Humour as an advertising resource: memes at the service of brands. The case of Casio

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Abstract

In this study, we investigated the phenomenon of memes generated based on user-generated content (UGC) discourse about the Japanese electronic brand Casio. We collected 150 memes from various platforms and applied a quantitative content analysis methodology to determine the main characteristics of the memes. Additionally, we employed statistical techniques to identify patterns and relationships among the variables studied. The results revealed that user-generated content could be interpreted as an unintentional advertising strategy for the Casio brand. We observed significant similarities in the structure and themes of the memes, indicating a mutual influence among users. Furthermore, we found that mentioning the brand in one of Shakira's songs significantly impacted the meme generation. These findings emphasise the importance of understanding and harnessing the unintentional advertising potential that arises from the interaction between popular culture and brands.

Keywords: Casio, memes, Bizarrap, Shakira, user-generated content

1. Introduction

In the digital era and within the culture of social media, the creation and dissemination of memes have evolved into a compelling form of cultural expression and visual communication. This article analyses the memes that emerged online in response to the musical collaboration between

two prominent artists: the renowned Argentine music producer Bizarrap and the iconic international singer Shakira. The resulting song from this collaboration has achieved viral status on various social media platforms. The memes included in the sample of this study focus on those generated by users concerning Casio, one of the brands mentioned in the song's lyrics. This brand is a Japanese electronics company founded in 1946. It has gained global recognition for its pioneering contributions to manufacturing watches and various electronic devices, including calculators and musical keyboards. With nearly 80 years of experience, Casio has positioned itself as a brand of tradition for the middle classes worldwide and consistently embodies a symbol of durability and quality.

Therefore, this article raises intriguing questions about the interaction of online creativity, pop culture, and brand identity within an ultra-competitive digital environment where immediacy and originality are highly valued skills, especially in the fields of advertising and marketing, where establishing an online presence and creating content that goes viral among users is a sought-after goal.

1.1. Viral communication

Viral communication prompts users themselves to be the ones who transmit a specific message to others, whether it is a video, an event, or a news item, among others. With this, a rapid expansion of the content transmitted is sought (Estrella-Ramón and Segovia-López, 2016). It could be considered the sum of traditional "word of mouth", exponential growth, and social media (Montañés-del Río et al., 2014). In essence, viral communication seeks spontaneity among users, who self-replicate the content, and spreads like a virus among other users. As Gobé (2005) states,

> [w]ord of mouth has credibility because it is based on another person's emotional experience. It is emotional branding at its purest. In today's digital environment, word of mouth is in a different dimension because it is global and immediate. It can influence millions of people in milliseconds.
>
> (Gobé, 2005, p. 281)

What are the elements that influence the virality of a communication campaign? According to Pintado and Sánchez (2018), there are several variables among which the following stand out: (1) that the message reaches opinion leaders: passionate people, experts, communicators, leaders or fans who are part of the brand's audience; (2) that the forwarding occurs in a simple way; (3) brevity; (4) surprise effect, avoiding normality; (5) use of representative elements of the brand that are easy and simple for users to interpret; (6) contents that give rise to parody are easier to viralise, also because the tactic of spontaneity and naturalness is exploited.

In the current technological context, we can observe that humour merges with social media. A significant portion of viral content, both within and outside platforms, carries a humorous element. Bringing this into the realm of advertising, humour also stands out as an intriguing tool for creating value in companies. Ultimately, the primary objective is to make the consumer feel a sense of closeness and trust with the brand, and humorous messages facilitate this connection. The current digital landscape places the "prosumer" (Toffler, 1980) at the centre of communication. This user, who expresses their opinions and engages with the brand, primarily using social media channels such as Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, or TikTok to convey their views, can also be seen as the amplifier that brands need to reach broader audiences. All of this operates from a more emotional perspective than a rational one.

Getting consumers to share content on their social networks and talk about brands, products, or services is one of the primary goals of all advertisers. Kotler (1980), the father of marketing, once said: "Satisfied customers are the best advertisement". On the other hand, Allard (2006)

delves into the creativity that brands need to engage the audience and get closer to consumers than in the realm of more traditional advertising.

1.2. User Generated Content (UGC)

User-generated content (UGC) is one of the pillars upon which internet virality is built. As mentioned earlier, active digital audiences play a fundamental role in the creation and dissemination of content (Scolari and Piñón, 2016). What was once the domain of mass media or brands is now the responsibility of digital users. In this regard, UGC is a critical asset in the dynamics of digital environment relationships (Atarama, 2023), as it energises interaction within the digital spaces where it is disseminated and enriches the interaction of the digital community.

