

## The Commodification of Internet Culture: Online Memes and Differing Perceptions of Their Commercial Uses

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**Abstract :** As products of participatory culture, internet memes represent a global form of interaction with online culture. These digital objects draw upon a rich historical engagement with remix practices that dates back decades: from the copy and paste practices of Dadaism and punk to the re-appropriation techniques of the Situationist International; memes echo a long established form of cultural creativity that pivots on the art of the remix. Online culture has eagerly embraced the changes that the Web 2.0 afforded in terms of making use of remixing as an accessible form of societal expression, bridging these remix practices of the past into a more widely available and accessible platform. Memes embody the idea of 'intercreativity', allowing global creative collaboration to take place through networked digital media; they reflect the core values of participation and interaction that are present throughout much internet discourse whilst also existing in a historical remix continuum. Memes hold the power of cultural symbolism manipulated by global audiences through which societies make meaning, as these remixed digital objects have an elasticity and low literacy level that allows for a democratic form of cultural engagement and meaning-making by and for users around the world. However, because memes are so elastic, their ability to be re-appropriated by other powers for reasons beyond their original intention has become evident. Recently, corporations have made use of internet memes for advertising purposes, engaging in the circulation and re-appropriation of internet memes in commercial spaces - which has, in turn, complicated this relation between online users and memes' democratic possibilities further. By engaging in a widespread online ethnography supplemented by in-depth interviews with meme makers, this research was able to not only track different online meme use through commercial contexts, but it also allowed the possibility to engage in qualitative discussions with meme makers and users regarding their perception and experience of these varying commercial uses of memes. These can be broadly put within two categories: internet memes that are turned into physical merchandise and the use of memes in advertising to sell other (non-meme related) products. Whilst there has been considerable acceptance of the former type of commercial meme use, the use of memes in adverts in order to sell unrelated products has been met with resistance. The changes in reception regarding commercial meme use is dependent on ideas of cultural ownership and perceptions of authorship, ultimately uncovering underlying socio-cultural ideologies that come to the fore within these overlapping contexts. Additionally, this adoption of memes by corporate powers echoes the recuperation process that the Situationist International endured, creating a further link with older remix cultures and their lifecycles.

**Keywords :** commodification, internet culture, memes, recuperation, remix

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