

# **INTERNET MEMES AS AN INTERNAL COMMUNICATION STRATEGY: PRACTICES AT THE STARTUP DELIVERY DIRETO AS A CASE STUDY<sup>1</sup>**

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**Abstract:** This article presents some results of the application of internet memes as a strategic tool for internal communication in the startup of the Locaweb group, Delivery Direto. The use of these contents as a management technique occurred during the year 2021 and the first half of 2022. We carried out a study with comparative data regarding the turnover rate (FORMAGGIO; MELO, 2021), engagement in company events and favorability rates for from the calculation of the employee Net Promoter Score (RAJASEKARAN, 2018).

**Keywords:** internal communication; memes; endomarketing; organizational culture; communication.

## INTRODUCTION

This article presents some results of the internal communication actions carried out at the startup Delivery Direto, from the Locaweb group, in São Paulo. Among the practices carried out, the company chose the “internet meme” media as an internal communication tool that helps the function of “enchanted”, engaging and retaining employees (BRUM, 2020). In parallel, the startup started the “Encantômetro” action: a weekly organizational climate survey that uses the Google form to collect information related to the employee’s perception of the organizational climate. With the data obtained, we carried out a comparative study regarding the staff turnover rate (FORMAGGIO; MELO, 2021), engagement in company events and favorability indices based on the calculation of the employee Net Promoter Score (RAJASEKARAN, 2018). The objective is to understand how internet memes can be considered important tools in internal communication actions.

It is difficult for communication to occur without facing problems, as Chiavenato (2005) points out. Communication barriers

are common during information exchange stages. Therefore, the basic process of an efficient communication requires that the message be transmitted in a way in which the communication noises are minimized and, thus, guarantee that the receiver understands it. The author (p. 142-143) states that the communication process is part of administrative activities and, in this dynamic, has two objectives. The first is to convey information clearly so that people can perform tasks efficiently. The second purpose is to engage, motivate and promote employee satisfaction in their jobs.

In this sense, we understand that internal communication is a strategic management tool. Linked to it is internal marketing<sup>2</sup> which assumes the role of convincing employees in companies that their journey at the institution is valued and profitable. For Analisa Brum (2020, p.29) endomarketing uses internal communication as a mass tool and, therefore, companies bet on ways to “make common” the message in order to reach the entire segment of the internal public and make them to have the behavior she wants. For the author:

Both internal communication and endomarketing efforts must have as a final result the motivation and engagement of people, as well as a comfortable and happy environment so that they can carry out their activities with more quality and productivity. (BRUM, 2020, p. 47)

In the midst of this challenge, internal communication professionals need to “say what needs to be said, but in an emotional, inspiring and engaging way” (BRUM, 2020, p.47), since 4.0 professionals tend to give preferences for companies that are concerned with the fluidity of communication and, consequently, have a pleasant organizational environment.

To achieve this purpose, a series of devices are used by professionals who have been given

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2 Endomarketing is a set of actions aimed at developing a pleasant work environment for employees

the mission of managing activities related to corporate communication. Among these techniques is the use of playful resources to capture the public's attention. According to Lipovetsky apud Siqueira (2013, p.26), producers of advertising content must, instead of using meticulous coercion, communicate effectively; instead of transmitting regulatory rigidity, seduce the public; and instead of promoting mechanical training, provide playful fun.

About these contents, Jenkins et al. (2014) emphasizes that they need to be of the "sticky" type, and this is linked to propagation practices. According to the author, "spreadability" refers to the technical resources that make it easier for some type of content to circulate compared to others, to the economic structures that support or restrict circulation, to the attributes of a media text that can arouse motivation of a community to share material and the social networks that connect people through the exchange of meaningful bytes. Jenkins adds:

Our use of "spreadability" is perhaps most effective as a corrective to the ways in which the concept of "stickiness" has evolved over time to measure success in online commerce. This term has emerged in the marketing discourse and has been popularized through its use in Malcolm Gladwell's work entitled *The Tipping Point* (2000) and in other contexts; In a broad sense, "adherence" refers to the need to create content that attracts and engages the audience. [...] In short, for Gladwell, the content that sticks, that has grip, is the material that people want to propagate. (JENKINS et al., 2014, p. 27)

In our view, internet memes are content that sticks. And for this reason, they were the contents chosen in the actions developed in the internal communication of Delivery Direto.

