Memes as Images that Envisage Social Representations in Social Media. The Case of Internet Memes on Remote Teaching during the COVID-19 Confinement

SILVIA GUTIÉRREZ VIDRIO[1], YAZMÍN CUEVAS CAJIGA[2]

[1] Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, Xochimilco, México

[2] Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, México

In recent years, the study of social representations through images, icons, drawings, and the like, has attracted the attention of researchers interested in analyzing the role visual devices play in the elaboration and interpretation of Social Representations and Social Imaginary. Along the same lines, in this paper we study some visual elements that can provide relevant information for exploring and reconstructing social representations. These visual units are called Memes "units of popular culture that are circulated, imitated, and transformed by individual Internet users, creating a shared cultural experience in the process" (Shifman, 2013, p. 367); they generate and shape the mindsets and significant forms of behavior and actions of a social group.

Memes spread a particular idea as presented in images, animated GIFs, videos, written text, or some other units of cultural practices. They give rise to the materialization of the expression of a given social reality within which individuals and social groups live which is why we consider them as useful tool for communicating and reconstructing social representations. During the COVID-19 confinement, many internet memes circulated but

we decided to study those on remote learning and teaching since education in that period was a great challenge. The corpus of study was gathered by manually tagged searches on social media such as *Facebook, Reddit and Twitter* using the following hashtags: *#virtualeducation*, *#remoteteaching*, *#pandemicandschool*. The internet memes analyzed show the difficulties students faced when they were confronted with remote teaching and the emotional states they experienced. These expressions and meanings allow us to reconstruct the social representation they have of this modality of teaching.

Keywords: images, social representations, internet memes, education, COVID-19

INTRODUCTION

In the field of social representation, there has recently been a renewed interest in studying the role of images, icons, drawings, and the like which is why some researchers have sought different ways for analyzing the role these visual devices play in the elaboration and interpretation of Social Representations and Social Imaginary (Milgram & Jodelet, 1977; Jodelet, 1982; De Rosa, 1987; Ullan, 1995; Mamali, 2006; Arruda & De Alba, 2007; Arruda, 2016; Jodelet, 2014; Bravi, 2022). As Mamali (2006) has pointed out: "visual images (pictures, icons, figural and nonfigurative images, concrete and abstract images, mental maps, etc.) are parts of the socialization and enculturation processes and as such are integrative and central components of social representations" (p. 2). This implies that the study of these visual elements can provide relevant information to explore and reconstruct social representations.

In 2016, Arruda wrote an important overview on the use of visual productions such as photography and publicity in researching social representations. In this text, she points out some of the initial works on the subject which show the interest of researchers in exploring the images produced by participants as a means to attain their social representations and to show how deep the graphic representation can go (Arruda, 2016). Recently Bravi (2022) has attempted to demonstrate that, from a theoretical point of view, social representations can be read not only through verbal language but also through visual representations produced and circulated within a community.

Along the same lines as Bravi´s work (2022), in this paper we will try to show that 'Memes', a term used for describing the rapid uptake and spread of a particular idea as presented in an image, a written text, language 'move' or some other unit of cultural practices, can be a useful tool for communicating and reconstructing social representations since they give rise to the materialization of the expression of the social reality within which individuals and social groups live.

Memes are considered as "contagious patterns of 'cultural information' that get passed from mind to mind and directly generate and shape the mindsets and significant forms of behavior and actions of a social group" (Knobel & Lankshear, 2007, p. 199). The term meme was introduced by the biologist Richard Dawkins in his book *The Selfish Gene* (1976). However, as Shifman (2014) and Wiggins and Bowers (2015) have revealed, the original definition of a meme can only partially be applied to internet memes "since the latter tend to refer to short-lived constructions that involve user-generated variations compared to the cultural units that Dawkins considered which spread relatively passively and largely unaltered over long periods of time" (Hassan, 2022, p. 30). In this paper we are interested in showing that online memes, as a powerful visual communication tool, constitute a dimension of cultural production and transmission and as such, can provide important clues that help reconstructing the social representations of their users on a specific topic.

During the COVID-19 health crisis which caused social confinement, many internet memes circulated on social networks regarding the difficulties, moods, opinions and imaginaries around different facts, problems, or concerns of the prosumers (individuals who both consume and produce). For example, the use of masks, self-medication, the changes in conventional routines, the vaccines, etcetera, but those that attracted our attention were those on remote teaching and learning. We therefore started a research project focused on the internet memes that showed the difficulties that Mexican students faced when confronted by what was called, during the pandemic, emergency remote teaching (ERE) (Hodges et al., 2020) which included, among many others, the use of computers, television, radio, and other devices enabling students to follow classes online. We were also interested in analyzing the emotional states students experienced when they were forced to take classes online. As we will show in this paper, the analysis of these memes allowed us to capture and to reconstruct the social representations Mexican students have on this type of teaching whose main representational contents refer to the obstacles they had to confront, the emotions they experienced, as well as the role that the digital gap played in implementing mediated

instruction efficiently. In the case of memes that refer to what teachers experienced; they also convey the obstacles they had to confront.