To attract the attention of consumers and achieve greater engagement, advertising agencies must focus on messages that encourage the participation of the target audience by creating content. "Advertising has made the leap from branding to storytelling in a process in which the active participation of potential consumers is essential and ultimately aims to establish an emotional connection with the audience" (Rodríguez-Fidalgo et al., 2017, p. 32).

One of the main advantages behind user-created content is that it builds trust with other potential customers who do not associate the brand with intrusive messages, as advertisements or brand-created content are often perceived to be. It is also a way to increase the reach and traffic of a product or service at a meagre cost. Thus, companies stop creating content and start managing user-created content, implementing marketing strategies with the target audience and not for that audience (Hinojosa, 2017). However, it should be noted that these contents also have disadvantages, as they are unpredictable messages and, as the user has the freedom to express his or her opinion, there is a risk of generating negative comments. In addition, there may be cases in which brands lose some control over the messages and their positioning.

In the current media ecosystem, content consumption is influenced by the relationship that the audience establishes with the various portable devices that favour the creation of UGC. "Access to smartphones and tablets has amplified, changing how users can connect and enjoy their favourite content anytime, anywhere" (Negri, 2015, p. 88). This means opening new possibilities to the initial process of appropriation that is the consumption of content; thus, in the current culture of convergence, we experience "the predominance of the visual that has created new narrative rhythms, new forms of appropriation of culture, knowledge and entertainment" (Rincón, 2008, p. 97).

The traditional positions of viewers in physical space, facing a single screen, and in time, at a specific hour, have evolved to favour ubiquitous consumption through mobile screens, bringing different participants in digital interaction closer together. In this regard, the medium through which content is consumed influences the decoding of the message. Therefore, it is considered relevant for UGC studies to reflect on the medium and how it affects the construction of a fictional story or a brand (Ryan, 2016).

Social media platforms are the most widely used channel to disseminate messages and merge them with original and creative strategies so that users can interact and even create content. This happens in the case of memes, which emerge as a humorous narrative in digital environments (Racioppe and Párraga, 2020), which are the study object of this research. The objective pursued here is to recognise the importance of internet memes in the context of a brand and the phenomena of viral behaviour as modes of transmitting information and opinion.

1.3. The meme as a humorous device

One of the easiest ways to exemplify user-generated content is memes. Internet memes are a digital communication phenomenon that has gained importance over the last decade in different social contexts thanks, in part, to their rapid and constant dissemination on social media. The

biologist Richard Dawkins introduced the concept of *meme* in 1976 to denote cultural units (e.g., phrases) that spread virally. The concept changed with the emergence of Web 2.0 digital where users underwent a transformation from mere consumers to individuals endowed with the capacity to generate information (Bruns, 2008), thus having the advantage of remaining in that anonymity inherent to being a member of an amorphous mass (Wiggins, 2016). In this context, the term *meme* was redefined by Shifman (2013, p. 367) as "units of popular culture that circulate, are imitated and transformed by individual Internet users, creating a shared cultural experience". Some factors inherent to the development of Web 2.0, such as accessibility to digital tools and connectivity, have led to the creation and massive dissemination of memes on the Web in recent years (Makhortykh and González-Aguilar, 2020). To understand the concept of *meme*, Shifman (2014) proposed a classification of three genres of memes based on still images: memetic photos (edited with a computer programme), image macros (images with text superimposed on them) and photographic fads (photographs of people posing in a certain way). However, the conventional meme could be understood as an image accompanied by a text that completes the context for its full understanding.

The rise in popularity of memes in the digital environment is due, among other things, to their importance in communicating different ideas and adapting to any situation, no matter how serious or banal. Memes have become a standard frame of reference for acting and discussing a wide range of topics (Seiffert-Brockmann et al., 2018). Moreover, they are polysemous and open to diverse interpretations (Paz-Rebollo et al., 2021). Likewise, their ability to provoke highly arousing emotions (Shifman, 2014) and their capacity to adapt different cultural texts (Wutz and Nugteren, 2018) position them as almost indispensable elements of contemporary digital language (Xu et al., 2016). The memes' close relationship with global popular culture makes it easy to understand them. They are thus the result of intentional production and consumption due to social and cultural connections experienced online and offline (Wiggins, 2016). While memes do not easily lend themselves to expressing complex situations and identities (Wolf, 2015), they can express more complex ideas.

Memes often use humour to communicate ideas or messages ranging from the absurd to the offensive (Williams et al., 2016) and often seek to engage the user, who must complete the idea to understand the final joke. This involves understanding references to cultural and social issues, popular and alternative culture, general knowledge and media awareness, and internet and political literacy, among other aspects (Denisova, 2019).

