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Toward a taxonomy of Memes as socio-cultural and socio-linguistic phenomena: a discursive semiotic analysis of Hip Hop Festivals Memes in the Netherlands.

BA Thesis

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Table of Contents

1. Introduction

Memes are omnipresent on various social media platforms, there are **taxonomy** of Memes and their usage as an online communication infrastructure cannot be defined just by one subject, as there are many ways in which Memes are authored, authorized, used and picked up by viewers as a matter of meaning making in multimodal interaction. By the definition of Dawkins in regards to the term "Meme", he explains the following: "*We need a name for the new replicator, a noun that conveys the idea of a unit of cultural transmission, or a unit of imitation. 'Mimeme' comes from a suitable Greek root, but I want a monosyllable that sounds a bit like 'gene'. I hope my classicist friends will forgive me if I abbreviate mimeme to meme*. "(Dawkins, 1976, p.192)

In addition to the above, Dawkins defines Meme based on the notion of replicator (applied to culture). A replicator is a biological or chemical singularity of indivisible proportions. This "molecule" acts as a template, and has the capacity of creating copies of itself. (Dawkins, 1976, pp. 15) John S. Wilkins retained the notion of Meme as a core of cultural imitation while emphasizing the Meme's evolutionary aspect, defining the Meme as "the least unit of sociocultural information relative to a selection process that has favorable or unfavorable selection bias that exceeds its endogenous tendency to change". (Wilkins, J. 1998)

In the specific case of Hip Hop Memes, there are different categories of Memes that can be defined, through several elements of the Hip Hop culture. There are artists, lyrics, fans, festivals, concerts, enterprises and so on. Interestingly, if one narrows the field of Memes' authorized, used and picked up by viewers only to the making of Hip Hop festival Memes, the **taxonomy** gets rather complex, and even more when it comes to festivals in one country such as the Netherlands.

In order to understand why is there a complex taxonomy of Memes surrounding Hip Hop festivals in the Netherlands, it is important to understand and apply knowledge to stemming from the field of the sociolinguistics of globalization (Blommaert, 2010) and explore how Memes and their usage function and are influenced by one another across Hip Hop specific arenas. When it comes to Memes as a system and way of communication we are confronted with text and signs. Text and signs have meaning not in themselves but only when in use; this to say that they need to be understood productively, contextually and discursively, because they have histories, they are influenced by context and they occur within larger framework of meaning (Pennycook,2007, 44).

It follows that, Memes could be considered as **chronotopically** bounded semiotic objects of meaning making, with a history that makes new history and that in so doing helps building while being authored authorized and interpreted to new discourses. For example the "*Distracted boyfriend*" Meme first became popular in 2017, when a Turkish Facebook group used a stock photo of a man walking with a girl while checking out another girl to make a joke about Phil Collins. The Meme continues to be relevant today while being used as inspiration for pop culture

references, but is used differently by users applying all sorts of text on it and changing the context. (50 famous Memes and what they mean. (n.d.).)

When taken out of asynchronous interaction, a Meme does not bring any meaning on its own as it is an image combined with a piece of written text. However, within a given socio-cultural platform and together with the audience that makes up for the members of that very platform, a Meme develops into something more. It becomes a link to pre-textual history (socio-historical associations of text) , the contextual relations (the physical location, the participants, the indexical pointing of the world), sub-textual meaning (the ideologies, cultural frames and relations of power that enable interaction) , the inter-textual echoes (the covert and overt references to other signs and text), the post-textual interpretations (the meanings participants read into sign) (cf. Dovchin et al., 2018; Pennycook, 2007a, pp. 53-54; Sultana et al., 2015). The above lens adopted here for looking at Memes and investigating their meaning potential, not only reveals the textual processes by which users use their own personal, social and historical elements in relation to broader social scapes, but it also unravels their various sophisticated ways of connecting social semiotics of transignification (Pennycook, 2007, pp. 53-54).