RESEARCH ON IMAGES IN THE SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS FIELD

In his work *Psychoanalysis, its image and its public*, Moscovici (1961/2008) outlined the theory of social representations as referring to the commonsense knowledge that circulates throughout society, and to studying the role that social processes play in the construction of reality. In his theoretical considerations of Social Representations, the role of image was contemplated from the very beginning. In his pioneer work, he sketched out the public image of psychoanalysis and the processes that led to its elaboration and showed how social representations organize images and language since they identify and symbolize acts and situations that are, or will become, common to us all (Moscovici, 2008).

Jodelet (1982) and Milgram and Jodelet (1977) also inaugurated a line of research on iconic images in the field of social representations with their work on the representations of the city of Paris. Another pioneering works are that of de Rosa (1987) who developed an extensive research program on children and teenagers' social representations of madness using drawings and that of Ullan (1995) who suggested that works of art (iconic) could be considered as social representations of a socially constructed reality. In the context of Latin America, several researchers (Arruda & de Alba, 2007), used images produced by different sources and methods (e.g., mental maps, drawings, graffiti) to work empirically with the participants' social imaginaries of Latin American countries.

The studies carried out show that images can fulfill different functions. For example, they can shape perceptions, that is, influence how we perceive a particular concept or idea, especially when coupled with text or media. They can also create stereotypes since images can perpetuate stereotypes by depicting individuals in a certain way, generating incomplete or false representations. But on the other hand, they can generate inclusivity since images that portray a diverse group of individuals can create a sense of belonging and promote social equity. They can also reveal typification and prejudice hidden by humor.

MEMES AND SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS

In this paper, internet memes are considered as: (a) "a group of digital items sharing common characteristics of content, form, and/or stance, which (b) were created with awareness of each other, and (c) were circulated, imitated, and/or transformed via the Internet by many users"[1] (Shifman, 2014, p. 41). These contagious patterns of 'cultural information' include such things "as popular tunes, catchphrases, clothing fashions, architectural styles, ways of doing things, icons, jingles, and the like" (Knobel & Lankshear, 2007, p. 199).

According to Wiggins (2019), memes have a discursive power; this means that "they inhere an agency possessing the capacity to do something, that is, to engage in the constituting and reconstituting of social relations in online spaces" (Wiggins, 2019, p. 23). However, it is important to have in mind that social relations are also constituted and reconstituted offline given the degree to which individuals remember, create, talk about internet memes[2] (or any other related content, for that matter).

Internet memes reveal ways of representing the world by expressing culture in its subjective dimension; they make visible ways of representing the world and the existence of structures, rules, values, concerns, experiences, and imaginaries of a community. They constitute a new genre of "online communication and an understanding of their production, dissemination and implications in the real world enables an improved ability to navigate digital culture" (Wiggins, 2019, frontmatter). As Wiggins (2019) points out, "Often images, animated GIFs or videos are remixed in such a way as to incorporate intertextual references, quite frequently from popular culture, alongside a joke or critique of some aspect of the human experience" (*ibid.,* frontmatter). That is why memes represent a new form of meaning-making.

The study of memes is important since they express a digital audience's interests in a given situation; they are linked to current social events and concerns and, therefore, occupy a preponderant place in the battle to capture the attention of the public and consequently in the dissemination of certain facts, problems or concerns and, for this reason, they spread quickly (Gutiérrez, 2022; Lankshear & Knobel, 2012). It should be noted that memes have been

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[1] There are different theories and perspectives in the study of memes. For a complete review see Castaño (2013).

[2] The term onlife is now used to refer to communication that takes place both in online and offline environments (Floridi, 2015).

transformed into a kind of digital showcase that reflect contemporary social thought. Their analysis thereby allows understanding the "spirit of time", understood as ideas, opinions, and assessments of what is going on culturally, religiously, or intellectually during a certain period (Jodelet, 2020). Moreover, following Moscovici, "a social representation is an organization of images and language because it cuts out and symbolizes acts and situations that are or become common" (Moscovici, 2008, p. 16), hence memes can be considered as ways of expressing through images those situations, problems, interest that are common to certain groups of prosumers.

In this regard, it is pertinent to mention that the analysis of the internet memes regarding online education during the COVID-19 confinement that circulated in socio-digital networks can become a tool for analyzing and understanding the limitations and problems with the equipment and internet connection that students and teachers had, as well as the emotions aroused by this teaching-learning modality (Majdzińska-Koczorowics & Ostanina-Olszcwka, 2021). The social representations associated with the teaching-learning processes during COVID-19 displayed in the internet memes can allow the examination on how the discursive communities represent the problems related to this type of educational modality.

In Mexico, as well as in many other countries, the pandemic caused by COVID-19, and the resulting social estrangement for preventing its spread, led most educational systems to close their establishments and generate other modalities for students to continue their studies at home. These included, among many others, the use of computers, television, and radio; this type of teaching was called emergency remote teaching (Hodges et al., 2020). One of the most used devices was that of synchronous platforms such as Zoom, Meet or Teams, where teachers transferred, without any didactic adequacy, from face-to-face teaching to remote teaching.

