

Content Analysis: Memes and Higher Education in Pandemic *

Análisis de contenido: memes y educación superior en tiempos de pandemia

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Abstract

The pandemic represented a set of transformations in human activities and implications for higher education. This study aims to analyse the perspective of professors from Higher Education Institutions on the COVID-19 pandemic through memes as a means of expression on the Internet. A total of 177 memes, published on Facebook by professors of Business Administration of Higher Education Institutions in Colombia, were analysed through a content analysis with framing elements and narrative comparative analysis to categorize the experiences lived by them in the pandemic. Here it is shown that the category with the highest presence identified in the study was work and study, the main actor and receiver of the published memes was the ordinary person, and the most used narrative scheme was the comic narrative. Content analysis based on digital interactivity represents an alternative way to generate a greater understanding of changes in education.

Keywords: content analysis; COVID-19; higher education; memes; professors

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Resumen

La pandemia supuso una serie de transformaciones en las actividades humanas y tuvo repercusiones en la educación superior. Este estudio tiene como objetivo analizar la perspectiva de docentes de instituciones de educación superior sobre la pandemia de COVID-19 a través de los memes como medio de expresión en Internet. Se analizaron 177 memes, publicados en Facebook por profesores de Administración de Empresas de instituciones de educación superior en Colombia, mediante un análisis de contenido basado en elementos de encuadre y un análisis narrativo comparativo para categorizar las experiencias vividas por ellos durante la pandemia. Los resultados muestran que la categoría con mayor presencia fue la de trabajo y estudio; que el actor y receptor principal de los memes publicados fue la persona común; y que el esquema narrativo más utilizado fue el cómico. El análisis de contenido basado en la interactividad digital representa una vía alternativa para comprender mejor los cambios en la educación.

Palabras clave: análisis de contenido; COVID-19; educación superior; memes; profesores

1. Introducción

The pandemic brought with it many changes in people's daily activities, due to the preventive isolation to avoid infection by COVID-19. Therefore, closed spaces where services were provided and that had a high flow of people, closed their doors, and those who were able to migrate to the provision of their services online continued with their operations. A clear example was higher education institutions around the world, who had to transform and reinvent traditional education to distance education, as it was an obligation [1] and an order from the government who demanded changes towards online learning for students to participate meaningfully during quarantine [2].

However, such changes in a normal environment would take months, as expressed by [3], who point out that the traditional design of online courses, with a duration of one semester, and adopting asynchronous teaching methods, require no less than 6 months of collaborative work among teachers of educational institutions. For this reason, the pandemic generated models of Emergency Remote Education [4], or Emergency Remote Online Teaching [2], since, as the latter author argues, it is a mistake to classify remote online teaching and emergency remote online teaching as analogous concepts, because the latter concept explains the sudden change from traditional teaching methods to remote online learning without planning, organization and support for both instructors and students [2].

This abrupt and sudden transition brought benefits, since if this change in the education service had not been generated, continuity in learning would not have been guaranteed [2] and the right to education would have been violated. In contrast, the improvisation and lack of knowledge in the management of technologies by teachers and students hindered the adaptation of the new methodologies and brought problems, physical and psychological for

teachers, since the emotional burden brought by change, hesitation and resistance [5]; added to the burden of the pandemic context experienced by teachers, triggered physical and mental health problems in them [5], [6], since the levels of anxiety and stress worsen due to the constant uncertainty due to the contingency.

Although the initial shift toward distance teaching was driven as an emergency response, subsequent literature highlights that post-pandemic academic environments have normalized digital and hybrid modalities. However, this prolonged adaptation left a persistent legacy of cognitive fatigue, burnout, and socio-emotional distress among university educators [6]. In this scenario, social media platforms served not only as channels for informal communication, but also as vital spaces for emotional relief, peer solidarity, and collective coping through shared humor [7].

Additionally, the lack of balance between work and personal life, due to the lack of separation of spaces, generated a challenging situation for teachers, between home tasks, their children's school, and classes [8]. This problem affected female teachers to a greater extent, who presented higher levels of stress and interference of work with personal life, causing lower levels of mental wellbeing [3]. From there, a gender problem originates, which probably arises from the imbalance of domestic activities in the family environment [3], a dynamic that can be further understood through technological dependence and generative AI adoption [9], building upon behavioral economic analyses of excessive smartphone use and impulsivity [10].