In this study, the results indicate that Hip Hop festival Memes are not simply semiotic resources for online communication, but they also represent the micro-hegemonic identity of their users. Digital ethnographic research takes place within the festival WOO HAH!, in order to determine why do Memes have such an influence on users and consumers and what drives them into those patterns of behavior.

As it is with Hip Hop festival communities, not only that festivals by themselves are immediately presupposing a certain discourse and behavior, but when that is added with Hip Hop as culture, and that is added to the country where the festival is held, which is another layer or category, this represents all together a very separate and unique cultural and linguistic field.

1.1 Thesis statement/objective
The objective of this research is based on a discursive semiotic analysis of Hip Hop Festival Memes in the Netherlands. With the specific focus on one Hip Hop festival in the Netherlands- WOO HAH!, the research aims to identify how Memes can play a significant role in the socio- cultural, socio-linguistic, discursive and business development of a festival in that genre, influencing the behavioral patterns and characteristics of Hip Hop festival fans.

1.2 Method
To accomplish this objective, a qualitative method was applied. More specifically- online linguistic ethnography. This method allowed me to physically and online interact with research subjects. It was applied "online vigilance", with prolonged and persistent observation online. Through this method, I gathered useful data materials and resources for this study. I visited numerous online social platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and Reddit, where I identified that all of the mentioned platforms are being actively used by Hip Hop fans of WOO HAH! and the organization of the festival, for the purposes of promotion, exchange of information and social

grouping surrounding the Hip Hop festival culture. This includes a direct access to the official pages of WOO HAH! Festival on all of the social media platforms and unofficial fan groups/pages, where only fans of WOO HAH! Interact with eachother.

I was able to collect through those social media groups Memes about WOO HAH! Festival, commentaries from WOO HAH! Fans, online music reviews from critics, promotion music videos, banners and WOO HAH! Merchandise. With that collection of materials, few categories of Memes were distinguished, indicating that there are differences in the context and purpose of the making and distribution of Memes, which are all connected to one socio- cultural group.

To further investigate into the manner of why there is a taxonomy of WOO HAH! Memes and how does that influence the industry surrounding the festival, including the marketing of the festival and the behavioral characteristics of Hip Hop fans, I decided to base the research on literature related to Discourse, Semiotics, Affinity groups, Multimodality, Light communities and Communities of practice. Through the definition of these concepts, I was able to understand and explain the role of Memes in the industry surrounding WOO HAH! Festival and the connection between the socio- cultural interactions online and offline of Hip Hop fans.

2. WOO HAH! Festival and the Hip Hop culture

In this Chapter, The Hip Hop culture in festivals, the history of WOO HAH! Festival, the Fandom surrounding this culture and this festival, will be presented.

2.1 Hip Hop culture in festivals

To go into the whole history of Hip Hop and why it is such a big phenomenon as it is today, both in the Netherlands and beyond, is a lot to go into. R J. Riesch defines Hip Hop as a genre and its usage in "Hip Hop Culture: History and Trajectory" as the following:

"*Hip Hop is used as a noun or an adjective. It is often used interchangeably with the word "rap" to describe urban spoken word music. It is also used to describe a certain typology of clothing, language usage and bodily semiotic performativity. There are three main ways in which Hip Hop artist establish authenticity: being true to themselves (i.e. being original and not trying to fit in), reflecting the community from which they are coming, and having an understanding and respect for the styles and origins of early Hip Hop.*" (R J. Riesch, 2005, p.2)

The culture of Hip Hop extends to being adopted by many other cultures around the world and constantly developing as a genre. What is even more important is that it transforms into a separate industry of its own apart from the overall music industry. The reason is that there is no other genre in music nowadays that is involved in so many cultural and artistic niches. Hip Hop and its discourse therefore are influencing the way young generation behaves, speaks, moves, travels and consumes. Hip Hop is a way of life, and conditions the way the audience views the world and society (Gadet, 2015).