As mentioned above, memes are polysemic and open to various interpretations, and while it is the receiver's role to interpret their meaning, the socio-cultural environment significantly contributes to building the coherence of the message (Johann & Bülow, 2019, p. 1723). In other cases, for example, when using certain iconic or historical images, the context takes a back seat due to their symbolic weight, which facilitates meme interpretation. However, the constant recycling and editing of such images can lead the original image to acquire a radically different meaning (Boudana et al., 2017).

1.4. Humour and advertising

Humour and wit create virality, are easily consumed, and transmit the advertising message very effectively (López-Lita and Farrán, 2010; Valiente-Alber, 2016; Hernández-Toribio, 2017). In times when users are impacted by an infinite number of messages and advertisements, humour is a resource that is gaining strength to create advertising content. Advertising campaigns have evolved from the rational to the emotional, using humour, as Bassat (2014) states:

Humour is the most successful creative path in recent decades. Years ago, it was said that humour travelled badly, but this is untrue. You only have to look at the most important creative festivals in the world to see that the spots that use humour are at the top of the list.

(Bassat, 2014, p. 98)

Thus, this humorous strategy is used to achieve the emotional adhesion of the listener and the subsequent purchase of products and services (Sola-Pueyo et al., 2021). One of the reasons why the use of humour in advertising has become popular is because of its ability to generate *insights*, a term widely used in marketing and advertising, which refers to "truths and/or subjective experiences that are revealing and relevant to the consumer, based on deep motivations that, when used in persuasive communication, allow reinforcing the link between brand and consumer, connecting with the consumer as a person" (Castelló-Martínez, 2019, p. 32). With this resource, creatives bring consumers closer to the product, generating complicity, affinity and engagement, that is, commitment and loyalty to the brand (Valiente-Alber, 2016). When viewers find an ad funny, they immediately want to share it, thus becoming brand prescribers. In fact, as Valiente-Alber (2016, p. 15) states, "[t]his is one of the main advantages, virality, that Calder and Maltouse (2008, p. 5) attribute to engagement". Advertising is evolving as it seeks to generate notoriety and impact to achieve effective results, adapting to a demanding public.

This relationship between humour and advertising strategies also includes Internet memes, which stand out as a resource for virality and engagement. This study aims to contribute to the field of *meme marketing*, which has received little scientific attention (Brubaker et al., 2018; Chuah et al., 2020; Taecharungroj & Nueangjamnong, 2015). However, with the rise of native advertising, memes have evolved into a powerful advertising tool: brands have started to introduce them in their digital marketing campaigns to reach, above all, a young audience that is on social networks (Meer et al., 2022). New generations tend to be irritated by online advertising (Andersen, 2008; Sandberg, 2011) and a widespread attitude towards mobile devices because it interrupts their activity (Martinez et al., 2013; Roth-Cohen et al., 2022). This irritation is softened when they perceive in it some utility (rewards, discounts, promotions) or entertainment (Martí-Parreño et al., 2013; Martínez et al., 2013; Martínez, 2019). Meme marketing is effective because persuasive intentionality is more subtle; it is a form of communication oriented to transmit brand values and build community (Meer et al., 2022). Along these lines, memes are fuelled by current and relevant events that brands leverage to connect with consumers' feelings and generate memorable experiences (Csordás et al., 2017).

At the same time, meme marketing provides relevant information for advertisers as they are publications that encourage users to share their opinions and interact with each other, which facilitates the effective collection of feedback from potential consumers about their products and brands (Brubaker et al., 2018). Thus, the value of a successful meme transcends any measure of its virality and reach (Razzaq et al., 2023), so much so that several studies highlight the potential impact of meme marketing on consumer purchase intentions (Meer et al., 2022).

Humour is also a key ingredient in meme marketing (Taecharungroj & Nueangjamnong, 2015; Bury, 2016; Yang, 2022); these campaigns achieve more virality when they are grounded in an appropriate style of humour and are relevant, iconic, and easily replicable (Malodia et al., 2022). Along these lines, Yang (2022) concludes that advertising memes with humorous overtones achieves positive attitudes toward the publication and a greater intention to share it on social networks. However, Yang (2022) warns that using funny memes can hurt brand recall. Similarly, Sharma (2018) gathers that unlike traditional media, which allow marketing communication to be tightly controlled, memes are uncontrollable and largely user-generated, another issue that can be observed as a disadvantage.