Assi and Rashtchi (2022) have pointed out that "the sudden outbreak of COVID-19 challenged the education system worldwide and forced virtual learning as a panacea in times of crisis. Most teachers and students participated in virtual courses; however, many believed in the prominence of face-to-face lessons" (p. 1). Such preference was based on several factors, for example, slow internet connections, power outages, and the handling of errors that impacted the teaching and learning process. Inadequate knowledge of computers among students and teachers was another facet of the problem. Besides those challenges, there were several affective factors that were decisive in the teaching-learning process; as is well known, emotional experiences reflect how individuals become aware, interpret, and emotionally link to a context, in this case to the

online environment. It is important to emphasize that the affective dimension is essential in the teaching/learning process since it includes other factors vital for successful learning: emotions, attitudes, motivations, and values.

METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURE

One of the challenges of this study was the analysis of the corpus; frequently, the studies that concentrate on the production of what circulates in socio-digital networks have made use of anthropological approaches such as virtual ethnography, digital ethnography, connective ethnography or more extensive methods such as data mining[3] (Gutiérrez-Vidrio & Reyna-Ruiz, 2020). In this research, following the principle that social representations are expressed through discourse[4], we concentrate on the analysis of their discursive nature focusing on their referential, contextual and ideological system in order to grasp their meaning, as well as reconstructing the social relations to which they refer to (Lankshear & Knobel, 2007).

Selecting from different existing discourse analysis proposals, we decided to use multimodal discourse analysis (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001) since it is a methodological approach for the understanding of data that makes use of different resources or modes such as text, image and sound which are distinguishing features of internet memes. Following Van Leeuwen (2005), memes could be considered as multimodal communication acts that combine various verbal, typographic and graphic components.

In addition, following Knobel and Lankshear (2007), we sought to rebuild the ideological system on which the memes are based. This involves the analysis of values, beliefs that allow the reconstruction of the themes and ideas, as well as deeper or broader positions that are transmitted by a meme. The idea behind this methodological procedure was to reconstruct what these ideas and positions could tell us about how different social groups viewed emergency remote teaching, that is the different social representations they built about it. These analytical guidelines allowed us to connect the analysis of memes to social representations.

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[3] The practice of analyzing large databases to generate new information.
[4] We consider discourse to be constituted not only of verbal language but also by nonverbal modes.

Following Knobel and Lankshear (2007) together with methodological insights from the theory of social representations, some of the research questions that guided the selection of the corpus, and the analysis were the following:

- o What idea or information is being conveyed by this meme?
- o Who is involved? How do we know?
- o How is this idea or information being conveyed?
- o What role does the image play in conveying the meaning?
- o What meaning does the text anchor?
- o What does this meme seem to assume about knowledge within this particular context?
- o What does this meme tell us about the kinds of contents that are shared in an online community?
- o What do these themes, ideas and positions tell us about different social groups?
- o What do these memes tell us about the social representations of online education?

The corpus of study (data pool) of our research was gathered from manually tagged searches on the following social media: *Facebook, Reddit and Twitter* using the following hashtags: *#virtualeducation*, *#remoteteaching*, *#pandemicandschool*[5]. The search was carried out in the period between March 2020 and September 2021, when most of Mexico's education institutions were kept in Remote Emergency Education. We gathered a total of 75 memes, but the corpus includes only 41 memes. The following inclusion criteria were applied: 1) they had to be memes that referred to online education or virtual classes in the context of the closing of school institutions due to COVID-19; 2) they had to be memes published on social media such as Facebook, Reddit or Twitter. The exclusion criteria applied were: 1) they addressed a different issue to the ERE generated by the health crisis; 2) they did not fall within the Mexican context. The 41 internet memes[6] that were selected were grouped in a database that incorporated the following elements:

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[5] To select the hashtags *#educacioadistancia* and *#educacionenlinea* it was considered that in Mexico the ERE was colloquially named, by educational authorities and media, distance education and online education. During the first searches the hashtag *#educacionypandemia* appeared organically and was also incorporated into the search process.
[6] They were mainly memes called 'image macros' since they refer to a more general form of pictures with an overlaid text (Shifman, 2014).

the type of visual used (a cartoon, a sequence of photos, an animated image), the image referent used (famous people, animals, animated figures) the verbal message (text) included, the topic that was addressed (for example, tiredness, lack of understanding of contents, distractions from following classes).

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

After collecting the data, we classified the different memes into categories that we expected would allow us to grasp what they tell us about the social representations that are behind the expression of these visual and cultural artifacts and more particularly about emergency remote education.

One of the methodological aspects of the theory of social representations that is important to point out before presenting the analysis, is that we observed that generally images communicate the objectification of a social, cultural, and/or political concern while the verbal component of the meme (the text) anchors the meaning that prosumers want to convey about that concern[7]: "Representational anchoring includes propositional/verbal components mixed in different degrees with iconic/pictorial components" (Mamali, 2006, p. 3).

One issue to point out about images used in memes is that they portray cultural traits of a given community; this implies that to decode the message of a meme, interlocutors need to belong to the same culture and share a similar background, otherwise, it could be perceived as meaningless and lacking humor. Hence, to grasp the meaning, they are intended to convey, it is necessary to know the characters, the context in which they are portrayed, the circumstances where characters are represented, as well as the communities in which they circulate. As Majdzińska-Koczorowics and Ostanina-Olszcwka (2021), argue:

> The interpretation of a meme often requires extra-contextual knowledge such as a convention fostered by a meme as well as other displayed components, including quotes, sayings, names, etc., which can spark intertextuality, allusion, and above all, connotation—the rudimental semantic operation for creating meaning (p. 142).