Since the 1980's, Hip Hop culture has become a cultural product bought and sold all around the world. Hip Hop influence is far reaching, and mostly influences the youth culture. The genre has quickly become a way to escape from social exclusion and poverty for a category of young people in America and even Europe (Gadet, 2015).

According to Spady (2013), within the last two decades, Hip Hop has begun to be understood as a type of articulation of local conflicts that have the sole function of integration for the ethnic minorities that stay in European cities. Because of the unique aesthetic participation, Hip Hop culture has transformed into a form of protest against the urban crisis. The urban crisis is based on young people within the city that have a hard time escaping the street life. Some Hip Hop artists talk about the street lifestyle because this is the life that they grew up in or around. But the point of protesting against the urban crisis is to influence young Hip Hop music consumers to follow a new path instead of the pathway in the hood. Hip Hop has roots within the Afro-American experience, but has transformed into a global urban language that is used by ethnic minorities in multiple cities throughout. (D. A. Hollie, 2018, pp.10)

For this reason Hip Hop becomes a phenomena as the public and the consumers are bombarded daily with newcomers in the Hip Hop music industry, music festivals that attract millions of people to spend thousands on travelling in order to take part of this cultural and entertainment industry.

While innovations in sound production and lyrical content have driven rap music's evolution, the key to the impact of Hip Hop on larger portions of mainstream society has come from the financial successes that rap music have yielded for the business world. The visual arts form that was once associated with hip-hop culture has been co-opted by the business world as ad campaigns and slogans. (R J. Riesch, 2005, pp. 3)

As Hip Hop grows as a genre, many artists, such as Travis Scott and Eminem, mixed their businesses as song writers and producers with other sub businesses, such as clothing merchandise labels, record studios and festivals. Consumers of their music in that way are immediately dragged to their other niches and in that sense Hip Hop is not all about the music anymore.

In the Hip Hop industry, when it comes to the festivals organized all around the world, it is not about buying a ticket and going to multiple performances of favorite artists. It is about becoming part of something big and collective. By purchasing the merchandise created by the artist, the merchandise produces a symbolic meaning of status, connection between artist and fan, belongingness, dedication, being part of a community that you understand and they understand you. The artist is wearing the same hat as the fan. The artist is consuming the same beverages as the fan. The artist is smoking weed on stage and is attracting the crowd to do the same.

Uninformed outsiders to the Hip Hop community have used marginal issues within Hip Hop as representative of the whole. Starting with the violence associated with the gang members who were the earliest audience, and often time creators of Hip Hop, mainstream society sees what it wants to see in this subculture. The devastating effects of the crack cocaine epidemic since the

1980s plagued the communities from which rap stars were born and where its audience resided. Some of these marginal issues have come to define Hip Hop. (R J. Riesch, 2005, pp.7)

Hip Hop culture became ultimately associated with drug use and weed smoking. Therefore festivals like WOO HAH! step on this history and culture and promote it as part of the entertainment.

In a promotion video for WOO HAH! 2020 with the description of the participants going to the festival, what is considered a typical behavior is being used through multimodality with commercial purpose. Again as with Memes we see the connection between discourse, semiotics, culture and commercialization. This whole circle turns around one main purpose- profit.

"July, the time where the population of Woo Hah! arrives in their natural habitat. It may appear hostile to some, but for the bold, this is a world of surprising opportunity. Like migration birds this population goes sought, to flee from the bad festival circumstances up in the North. Close to nature. No cities. No rush. Only the best Hip Hop. The various inhabitants of this vastly- altered landscape are putting the last touches to their outfits and accessories to attract other species. Once a year this massive migration takes place, a migration that brings this unique population together. Every year the population grows bigger. We can't wait to see what will happen in the upcoming years" (WOO HAH! Festival, Planet WOO HAH!, YouTube, Jul 19, 2019)

