

The tribe of memes. A virtual territory of inclusion-exclusion among adolescents

*La tribu de los memes. Un territorio
virtual de inclusión-exclusión entre los
adolescentes*

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Memes constitute symbolic resources which are especially significant for adolescents, because they are able to summarize aspects shared at local and global level. This article presents the results of an online ethnography which evidences, on the one hand, how such parodic resources are expressed when creating tribal identities and strategies of social inclusion-exclusion and, on the other hand, the epistemological and methodological suitability of not separating the creation and the consumption of contents from the production of sense, in the study of adolescent practices on the Web.

KEYWORDS: Memes, adolescents, virtual tribes.

Los memes constituyen recursos simbólicos especialmente significativos para los adolescentes por su capacidad de condensación de sentidos compartidos a nivel global y local. Este artículo presenta los resultados de una etnografía en línea que evidencia, por una parte, cómo se expresan dichos recursos paródicos en la generación de identidades tribales y estrategias de inclusión-exclusión social, y por otra, la conveniencia epistemológica y metodológica de no separar la creación y el consumo de contenidos de la producción de sentido en el estudio de las prácticas adolescentes en la Red.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Memes, adolescentes, tribus virtuales.

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INTRODUCTION

To Jesús Martín-Barbero. Technology is today one of the most powerful metaphors to understand the web –nets and interfaces- which make up subjectivity. But there are some who stand against this powerful metaphor, those who still believe in the persistence of the modern being endowed with their own self, identified by reason, which is lodged somewhere in the brain totally different and distant from the place where emotions, imagination and wishes are lodged (Martín-Barbero, 2008, pp. 34-35).

With memes and other content which adolescents create or edit on the Internet we find ourselves so enthralled by the tree of digital wonders, that we do not notice the symbolic density of the forest which houses it. Seduced by their transmedia abilities and narratives, we are not aware of the universe of shared and exclusive meanings where the production of sense is organized by means of wishes, affections and emotions in each of these demonstrations. As we will see in the case analyzed in this text, behind the memes fanpage *Uruguayan Memes for Young Citizens* (UMFYC), there is a tribe led by a 17-year-old adolescent who created the page in order to convene friends who thought and felt the way she did, with the same sense of humor and critical vision of local reality.

The well-known metaphor of “urban tribes”, originally coined by Maffesoli (2004) to refer to the spontaneous, “polymorphic” and ephemeral emergence of small, close groups, around ideals with a strong emotional charge is still appropriate for naming diverse phenomena of association in socio-digital networks. In the bibliography about young people, the term urban tribe is used to name those groups who:

Act towards the outside –in their relationships with others– as a means of protection and security before a regulation which excludes them and, towards the inside as spaces of belonging and identity affiliation, which allow them to create a common sense (Reguillo, 2012, p. 13).

They are also perceived as “the mirror on which the processes and struggles of youngsters and adolescents to govern their own reputation are reflected; that is to say, their image in the face of others and to find emotional support from their peers” (Costa, Pérez Tornero & Tropea, 1996, p. 13). Within urban tribes, graffiti artists, punks, darks, anarcho-punks, gothic people and other emerging groups from different periods of time from the decade of the 80’s are usually included. But also, there are other identity affiliations surrounding the protest in their heterogeneous demonstrations which are recognized (Aguilera, 2016), or which are linked to certain types of cultural consume (Urteaga, 2012, p. 29), or associated with the assertion of social, ethnical and sexual differences (Hopenhayn, 2011). What these heterogeneous forms of association do have in common, as it is well expressed by Reguillo (2012): “is that they have learnt to take the word on their own way and to reappropriate the communication instruments” (p. 14). Nowadays it is difficult to think that these groups would exist without the resources found on the web in order to organize themselves and to make their demands and performances visible (García Canclini, 2012).