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[7] However, there can be cases in which objectification can also be conveyed in the text and anchoring in the image. These are two interrelated processes and sometimes it is difficult to separate them and to know exactly their contribution to the overall global meaning of the meme.

One criterion that we followed when deciding the level of detail in the analysis of visual materials as well as the amount of material to be considered, was the objective we pursued as researchers. As Arruda (2016) has pointed out, objectives may determine universes of different extension to be studied, as well as different densities of exploration: extensive or intensive; that is, the interest for specific aspects will require different choices. In the case of the analysis of memes, we opted for a reduced universe and an intensive exploration that could tell us something about the social representations of online teaching during the coronavirus pandemic.

Students' experiences of online education

In this first category we grouped those memes that could tell us something about what students experienced during virtual education. As mentioned above, many changes in the teaching-learning processes took place during remote teaching. In face-to-face mode, students usually express their concerns and doubts about exercises, readings and tasks during the daily interaction with their teachers and peers. In contrast, virtual education was a major change for students who had to carry out different academic activities on their own, according to the technological resources at their disposal (computers, tablets, or cell phones). In the analysis of our corpus, we observed that, although the students' experience was shaped using technology, what was actually given greater weight were the consequences virtual education had on them, being fatigue, anxiety and stress the main ones.

Figure 1.
Comparison of experiences (Source: Twitter, retrieved September 28, 2021)

Figure 2.
Comparison of experiences (Source: Twitter, retrieved September 22, 2021)

Figures 1 and 2 compare the students' experience after two years of online classes. Usually, the before and after of a given situation is commonly compared in memes; in the case of those analyzed here, the main visual trait they portray is fatigue expressed by humor. In figure 1, Izuko Midoriya, known as Duku of the manga series *My hero academy*, is portrayed as cheerful, with the text "*12 years of face-to-face classes*" and on the left side, the same character, but in black and white, with half-closed eyes, exhausted and with the text "*two years of virtual classes*". Figure 2 uses the image of Antoine Griezmann, French footballer world champion; in the first vignette, on the left side he is smiling, with short hair and says, *"Me in my first virtual classes"*, as if he was taking the place of a student. In the second vignette Griezmann appears with long and disheveled hair, showing tiredness and discouragement, with the text *"Me in my second year of virtual classes"*. In these two memes the force of the macro-images is that they convey information on the students' perceptions, attitudes and emotions they experienced in online classes during the pandemic expressed in their self-image they portrayed: being the main emotions fatigue and tiredness.

Figure 3.

Comparison of generations (*Source: Facebook, Retrieved June 17, 2020).*

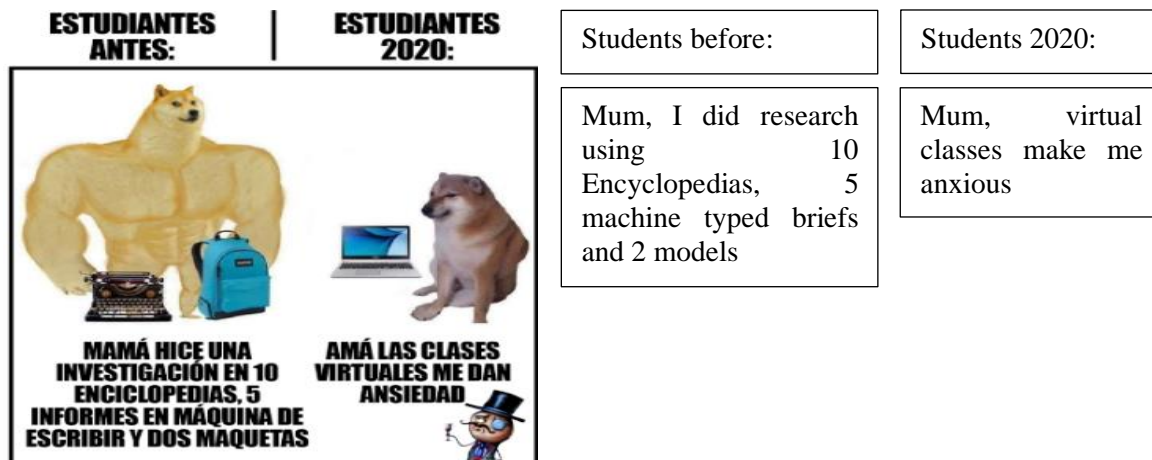| Students before:	Students 2020:
Mum, I did research using 10 Encyclopedias, 5 machine typed briefs and 2 models	Mum, virtual classes make me anxious

Figure 3 portrays the image of the strong dog vs weak dog (Buff Doge vs. crying Cheems), which emerged in 2017; typically, strong Doge is labeled as someone from the past, and Cheems as someone from the present; they are often used to suggest that people in the present-day are less

mighty than they were in ancient times (Majdzińska-Koczorowics & Ostanina-Olszcwka, 2021). In the context of the pandemic, meme 3 refers to the fact that in the past students carried out their daily academic activities in a timely manner by consulting books on paper, producing typed works which required not only intellectual, but also manual skills, while students during the pandemic despite having at their disposal digital technologies at hand, which can simplify the performance of their school work, they experienced anxiety, which apparently made them weak since they lacked the mental strength to follow their classes. That is, this meme reveals the tiredness, tension, and anxiety that ERE caused on students.

