Internet memes as an information dissemination tool for libraries: the Ateneo de Manila University experience

Karryl Kim A Sagun* 

Ateneo de Manila University, Katipunan Avenue, Loyola Heights, Quezon City 1108 Philippines

Abstract

An increasing popularity of Internet memes can be observed particularly among college students. Websites such as 9gag, Reddit, and 4chan provide a venue for these memes to be visited by the general public. Having observed this trend, the Rizal Library of the Ateneo de Manila University embarked on a strategy to use Internet memes as an information dissemination tool. The initial phase involved creating social media accounts for the Rizal Library to serve as the initial source of information. After which, various marketing strategies were implemented to amplify the followership of the aforementioned accounts, therefore increasing the figures of the targeted audience. The final phase involved creation of the memes and the evaluation of results. After the completion of the project, statistics reflected an exponential growth in the reach of the advertisements posted by the Rizal Library, with the audience themselves contributing to the information dissemination process. This can be supported by the enhanced usage of the services and collections which were promoted using memes.

Keywords: Internet memes; information dissemination; libraries; social media; Ateneo de Manila University; Rizal Library; Philippines

1. Background

The Rizal Library of the Ateneo de Manila University kept itself occupied in the past years by continuously building its collection and improving its services. It prides itself in its unique special collections, namely, the Ateneo Library of Women’s Writings (ALIWW), a collection of manuscripts and other realia by and about influential Filipino women, the American Historical Collection (AHC), with materials from the American regime in the Philippines, and the Pardo de Tavera Library and Archives, which houses donated materials from

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +632 426 6001 local 5559; fax: +632 426 6001 local 5564. 
E-mail address: ksgun@ateneo.edu
influential Filipino families, and is considered a rich collection of materials on Philippine culture. During the past half decade, it has managed to construct two buildings for its expanding collection and growing number of users. Aside from that, it keeps itself abreast with current library practices, such as e-collections, ubiquitous access for library materials, and various digitization projects for preservation and access purposes. However, despite these efforts, statistics reflect low usage for library materials. Announcements also have a very small reach, with very few students knowing about training schedules, changes in hours, and events in the library. Management decided it was high time to give more importance to marketing. Aside from exploiting the gains from the various expenses the library has incurred to service its clients, it is also important to conduct marketing for institutions such as the Rizal Library to gain political, social, and economic support. (Naikwadi & Chaskar quoting Kotler, 2012). The move was not only necessary; it was also long overdue. The institution then hired an Assistant to the Director for Special Programs and Events in 2011 to focus solely on marketing and promotions. She started with getting to know the different market segments, and found out that the largest mass of the client base was not being marketed to: the undergraduate students. This group was found to be composed of millennials, born between years 1980 to 2000, the era of the computer, and are proficient in working with technology. (Beekman, 2011) They are further described by Solheim (2012) as individuals who “grew up with video games and tend to interact over their smart phones.” In the same article it was said that social media plays a vital role in their lives.

It has been evident in the social media sphere that Internet memes have been gaining popularity during the past few years, with websites such as 9gag, Reddit, and 4chan providing venues for these memes to propagate. Masterpasqua (2010) defined memes as “bits of information that replicate themselves; they can exist in brains as well as in any number of other storage devices, from books to the Internet.” Thus, it is natural or innate for a meme to replicate itself, even those found on the Internet. This has been the premise of this study: that memes can prove to be an important information dissemination tool for libraries—particularly for promotion of its collection and services as well as for circulating important announcements. Furthermore, Bell (2013) described the importance of using memes in her column, Belltones. According to her, “students of all ages are in tune with popular culture and love tie-ins that show teachers, librarians, and other educators are as well.” She adds that memes appeal to people across different age groups. This information served as the basis for the marketing plan of attack to use social media and Internet memes as an information dissemination tool in the Rizal Library. The strategy was implemented by the second semester of academic year 2011-2012.

2. Marketing via Internet memes

2.1 Preparation of Social Media

While the Rizal Library did have its own Facebook and Twitter accounts since 2010, the use of these accounts was not very utilized. The Facebook account had only 2,000 likes, while no more than 900 users were following its Twitter account. This is a far cry from the University’s approximately 10,000 students. Moreover, the accounts were being used to post traditional announcements, with a formal status update informing the community of changes in schedule, public holidays, among others.
To improve its utilization, various marketing activities were conducted in 2011 to increase the followership of these accounts. Updating the accounts regularly was the first step conducted. Posting quotes from books, asking engaging questions to help initiate interaction, and holding contests from time to time were performed by the Library.
Followership doubled at this time, and it was evident that the market was ripe for picking—there were enough people to see and share the memes as they are posted.