Many of the groups mentioned before are born and developed in the digital environment, natural habitats for adolescents. They are ideal for the activity of new identities (Gardner & Davis, 2014), and the flourishing of virtual communities which are good for obtaining “important sociability profits” (Pasquier, 2008, p. 77). These sociabilities are basically organized by and through images. Almost everything that is produced, consumed and shared by adolescents on the web are images: “They inhabit the image and the image inhabits them” (Fontcuberta, 2016). The image constitutes the content and layout of creation and of communication. In this sense, the image not only becomes a symbolic resource to express themselves but a language which includes all existing languages. They read, live and handle images, and at the same time, images encode, inhabit and question them. In this group of images that speak for and through adolescents, memes are especially significant because of their great capacity to encompass senses shared at a global level and to possess them at local level by means of humor, irony and

parody (Cortazar Rodríguez, 2014, Pérez Salazar, Aguilar & Guillermo, 2014). This implies that most memes which have become viral, have done so because of their condition of global narrative with a semantic capacity to connect different sensitivities and heterogeneous cultural realities. The specific meaning of a meme varies not only because of social, political or cultural differences among those who share them and interpret them, but also because of the need for an identity cohesion from certain groups clustered in parodic communities. Research carried out in Mexico about the appropriation of the popular meme *Harlem Shake* among a group of university students, evidenced that memes are particularly versatile for the “incorporation of contextual elements which allow them to rework the message from an experience of identity appropriation” (Pérez Salazar et al., 2014, p. 95), and to promote the inclusion and sense of belonging in different groups of young people (Pérez Salazar et al., 2014, p. 96).

The access to a fanpage of memes is not restricted, in principle, to any kind of people; it is enough to have a Facebook account to participate, but in practice there are several levels of inclusion-exclusion (Miltner, 2014), and some of them are rapidly defined. Not sharing linguistic and dialect codes, not having a meme, anime or videogame culture, not using certain applications or not knowing the symbols of each youth culture and/or subculture on the Internet, leave many people automatically out, for example, most adults older than 40 years old. Nevertheless, and although most adolescents and young people use the codes of such digital culture, that is not sufficient condition to be able to become part of the hard core of the tribe of meme makers. In the specific case, as we will see further on, belonging to a tribe depends on using certain kind of parodic humor of inclusive speeches which is handled by groups of peers at secondary school; a hybrid language which is becoming more and more popular among adolescents to communicate using socio-digital networks. In the same way as other urban tribes, the meme tribe needs media significance to legitimize itself and to be recognized, but differently from those who intervene the urban space with graffiti and different kinds of performances, this tribe resorts to humor and satire to become known and to make a difference, merging around an identity built for this effect.

Regarding the phenomenon of memes, there are several theoretical and disciplinary approaches,² but in general it is understood that a meme is “any unit of culture which is replicated” (Pérez Salazar, 2017, p. 17). And this includes not only images, videos or graphics, but also other cultural expressions which are reproduced in different environments and historic times. Memes have become a very popular symbolic resource because of their capacity to group content shared at a global level and their possibilities of appropriation at a local level. They are characterized by their variation and repeatability (Heylighen, 1996), and also by their fruitfulness and longevity (Da Cunha, 2007), by the usage and juxtaposition of different digital, semantic and literary resources (Arango Pinto, 2015; Cortazar Rodríguez, 2014; Knobel & Lankshear, 2007) and by their immediate diffusion (Arango Pinto, 2015, p. 123; García & Gertrudix, 2011). The key to a meme’s diffusion and repeatability does not lie in how sophisticated their edition is, but in its possibilities of being “reinterpreted” (Pérez Salazar, 2017, p. 21). A meme groups several layers of content, some permanent and global, and others ephemeral, incidental and local. A meme is polysemic: it admits many interpretations and appropriations, and at the same time it produces antagonistic senses to say something witty, timely and significant within a certain community of peers, which can be very wide and globalized, or very restricted and local, or very open and inclusive, or very closed and exclusive. In this sense, memes can also function as resources used to establish a relationship of otherness with the others by means of humor and satire (Pérez Salazar et al., 2014).