Within the text used in the video there are few key elements and those are- the outfits and accessories used as attraction, the unique population referred to as habitants and the grow of the numbers. By implementing these particular characteristics being part of the "natural behavior" within the festival, it becomes clear that first Hip Hop festivals apply multiple sectors than just music in order to gain more profit and that is accomplished by imposing the "right discourse", meaning what is the proper behavior in order to fit in the Hip Hop community (smoke weed, buy the merchandise, go to the festival for the full weekend). Second there is a commercially created connection between the organization of the festival and the consumer, as the organization is paying attention to what the consumer needs and refers to them as habitants, meaning that the festival is their natural space, where they belong, where is their home, where they can be themselves, which is all connected to Hip Hop as a genre- the community feeling.

Hip Hop did have something to say and would continue to reflect the lives of the artists and audience. "The Message" united urban Black America as a hip-hop community because it reflected what many people dealt with day to day and how they felt. It also allowed people, unfamiliar with the conditions of urban ghettoes, to hear first-person accounts of what it was like to live in that environment. Hip Hop had the ability to bridge cultural gaps and make outsiders to the community empathize with urban Black America. However, Hip Hop's past and near-future would be based in entertainment and escape. (R J. Riesch, 2005, pp.11)

2.2 WOO HAH! The festival

WOO HAH! is a Hip Hop festival that has been taking place annually in Tilburg since 2014. The festival is organized by Mojo Concerts and the local concert venue- 013 Poppodium. "*Woo Hah! is the biggest hip-hop festival in the Netherlands. It's grown considerably over the years – beginning as a small festival with 4,000 visitors in 2014, growing to 30,000 (sell out) within a few years.*"(Dutch Review, WOO HAH! Festival, (n.d),)

Its programming consists of a combination of international names and new talents, featuring the biggest names in the hip- hop industry. As the crowd grows bigger every year reaching over 40,000 people crowd, the festival itself grows, adding indoor and outdoor stages. The festival offers more than just a music program: there is also room for fashion, sports and art. The festival has a skate hall where demonstrations of professional skaters take place and there is live graffiti on the festival site. (Bishop, 2019)

In 2017, the festival grows into a two-day event for the first time. In the construction and expansion phase, planned from 2015 to 2018, the festival receives a subsidy from Brabant C. WOO HAH! Festival moves to a new location in 2018 and grows into a three-day festival.

2.3 WOO HAH!'s Fandom

What is interesting about the popularity and success of this festival is its socio- cultural effect on the community of fans. Music festivals are in general events that attract a lot of people. The reason for that is because a festival, through history, is an event ordinarily celebrated by a community and centering on some characteristic aspect of that community and its religion or socio-cultural salient features. It is often marked as a local or national holiday. A festival constitutes typical cases of glocalization, as well as the high culture-low culture interrelationship. Next to religion and folklore, a significant origin is agricultural. (Wikipedia contributors, 2020)

By that meaning festivals hold socio- cultural significance to different communities and usually are a way of celebrating rituals, cultures and communal interests.

WOO HAH! as a festival embodies this concept by providing space and opportunity for a range of cultural and social activities such as music (Hip Hop), art (graffiti), fashion (merchandise), sport activities (skateboarding competitions), consumption of food and drinks, camping and so on. The participants in the festival engage in those social and cultural activities and form a community in the meantime, which is defined and connected by those specific group activities. Going to this music festival, as any social activity and gathering, provokes social interaction amongst the participants, which on the other hand leads to the production and distribution of discourse online and offline.

Some WOO HAH! fans take their social interactions from the festival and transfer them online under Facebook group fan pages. They interact through Memes, videos and images, by producing a lot of content related to the festival and sharing it on the official page of WOO HAH! on Facebook

- WOO HAH! Festival 2017-2021. The same goes for other social media such as Instagram, Reddit.com and YouTube.

Nowadays a fan does not necessarily incline towards being present physically at a place, by participating and communicating with other fans, in order to represent their support and interest in something/someone, thanks to online socio-technological platforms.