2. Rationale and research questions

For some years now, memes have proven to be an effective way of spreading viral messages and generating interactions on social media. Their potential has been proven in different areas, and some brands have now included this tool in their brand communication strategies. Taking advantage of the mention of the Casio brand in the song BZRP Music Sessions #53 by Shakira and Bizarrap, we wanted to analyse the image projected by memes about the brand online. The novelty of this study lies in the fact that the memes analysed were not produced by Casio's communication managers but rather constitute UGC, which has gone viral. The development of this study is based on an interest in understanding the impact of this user-generated content and, in particular, Internet memes on the advertising and promotion of a brand in the digital environment.

In this context, our research seeks to answer three research questions:

RQ1- What advertising characteristics are observed in Casio's viral memes?
Even though we are dealing with UGC, one of our main objectives is to define which advertising features stand out in the viral memes of the Casio brand.

RQ2- Do the language, communication objective, creative resources, or brand features of memes differ depending on their intentions?
We want to find out if there is a relationship between the variable of intention and other descriptive factors of memes, such as language, communication objective, creative resources, or brand features. The aim is to observe whether there is a characteristic pattern of memes with negative, positive or neutral intention.

RQ3- What impact has the mention of the brand in Shakira and Bizarrap's BZRP Music Sessions #53 had on Casio's viral memes? Are there significant differences in the (a) communication objective, (b) intention, (c) creative resource, or (d) brand features that the meme focuses on?
As a trigger for this study, the aim is to investigate the influence that the mention of the Casio brand in Shakira and Bizarrap's song has had on the memes analysed to reflect on whether this appearance in the song has fostered changes in the content of these memes.

Overall, this descriptive and exploratory study will provide valuable information on the advertising characteristics of Casio's viral memes, the relationship between meme intention and different factors, as well as the incidence of brand mention. In this case, the results will contribute to a better understanding of the use of UGC, particularly brand-related memes. This study is also intended as research to help decipher advertising traits in this type of user-generated content.

3. Methodology

To conduct our study, we collected memes related to the Casio brand by searching social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter and search engines such as Google and Yahoo. Subsequently, we expanded the sample by searching on the platforms 9Gag and Reddit, which favour producing and disseminating memes (Wagener, 2014; Milosavljevic, 2020; Barnes et al., 2021). Specific keywords such as "Casio memes", "Casio watch memes" and "Casio Shakira memes" were used. We downloaded the memes on two consecutive days, 27 and 28 February

2023, and we excluded those related to Casio brand calculators due to their low number (11 memes). The final sample consisted of 150 memes.

With the material collected, we carried out a content analysis with a more significant predominance of interpretation over quantification (Andréu, 2002). Based on this approach, we drew up an analysis sheet to describe the creative content of the memes under study and their link with the Shakira song. The study variables taken into account to analyse each meme are listed in Table 1.

Table 1. Categories and variables of analysis

Language	● English ● Spanish ● Another
Communication objective (Based on Bassat, 2014)	● Brand image ● To make a product feature known ● Another
Intention	● Positive ● Negative ● Neutral
Argumentation (Based on Bassat, 2014)	● Rational ● Emotional ● Both
Brand features (Based on Fernández-Gómez et al., 2023)	● Durability ● Battery ● Price ● Functions ● Technology ● Design ● Pop culture
Creative resources (Based on Bassat, 2014)	● Demonstration: to highlight how the product (i.e. Casio watches) operates in the everyday life of the consumer. ● Comparison: to demonstrate how Casio watches surpass those of the competition. ● Analogy: compare two concepts or ideas in a manner that enhances consumer message comprehension. ● Visual symbol: graphic or iconic element representing the Casio brand or product. ● Celebrities: the utilisation of renowned individuals, such as actors or athletes. ● Testimonial: to display real opinions or experiences from satisfied customers with the product or brand. ● Lifeline: to demonstrate how a Casio watch can enhance the consumer's life or well-being. ● News: presentation of new or relevant information about the product or brand. ● Proximity: geographic or emotional proximity to the product. ● Love/lovelessness: positive emotions or a sense of need towards the product or brand.

	●Nostalgia: the utilisation of elements from the past to evoke positive emotions and memories in consumers
Meme related to Shakira's song	●Yes ●No

Source: own elaboration (based on Bassat, 2014; Fernández-Gómez et al., 2023)

We employed a statistical analysis using the SPSS software package version 25.0. To answer RQ2 and RQ3, a chi-square test was performed to analyse the relationship between the dependent variables (communication objective, argumentation, brand traits, creative resources) and the independent variables (meme intention and incidence of Shakira's song).