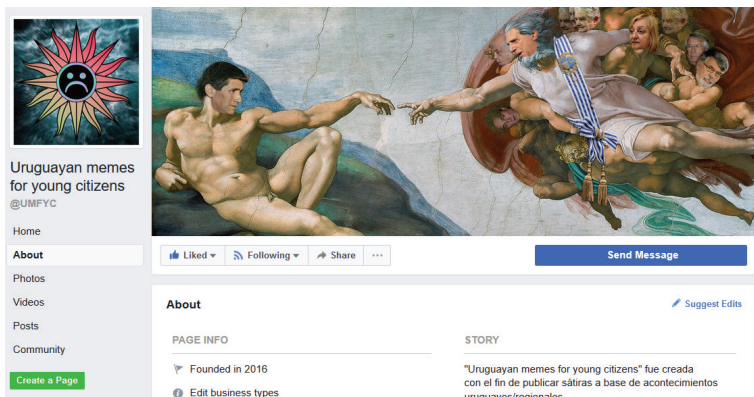
DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY CASE AND METHODOLOGIC STRATEGY

Our interest to study a page for the creation of memes arose in the framework of our research project *Horizon2020: Transmedia Literacy*,³

² An excellent concept revision about the topic can be found in Pérez Salazar (2017).

³ See *Transmedia Literacy. Exploiting transmedia skills and informal learning strategies to improve formal education: research and innovation actions*. Available at <http://transmedialiteracy.org/the-documents/>

whose aim was to explore transmedia practices in adolescents in eight countries in Europe and Latin America. The selected study case was the Facebook page *Uruguayan Memes for Young Citizens* (UMFYC), which has 2 328 followers:⁴



The page UMFYC was created in February 2016 and it was thought of by a 6th-grade student of a public high school in Montevideo, with the aim of, in her own words, “making more friends”, to be able to get in touch with other adolescents who share similar tastes and interests, and share “the same sense of humor”. The page is currently administered by six friends who had previously formed a Facebook group with interests in common. All the suggested content sent by followers or produced by the administrators is discussed, and only the one that, according to the administrators better reflects the humor the page tries to convey is published. In the interview, they pointed out that they use anonymity in order to avoid being personally “attacked” as many of the memes cause violent reactions when some people feel aggrieved or offended, which becomes itself a paradox, as we will discuss further on. They also remarked that Facebook has censored some of their content in answer to the request of some of the followers who find it offensive.

In order to carry out this research, an online ethnographic observation guideline was designed, known by some authors as “netnography”

⁴ Retrieved on July 22nd, 2018, from <https://www.facebook.com/UMFYC/>

(Ardévol et al., 2018, p. 2; Del Fresno, 2011; Kozinets, 2002) because it locates its subject in the new socio-cultural realities which flourish on the Internet and in the growing sociability developed in socio-digital networks. Netnography, like other approaches of ethnographic nature, studies the building of sense in different groups and communities in everyday life, but at the same time acknowledges the need to relocate observation spaces and time in the growing hybridization in social and cultural practices in the near and virtual environments, understood as a “social continuum” (Del Fresno, 2011; Winocur, 2009). The concept of social continuum refers to the social experience which organizes the transfer from a relational context to another without the authors perceiving significant changes in sociability, because it is already part of “the same social experience, mundane, natural and ubiquitous” (Del Fresno, 2011, p. 36).

In our case, netnography became an online observation guideline of the production and publication of memes on a Facebook fanpage, which was mentioned by the participating adolescents in the study *Transmedia Literacy* during field work. The aim of the observation was to explore, understand and describe the dynamics of their favorite online sites and the circulation of their narratives. Such observation was complemented with a face-to-face interview with six young administrators which allowed us to contextualize and make sense of many of the exchanges which took place on the page. For the observation and encoding of the meme pages, done between May and June of 2017, a team of six 20 to 22-year-old students of the Degree in Communication of the Information and Communication Faculty from the Universidad de la República in Uruguay was formed. The strategy of integrating communication students was a key element in order to understand the content and dialogues on the meme pages because they share most of the identity and linguistic codes with adolescents. In the research team, not only did they act as “translators”,⁵ but they also contributed

⁵ Dictionary drawn up by communication students who assisted us with the observation of the page so that the researchers were able to understand the meaning of some expressions:

1. LMAO: English acronym which means “laughing my ass off” (laughing very hard). It is used when something is hilarious.

to clarifying the content shared in a subjective way, in the context of the page UMFYC, as well as in a more general sense of the digital culture of adolescents.