Student's tactics to confront synchronic lessons

The exceptional and unpredicted lockdown made teachers, students and their families depend on internet communication, this made them encounter "a myriad of problems, the most obvious being equipment and space limitations, technical problems, lack of experience in remote learning and short attention span in front of a computer screen" (Majdzińska--Koczorowics & Ostanina-Olszcwka, 2021, p. 140).

Since ERE system classes took place in virtual rooms such as Zoom, Classroom, Moodle and Google Meet and through chats, students were forced to follow and do all their activities on these online spaces while at home. Places such as the kitchen, the bedroom, the bed, became their virtual classrooms and, as we mentioned above, caused them stress and fatigue. The memes that we assigned in this analytical category have as a background the irruption of the educational institution in the students' homes which, on many occasions, were private spaces not equipped to be adequate learning spaces. They also share the fact that they show the tactics students developed to try to simulate following their lessons when connected to Zoom or Meet.

Figure 4.

Pretending to be in class (Source: Twitter, retrieved September 14, 2021).

Figure 4 portrays in the background a woman sleeping on a sofa and on the foreground a mannequin of a head facing the laptop's camera as if she was present and following the lesson. This was one of the tactics that students used when taking lessons in online platforms since they knew that the teacher would not be able to check whether they were actually following the class or doing what the teacher assigned them.

Figure 5.

Pretending to be in class (Source: Twitter, Retrieved: September 13, 2021).

Figure 5 shows an animated drawing of a father sitting on his son´s bed while he is in his pajamas sleeping. He asks him if he is not supposed to be following his online classes and he answers that he has already said "I am here" (present) and returned to his bed to continue sleeping. This was a

very common tactic students used; many of them did not turn the camera on, so teachers would not know whether they were actually there or not. The decoded message indicates that in synchronous courses the students appeared the first minutes of the class so that the teachers noticed their presence and later, left the camera off to continue doing other things. At the same time, these two memes offer indications that in remote education, since teachers were not experts in virtual learning environments, they concentrated on verifying those students entered the platforms, they carried out the rollcall and then taught their class, unable to verify whether the students were following the class. Another reason why students sometimes did not follow the request to switch on their cameras, is that they felt uncomfortable and reluctant to share their personal space with the rest of the class.

Figure 6.

Virtual classes be like… (Source: Facebook, Retrieved: October 2, 2020).

Figure 6 shows a young man wearing only pants (or shorts) with a laptop on his back held by his pants and wearing headphones while preparing a meal; on the right side there is a text: 'virtual classes be like'. This meme conveys the messages that in online classes students followed their classes with the computer camera turned off while they concentrated on other activities at home. As some researchers have pointed out, face-to-face education demands a certain type of dress and behavior of students, which provides a pedagogical framework for following classes and achieving learning (Dussel, 2020). However, online education portrayed in the memes is represented as the possibility of following their classes in pajamas, half naked, and so on, carrying out other activities ranging from sleeping to cooking, which take place in differing spaces of the house such as the bedroom or the kitchen. What can be inferred from these memes is that students engage in certain

activities to avoid getting bored in their online classes or that they do not want to show their private living spaces.

Bewilderment at the lack of learning

In times of crisis, such as health, the stability of human beings is broken, which leads them to make immediate changes in different dimensions (economic, social, personal) and can cause alterations in emotional health such as anxiety, stress, neurosis, depression (Fernández-Poncela, 2021). In the same sense, some studies have reported that students experienced sadness, anxiety and fear as a result of the pandemic and social estrangement that prevailed (ANUIES, 2022; Díaz-Barriga, et al., 2022; Fernández-Poncela, 2021). The analysis of the memes placed in this category show that the lack of learning in online education was a trigger for the emotional states mentioned above.

Figure 7.
Sadness mood (Source: Twitter, retrieved: September 12, 2021).

¿Are we supposed to be learning?
I don´t feel I am learning anything

Mood since all lessons are online

In figure 7, Doctor George O´Marley, a character of the series *Greys Anatomy*, expresses sadness and discouragement. The verbal message that accompanies the image explains that what triggered these emotional states is the misunderstanding of the contents of the courses and the failure to acquire new learning in online education. This lack of learning probably implies concern regarding

the state of their knowledge which is, ultimately, the goal of education.

Figure 8.

Fear mood (Source: Twitter, Retrieved: September 8, 2021)

Alguien: solo le temes a lo que no entiendes.
Yo con las clases virtuales:

Someone: you only fear what you don´t understand.
Me in online lessons

Figure 8 conveys the fear that students experienced in virtual education. It uses an image from the animated film Ralph the Wrecker 2, where a girl has a tablet with a facial expression that involves, apparently, fear or even terror. The text of the meme communicates the message: 'you only fear what you do not understand'; 'Me in online classes'. This meme expresses that the contents disseminated in electronic devices generated distress due to the lack of understanding. This was a very common feeling experienced by students.