On YouTube the community of fans express their collective feelings and experiences from the festival under the comments section of the videos, produced as promotion material by the festival. Through those social media interactions, a direct connection between the organization of the festival and the fan community is established.
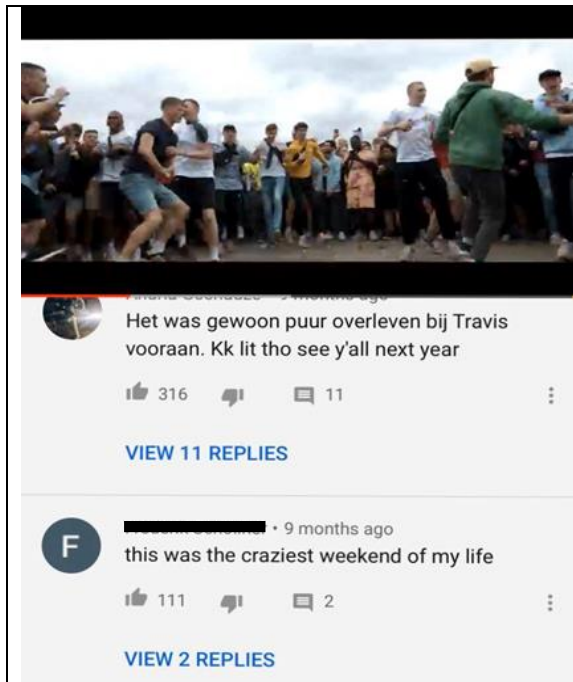

Image 1

Image 2

Image 3

Image 4

¹*Figure 1*. *Images of the comments from fans under the comments section of the You Tube video "WOO HAH!2019- Official Aftermovie"*

Through the comments by fans of the You Tube video "WOO HAH!2019- Official Aftermovie" (see Figure 1.), what can be found is a common and mutual expression of appreciation: "*Best festival in Europe*" (Image 2), "This *was the craziest weekend of my Life*" (Image 1), and a belonging to a certain group: "See *y'all in a few months!*" (Image 3). Some of the comments refer to the festival as a "vibe" (Image 2), a word defined and used to express a person's emotional state (positive or negative) ,or the atmosphere of a place as communicated to and expressed by others, bringing the feeling that WOO HAH! is not only about the music, but about the communal activities and interactions that transform it to an experience.

It seems that the festival not only introduces an amazing experience, but most importantly, the fans feel part of the festival and refer to themselves as one group. Even with the number of 40 000 participants, the turn sentence " *see you next year*", being an expression that refers to acquaintance among other people, seems natural and often used by many fans, as if they are referring to other fans as a group of friends. This multiple social media interactions bring with themselves through their social semiotic doings a feeling that WOO HAH! Festival is special in the way that the social – cultural aspect of this festival is combined with the production of discourse and the construction of conviviality. This particular community distinguishes itself from other communities by their way of behaving, interacting, their social practices and their engagement with the festival.

3. Conceptual framework and background literature

In this Chapter, the conceptual framework adopted in this research will be outlined. By explaining the used concepts- Discourse, Multimodality, Community of Practice, Light communities and the Meaning of Memes, the purpose of the research is to examine the way that these concepts apply to and influence the making and consumption of diverse categories of Memes. Together with defining what is the culture of Hip Hop festivals, by using WOO HAH! Festival and its fan community as my case in point, the research aims to distinguish the reason behind the patterns of behavior and communication, identified amongst online and offline consumers of this particular genre.