BUILDING A SENSE OF BELONGING

The page UMFYC identifies itself with ample and inclusive text, which, as we will see later on, only represents one of its levels of convening:

Uruguayan Memes for Young Citizens was created in order to publish satires based on regional/Uruguayan events. The whole content published by the administrators is shared simply in order to entertain. The administrators of this page do not encourage, promote and/or support any kind of hateful behavior towards a certain person, political party, ethnicity, race, belief, religion, etc. The images used can be modified in order to generate humor and does not entail a true representation of events, people, entities or facts. Any doubt, comment and/or complaint can be sent directly to this page, and an administrator will contact you as soon as possible. Again, the content published by this page is for the sake of satire.

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2. Bach plaz: in English it is correctly spelled “bitch please”. It is used to respond to someone who says something silly or ridiculous.
 3. 3edgy5me: in English it is correctly spelled “2edgy4me”, which means “too edgy for me”. It is used to respond when something (or someone) is disgusting or irritable.
 4. STFU: acronym in English which means “shut the fuck up”. When someone is talking too much or talking nonsense.
 5. Madafaka: in English it is correctly spelt “mother fucker”, but in Spanish it is common to write it like this because it sounds like that phonetically.
 6. LPMQLP: abbreviation in Spanish which means: “the whore that gave birth to you”. Swear word which in this kind of pages is usually used when something is very funny.
 7. Tmb te keremos: in Spanish is correctly spelled “También te queremos”. It means “we love you too”.

Nevertheless, the sense of belonging to the tribe is not given by this statement of objectives, nor by the great number of followers the fan page has. The sense of belonging is born and set in the interactions which take place among those participants who know each other and have a friendship which goes beyond the page. And this, without a doubt, makes it easy for them to “recognize their looks”, as was stated by Silva in a thought-provoking essay written a while ago:

The showcase coincides with a local landscape; its protagonists know each other and the proof of this is that they recognize their gazes. Local, in the sense that their symbolic radiation is primary, the foreigner is not shown, that one who cannot recognize it, but a fellow person, a particular subject of the community who can have been formed in the imagination of the person who built the mini-theatre (Silva, 1992, p. 65).

Most followers who, as we will see later on, have a very important role as legitimizing members of the public (Pasquier, 2008, p. 81; Winocur, 2018), stop briefly at the site, occasionally *like*, do not get involved in controversies or feed comments. The identity key of the tribe of this page arises from the fact that they feel special, different, they have different opinions from most of their peers, and that they share a kind of black, acid and ironic humor, which excludes those who do not understand or share it, as it is clearly stated by its creators at the face-to-face meeting:

We are a minority characterized by being controversial, by irony, because we are different... You may like the humor or not... Those who take the page seriously insult you, but the key is to take things with humor although they may not be humorous for all people... this is our humor and those who do not understand it are out.

The publication of the meme *The young socialist starter pack*, which makes fun of the stereotyped left young militant of the student’s union of the public high school IAVA,⁶ caused a clash which reveals

⁶ In Uruguay most adolescents attend public secondary schools. The sociocultural differences among students are given by the place where the institution is located and/or the social background of those who attend. In

tensions and antagonisms between two tribes of the same secondary school about the sense of what is inclusive or not. The members of the meme tribes, on the one hand, question the legitimacy of the student militants to assume that they represent the rest of the students. The militant ones, on the other hand, question the use of humor to ridicule or tag groups or people, and finally, the page owners put an end to the argument mentioning the lack of understanding of the humor codes: “If you don’t tolerate this kind of humor, you are intolerant, hippie”, and another member of the tribe adds: “When the memes game is too strong for all the lefties”, and another one concludes: “and normies”. In summary, paradoxically, the discussion about inclusion ends with mutual intolerance and expelling one of the parts (Figure 1).

What is interesting in this case is how memes act as a mechanism of inclusion and exclusion at the same time, turning the original meaning of inclusion-exclusion. Those who feel left apart or excluded in the traditional socialization environments at high school, will vindicate this space as a place of belonging that leaves out those who do not share “the sense of humor”. Indeed, those followers who criticize the page not only disagree with the sense of humor that ridicule them, but they answer using the strategy of traditional argumentation based on the rhetoric of defense of inclusion without dealing with or recognizing the core vindication of the tribe. They neither create other memes to ridicule their critics on the page, and they refuse to use *Spanglish* as a matter of principle or because they do not know it.