4. Results

4.1. Descriptive analysis of the Casio memes

As noted in the methodology, the analysis sample is made up of 150 memes extracted from a crawl of the leading search engines on the Web. It is essential to underline that this study focuses on studying the thematic content of memes designed by users, which allows us to understand the type of engagement generated between consumers and brands.

We found that most of the creations collected are in Spanish (70%) (Example: Figure 1), and less than a third use English (28.7%) (Example: Figure 2). As we can observe in Table 2, the memes exploit Casio's brand image, i.e., they revolve around the brand's attributes; only 12.7% of the cases focus on highlighting a specific feature of a product (in this case, watches).

Figure 1. Meme that highlights the durability of the watch battery.
Translation: "Everyone talks about the infinite battery life of these"
"They forget about these"

Source: Google Images (https://es.memedroid.com/memes/detail/1413010)

Figure 2. Meme with positive intent and comparing a Casio with an Apple Watch.
Source: Google Images (https://imgflip.com/i/1toq9m)

As a point of interest on a communicational level, 58% of the memes analysed have a positive approach (see Figures 1-2), constructively referring to the brand in affective terms, which is a remarkable fact, as it should not be forgotten that this is content created voluntarily by the users. 24.7% of the examples are neutral, and 17.3% have negative intentionality.

Table 2. Advertising objectives of the memes

		Frequency	Percentage
LANGUAGE	Spanish	105	70.0
	English	43	28.7
	Another	2	1.3
OBJECTIVE OF COMMUNICATION	Brand image	126	84.0
	To make a product feature known	19	12.7
	Another	5	3.3
INTENT	Positive	87	58.0
	Negative	26	17.3
	Neutral	37	24.7
ARGUMENTATION	Rational	2	1.3
	Emotional	129	86.0
	Both	19	12.7

The argumentation used is mainly emotional (86%) (see Figure 2), which is to be expected in content where humour is the main ingredient. As for the brand features most users highlight through memes, the most prominent by far is price, which is present in almost half of the cases analysed. Secondly, pop culture is also recurrently associated with the brand (21.3%). This pop

culture is represented by cartoon characters such as Shrek (Figure 3), The Simpsons, or SpongeBob SquarePants; other frequently mentioned characteristics were the functions associated with the watch (16.7%) and its durability (12.7%) (see Figure 4). In terms of the creative resources used in the memes, there was a preference for proximity issues (76.7%) and current affairs (50%), which are frequent in the creation of real-time content such as memes; secondly, famous characters were also used (40%), and resources such as comparison (37.3%) and nostalgia (29.3%) were used.

Figure 3. An example of the relationship between Casio and Pop Culture
Source: 9GAG https://9gag.com/gag/aKE6876

Table 3. Brand features and creative resources of the memes

		Frequency	Percentage
BRAND FEATURES	Durability	19	12.7
	Battery	9	6.0
	Price	68	45.3
	Functions	25	16.7
	Technology	11	7.3
	Design	11	7.3
	Pop culture	32	21.3
CREATIVE RESOURCES	Demonstration	8	5.3
	Comparison	56	37.3
	Analogy	22	14.7
	Visual symbol	12	8.0
	Celebrities	60	40.0
	Testimonial	1	0.7
	Life line	15	10.0
	News	75	50.0
	Proximity	115	76.7
	Love/lovelessness	2	1.3
	Nostalgia	44	29.3

When we performed Pearson's chi-square test between the variables of intentionality and brand traits, we found a statistical relationship between the two. Specifically, meme intentionality is associated with durability (χ^2(2, N=150)= 15.754, p=.000); with battery-related characteristics (χ^2(2, N=150)= 6.933, p=.031) (Example Figure 1); price (χ^2(2, N=150)= 23.991, p=.000); features (χ^2(2, N=150)= 11.110, p=.004) and pop culture (χ^2(2, N=150)= 13.078, p=.001). Thus, as shown in Table 4, although price also has a positive connotation in 34.5% of the cases analysed (see Figure 3), most (88.5%) of the memes with a negative focus used price as the main argument. Three cases stand out: the use of popular culture, the mention of the durability of watches, and the mention of the functions of Casio watches. We found mostly memes with positive and neutral intention in these three cases. The mention of functions is the only variable where we found a meme with negative intent.

