: Touchstone, 1995).
2. For a detailed discussion of the "behavioral" approach, see Derek Gatherer, "Why the 'Thought Contagion' Metaphor Is Retarding the Progress of Memetics," *Journal of Memetics—Evolutionary Models of Information Transmission*, http://jomp.cfm.org/1998/vol2/gatherer_d.htm.
3. Patrick Davidson suggests using the dimension of "behavior" in addition to the dimensions of ideas and their expression. I think this dimension is particularly applicable to the analysis of genres, as I will outline in chapter 7. See Patrick Davidson, "The Language of (Internet) Memes," in *The Social Media Reader*, ed. Michael Mandiberg (New York: NYU Press, 2012), 120–127.
4. Susan U. Phillips, "Participant Structures and Communicative Competence: Warm Springs Children in Community and Classroom," in *Functions of Language in the Classroom*, ed. Courtney B. Cazden, Vera P. John, and Dell H. Hymes (New York: Teachers College Press, 1972), 370–394; Shoshana

Blum-Kulkka, Deborah Huck-Taglicht, and Hanna Avni, "The Social and Discursive Spectrum of Peer Talk," *Discourse Studies* 6, no. 3 (2004): 307–328, doi: 10.1177/1461444804044291; Roman Jakobson, "Linguistics and Poetics," in *Style in Language*, ed. Thomas A. Sebeok (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1960), 350–377.

5. For further analysis of "Leave Britney Alone," see Aymar Jean Christian, "Camp 2.0: A Queer Performance of the Personal," *Communication, Culture, and Critique* 13, no. 3 (2010): 352–376; Nick Salvato, "Out of Hand: YouTube Amateurs and Professionals," *Drama Review* 53, no. 3 (2009): 67–83.
6. Noam Gal, "Internet Memes and the Construction of Collective Identity: The Case of 'It Gets Better'" (unpublished MA thesis, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2012).

Chapter 5

1. Jeff Hensley and Robert M. Mason, "The Nature of Knowledge in the Social Media Age: Implications for Knowledge Management Models," *Journal of Organizational Computing and Electronic Commerce* 23, no. 1–2 (2013): 138–176.
2. Both types of videos can be relegated to what Jenkins et al. term *spreadable media* ("If It Doesn't Spread, It's Dead [Part One]: Media Viruses and Memes," Feb. 11, 2009, http://henryjenkins.org/2009/02/if_it_doesnt_spread_its_dead_p.html). While I agree with Jenkins's criticism about the fuzziness of previous descriptions of viral media and Internet memes, I suggest that we should not abandon these terms, but rather attempt to define them better.
3. This does not mean that studies on this issue use only the word *viral*, but that this is a key term in this tradition. Prominent works that deal with the actors involved in online diffusion processes are Jure Leskovec, Lars Backstrom, and Jon Kleinberg, "Meme-Tracking and the Dynamics of the News Cycle," in *Proceedings of the 15th ACM SIGKDD International Conference on Knowledge Discovery and Data Mining* (Paris, June 28–July 1, 2009); and Gabe Ignatow and Alexander T. Williams, "New Media and the 'Anchor Baby' Boom," *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 17, no. 1 (2011): 60.
4. Lada A. Adamic, Thomas M. Lento, and Andrew T. Fiore, "How You Met Me" (short paper, International AAAI Conference on Weblogs and Social Media, Dublin, June 4–7, 2012), <http://www.aaai.org/ocs/index.php/ICWSM/ICWSM12/paper/view/4681>; Matthew P. Simmons, Lada A. Adamic, and Bytan Adar, "Memes Online: Extracted, Subtracted, Injected, and Recollected" (short paper, International AAAI Conference on Weblogs and Social Media,

Chapter 6

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Chapter 7

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