## **THE NOTION OF MEMES APPLIED TO THE STUDY AND OUR CORPUS**

Several studies have already been developed to understand the dimension of memetics, or rather, of memes. The concept of the term "meme" comes from the field of biology and was coined by the biologist Richard Dawkins when, in his book "The selfish gene", of 1976, he abbreviated the Greek term "Mimema" - which means "that which is imitated" - to rhymes with gene. Although it emerged in the area of natural science, the study of memes expands into social science. The concept of what we know today as memes goes through a series of discussions between authors. Among them, Dawkins' concept, which encompasses the idea of a particle of information that is transmitted from person to person - as if memes were the genes of culture (apud CHAGAS, 2020, p. 25). Also in this line, the philosopher Daniel C. Dennet already stated that memes compete with each other for the information storage resource that our mind has (apud CHAGAS, 2020, p. 26).

After decades of the first investigations on memetics, the theme has gained strength and focused on understanding what has been circulating in online and offline networks: internet memes. Created and spread mainly by the inhabitants of cyberspace, memes are "fully social", usually in which the Picture and the text work together to convey a particular message. Many of them are a consequence of already consolidated ideologies and affinity spaces, with ideas that already occupy these places, without needing innovative creative strategies to grab hold of people and transfer to their minds. Memes play a significant role in how we interact and position ourselves in relation to others, and in how we read and write our worlds (KNOBEL & LANKSHEAR, 2020).

They are a media genre, as argued by Knobel

and Lankshear (2007) and there is cultural expertise and social semantics instilled in the practice of sharing popular references through these contents. According to Chagas and Toth (2016), memes are “serious business” because the production of meaning operated by them makes explicit possible fluctuations in public opinion regarding a given topic. They always act in groups and are characterized, as Shifman (2014) explains, by gaining context together. They are perceived as diachronic experiences, based on their discursive and associative elements, and yet, the meme has a potential for a rhetorical and persuasive artifact (HUNTINGTON, 2016; MILNER, 2013; SHIFMAN, 2014).

Chagas and Toth (2016) explain that observation proves that restrictive definitions of the concept of meme can lead to inaccuracies in the evaluation of contents. The authors note that it is common among researchers, two types of classification: which takes into consideration, only the media through which the meme circulates, characterizing these contents according to their formats in: imagery, textual, sound and audiovisual memes. The second takes into account native categories created by Internet users who share them, dividing memes into types such as: image macros (photographs with captions), exploitables (montages with overlapping images), look-alikes (juxtaposition of portraits of characters side by side for comparison purposes), selfies, snowclones (textual formulas, such as “you can replace X with Y” or “in Brazilian Portuguese, we don’t say X we say Y and I think that’s beautiful”), and various other denominations. “The problem is that these two ways of classifying these contents are primarily based on their formats and ignore intentionality. Therefore, they are not exactly meme genres”, they state (p. 2016).

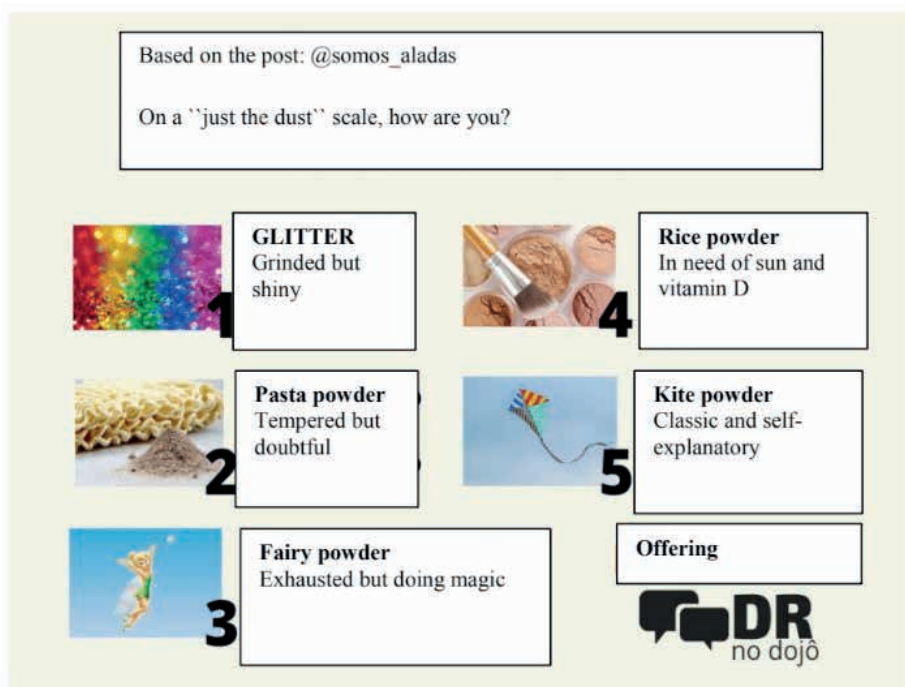
<sup>3</sup> The Newsletter “Anúncios de Quinta” involves a comical meaning, because in Brazilian Portuguese there is the expression “Quinta categoria” which means something of very low quality, and “Quinta” is also the noun for one of the days of the week in Portuguese. In other words, “Anúncios de Quinta” may be interpreted as a low-quality newsletter sent on Thursdays