The use of colloquial or dialectal English and of Spanglish, which is the dominant language in the meme tribe, clearly acts as an exclusion mechanism. The administrators and their most regular followers use Spanglish as a hallmark which allows them verbal and metaphorical games meant to generate a greater complicity among those considered to be a valid interlocutor. Those who play these games which involve

the case of high school number 35 “Instituto Alfredo Vázquez Acevedo” (IAVA), one of the oldest in the city of Montevideo, the student body is very heterogeneous. The high school is renowned for the high academic level of the teachers and the participation of students in different social, cultural and political movements.

FIGURE 1
MEME *THE YOUNG SOCIALIST STARTER PACK*



██████████ "gremios estudiantiles"
Like · Reply · 53 ·

██████████ Estudiantiles, y tienen 25 años y estan cursando 3ro de liceo.
Like · Reply · 28 · 23:34

██████████ Faltó no ir a clase para pelear por la educación haciendo carteles No sé cómo podés representar eso en una imagen tho
Like · Reply · 15 · 23:44

██████████ yo milito en secundaria hace 2 años y quedate tranki que no hay ninguno de 25 años, los prejuicios no le dejan ver mas halla de sus narices
Like · Reply · 2 ·

██████████ Dejen de catalogar personas como si fuesen mercadería
Like · Reply · 17 ·

██████████ jajaj lo mas ironico es q esta en ingles intolerante seran ustedes que no dejan vivirr
Like · Reply · 4 ·

Uruguayan memes for young citizens
Todo esto es irónico linda
Like · Reply · 10 ·

██████████ cual hacen??? por que tienen la necesidad de etiquetar a las personas? uno hace y es como quiere loco!!!!!!!
Like · Reply · 9 ·

Uruguayan memes for young citizens
Uyyyyy
Like · Reply · 7 · 09:07

██████████ Young socialist
butdevastated
Like · Reply · 15 · 10:23

██████████ Young socialist detected
Like · Reply · 14 ·

Uruguayan memes for young citizens Solo un recordatorio: si no te tolerás este tipo de humor, ya sos un intolerante, hippillo
Like · Reply · 33 ·

██████████ tu imagen está buena y es patética al mismo tiempo ya que solo alienta lo mismo que critica, con la supuesta "ironía" "humor"claro... Esa es, muchas veces, la trampa del humor... tiras mierda pero como es "chiste" te puedes desentender de esta...

██████████ When the meme game is too strong for all the lefties
Like · Reply · 16 ·

Uruguayan memes for young citizens and normies*
Like · Reply · 5 ·

Source: Facebook page UMFYC. Retrieved on July 22nd, 2018.

the use of Spanglish combined with colloquial English and Spanish, defend their hybridization, arguing that languages in their traditional forms do not “allow” or limit what you really want to say in certain peer communities. That is why, in order to understand the symbolic dimension of this phenomenon, it is not enough to understand the codes

but it is necessary to rebuild these codes in the context where they acquire meaning among those who share them. In the dialogue below, what is observed is how their use causes another confrontation with some visitors to the page, which is finally solved (or not) by “inviting” them to visit other pages where English is not used:

FIGURE 2
SCREENSHOT OF UMFYC (APRIL 19TH, 2017)

[Redacted] Yo digo algo si sos uruguayo porque pones en ingles las cosas pajero del orto eso no quiere decir que no sepa ingles peores al pedo
 Like · Reply · 1 · 19 April at 12:26
 ^ Hide 15 Replies

Uruguayan memes for young citizens
 Mira la descripción de tu foto de perfil y despues veni a hablar aca, gordo bondiola.
 Like · Reply · 6 · 19 April at 13:13

[Redacted] Y que tengo que ver yo con tu pagina? Banana
 Like · Reply · 19 April at 13:15

Uruguayan memes for young citizens
 Si sos uruguayo por que pones cosas en inglés?
 Like · Reply · 3 · 19 April at 13:17

Uruguayan memes for young citizens
 No sabes ni que decir pa meter bardo, raja de aca antes de que venga frigorífico Tacuarembó
 Like · Reply · 2 · 19 April at 13:18

[Redacted] Porque es la letra de una canción quieras o no la letra de la canción es en ingles Putin busca:good morning freedom
 Like · Reply · 19 April at 13:19