Remote education for different social groups

During the analysis, we observed that some memes portrayed a concern that many researchers had about the role that the social and digital gap would play in the online teaching learning process. The following meme shows that not all social groups had the technological resources necessary to follow online classes.

Figure 9.

Social inequity (Source: Twitter, Retrieved: April 1, 2020).

Education during pandemic time

In figure 9, a cartoon is used showing a student at home following his online lessons on his computer while outside there is another student with worn out clothes standing on top of some boxes which allow him to look through the window and follow the lesson. Through this meme, a criticism is made of the economic inequality and the digital gap of students; it implies that these conditions were not favorable for professional learning. Although this was a problem highlighted by experts on educations right from the beginning of the pandemic, it is interesting to observe that memes portrayed that very same problematic situation.

Figure 10.

Social inequality (Source: Facebook, Retrieved: October 19, 2021)

Online classes: They do exist.
The guy who does not have internet:

In figure 10, a picture of an anime for otakus (this term derives from the Japanese word used to describe a young person obsessed with computers or particular aspects of popular culture to the

detriment of their social skills[8]) who do not consider themselves to be otakus, is used to portray the problematic situation of the digital and social gap. The verbal message ('The guy who does not have internet') describes how students who do not have access to internet feel: no sense of joy or encouragement.

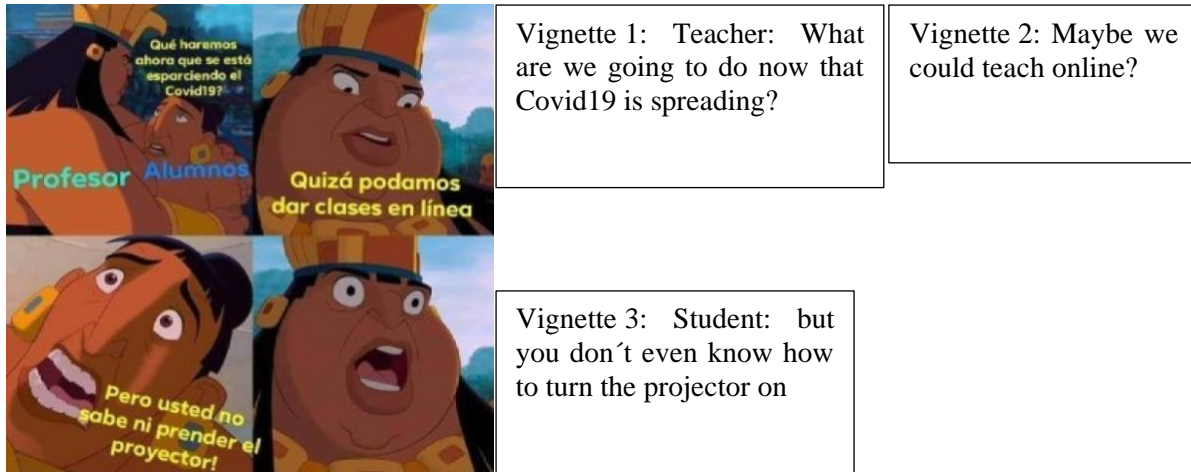**The image of teachers in virtual education**

A central actor in online education is the teacher. During the health contingency, teachers were forced to transfer immediately from their face-to-face teaching to different online platforms. Some teachers had already some knowledge about how these platforms work while others did not. During the search for internet memes, we found some that referred to the teachers´ experiences lived during their teaching profession in the confinement period. It should be noted that they communicate the point of view of the students since young people are the ones who usually created the memes. Although we only found one meme in which the teacher names himself/herself in such memes (I, me…), the point of view of students reveals some of the experiences that teachers had during the ERE. This indicates that these actors also faced challenges when adopting the emergency remote education system and had to use different technological resources to interact with their students through synchronous and asynchronous platforms.

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[8] The term otaku in Japanese, literally 'your house', in formal speech also meaning 'you', used by some anime and manga fans as an affectedly formal way of addressing others with similar interests, however due to the context in which the meme is used the meaning above describes better the situation portrayed in the meme.

Figure 11.

Lack of knowledge of technologies (Source: Facebook, retrieved: May 23, 2020)

Vignette 1: Teacher: What are we going to do now that Covid19 is spreading?	Vignette 2: Maybe we could teach online?
Vignette 3: Student: but you don´t even know how to turn the projector on	

In meme 11, four cartoons are used with images from the animated film The Emperor's Follies, where in a kind of a dialogue (question and answer) with a student, the teacher wonders what to do in order to continue teaching her/his lessons and suggests the possibility of doing it online. The student reacts by expressing his amazement as he knows that the teacher does not have the necessary mastery of technologies to be able even to turn on a projector in the classroom. This meme expresses the paucity for the management of technological devices that some teachers had at the beginning of the pandemic and implicitly questions the capacity of teachers for teaching online if they did not have even the basic knowledge required for using the different platforms.

Figure 12.