In addition to the above, teachers faced several challenges and difficulties in conducting their classes, one of which was the perception of the quality of education through this teaching modality [5]. Another challenging factor was the promotion of group work, since many of the teachers whose teaching areas are more practical, saw the limited access to laboratories as a problem [8]. They also point to the challenge of ensuring rigor and fairness in remote assessments to measure student learning, where in many cases it was very difficult to ensure this due to the wide variety of contexts in which each of the students were immersed [8].

Likewise, the technical problems that arose, both in terms of connectivity and difficulties with the use of technology, affected the proper development of synchronous and asynchronous classes, for example, the use of didactic tools such as the blackboard and surveys during classes [8] or the delay and distortion in audio and video of live sessions, which made the teachers' feeling towards the change to online learning negative [5], and also generated an increase in the digital divide [3]. Regarding course activities, many professors expressed the need for increased interaction between students and teacher, especially for large class sizes where students are often distracted [8] this due to distractions from the study environment, absence of the habit of self-discipline, and loss of interest in virtual classes [2].

Teachers felt that there was little or no training on what to do. They were not provided with information about online resources to use in teaching [2], therefore, they felt that there was a need for proactive support and resources at the governmental and institutional level [8]. It should be emphasized that, lack of technical skills is an obstacle that negatively affects the

process of teaching change [1], but it also demanded teachers more time to prepare classes, due to self-learning of new ways of teaching.

Finally, it is important to highlight, as expressed by [8], that despite the difficulties encountered by teachers because of the rapid transition from traditional teaching and learning to the distance model, it is observed that this transition process showed the agility and flexibility of teachers to adapt to the new situation. In addition, it was also a learning and teaching opportunity for all those teachers who had been curious to experience teaching through information technologies but had not yet dared to do so [8].

From a communicative and pedagogical perspective, internet memes have evolved beyond simple entertainment artifacts into complex multimodal devices that condense socio-cultural commentary, organizational critique, and emotional expression. In higher education settings, recent empirical evidence demonstrates that memetic discourse allows faculty and students to negotiate academic identity, challenge top-down institutional mandates, and articulate nuanced critiques regarding the realities of digital pedagogy [11].

Based on the above, this research seeks to represent the experiences lived by university professors in times of pandemic, thanks to the amount of information that was generated in social networks, especially Facebook, where a search for memes published by teachers in times of pandemic was carried out, to categorize feelings and situations lived by them.

Materials and methods

Mixed methods were used in this study. Content analysis represents the main technique of the present research. The collected memes were analyzed by means of content analysis with framing elements for the first stage of analysis and for the second stage a comparative narrative analysis was performed [12]. To ensure that the criteria are met, for a meme it is necessary to apply Shifman's guidelines [13] for unit review: text superimposed on the background of an image, and excluding advertisements, infographics, social media screenshots, celebrity quotes, and images without text. The data collection was carried out by extracting images of memes published from the Facebook accounts of professors of Business Administration in different Higher Education Institutions in Colombia.

Methodological developments in digital visual research support the integration of framing and narrative approaches when analyzing user-generated visual content during crisis management [14]. Combining foundational memetic criteria with contemporary multimodal content analysis enables a robust categorization of both textual and visual semiotic layers embedded within academic digital expressions.

Results

To begin the data analysis, it should be noted that after the evaluation to determine whether the graphic pieces selected as the original sample for the study met the requirements to be considered memes, a final sample of 177 memes was obtained, eliminating 24 of the 203 collected for not meeting the criteria and eliminating a couple of memes that were repeated. This can be seen in Table I.

Table I: Final sample

Initial sample	203
Do not meet the criteria	24
Duplicates	2
Final sample	177

Source: Created by the authors.

Subsequently, the analysis of the memes database was divided into two stages, where in the first stage we assigned each of the memes to one of the 8 categories, which refer to the central theme of each meme. The following categories were applied: “Work and study”, “Prohibitions and orders”, “Politics”, “Stigma and exclusion”, “Services”, “Free time”, “Mental health” and “Others” [12]. It should be noted that the most common categories of memes were "Work and study" with 50 memes out of 177 of the final sample, representing 28.25% of the sample. This was followed by 43 memes, whose central theme was "Prohibitions and orders". Finally, the "Others" category, which did not fit into any of the categories, is composed of 37 memes of the total sample. Table II shows the summary of the number of memes contained in each category, as well as the percentage that each category covers with respect to the total sample.