[Redacted] Tengo argumentos para rato mijo
 Like · Reply · 19 April at 13:21

Uruguayan memes for young citizens
 Argumentame la buzarda
 Like · Reply · 1 · 19 April at 13:22

[Redacted] 1. Tu buzarda?
 2.ya te quedaste sin argumentos no sabes que decir
 3.esos comentarios los hacia cuando tenia 8 años ... See more
 Like · Reply · 1 · 19 April at 13:24

Uruguayan memes for young citizens
 banana bee doo bee doo
 Like · Reply · 2 · 19 April at 13:52

Uruguayan memes for young citizens
 ¿Acaso asumiste nuestro género? ¿Y si somos todas minas?
 Like · Reply · 20 April at 12:17

[Redacted] y eso que tiene que ver?
 Like · Reply · 20 April at 12:36

[Redacted] Tiene razon 🙄 es uruguaya la pagina y ponen en ingles ,cualqui
 Like · Reply · 1 · 21 April at 01:24

[Redacted] No entendieron nada de la vida. Nada
 Like · Reply · 10 · 21 April at 17:26

[Redacted] La solucion es entrar en paginas uruguayas k publiquen en español y dejar las otras
 Like · Reply · 23 April at 13:14

Source: Facebook page UMFYC. Retrieved on July 22nd, 2018.

The confrontation between the members of the meme tribe and its critics is witnessed by the page followers, who seldom take part in the discussion, but who are essential when it comes to legitimate the members of one group or another by giving them likes. It is very

clearly stated by Pasquier (2008): these communities of fans need an audience and followers to symbolically guarantee their existence. In the same way as with the long list of Facebook contacts or the radio audiences of sentimental phone-in programs, it is not expected that they intervene or give their opinion; it is enough for them to be there as empathic witnesses of our confessions, affective exchanges or disputes in the sense of what is politically correct, as we have just seen in the meme page.

THE IDENTITY OF THE TRIBE

To belong or to be rejected for “being or not being part of something is essential in the building process of the identity of the adolescents in their near and virtual networks” (Winocur, 2009, p. 65).

Adolescents closely depend on others’ consideration and they endlessly try to build their own relational status... in this context, tribes tend to provide them with clues, accessible methods, and a sort of non-written manuals to determine their own expressiveness (Costa, Pérez Tornero & Tropea, 1996, p. 13).

This process acquires specific connotations when socio-digital networks become common among adolescents. New platforms and dozens of applications are available to work on sociability online; they multiply the possibilities of generating different kinds of identities: flexible, precarious, instrumental, some cross-sectional and relatively stable, others autonomous and ephemeral. Today more than ever it is evident for adolescents that the identity is in permanent construction, and because of this, it becomes a reflexive process which becomes part of and selectively appropriates the different available resources:

Young people negotiate with the different available identities, filtering, synthesizing and choosing, generating devices which usually encode reflexive processes. Nevertheless, it is possible that the recent emphasis on reflexivity –self-aware invention and re-invention of youth identities– is a much wider function of current global culture, and that all youngsters participate in it to a greater or lesser extent (Feixa, 2014, p. 35).

In terms of identity construction, the difference between virtual communities and virtual tribes is that in the first, as would be the case of communities of video gamers, the main motivation does not lie in asserting an identity of video gamers but in playing, passing levels, sharing tips and showing their achievements to the rest. In terms of identity, video gamers are not opposed by “non-video gamers”. On the contrary, tribes assume an identity which is strongly defined in the creation of an otherness. It is essential that there exists an “us” and a “them”. The others are essential when it comes to found and consolidate the us; that is to say, there are part and parcel of us, as we will see in the founding otherness of the meme page between *Danks* and *Normies*.