According to Schiffman (2014) and Chagas et al. (2016), memes can be categorized in three different ways: persuasion memes, collective action memes, and public discussion memes. Chagas and Toth (2016, p. 218) consider them genres of memes and explain that:

persuasive memes emphasize rhetoric in their content; grassroots action memes focus their efforts on recruiting individuals to take part in their campaigns; and public discussion memes are governed by the repercussion and reappropriation of the pieces by different internet users or groups of internet users. Analyzing the memes based on their genres and aspects facilitates the monitoring work, as it allows the researcher to plan with greater clarity the focus on its object and, consequently, its methodological strategy for collecting its corpora.

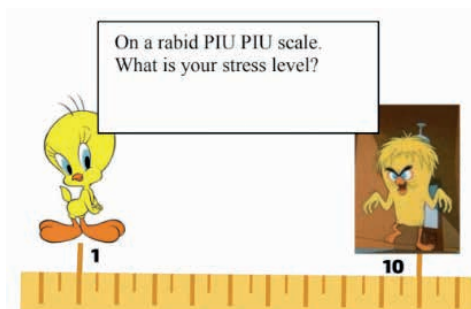
The universe, a set of elements that have the characteristics that form our object of study, is made up of 94 memes used, within a year (May 2021 to May 2022) to publicize “DR no Dojô” (a conversation wheel which happened weekly - from May to December 2021), in the Newsletter “News Thursday”<sup>3</sup> (published weekly on Thursdays, since January 2022), and in extra communications - three times a month - (such as reports from Human Resources, events and training). In this universe, memes linked to the genres “persuasion” and “public discussion” prevail, as in the following images:

It is important to highlight that the memes used are intended to “awaken engagement (in others)” (CHAGAS; TOTH, 2016), with persuasion memes; and “familiarize and socialize (others and oneself) with the universe of politics” (CHAGAS; TOTH, 2016), with public discussion memes, even if this “policy” belongs to the company, intrinsically linked to the principles of its organizational culture.



**Picture 1:** Meme used in the dissemination of “DR no Dojô” about exhaustion.

**Source:** Picture prepared by the endomarketing of Delivery Direto and published internally on the Slack channel #Anuncios\_gente\_bem-estar on February 24, 2022.



**Picture 2:** Meme used in the dissemination of “DR no Dojô” about stress.

**Source:** Picture prepared by the endomarketing of Delivery Direto and published internally on the Slack channel #Anuncios\_gente\_bem-estar on July 1, 2021.



**Picture 3:** Meme used in the promotion of “Encantômetro” about the indication of free courses.

**Source:** Picture prepared by the endomarketing of Delivery Direto and published internally on the Slack channel #Anuncios\_gente\_bem-estar on October 21, 2021.

## THE DELIVERY DIRETO

The history of Delivery Direto began in 2010 with three students from the ``Universidade de São Paulo`` (USP) who decided to structure a website to identify the best establishments in the city based on consumer opinion. Before being Delivery Direto, the service was called Kekanto Guide. Initially, Guia Kekanto was headquartered in a small mezzanine and had three young founders and an intern. With a typical startup spirit, the team's monthly get-together included a barbecue on the roof above the store. This relaxed culture and communication without major barriers due to the size of the team, made the team increasingly engaged in the company's challenges.

According to its founder Allan Panossian, while participating in the podcast "Talks By Leo" (2021), many startups fail due to problems related to people management, hence the importance of promoting integration and maintaining a pleasant social climate in the company. With the commitment of the team and the excellent development of the company, the company received international investments, awards and recognition from Google and Apple with one of the best apps of the year 2010, 2013 and 2014. And with that, it developed partnerships with entrepreneurs of the city and mapping the main needs of restaurants.