Table II: Categories of memes

Category	Absolute frequency	Relative frequency
Work and study	50	28,25%
Prohibitions and orders	43	24,29%
Others	37	20,90%
Politics	18	10,17%
Stigma and exclusion	11	6,21%
Services	7	3,95%
Free time	6	3,39%
Mental health	5	2,82%
Total	177	100,00%

Source: Created by the authors.

In the second stage, the themes were analyzed according to the results of the categories through the following subcategories: “Type of meme”, “Narrative scheme”, “Actors” and “Target audience”; and the following typologies of each subcategory were assigned to each of the memes:

- Type of meme: Graphic, Textual, and Graphic-textual.
- Narrative scheme: Epic, Satiric, Comic, and Tragic.
- Actors and target audience: They will depend on the analysis of each meme.

Analyzing the subcategories, as shown in Table 3, it is observed that most of the memes were of the "Graphic-textual" type (118), since according to [13] guidelines, graphic pieces to be considered memes must contain a text superimposed on an image background.

However, the other type of memes that were most obtained in the data collection were the "Textual" ones, which represent 29.38%. Table III presents a summary of the type of memes contained, as well as the percentage of each subcategory with respect to the total sample.

Table III: Type of memes

Type	Absolute frequency	Relative frequency
Graphic-textual	118	66,67%
Textual	52	29,38%
Graphic	7	3,95%
Total	177	100,00%

Source: Created by the authors.

On the other part, according to Table IV, Narrative scheme of memes, it can be affirmed that the "Comic" narrative of the memes is the most representative within the sample, followed by the memes loaded with "Satiric" which allowed showing and expressing spicy and biting opinions whose objective was to censure or ridicule situations or characters that were present in the pandemic.

Table IV: Narrative scheme of memes

Narrative scheme	Absolute frequency	Relative frequency
Comic	100	56,50%
Satiric	58	32,77%
Tragic	19	10,73%
Total	177	100,00%

Source: Created by the authors.

Analyzing the relationship between categories and subcategories, it can be concluded that, for the "Stigma and exclusion" category, the most used types of memes were both "Textual" and the combination between "Graphic-textual ". Despite this, in the rest of the categories, "Graphic-textual" pieces prevail, as shown in Table V.

In addition, according to Table 5, the largest proportion of "Graphic-textual" memes belong to the "Work and study" category, while most "Textual" memes belong to the "Other" category. Finally, the largest number of purely "Graphic" memes are related to "Prohibitions and orders" and "Services".

Table V: Relationship between categories and types of memes

Category	Type	Absolute frequency	Relative frequency
Stigma and exclusion	Textual	5	2,82%
	Graphic-textual	5	2,82%
	Graphic	1	0,56%
Total		11	6,21%
Others	Graphic-textual	21	11,86%
	Textual	14	7,91%
	Graphic	2	1,13%
Total		37	20,90%
Politics	Graphic-textual	13	7,34%
	Textual	5	2,82%
Total		18	10,17%
Prohibitions and orders	Graphic-textual	27	15,25%
	Textual	13	7,34%
	Graphic	3	1,69%
Total		43	24,29%
Mental health	Graphic-textual	3	1,69%
	Textual	2	1,13%
Total		5	2,82%
Services	Graphic-textual	4	2,26%
	Textual	3	1,69%
Total		7	3,95%
Free time	Graphic-textual	4	2,26%
	Textual	2	1,13%
Total		6	3,39%
Work and study	Graphic-textual	41	23,16%
	Textual	8	4,52%
	Graphic	1	0,56%
Total		50	28,25%
Overall total		177	100,00%

Source: Created by the authors.

On the other side, Table VI presents the relationship between the category variables and the narrative schema variables, where for most of the categories, except for “Politics”, the prevailing narrative schema is the "Comic" one. For memes that have politics as a central theme, there was a strong preference for publishing "Satiric" memes to criticize the policies launched by the national government during the COVID-19 pandemic. At the same time, the category with the most "Comic" memes are "Work and study" with 34 memes, for the

"Satiric" type narrative scheme the category with the highest orientation to such scheme is "Politics" followed by "Prohibitions and orders". Finally, the category with the highest number of "Tragic" narrative scheme memes is "Work and study", information presented in Table VL.