Table 4. Features of Casio watches mentioned in memes

	Positive (N=87)		Negative (N=26)		Neutral (N=37)	
Durability*	19	21.8%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Battery*	9	10.3%	9	34.6%	9	24.3%
Price*	30	34.5%	23	88.5%	15	40.5%
Functions*	22	25.3%	1	3.8%	2	5.4%
Pop culture*	18	20.7%	0	0.0%	14	37.8%
					*Chi-square < 0.05 - Dependent variables	

There is also an association between the intentionality variable and some categories defined in the creative resources' variable. As Table 5 shows, the focus given to the meme is related to the use of demonstration (χ^2(2, N=150)= 6.119, p=.047); comparison (χ^2(2, N=150)= 22.649, p=.000); life trace (χ^2(2, N=150)= 33,576, p=.000); topicality (χ^2(2, N=150)= 18,965, p=.000); proximity (χ^2(2, N=150)= 7,668, p=.022) and nostalgia (χ^2(2, N=150)= 6,748, p=.034) (see Figure 2). As previously indicated, proximity was the most frequently used resource for the memes under analysis. However, it is used in virtually all memes with a negative focus (96.2%), as well as the resource of topicality (88.5%). In memes with a positive focus, comparison (52.9%) and appeals to nostalgia (36.8%) are frequent tactics.

Table 5. Creative advertising resources used in memes

	Positive (N=87)		Negative (N=26)		Neutral (N=37)	
Demonstration*	8	9.2%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Comparison*	46	52.9%	2	7.7%	8	21.6%
Stroke of life*	0	0.0%	10	38.5%	5	13.5%
Current affairs*	38	43.7%	23	88.5%	14	37.8%
Proximity*	61	70.1%	25	96.2%	29	78.4%
Nostalgia*	32	36.8%	3	11.5%	9	24.3%
					*Chi-square < 0.05 - Dependent variables	

4.2. Impact of Shakira's song on meme content

One of the added values of this study is to check the impact that the song BZRP Music Sessions #53 by Shakira and Bizarrap, in which the brand is mentioned, has had on the creativity of memes about Casio. The song is a dedication by Colombian singer Shakira (in collaboration with Argentine music producer Bizarrap) to her ex-husband Gerard Piqué, a former professional football player. In the lyrics of the song, the singer makes a negative reference to the Casio brand, comparing it unfavourably to the luxury watch brand Rolex (*You traded a Ferrari for a Twingo, you traded a Rolex for a Casio*). Of the total sample, half of the memes found alluded directly to the song's theme (N=75). The creations under this thematic line mainly allude to Casio's brand image (64 out of 75).

In this category of memes, intentionality introduced significant differences ($\chi2(2, N=150)= 19.586, p=.00$). More than half of the memes (39 out of 75) related to Shakira's lyrics have a positive approach to the brand (see Figures 4-5); however, 88% of the memes categorised as unfavourable are also linked to Shakira's song (23 out of 26).

Figure 4. Meme as a response to the song that compares a Casio watch and a Rolex.
Translation: Casio part: - Lasts 30 years - You are able to play football using the topwatch - 00:00 Goaaaal. Rolex part: -You have to be careful not to get it stolen - You are not able to play football using the stopwatch.
Source: Twitter (https://twitter.com/memes_zamora/status/1613535119813365760)

Figure 5. Meme as a response to the song
Source: Reddit
https://www.reddit.com/r/MurderedByWords/comments/10bslnw/casio_just_absolutely_nuke
d_shakira_from_orbit/

Figure 6. Meme as a response to the song. Translation: Shakira: "You exchanged a Rolex for a Casio".
Source: Twitter https://twitter.com/edinterpol/status/1613359769468956678

Next, we pay attention to the characteristics that stand out about the brand. In this case, it is also worth noting that there is an association between the study variables, as shown in Table 6. Thus, the meme about the Shakira and Piqué controversy is statistically related to the attributes price ($\chi2(1, N=150)= 13.020, p=. 000$), functions ($\chi2(1, N=150)= 17.328, p=.000$), technology ($\chi2(1, N=150)= 4.807, p=.028$) and pop culture ($\chi2(1, N=150)= 3.972, p=.046$) (see

Figure 6). We observe that the memes about Shakira and Piqué focus mainly on exploiting the price feature of Casio watches, a feature mentioned in the song.