DANKS Y NORMIES

Dank⁷ is the identity assumed by the members of the tribe who founded the meme page. A dank is a producer and a consumer of memes, a connoisseur and a regular practitioner of dialectal codes and a privileged interpreter of the humor clues of the tribe which are only accessible to connoisseurs. It is also someone who feels part of a discontent minority and who breaks the rules which regulate social life at secondary school and other socializing environments of adolescents. Normies, on the contrary, according to the perception of danks, are conformists,

⁷ The words “dank meme” and “normie” originated in the meme forums 4chan and Reddit and are used to catalogue the types of memes and those who post them, are used in all meme pages. Normie is used in a pejorative way to describe those memes or people who belong to the mainstream or to the conventional culture, while dank is used for darker and alternative memes which are found outside the norm. “Those memes which use the phrase dank meme tend to be deliberately unusual, self-referential and brimming with jokes which make fun of the creators of memes who think that they are offering new intakes of memes. To call something dank meme suggests a wider criticism of the rise and downfall of the viral content. In other words, “this meme was fun and cool until it became popular”. Retrieved from <https://www.dictionary.com/e/slang/dank-meme/> https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Internet_meme#Vine_memes “dank memes”

conventional and stereotyped in their beliefs, which prevent them from understanding the type of humor which characterizes the tribe, especially the one that makes fun of politically correct speeches in defense of minorities. Obviously, danks and normies are identities which only exist in the symbolic universe of meme pages, and they also represent an otherness which only danks recognize. In other words, the so called normies do not see themselves as such, and as a result, the normie becomes an essential part in the construction of the identity of the dank. Neither is there, differently from other urban tribes, aesthetics, a style, conduct or way of relating that is purely dank. Identity manifests itself discursively through humor and dialectal codes which arise from the combination of English and Spanish, as a way of setting the differences between disruptive and conformists, incorrect and politically correct, miming and being mimed.

In the following example, the poster on the left is the original one created by the students' union from IAVA high school to assert the use of inclusive toilets. The poster on the right is the resulting meme, after being modified to satirize such assertion (Figure 3).

What can be deduced from the controversy which aroused on the page, is that the satire does not make fun of the inclusive toilets but of those who use them as vindication, in this case the students' union of the high school. The reaction from the ones who criticized the meme is described as a typically normie answer, which does not understand the background or the subtlety of the humor because they interpret it literally, or because they assume that when they make fun of certain things, they offend or denigrate the members of other communities or minorities. During the interview, when the researchers asked the administrators of the page whether they considered that this parody of sexual minorities contributed to their stigmatization or not, they strongly claimed that the content published never has the explicit or implicit intention of making fun of minorities or of vulnerable groups. In reality, they act as metaphors to ridicule or criticize characters and facts in their everyday life in secondary school, or from the media or politics in Uruguay. In summary, in the context of this fanpage, the meme as a parody resource as well as other rhetorical discourse in the socio-digital networks, has been aestheticized in such a way (Gil Calvo,

2019), which stops symbolizes stigmatization of certain subjects or specific groups, to symbolize in a more general way the discontent and disbelief towards certain politically correct speeches about inclusion, and on a closer look, the painful gap between the popular ones and the *freaks* at secondary school.

FIGURE 3
MEME ABOUT *GAY MATE* (APRIL 10TH, 2017)



Podrían usar el humor para intentar cambiar las cosas, pero eligen quedarse en el tiempo, eso a la larga deja de tener gracia..
Like Reply 10 · 10 April at 19:23

Hide 22 Replies

you're are gay mate

Like Reply 57 · 10 April at 19:24

Si, es relevante en algo?
Like Reply 2 · 10 April at 19:25

ehhhhhh repetime la pregunta
Like Reply 19 · 10 April at 19:26

FUCKING NORMIES.
REEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE
Like Reply 13 · 10 April at 19:33

Que carajo te importa si es gay el pibe !!??
Like Reply 2 · 10 April at 19:36

Pleno siglo 21 y todavia creemos que ridiculizar a las personas por su orientacion sexual es chistoso !! Que horror !!
Like Reply 6 · 10 April at 19:37

Found the normie
Like Reply 30 · 10 April at 19:44

Fucking normies invading our urudank
Like Reply 33 · 10 April at 19:45

por gente que se ofende que a alguien lo ofendan por ser gay es por lo que todavia se sigue ofendiendo a los gays. Aguantate Jaime Roos.
Like Reply 22 · 10 April at 19:45

Its not about being homosexual, its about how not to be a silly faggot
Like Reply 15 · 10 April at 19:51

no digas fa66ot que te meten ban en el feibuk
Like Reply 5 · 10 April at 19:59

Source: Facebook page UMFYC. Retrieved on October 27th, 2017.