Table VL: Relationship between categories and narrative scheme of memes

Category	Narrative scheme	Absolute frequency	Relative frequency
Stigma and exclusion	Comic	6	3,39%
	Satiric	5	2,82%
Total		11	6,21%
Others	Comic	25	14,12%
	Satiric	11	6,21%
	Tragic	1	0,56%
Total		37	20,90%
Politics	Satiric	17	9,60%
	Comic	1	0,56%
Total		18	10,17%
Prohibitions and orders	Comic	22	12,43%
	Satiric	15	8,47%
	Tragic	6	3,39%
Total		43	24,29%
Mental health	Comic	3	1,69%
	Tragic	2	1,13%
Total		5	2,82%
Services	Comic	5	2,82%
	Satiric	2	1,13%
Total		7	3,95%
Free time	Comic	4	2,26%
	Tragic	1	0,56%
	Satiric	1	0,56%
Total		6	3,39%
Work and study	Comic	34	19,21%
	Tragic	9	5,08%
	Satiric	7	3,95%
Total		50	28,25%
Overall total		177	100,00%

Source: Created by the authors.

The next subcategory, it can be affirmed that the most used actors in the memes published by professors of higher education institutions during the pandemic were or referred to some

common person (31.6% of the total memes), followed by students and professors each with 17 and 14 memes respectively. However, some celebrities (12 memes), the vaccine against COVID-19 (10 memes), “Protection elements” and “Public servant” (each with a sum of 9 memes) were also actors. Table VII shows all the types of actors (29) that originated from the previous analysis of the memes.

Table VII: Actors of memes

Actor	Absolute frequency	Relative frequency
Common person	56	31,64%
Students	17	9,60%
Professors	14	7,91%
Celebrity	12	6,78%
Vaccine	10	5,65%
Protection elements	9	5,08%
Public servant	9	5,08%
Professors and students	6	3,39%
Salesperson	4	2,26%
Virus	4	2,26%
Brand	3	1,69%
Parents	3	1,69%
Entrepreneur	3	1,69%
Classes	3	1,69%
Isolation	3	1,69%
Organization	3	1,69%
Loving couple	2	1,13%
Toilet paper	2	1,13%
Medical personnel	2	1,13%
Economics	2	1,13%
Government	2	1,13%
Believer	1	0,56%
Drug trafficker	1	0,56%
Extraterrestrials	1	0,56%
Workers	1	0,56%
Drugs	1	0,56%
Tests	1	0,56%
Tax reform	1	0,56%
Antivaccine	1	0,56%
Total	177	100,00%

Source: Created by the authors.

As with the subcategories, the actors are related to the categories, as shown in Table VIII, where for most categories, the actor in the graphic piece is an "Common person", but categories such as "Politics" have " Public servant ", "Services" and focus on "Vaccines" as actors; in the category "Work and study" the most used actors in the memes during the pandemic, by professors of higher education institutions, were "Professors" and "Students". It should be noted that when the subcategorization of this topic was done, a total of 29 actors that could be found in the memes.

Table VIII: Relationship between categories and actors of memes

Category	Actor	Absolute frequency	Relative frequency
Stigma and exclusion	Common person	6	3,39%
	Organization	2	1,13%
	Vaccine	2	1,13%
	Virus	1	0,56%
Total		11	6,21%
Others	Common person	13	7,34%
	Protection elements	4	2,26%
	Celebrity	3	1,69%
	Virus	2	1,13%
	Toilet paper	2	1,13%
	Economics	2	1,13%
	Loving couple	2	1,13%
	Drugs	1	0,56%
	Brand	1	0,56%
	Public servant	1	0,56%
	Believer	1	0,56%
	Medical personnel	1	0,56%
	Vaccine	1	0,56%
	Entrepreneur	1	0,56%
	Antivaccine	1	0,56%
	Extraterrestrials	1	0,56%
Total		37	20,90%
Politics	Public servant	8	4,52%
	Common person	6	3,39%
	Vaccine	2	1,13%
	Government	1	0,56%
	Tax reform	1	0,56%
Total		18	10,17%
Prohibitions and orders	Common person	18	10,17%
	Celebrity	7	3,95%
	Protection elements	5	2,82%
	Salesperson	4	2,26%
	Isolation	3	1,69%
	Professors	1	0,56%
	Tests	1	0,56%
	Brand	1	0,56%