Thus, in 2016, during a readjustment, Guia Kekanto became Delivery Direto - a delivery application development company that carries the restaurant's brand and does not generate commission costs. The market adopted the idea and, in the following year, the company reached the *Breakeven*<sup>4</sup>. In 2018, with a few dozen employees and an office in the Butantã neighborhood, in the city of São Paulo, internal communication occurred fluidly and without strategic planning. The routine of a small office was conducive for information

to spread quickly by "word of mouth". In addition, the visual aid of posters on the wall fulfilled the role of informing the team about some matters relevant to their daily lives.

However, in 2020, shortly after it was acquired by the Locaweb group, the Covid-19 pandemic brought yet another challenge for Delivery Direto: a 3.5x growth in operations and, consequently, the multiplication of the number of new employees who they needed to have a quick overview of the business, an understanding of the organizational culture and a sense of belonging. As a result of these very sudden changes, one of the management's concerns was to keep the organizational environment relaxed so that, thus, the formula of mixing fun with work, which had worked so well over the years, would continue to work - even with the challenge of managing a team composed of new members who worked remotely and had not experienced the light and friendly dynamics of the office.

In addition, preserving the startup's identity and being faithful to the values of the organizational culture was a priority. Delivery Direto, in the midst of adaptations, valued communication that represented the topic "Have fun!" of the culture statute that says that employees spend about 8 hours a day connected to the work environment, so it is so important to transform some serious subjects into relaxed and fluid ones.

In this sense, Delivery Direto decided to structure an area dedicated to endomarketing in 2021. Internal communication assumed the strategic role of keeping employees' attention to the information passed on and inducing them to carry out the activities proposed by the company. In the midst of strategic planning to make this project viable, memes were selected as a tool for transmitting ideas. Because, according to Blackmore, information competes for the human mind to be stored and memes have the ability to adapt to the

<sup>4</sup> *Breakeveis* the break-even point at which there is no loss and no profit in the company.

environment as purely and simply “hosts” (apud Chagas 2020, p.26).

## MEMES APPLIED TO INTERNAL COMMUNICATION

As of May 2021, Delivery Direto strategically started using memes to communicate the company’s actions. So, it drew up a profile for the internal public and, for the collection of samples, it launched the Encantômetro - a weekly organizational climate survey that uses the Google form as a survey platform. Thus, he began experimenting with the meme as a resource for enchanting and retaining employees since, according to Siqueira (2013), entertainment is part of culture. Therefore, individuals engage in playful activities to vent their leisure desires.

We can see that, over the course of 1 year, the Encantômetro editions that had the most participation were those that used memes as the basis of communications. For example, in the 4th week of January - when sending the Newsletter “News Thursday” - which includes useful information and the link to the Encantômetro form, the sector had 73.7% in the opening rate of emails and 42 % of responses in the Encantômetro. This email was broadcast near the beginning of the 22nd edition of Big Brother Brasil, on Rede Globo de Televisão, in which one of the participants declared that he would like to be famous “Beyoncé level”. So, following the power of the catchphrase’s internet memes, the subject of the launch email was “The Beyoncé-level famous little newspaper has arrived” and captured the readers’ attention and thus achieved a high opening rate.

Another action that had repercussions was the “cookie festival”, whose name is a reference to the native expression of the inhabitants

of the internet: cookie. According to the newspaper Gazeta do Povo, this word would fit as a synonym for “giving a compliment” (2019). So, we used our Delivery of gratitude (a weekly ritual in which employees thank each other) to create a virtual wall with the main thanks. The result of the title of the subject of the email “With the cookie festival, the News Thursday arrived” was a 73.8% opening rate and 61.2% of the respondents of the organizational climate survey left a message of gratitude for compose this festival.