CONCLUSIONS

In the same way as it happens in other urban tribes, in the meme tribe there are “role plays” which exclude those who do not know or do not share identity codes (Costa, Pérez Tornero & Tropea, 1996, p. 91). The adolescents in this research chose memes to represent the identity of the tribe because they constitute parody resources with possibilities of open and encoded communication at the same time. It was possible to notice in this research that memes can be used to generate cohesion and identity belonging, and at the same time they can become elements of exclusion and stigmatization at different levels of the discursive exchange, some explicit and others concealed by means of satire or parody. Danks resorted to a kind of satirical humor and dialectal codes which combine the use of colloquial English with Spanish and the jargon from anime and video games. Although there is no explicit intention of excluding people from the page, such codes act, as a matter of fact, as a semantic barrier to leave normies aside.

Nevertheless, virtual tribes do not check adolescents’ biographies or exclude other communities or identities. That is to say, you can be part of several tribes and of different virtual communities, even when some of them are apparently opposed, and this would not cause any conflict of sense. They can even coexist, as it is the case of the meme page we studied, in which there are several levels of inclusion and exclusion in the same tribe. The clearest level of inclusion, and also the least compromising, is evidenced by those who visit the page and enjoy the memes without getting involved in the controversies of more regular followers.

The dank identity acquires true sense in the world of the fanpage of memes; it cannot be transferred to other communities or virtual or real space of belonging which other significant identity affiliations generate for the members of this specific group. Despite its great adaptability, the process of invention or reinvention of virtual identities does not happen in an anarchic way and it is not a multiplication game of masks in the socio-digital networks either. Such process is always located, though in a temporary way, in the biographic space of adolescents, understood as:

The group of affective, playful, emotional and cognitive experiences shared with other significant people who organize the production of sense in their close and virtual social networks, by means of different hardware or digital medium (Winocur, 2015, p. 245).

It is in the biography space where sense is put together by means of the juxtaposition of stories about him/herself and about the other people. These stories, which are usually contradictory, inclusive and exclusive, metamorphosed from narratives and images which originate in anime, memes and video games. They express and, at the same time, create new subjectivities whose symbolic depth can only be interpreted in the rebuilding of the multiplicity of their worlds:

The term plural worlds, refers to the construction of young subjectivities from speeches which are apparently opposed. Although the vast majority of young people live in “plural worlds”, deep inside they live in a “unique world”, but widely complex (Feixa, 2014, p. 35).

Another aspect of the research reveals that the confrontation among the page followers, responds not only to different humor codes but also to questioning the legitimacy of making fun of vulnerable subjects, humanitarian causes or politically correct speeches. In this confrontation, a “misunderstanding” appears which generates irreconcilable positions because they make reference to different ethical and semiotic areas of the discourse and the production of sense among adolescents. At the same time, such misunderstanding disguises another kind of gap, more silent but not less painful, which crosses all boundaries of sociability in the life of adolescents: the “popular” ones with their followers on one side, and the “unpopular” ones and outcast on the other side.

But from a wider perspective we could also see these seemingly unyielding exchanges as “places of negotiation-tension with social meanings and also as ways of social identification-differentiation” (Morduchowicz, 2008, p. 19) which constitute at a local and global level consumption and sociability practices of young people on the socio-digital networks. Nevertheless, we agree with Feixa (2014) that youth cultures are essentially local, although “their artifacts have a global

origin". And, as such, are crossed by both local political and economic realities and by the socio-cultural belonging of young people (p. 41).

Finally, online ethnography brought about a final epistemological reflection which we believe is worth mentioning in this text: it does not matter what concerns us teachers, researchers or professionals in order to understand what adolescents do on the web, and it does not mind whether we situate ourselves in a theoretical or methodological place to understand their competences and digital abilities, it does not seem to be convenient to separate consume, creation and diffusion of knowledge from the production of sense. Digital abilities and transmedia practices represent, above all, symbolic, playful and affective resources in order to manage inclusion and acceptance in the peer world. If we cannot recognize this hard core as an organizer of sense in the biographic space of adolescents, our understanding of their practices on the web will always be limited, incomplete and prejudiced.

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