Table VIII: Relationship between categories and actors of memes

Category	Actor	Absolute frequency	Relative frequency
	Virus	1	0,56%
	Drug trafficker	1	0,56%
	Organization	1	0,56%
Total		43	24,29%
Mental health	Common person	4	2,26%
	Celebrity	1	0,56%
Total		5	2,82%
Services	Vaccine	5	2,82%
	Government	1	0,56%
	Common person	1	0,56%
Total		7	3,95%
Free time	Common person	6	3,39%
Total		6	3,39%
Work and study	Students	17	9,60%
	Professors	13	7,34%
	Professors and students	6	3,39%
	Classes	3	1,69%
	Parents	3	1,69%
	Entrepreneur	2	1,13%
	Common person	2	1,13%
	Brand	1	0,56%
	Workers	1	0,56%
	Celebrity	1	0,56%
	Medical personnel	1	0,56%
Total		50	28,25%
Overall total		177	100,00%

Source: Created by the authors.

For the subcategory of "Target audience", 11 possible receivers of the meme message were created. According to Table IX, the main character to whom the memes are addressed is the "Common person", who represents approximately 63.3% of the total sample. Also standing out in the list are "Students" (23 memes), the "Government" (12 memes) and the duo of "Professors and students" which has 10 memes.

Table IX: Target audience

Target audience	Absolute frequency	Relative frequency
Common person	112	63,28%
Students	23	12,99%
Government	12	6,78%
Professors and students	10	5,65%
Professors	9	5,08%
Workers	5	2,82%
Parents	3	1,69%
Believer	1	0,56%
Antivaccine	1	0,56%
Virus	1	0,56%
Total general	177	100,00%

Source: Created by the authors.

Finally, the relationship between categories and the subcategory of "Target audience", is represented in Table X, from which we can highlight that in all categories of memes the "Common person" prevails, this to define to whom the meme is directed, despite this, the category of "Politics" the meme message is directed to the "Government", while memes about "Work and study", directed their central messages to "Students".

Table X: Relationship between categories and target audience

Category	Target audience	Absolute frequency	Relative frequency
Stigma and exclusion	Common person	11	6,21%
Total		11	6,21%
Others	Common person	35	19,77%
	Workers	1	0,56%
	Believer	1	0,56%
Total		37	20,90%
Politics	Government	11	6,21%
	Common person	6	3,39%
	Antivaccine	1	0,56%
Total		18	10,17%
Prohibitions and orders	Common person	40	22,60%
	Government	1	0,56%
	Virus	1	0,56%
	Professors and students	1	0,56%
Total		43	24,29%
Mental health	Common person	5	2,82%
Total		5	2,82%
Services	Common person	7	3,95%
Total		7	3,95%
Free time	Common person	6	3,39%
Total		6	3,39%
Work and study	Students	23	12,99%
	Professors and students	9	5,08%
	Professors	9	5,08%
	Workers	4	2,26%
	Parents	3	1,69%
	Common person	2	1,13%
Total		50	28,25%
Overall total		177	100,00%

Source: Created by the authors.

Narrative

To demonstrate the categorization and subcategorization in the practical part, a series of memes belonging to each category classification will be presented below. To begin with, by means of Figure 1, the "Services" category can be identified, since it refers to the vaccination service that was being provided to counteract the virus. The same figure was subcategorized as "Textual" since it only needed the textual format to express the central theme. The actor in this case is closely related to the category since they are "Vaccines", in this case mention is made of 5 product brands (Pfizer, AstraZeneca, Janssen, Sputnik and Sinopharm). In addition, the narrative scheme of this meme is of "Satiric" type since it makes a criticism in a burlesque tone that in the national market there is piracy of all kinds of products, in this case in vaccines, since the distribution of the same is regulated only for the government to do so. Finally, this meme is addressed to any "Common person".



Figure 1: Services-Textual [15].

For the category of "Prohibitions and orders", Figure 2 is a correct example, whose central theme is the restrictions, isolation and physical distancing that were imposed during the pandemic. Additionally, it is of the "Graphic-textual" type, since both components depend on each other to give the correct meaning to the meme, and this also allows fulfilling the necessary criteria to consider a graphic piece as a meme. The actor of the meme is a "Celebrity", since Diomedes Díaz was a renowned Colombian singer. It was classified as "Satiric" because despite its mocking tone and that it is related to a song of the artist "sin

medir distancias" (without measuring distances), it seeks to criticize the unconsciousness of people not to comply with the orders issued by the authorities. Finally, the meme is addressed to any "Common person".