3.1 Investigating the online offline nexus through the conceptual lens of a 'Community of practice'.

The term was first used in 1991 by theorists Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger who discussed the notion of legitimate peripheral participation. In 1998, the theorist Etienne Wenger extended the

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[1] Figure 1, with Images 1, 2, 3 and 4 were retrieved from source:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g7yvrhWP9bI&list=RDg7yvrhWP9bI&start_radio=1 on 12ᵗʰ of May 2020.

concept and applied it to other domains, such as organizations. With the flourishing of online communities on the Internet, as well as the increasing need for improved knowledge management, there has been much more interest as of late in communities of practice. People see them as ways of promoting innovation, developing social capital, facilitating and spreading knowledge within a group, spreading existing tacit knowledge, etc. (Lave and Wenger, 2016)

A Community of practice is not a super-imposed entity with a top-down nature. Rather, it can evolve naturally because of the members' common interest in a particular domain or area, or it can be created deliberately with the goal of gaining knowledge related to a specific field. It is through the process of sharing information and experiences with the group that members learn from each other, and have an opportunity to develop personally and professionally (Lave and Wenger 1991).

In that sense when it comes to Hip Hop festivals, people that are involved in these festivals share a common level of knowledge, practice and interests in the same field. More importantly the community that stands behind those festivals works hard to reach the same goal- economic and symbolic capital. Within this community there are many stakeholders- performers, their managers, their booking agencies, music venues, music organizations, multiple investors and sponsors, marketing and management teams, brands and etc. All of these stakeholders create one community of practice, because they develop professionally together on a high level.

These communities take on knowledge stewarding tasks that were formerly covered by more formal organizational structures. In some organizations there are both formal and informal communities of practice. There is a great deal of interest within organizations to encourage, support, and sponsor communities of practice in order to benefit from shared knowledge that may lead to higher productivity (Wenger, 2004).

An important aspect and function of the community of practice is increasing organization performance. Lesser and Storck identify four areas of organizational performance that can be affected by communities of practice:

1. Decreasing the learning curve of new employees.

2. Responding more rapidly to customer needs and inquiries.

3. Reducing rework and preventing "reinvention of the wheel".

4. Spawning new ideas for products and services.

(Lesser & Storck, 2001, pp. 836)

With Hip Hop festivals, in particular with WOO HAH! Festival in the Netherlands, the community of practice (the organization responsible for this festival) is in need, in order to function successfully, to stimulate all of the areas of organizational performance mentioned previously. In other words, this community needs to respond to the customer needs and inquiries and in doing so to be constantly up to date with the consumer's interests and interactions.

And here is where the online/offline nexus comes into order, as the community of practice becomes active in various social media platforms, stimulating a direct connection to their target group.

The customers that function as a target group for WOO HAH!'s community of practice, are the fans who buy merchandise, go to Hip Hop festivals and actively participates in any activities that are linked in some way to this creative and cultural industry. They are the ones who form social media groupings as well, linking their interests and information related to WOO HAH! , providing by that a huge amount of data, which the community of practice is able to use for their benefit.

3.2 Light communities

This community of fans and consumers of Hip Hop music festivals can also be defined as community of interest or light community. Compared with the previous conceptualization of community, there are a group of people interested in sharing information and discussing a particular topic that interests them. Members are not necessarily experts or practitioners of the topic around which the CoI has formed. The purpose of the CoI is to provide a place where people who share a common interest can go and exchange information, ask questions, and express their opinions about the topic. Membership in a CoI is not dependent upon expertise – one only needs to be interested in the subject. (Wikipedia contributors, 2020)

What is noticeable from the literature around cultural and linguistic phenomena that Hip Hop festivals produce is the connection between light communities and communities of practice in their online and offline practices. As both conceptualization of communities reported above differ in their functions and purposes, they come to share a common ground when it comes down to their socio-semiotic activities on socio technological platforms and more specifically the way that their offline consumption of products and services is transferred online.

Through social media interactions, light communities represent a valid source of data that allows to shed light on what the consumer wants and how they want it. In other words the community of practice uses this data in their marketing and business strategy in order to reach their target group. Both types of communities also share a commonality in the interest and dedication to Hip Hop festivals. The difference is in their positions, the light community being the consumer and the community of practice being the provider.

