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Student's Embrace 'Harlem 'Shake meme videos

It seems like everyone is doing the Harlem Shake nowadays.

Originating from the YouTube account of DizastaMusic, the Harlem Shake dance has turned into a popular video meme that students across the nation have latched on to.

The dance traditionally features one person, normally wearing a mask or helmet, dancing in a room of crowded people. When the music drops, everyone joins in, showing their craziest dance moves while wearing eccentric costumes.

This simple dance routine has inspired hundreds of other videos across the Web. College dorm friends, firefighters, even your grandma is probably doing the Harlem Shake.

The University of Georgia men's swimming and diving team took to the pool when filming their own version of the video.

Michele Knobel, a professor in the College of Education and Human Services at Montclair State University, has studied memes and how they change while traversing across the Internet. She says that the concept of memes predate the Web and hold "units of cultural meaning."

She points to research by evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins, who used the term "meme" in 1976 to express the natural human spread of information through replication and modification of ideas and cultures.

The Internet meme, Knobel says, shares the common characteristics of being quick to spread and easy to replicate.

"It has to capture people's imagination in some way," she said.

Knobel says that it is not so much the physical meme, a humorous video or picture, that makes the fad take off, but the communal aspect of participating in transmitting the meme to others. She says that the feeling of being part of an "inside joke," and ease of replication, helps spark the flame for a meme to become popular.

As Internet memes become part of daily life for many, students have also begun to study the cultural implications of online trends. Carl Chen, a senior sociology major at Yale University, was featured in the spring 2012 edition of *Habitus*, Yale's undergraduate social science journal.

He says that while a lot of people criticize memes for being the “easy joke” or “beating a dead horse,” he views them as a way to create a more democratic Internet.

With websites such as Reddit, where users can “upvote” good content, and YouTube, where popularity depends on views, Chen sees these platforms as a way for real people to select what content they find interesting.

“You only see what society deems as good,” he said, quipping, “Assuming you think society has good taste.”

Elias Gardea, a senior psychology student at the University of Texas at Austin, organized a Harlem Shake Video at the campus’ Perry-Castañeda Library.

Gardea says that filming the video in a calm place on campus where most students are accustomed to studying and then bursting into “utter mayhem” made the video achieve popularity on the Internet. The video currently has around 100,00 views.

“The video was a heck of a lot of fun to make, and you got to interact with people you have never met,” he said.

The original creator of the Harlem Shake dance, whose identity is not known, goes by the screen name of Filthy Frank. Videos on his YouTube Account, which has over 109,000 subscribers, feature his outlandish, and somewhat crude, cast of characters.

Request for interview through email and social media profiles went unanswered, but Filthy Frank did let his followers know through Twitter how he feels about inspiring this popular video meme.

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