Figure 2: Prohibitions and orders-Graphic-textual [16]

Figure 3 exemplifies a meme from the "Work and Study" category, as it refers to what most teachers suffered during the pandemic, which was that none of their students responded and participated in the virtual sessions. Like the previous example, it is a "Graphic-textual" piece whose narrative scheme is "Tragic", as the teachers felt alone and ignored. The actor, who is played by Krusty the clown, is the "Professors" who had to give classes remotely, and the meme is addressed to the "Students".



Figure 3: Work and study-Graphic-textual [17].

For the category of "Stigma and exclusion" we have the example in Figure 4, which refers to the stigmatization and dismissal of some vaccines by the common people, in this case it seeks to exclude the vaccine manufactured by Sinovac since when European Union countries opened borders, one of the requirements was that those who visited their countries had to have the required doses, but also from specific laboratories, to allow entry into the country. The meme is "Graphic-textual", and the main character is the "Vaccine" because although it can be considered as a common person, the central theme is the different vaccine laboratories. It is worth mentioning that the target was the "Common people" because the author, through "Satiric", seeks to expose the dilemma of discrimination of the COVID-19 vaccine laboratories.



Figure 4: Stigma and exclusion-Graphic-textual [18]

To exemplify memes about "Politics", the graphic piece in Figure 5 is used, since the "Satiric" narrative scheme seeks to criticize and show dissatisfaction with the macroeconomic policies adopted by the Colombian National Government, which sought to tax at a higher percentage some products of the family basket, in addition to the dissatisfaction with the problems of mass vaccination in the country. That is why, in the case of this meme, we want to make a mocking tone and relate the two situations with vaccination.

As for the actor or actors of the meme are "Public servant", in this case the president, the vice-president and the president of the Congress, who were in power at the time. As for, to whom the spicy and burlesque content is directed is to the "National Government", so that it would realize that Colombians did not agree with the political and health situation of the country. Finally, like most of the other memes, this one is of a "Graphic-textual" type.



Figure 5: Politics-Graphic-textual [19]

On the other way, vacations fall into the category "Free time", according to Figure 6 for the year 2020, which was the year where there were more restrictions and isolation, people could not go out to places of recreation and visit other parts of the country or the world, this because there were prohibitions, which is why the vacation photo of that first year of pandemic was a photographic montage where with a little framing and focus generates the composition and the perfect effect of a desired vacation at the beach. In this case, we are also facing a "Graphic-textual" meme, where both the actor and the target are the "Common people" who at that time were tired of confinement and restrictions, and only longed for the day it would all end to go out and enjoy life again. Finally, the narrative structure is "Tragic" because of the above, since, for a year, if not a little longer, there were many restrictions and prohibitions to go out, to enjoy life and to share time with family and friends.



Figure 6: Free time-Graphic-textual [20]

With respect to the category of "Mental health", it can be seen represented in Figure 7, because during the pandemic, because of the stress produced by the news about the number of deaths due to COVID-19, the number of contagions and isolation, mental and psychological health was affected. According to Hernandez [21], the excess of information and rumors could make people feel that they did not have a clear idea of what to do. Because of this, individuals during the pandemic felt feelings of stress, anxiety, fear, sadness, and loneliness, thus increasing the possibility of worsening previous mental health disorders. In the specific case of Figure 7, the need to look for everything related to how to prevent contagion and the scarcity of basic products in the family basket, such as toilet paper and food, can be observed.

The figure refers to the Google search engine to complement and give meaning to the graphic piece. That is why Figure 7 is of the "Graphic-textual" type, which has a "Comic" narrative structure, since each of the searches made by the person in the meme during the pandemic were nonsensical things that inspire humor to the people who were close to the meme. Additionally, the subcategories of actor and target, in this case, are "Common person", who during the pandemic were desperate to find answers and solutions to possible catastrophic situations that could be imagined.

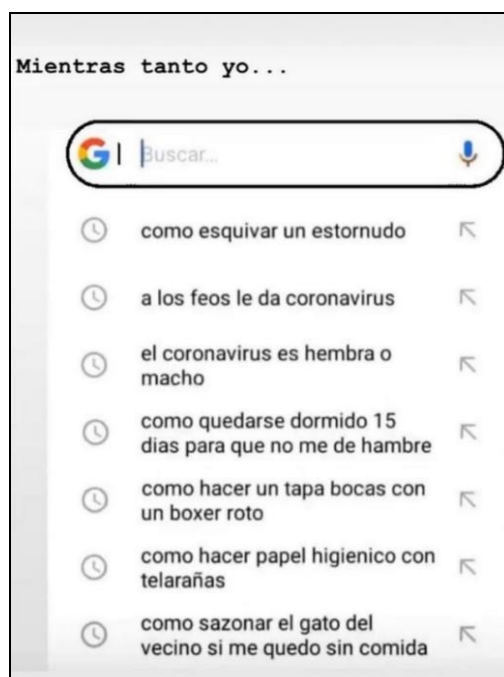


Figure 7: Mental health- Graphic-textual [22]