Multi-tasking (Source: Facebook, October 5, 2020)

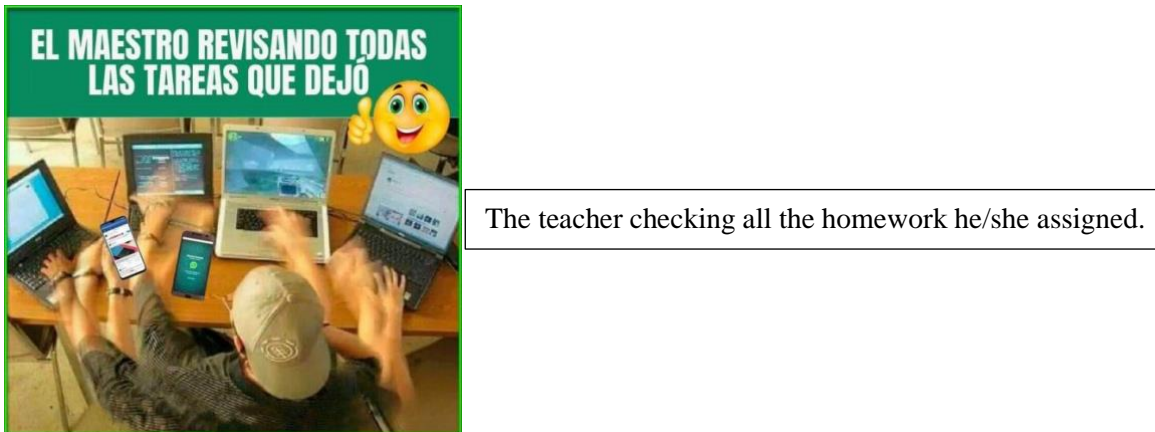The teacher checking all the homework he/she assigned.

Figure 12 shows a person with different computer equipment on a desk, doing parallel tasks at the same time, the written text anchors the meaning by referring to a teacher reviewing the different activities, he/she assigned to his/her students. This meme, on the one hand, communicates one of the characteristics of online education that was the saturation of tasks to students. On the other hand, we can illustrate the consequences that teachers experienced with the workloads they assigned and the need to develop strategies for reviewing all the works such using different computing devices at the same time.

Figure 13.

Effects of online education (Source: Facebook, Retrieve: August 25, 2021)

Figure 13 is composed of four photographs of the actor Jack Nicholson which address the effects of online education on teachers. This was the only meme of the data where the teacher represents himself/herself. In the first photo, Jack Nicholson is very young (almost a teenager), and the text indicates he was studying to be teacher. In the second, the actor in a mature stage, is a little disheveled and bearded, just as he appeared in One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest, and the text says: ten years in teaching. In the third photo he is older, bald, disheveled, and smiling, with the text "20 years in teaching". In the fourth and last photo, the actor appears as the Joker from the film Batman, who is a criminal and psychopath, and the text reads: 'in online classes'. The meme creates an analogy between the image presented in the photos and the teacher's experience since Jack Nicholson represents the teacher, and the different photos relate to the chronological period of this profession, which, according to the images, is hard and tiring, but online classes have exhausted

the teachers in such a way that they look similar to a psychopath. The memes that make up this category, show that teachers in remote education needed mastery of digital technologies, expertise for dealing with school content in a short time and attitudes such as the observation of their students on the screen, which could be a challenge.

As been shown in the analysis the meaning assigned to a meme comes from agents or groups belonging to a particular cultural context since they recover the views, values, stereotypes, and emotions that are common to them and that are associated with a specific event or juncture, in this case remote emergency education in Mexico for certain online communities.