Moreover, Light communities are characterized by their micro-hegemonic character: light features "rule" such communities. Members adopt resources and normative behavioral templates which define the light feature of the community to perform identities. The online Hip Hop festivals- fan community is light, as there are no shared traditional bureaucratic parameters to bind members together, but its influence is heavy and it spills offline. A light community can then generate a strong sense of belonging offline. Other more consequential influences are reflected in fans' enthusiasm in rewarding and buying merchandise. In this sense, the *taxonomy* of Memes in the Hip Hop festival discourse has hatched a new economic practice, a new type of cultural industry. (Ying Lu, 2018)

The members of such communities produce and use discourse practices that directs them through the "proper" communication in Hip Hop festival culture and determines their inclusion or exclusion within the community. With the Hip Hop festivals in particular, the offline experience, the inside rules, dress code, jokes and behavior are adopted online through the use of Memes as a form of communication among the real Hip Hop fans online, that connect them again back to the original roots of their community, which is offline- the festival itself. The offline/online connection and transformation, from public discourse, to online semiotics and narratives, back to offline adaptations in the form of merchandise and ticket sales, is what drives these music festivals and industries to become bigger, to gain profit and to stimulate action by stepping on the platform of online culture.

3.3 Affinity spaces and groups

The difficulty in attaching the concept of community of practice to a social grouping, such as the fan group of WOO HAH!-is that this term indicates a notion of belongingness, membership and labeling.

James Gee, on his work on gaming, explains in "*Semiotic social spaces and affinity spaces*" the following: "*In my view, the key problem with notions like "community of practice" is that they make it look like we are attempting to label a group of people. Once this is done, we face vexatious issues over which people are in and which are out of the group, how far they are in or out, and when they are in or out. The answers to these questions vary (even their very answerability varies) greatly across different social groupings. If we start with the notion of a "community" we can't go any further until we have defined who is in and who is not, since otherwise we can't identify the community. Yet it is often issues of participation, membership, and boundaries that are problematic in the first place.*" (Gee, 2005)

In that sense, when it comes down to the social group participating online and offline at WOO HAH!, being involved in exchanging discursive practices through Memes, it is hard to be defined under the concept of community. The reason for that is that, the WOO HAH! fans, differ as mentioned previously in their interests and behavior, which leads to their categorization under the terms of light community and community of practice. However, as they depend on eachother for the existence of one another, they are connected as what can be called an affinity group.

If we start by talking about spaces, rather than "communities", we can then go on and ask to what extent the people interacting within a space, or some sub-group of them, do or not actually form a community. That is, rather than assume a community at the outset, we can ask of given spaces whether or not the people interacting within them are communities and in what sense. The answer will be different in different cases. Even if the people interacting within a space do not constitute a community in any real sense, they still may get a good deal from their interactions with others and share a good deal with them. Indeed, some people interacting within a space may see themselves as sharing a "community" with others in that space, while other people view their interactions in the space differently. (Gee, 2005)

Therefore it could be said that there an affinity group is the product of several subgroups, transformed from the light community and community of practice within WOO HAH! Festival. This formed affinity group is connected with the affinity space of the festival, and more at large with the Hip Hop industry and its discourses.

3.4 Meaning making and Meme-ing

In Dawkins's original framing, Memes described any cultural idea or behavior. Fashion, language, religion, sports—all of these are Memes. Today, though, the term "Meme"—or specifically "Internet Meme"—has a new, colloquial meaning. While Memes themselves have been the subject of entire books, modern Internet Memes lack even an accurate definition. There are numerous online sources (Wikipedia, Urban Dictionary, Know Your Meme, Encyclopedia Dramatica) that describe Internet Memes as the public perceives them, but none does so in an academically rigorous way. Given this, Patrick Davison finds the following new definition to be useful in the consideration of Internet Memes specifically:

"*An Internet Meme is a piece of culture, typically a joke, which gains influence through online transmission.*"