2.2 Implementation and Results

The strategy initially targeted the most resource-intensive yet underutilized services of the Rizal Library: 1) EBSCO off-campus online database access, and 2) Readers Advisory Service. Being an institution from a third world country, subscribing to EBSCOhost databases and technology services entailed a huge chunk of the institution’s budget. It was still, however, found highly important by the Library as it is the “the most-used, premium online information resources for tens of thousands of institutions worldwide, representing millions of end-users.” (“EBSCO Publishing”, 2011) Readers Advisory Service, on the other hand, was very expensive in terms of labor, as three professional reference librarians were hired to conduct this service.

The strategy employed to use Internet memes was further utilized to market openings for student assistantships, changes in schedule, and new collaborative spaces within the library. In 2011, posters of these memes were posted on the social networking sites of the institution. These were augmented by printed posters situated inside strategic places within the building, such as elevator waiting areas, computer terminals, and doorways.

2.2.1 Marketing Underutilized Services

EBSCO off-campus online database access would allow students to view and download e-articles in the comforts of their own home. Thus, the library is able to provide service even after the working hours of its employees. While this is a useful service for students, there is still room for improvement in terms of usage statistics. Pre-implementation, there were only 1,417 password requests. This reflects low usage if these figures will be compared to the 10,000 students of the University. In the same manner, Readers Advisory Services, or one-on-one consultations with librarians is one of the standard reference services offered by academic libraries, yet the Rizal Library only garnered two during the year 2010-2011.
After implementation of the project, a significant improvement in usage of the two services was observed, as password requests increased by 39%. On the other hand, the number of Readers Advisory requestors recorded a 2500% increase, rising to 52 sign-ups in 2011-2012, after the strategy has been implemented.

The memes for the two aforementioned services were posted on the Rizal Library’s social networking accounts. The poster for the EBSCO off-campus access garnered 406 “likes” and 285 “shares” on Facebook, while the poster for Readers Advisory Service acquired 545 “likes” and 147 “shares”.

2.2.1 Use of Memes for Announcements

The Rizal Library has had openings for student assistants for the past couple of years, but had no applicants for the posts. In the same manner, students were being informed by the library of changes in schedule, but only a few have been reached by the said announcements. Thus, it has been decided that the same strategy implemented to promote the aforementioned underutilized services be used for important announcements as well. Results show a positive outcome, as post-implementation, the institution has received 91 applicants and counting.
In applying memes to its announcements, the Rizal Library has achieved a farther-reaching effect for its posts, with its audience “sharing” or “reblogging” the posts, hereby helping extend the reach of the announcements. Announcements have also increased their reach exponentially, with 317 “likes” and 71 “shares” for the term break schedule announcement, and 119 “likes” and 105 “shares” for the availability of the Roofdeck Study Hall.

3. Conclusion

Memes proved to be a very effective means of conveying a message to the Rizal Library’s clients. With an expanding followership for its social media accounts, and a continuing popularity for Internet memes, the Rizal Library intends to continue using this medium to promote its other services and collection. In the same manner, the institution shall continue to use memes to post announcements and exploit the multiplier effect of this method. The Facebook account of the Rizal Library now has over 7,000 likes, and its Twitter account has garnered over 5,000 followers, and an increasing trend is foreseen for the academic years to come.

References

Masterpasqua, F. (2010). What are memes, and what do they contribute to our understanding?. *Psycritiques, 55*(47), doi:10.1037/a0021858

Appendix A. Internet Memes Used for Underutilized Services

A.1. EBSCO Off-campus Access Password
A.2. Readers Advisory Service

**PAPER ON BAZOOKANOMICS USING 50 PEER-REVIEWED ARTICLES CITED AT LEAST 10 TIMES**

**DUE TOMORROW**

**THE NEXT DAY...**

**LIBRARIANS**

**CHECK-OUT!** We’re loaning out librarians for one-on-one sessions to HELP YOU OUT IN YOUR RESEARCH during hell weeks. Sign up for a free appointment at the Reference Counter (G/F, New Lib).
Appendix B. Internet Memes Used for Announcements

B.1. Term Break Opening

B.2. Roofdeck Study Hall Availability
B.3. Student Assistantship Program

SO YOU’RE TELLING ME
I CAN SPEND TIME IN THE RIZAL LIB AND GET PAID AT THE SAME TIME?