Table 6. Memes related to the Shakira's song

		Price*		Functions*		Technology*		Pop culture*	
Meme related to Shakira/Piqué	No	3	33.8%	22	88.0%	9	81.8%	21	65.6%
	Yes	5	66.2%	3	12.0%	2	18.2%	11	34.4%
	Total	8	100.0%	25	100.0%	11	100.0%	32	100.0%
*Chi-square < 0.05 - Dependent variables									

Finally, we calculated that there is an association between the variable that categorises memes related to Shakira and Piqué and the creative resources variable, specifically with the resources of comparison ($\chi2(1, N=150)= 16.413, p=.000$) (see Figures 4 and 7), analogy ($\chi2(1, N=150)= 10.440, p=.001$) (see Figure 7) ; celebrities ($\chi2(1, N=150)= 40.111, p=.000$); topicality ($\chi2(1, N=150)= 92.827, p=.000$); proximity ($\chi2(1, N=150)= 23.292, p=.000$) and nostalgia ($\chi2(1, N=150)= 32.933, p=.000$) (see Figure 8). As shown in Table 7, the most used elements in this meme profile were the use of topicality (89.3%), celebrities (81.7%) and proximity (60.9%) to create complicity with the audience. Nostalgia, analogy and comparison were less frequent in this profile of memes about Casio.

Table 7. Creative resources used in memes referring to the song

		Comparison*		Analogy*		Celebrities		News*		Proximity*		Nostalgia*	
Meme related to Shakira/ Piqué	No	40	71.4%	18	81.8%	11	18.3%	8	10.7%	45	39.1%	38	6.4%
	Yes	16	28.6%	4	18.2%	49	81.7%	67	89.3%	70	60.9%	6	3.6%
	Total	56	100.0%	22	100.0%	60	100.0%	75	100.0%	115	00.0%	44	100%
*Chi-square < 0.05 - Dependent variables													

Figure 7: Example of creative resources (Analogy and Comparison) used in the memes.
Source: Google Images https://www.fanpage.it/spettacolo/gossip/cambi-una-ferrari-per-una-twingo-clara-chia-risponde-alla-canzone-di-shakira-contro-lei-e-pique/

Figure 8: Example of creative resources (Nostalgia) used in the memes. Translation: "If you didn't have one of these, you didn't have a childhood".
Source: Google Images https://www.dopl3r.com/memes/graciosos/si-no-tuviste-uno-de-estos-casio-f-91w-ught-alarm-chronograph-pm-su-30-058so-ili-alarm-onoff4hr-water-nr-resist-no-tuviste-infancia/198735

5. Discussion

In this study, we analysed memes related to the Casio brand. Our findings highlight some points that can contribute to the current understanding of the link between humour and advertising features within the digital environment, specifically through user-generated content. From a general point of view, our results also help to understand another side of humour conceived as a communicative tool with advertising objectives. It is true that in this article, we focus on scenarios where users produce information in the form of a meme in a wholly voluntary and spontaneous way, i.e. it is not a call to action from the Casio brand but rather users, based on their loyalty to the brand, include it in the memes and make it part of their digital communicative process. In this case, what is particularly relevant is not only the intention of the meme (to value or underestimate the brand) but also the attachment that digital users have to this brand, which is understood as part of popular culture and used as the basis of a humorous, comical or funny message. Our results show that the Casio brand is a brand that is well-valued by the audience, that is part of popular culture, and that also lends itself to developing a humorous narrative in a constructive and valuable way for the company itself.

In response to RQ1, we observe that the memes related to the Casio brand have a primarily positive intention and tend to highlight the general attributes of the brand rather than a common characteristic. We also observed that their argumentation is preferably emotional rather than rational, in line with new advertising trends. This result may be associated with the affective characteristic of memes (Makhortykh and González-Aguilar, 2020) in which users relate the brand to something close or familiar. It should be borne in mind that we are talking about a brand that is well known by society at a global level and with more than seventy years of experience (founded in 1946), standing out among other things for its low prices and the longevity of its products, attributes that are also valued in some of the memes analysed.

Concerning RQ2, we found that several factors influence the intention of the meme. Firstly, it seems appropriate to mention that our sample contained memes in both Spanish and English, which reflects the popularity of the brand at a global level, and this adaptation of the humorous texts in two languages responds to the intertextuality of memes as an example of contemporary digital culture (Laineste and Voolaid, 2016). Shifman (2014) suggests that the more

interpretations the meme contains, the greater its popularity. In this case, our analysis starts by analysing memes in two languages that contain affinities when satirising the brand. As for the relationship between the intention of the meme and the language, we can deduce that the rough intention of the memes in Spanish could be related to a humorous cultural aspect, even related to this struggle of social classes where the brand is related to lower socio-economic strata.

Our findings show a certain similarity in the use of some creative resources in producing memes, regardless of whether the intention is positive or negative. Memes use proximity and topicality as their primary creative tools. However, it is essential to mention that memes with a positive intention also often use the nostalgia effect and comparison as resources. This particularity presents the meme as a humorous element with the ability to rescue elements of the past to enhance its understanding and interpretation. This result also shows that Casio watches are understood as resistant and have good quality elements. It starts with humorous and satirical content, but comparing the watches with other more valuable brands, such as Apple or Rolex, suggests that Casio has a good reputation, at least from the users' point of view.