Finally, the "Others" category includes memes that have no relation with the other 7 categories already established. In the case of Figure 8, the actor are those "Antivaccine" people, represented by Hollywood actor Willem Dafoe, who is having a conversation with a person who defends the erroneous ideas that the earth is flat. The graphic piece is "Satiric", since in a mocking tone its objective is to criticize and judge the people who said they were not in favor of vaccines and who believed that not getting vaccinated was going to be the way out of the pandemic. This meme is addressed to any "Common person" and like most of the memes evaluated, it is of the "Graphic-textual" type, where the graphic part is a quote from the Spiderman movie, while the textual part is the adjustment of this quote to the context of the pandemic.



Figure 8: Others- Graphic-textual [23]

Discussion

Content analysis based on digital interactivity and information exchange across social networks offers a critical lens for comprehending systemic transformations in higher education. The findings of this study—highlighting a heavy reliance on "Work and study" themes (28.25%) expressed predominantly through comic (56.50%) and satirical (32.77%) frames—align with contemporary literature positioning memetic humor as both a psychological defense mechanism and a form of informal institutional critique. Building upon [13], foundational work on memetic units [12] categorization of pandemic social media dynamics, our empirical results show how university faculty utilized online platforms to process sudden operational shifts. Recent studies further confirm that design elements in internet memes directly contribute to relieving academic stress and emotional tension within university environments [7].

While early academic literature focused almost exclusively on immediate emergency teaching friction, pedagogical confusion, and digital adaptation [2]; [8], post-pandemic scholarship demonstrates that university instruction continues to be shaped by digital fatigue, behavioral dependence, and blurred professional-personal boundaries. Memes serve as multimodal narrative devices that allow university professors to externalize labor

precarity, technological anxiety, and student disengagement without directly confronting institutional hierarchies. Furthermore, these digital behaviors connect with broader behavioral economics perspectives, where technology dependence, impulsivity, and digital resource usage alter decision-making patterns in academic work environments [10], [9].

Furthermore, the high prevalence of the "Common person" as both main actor (31.64%) and target audience (63.28%) reinforces the function of memes in fostering collective identity and peer empathy across academic communities. This collective coping mechanism was particularly crucial given the disproportionate mental health impacts, gendered work-life imbalances, and heightened anxiety experienced by university staff during crisis periods [3]. For future research, scholars should explore how memetic communication interacts with long-term faculty well-being, gendered academic burdens, behavioral digital dependencies, and the deliberate pedagogical integration of memes as active learning and reflective tools in higher education.

Conclusiones

This paper has developed a content analysis based on the memes published on the Internet during the COVID-19 pandemic, as a form of expression by teachers in higher education of the experiences, emotions and situations lived, shared by digital media amid the transformations and impacts generated in the human, daily and professional dimension. The categories with the highest presence identified in the study were: Work and study and Prohibitions and orders with relative frequencies of 28.25% and 24.29%, in that order. In the first case, it should be noted that from the teachers' point of view, the participation of their students' suffered limitations. In many cases, they felt ignored or that their students were not listening to them and were distracted by other activities. Regarding Prohibitions and orders, critical positions were expressed about non-compliance and the lack of awareness of people in the face of restrictions, isolation, and physical distancing. The category with the lowest frequency was Mental health (2.82%).

Another observation of the study implies that the main actors with the highest frequency in the memes published by professors of higher education institutions during the pandemic were the following: Common Person (31.64%), Students (9.60%) and Professors (7.91%). On the other hand, the main recipients of the memes, i.e., to whom the message is directed corresponded to the following: Common Person (63.28%), Students (12.99%) and Government (6.78%) and the recipients with the lowest frequency were Antivaccine and Virus with a relative frequency of 0.56% each. Finally, it should be noted that the type of meme with the highest preponderance was the Graphic-textual with a relative frequency of 66.67% and the most used narrative scheme was the Comic narrative with 56.50%.

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