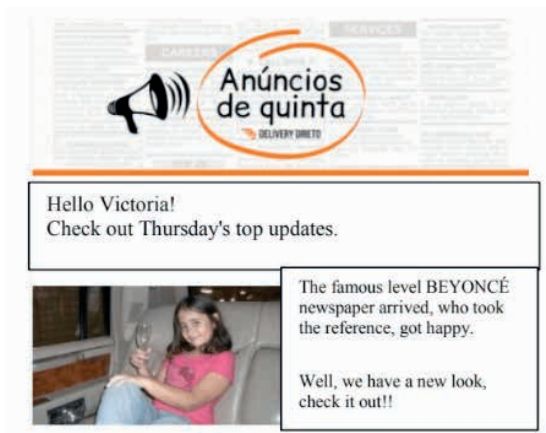
The certification journey campaign: *Great Place to Work*<sup>5</sup> was produced in a light language and full of memes, since the planning of media flights<sup>6</sup> was focused on just two weeks. For this reason, in the midst of “jokes”, we use various memetic resources to engage the team in responding to the consultancy’s survey. GPTW<sup>7</sup>. Since the more creative the initiatives and communications, the greater the chances of being conceived the involvement (BRUM, 2020).

Among the meme tools used in this certification challenge, there is the example of communications about updating response rates, which used the catchphrase “Let’s go, guys, girls!” - said by blogger Bianca Andrade during the 20th edition of Big Brother Brasil - to motivate the team. The classic Picture of the player David Luiz was also used, in the 2014 World Cup, saying “I just wanted to bring a little happiness to my people”, when the rates of respondents started to decline. With this, Delivery Direto was able to recover the growing wave of completed forms. Thus, 10 days after the start of the survey and 4 days before the closing date, the required number of opinion submissions on the platform was reached. The journey towards certification ended with 83% participation - 13% more

5 Great Place to Work is a consultancy that supports organizations to achieve better results through a culture of trust, high performance and innovation.

6 Media flights is the period in which the campaign will run.

7 GPTW is the abbreviation of the consultancy: Great Place to Work.



**Picture 3:** Reformulation of “News Thursday”, by Delivery Direto.

**Source:** Newsletter “News Thursday”, conveyed internally in the email on January 27, 2022.



**Picture 4:** Certification journey campaign: *Great Place to Work*.

**Source:** Newsletter “News Thursday”, published internally on March 24, 2022.



than required by: *Great Place to Work*.

## **RESULTS FOR COMMUNICATION MANAGEMENT**

Monitoring the organizational climate at Delivery Direto, through the Encantômetro survey, revealed the importance of strategic planning for the transmission of ideas. Employees rate the company on a weekly basis from 0 to 10. From this classification, the internal communication sector extracted the calculation of eNPS - a method that assesses the level of satisfaction and loyalty of two respondents - which reported 72.36% favorability in the first 15 weeks of the encantômetro (from May 27, 2021 as of September 09, 2021). This period marks the beginning of the use of two memes in internal communication. The eNPS index of the most recent 15 weeks (from March 10, 2022 to July 17, 2022) reported 85.58% favorability.

This 13.22% increase in the quality of the organizational environment reflected the resolution of a management problem: the turnover rate (FORMAGGIO; MELO, 2021). This indicator measures the number of employees who leave the company in a given period of time. When elevated, this metric can indicate a series of corporate problems, including poor management of the institutional environment. With the technical use of two memetic resources to promote well-being through a well-humored communication, the rate of turnover in Delivery Direto fell from 26.92% in the first semester of 2021, to 13.85% in the first semester of 2022, or see, a decrease of 51.45% in the numbers of turnover of employees.

The results of the research of the Great Place to Work consultancy in March 2022, revealed that the plan of leadership of transmitting a quick vision of the business to the new members of time, an understanding of the organizational culture and a feeling of

belonging to the team obtains success. It was verified that 98% of employees who responded to the GPTW 2022 request affirmed that Delivery Direto is a relaxed place to work and 100% highlighted that the organization had an excellent reception. Also, in this same question, internal communication registered 91% of the satisfaction rate with the company - a higher number than the market average.

The reflection of these numbers surpassed the barriers of endomarketing and affect the company in various aspects. Among them are the reduction of costs in the recruitment processes for the replacement of the staff who request dismissal due to dissatisfaction; the retention of talents that is producing with broad knowledge in the market and the company; and the construction of a solid business brand.

According to Lima (2016), a brand can use the comic spirit, the ability to fix and perpetuate two memes as the basis of a totally transparent and understandable dialogue for consumers - in this case, collaborators - will increase empathy with the company. The author highlights that people are bombarded by countless occupations and interests. Being like this, they reserve a limited time for the oil of new information. For this reason, memes, with their doses of humor and their contagious patterns of "cultural information" that generate identification as an individual, have proven efficient and valuable as tools in marketing communication actions.

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