The results concerning the test between intentionality and brand traits also yielded interesting information for analysis. In this case, in the production of memes, price was used to highlight and defend the brand and denigrate it through this satirisation of the lower social classes. On the other hand, the memes with a positive intention preferentially emphasised the functions and durability of the watches. These results are not entirely surprising, as it should be remembered that these watches are also known to include a calculator, games, and compass and are also known to last for many years. The meme creators rely on precisely these attributes to put the brand above its "competitors".

In response to RQ3, we found that the mention of the Casio brand in Bizarrap and Shakira's song had a very significant impact on the content of the memes. In this case, we can conclude that this production of memes related to the song is associated with an utterly sentimental element. It should not be forgotten that the mention of the brand in the song is made in a derogatory way "You swapped a Rolex for a Casio", so we could consider this phrase an involuntary "call to action" in which several users came to the defence of Casio watches and began to produce memes that protect their long tradition as the companions of the middle and lower classes. This seems to be an essential issue since it relates to representation and a specific dispute between social strata. In this case, the representation of the lower social strata is both positive and negative. Satire and ridicule are indeed found in both cases. However, the memes with positive intentions, besides highlighting some characteristics already mentioned, are also perceived as a manifestation of pride in using Casio watches. In those memes, and from a humorous point of view, the watch becomes the dignified and unpretentious representative of the middle and lower classes. On the other hand, memes with a negative intention try to ridicule people who wear Casio watches by underlining their economic poverty.

This mention not only reinforces the communication objective by focusing attention on Casio watches but also influences the intention of the meme by highlighting their features and benefits. In addition, including the brand in the meme content led to greater diversity in the creative resources used, from comparisons with other brands to the humanisation of the brand and even the watches.

It is also important to note that this satirisation of social classes through the memes analysed is somewhat harmless. It is indeed associated with class struggle. However, we did not find messages that could be considered hate speech, unlike in other environments, such as the case of memes referring to political issues (Paz-Rebollo et al., 2021) or to issues related to the mediatisation of history (González-Aguilar and Makhortykh, 2022), where their nature is more aggressive and prejudicial to particular groups, as well as containing messages with more foul humour.

6. Conclusion

This study is a clear example of how the mixture of humour and popular culture gives rise to practices that can be understood even in other fields, such as advertising and marketing. Not all the memes analysed clearly had a positive intention concerning the Casio brand. However, given the ultra-competitive digital scenario we find ourselves in today, the brand can and should value these practices that place its products above its competitors. Perhaps we can even quote the Irish poet and playwright Oscar Wilde when he says that "The only thing worse than being talked about is not being talked about".

In short, this study sought to reflect on UGC's contribution to the brand's image and how the audience contributes to the strengthening and transmission of its values. In this case, memes that generate engagement through humour are produced spontaneously by users who enrich and expand Casio's brand world and contribute much communicative value. This is a construction of the brand image in which not only the sender participates but also all the receivers collaboratively, an excellent challenge for companies as they no longer have absolute control over their messages, but which give truth and honesty to their communications. It is essential to understand that social networks demand interactivity, participation, and co-production, hence if a brand wants to be on these platforms, it must be willing to give space to its audience and to generate community communication, assuming the risks, but also exploiting the advantages and the value generated by UGC.

Among the limitations of our analysis, we can cite, firstly, the difficulty in collecting the sample. Our main idea was to extract memes from one or two platforms at most (Facebook and Twitter). However, as we began the collection work, we realised that we would have to look at other types of platforms to compile a solid sample. Perhaps analysing memes from a single platform would have allowed us to find other interesting features to understand the digital humour discourse in specific social networks. Another important limitation was that we could not compare our results with similar studies, as we did not find any references that dealt with the meme from an advertising point of view and as a brand image enhancer in the user's hand. This also opens the door to future research, and it would be interesting to continue this line of research on the role of user-generated humorous content in the context of advertising. So far, existing research tends to examine the role of memes based on marketing strategies previously proposed by brands. However, it is essential to pay attention also to the spontaneous communication of digital users and how it can manifest transcendental features of the brand, even if the content is treated in a humorous and even superficial way. It would also be interesting to measure the engagement of memes. Although it is also important to mention that, to a certain extent, the digital conversation is migrating to more private communication channels such as Telegram or Whatsapp, so in this scenario, it is not easy to calculate the absolute penetration of the content and the participation or interaction with it.

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