CONCLUSION

The analysis we have carried out reveals that these videos, photomontages, images, and multimedia construction texts known as memes, replicated in socio-digital networks are an invitation to rethink how these memes can function as a powerful weapon for demonstrating public opinion, for capturing the issues that most concern a community and for reconstructing certain social representations.
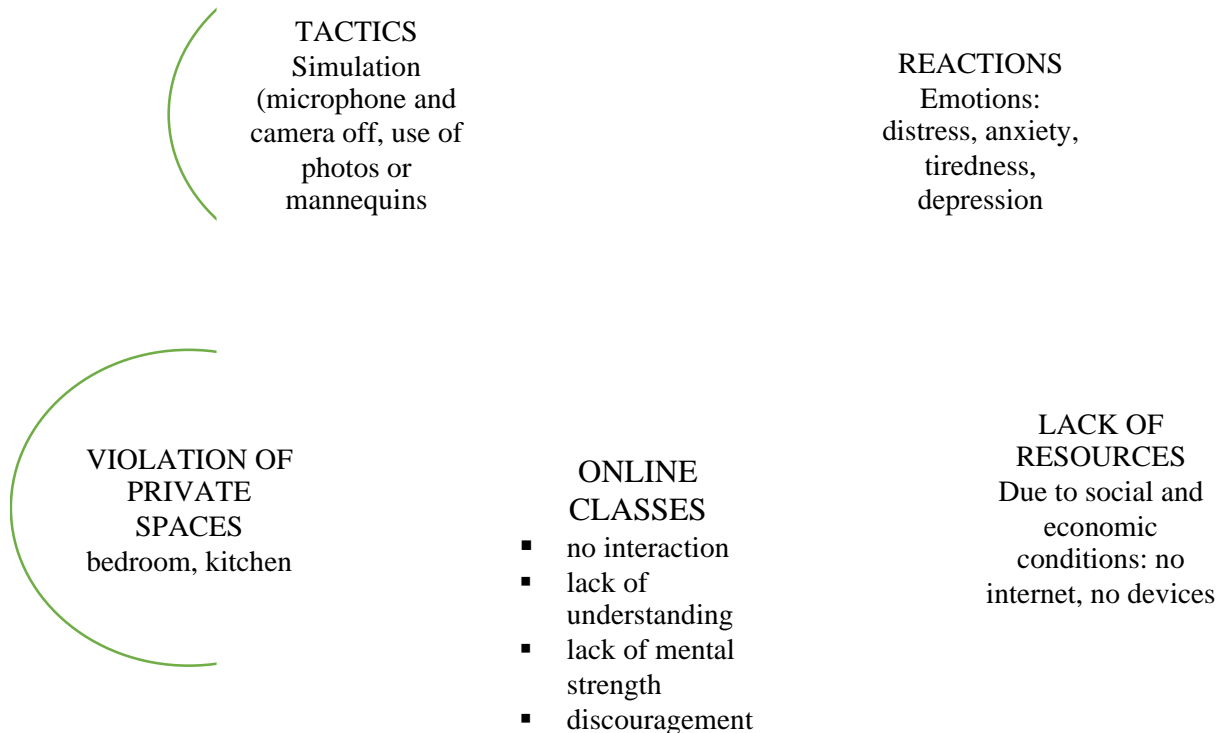
When analyzing memes, a special attention needs to be given to determining the contribution that each mode (text/image) makes to the overall global meaning of the meme since there can be cases in which the text makes little or no contribution to its interpretation or the opposite relationship: the image making little or no contribution to the interpretation of the meme (Yus, 2018). In our analysis we observed that text and image combine to generate implicated meanings that may only be obtained from the combination of the information from both modes.

Based on the analysis carried out, one of the findings of this research is the recognition that memes can facilitate the creation of shared discursive spaces in which certain beliefs, perceptions, attitudes, and ideologies are conveyed embodied in certain social representations shared among those who publish them, consume them, and circulate them.

The analysis also enabled us to reconstruct the main contents of the social representation of online remote learning during the pandemic as shown in the following diagram.

Figure 14.

Student´s social representation.

TACTICS
Simulation
(microphone and
camera off, use of
photos or
mannequins

REACTIONS
Emotions:
distress, anxiety,
tiredness,
depression

VIOLATION OF
PRIVATE
SPACES
bedroom, kitchen

ONLINE
CLASSES
- no interaction
- lack of
  understanding
- lack of mental
  strength
- discouragement

LACK OF
RESOURCES
Due to social and
economic
conditions: no
internet, no devices

As can be inferred from the diagram, the memes analyzed portray the social representation that many students shared about online teaching. This representation has several figurative contents, the main ones being the reactions that students had when confronted with this type of teaching-learning modality, expressed mainly through the emotions they experienced, the tactics that they used to pretend to be in classes, and the outbreak of education in their private spaces. All these factors show that the social representation of online learning-teaching was a hard task that required extra effort from both students and teachers. Teaching in this way left no room for face-to-face interaction and there was, therefore, no way of checking whether the students had understood or whether they had any doubts. Neither was there any way of knowing how they felt which, in turn, gave rise to the lack of mental strength required to be able to follow the class leading them to feel discouraged.

Regarding the main objective of this paper: the use of visual materials as a tool for

reconstructing social representations, we observed that the conceptual mapping of the memes triggers the projection of constituent conceptual elements between the visual and the verbal components. Images and written texts are carefully chosen to communicate the meaning the prosumers want to convey. In all the memes we analyzed, we observed that the connotations of the visual elements are enhanced by the verbal text.

As argued at the beginning of this text, beyond the apparent banality for its generally humorous content, memes represent a valuable viewpoint which reflect, in this case, not only the way in which educational institutions during the COVID-19 tried to continue their main function but also their vision on the type of formal education that took place during the confinement[9].

This study depicts how online learning is metaphorically visualized in internet memes. Besides, it also shows, following Striker (2011), that a new meme language, is being formed, a language in which people communicate visually, briefly, and concisely, emotions and opinion. Therefore, if the meme phenomenon continues to become an important way of portraying the latest phenomena it is necessary to study this kind of visual language and to be able to incorporate it in new lines of research, such as the one developed here. This will enable us to broaden our understanding of how meaning-making operates in the construction and transformation of social and mimetic representations of global and local concerns.

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[9] We want to point out that it would have been very useful to analyze all the comments these internet memes produced when published in the social networks since they could confirm or contradict the interpretation we offered.

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SILVIA GUTIÉRREZ-VIDRIO, is a professor at the Autonomous Metropolitan University (UAM) of Mexico. Her areas of interest are the study of social representations and their link with emotions, as well as the argumentative analysis of discourse. E-mail: sgvidrio@correo.xoc.uam.mx

YAZMIN CUEVAS is a professor at the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters at the National Autonomous University of Mexico. Her area of interest is the study of social representations in education with an emphasis on teachers and students. E-mail: yazcuevas@gmail.com