He continues by specifying: " *While not all Internet Memes are jokes, comparing them to offline jokes makes it clear what makes Internet Memes unique: the speed of their transmission and the fidelity of their form. A spoken joke, for instance, can only be transmitted as quickly as those individuals who know it can move from place to place, and its form must be preserved by memory. A printed joke, in contrast, can be transmitted by moving paper and can be preserved by a physical arrangement of ink. The speed of transmission is no longer limited by the movement of individuals, and the form of the joke is preserved by a medium, not memory.*" (Davison, P. (n.d.), pp.122)

In other words, Memes satire certain peculiar characteristics of different social behaviors, activities, patterns and selected pieces of information. Those selected pieces of characters are much generalized, as Memes represent things that groups of people can relate to, and as such they represent common knowledge and shared experiences. Therefore Memes reproduce meaning that is well established, defined and understood. A misunderstanding when it comes to Memes could only happen if one is lacking knowledge of certain events, is not acquainted with certain traditions and cultures and is an outsider from a certain social group.

As an example, a Meme that refers to and mocks the "typical behavior" of girls going partying, could not be understood or be relatable to girls who don't party and have never had such an experience. But for girls that do go out partying, this Meme would represent a symbolic meaning that refers to their social group, which they can relate to. As it happens Memes construct context through the operation of meaning making, of uptake and of interpretation.

Internet Meme has been an important part of the social life as it helps in opinion formation. Amongst the various roles, a major one is that it helps in conveying information. Most of the times

for digital natives it acts like a primary source of information too as they turn to read more of the news on the basis of the Memes made on it (Liisi Lainesk, 2016).

By that meaning, when it comes to Memes, their content and their vast spread online, play a significant role to the formation of people's opinion and in that way they become powerful. People capture news, personalities, celebrities and events into one piece through the form of a Meme and transfer a message to the public, weather it would be political, sociological or cultural.

Many professions like public relations and advertising have started using Memes creatively to communicate their message and attract audiences. The information that is passed through these Memes is for creating a buzz and is for publicity purpose rather than for just giving information. Memes that are used in political campaigning are used for creating public opinion and as a tool for propaganda. (C. Bauckhage, 2011).

They are used in various ways- to distribute information, as propaganda, as inside jokes but one thing is sure and that is the fact that Meme's core concept is to produce meaning, which would lead to understanding, that leads to recognition and reliance, which in the end leads to Memes being communication mediums for the use of the public. Just like any other piece of art, Memes produce meaning and significance only because of their context and their reliance to society.

3.5 Memes as communication mediums

Memes are a way network societies use to share thoughts in the online "word", feelings, humor and ideas overall. The popularity of Memes is due to the fact that they are mostly relatable, in such a way that people make connections through Memes with their peers and by different categories of Memes, communities are build based on those social media interactions.

A Meme as a concept is generally described as an idea, behavior or style that spreads by means of imitation from person to person within a culture. Within online communities Memes represent "copied realities", transferred on the combination of texts and images, which together form a *transtextual* framework, often with the aim of conveying a particular phenomenon, theme or a meaning.

Transtextuality emphasizes that text and signs have meaning not in themselves but only when used; they need to be understood productively, contextually and discursively, because they have histories, they are contextually influenced and they occur within larger framework of meaning (Pennycook, 2007a, p.44).

The *transtextual* analysis framework examines pre-textual history (socio-historical associations of text), the con-textual relations (the physical location, the participants, the indexical pointing of the world), the sub-textual meaning (the ideologies, cultural frames and relations of power that enable interaction), the inter-textual echoes (the covert and overt references to other signs and text) and the post-textual interpretations (the meanings participants read into a given sign). (cf. Dovchin et al., 2018; Pennycook, 2007a, pp. 53-54; Sultana et al., 2015).

By that meaning, when it comes to Memes, and within that-Hip Hop festival Memes in particular, the **trans-textual** analysis framework is distributed in the following ways: the **pre-textual** history in this case is the Hip Hop history, the **con-textual** relations are linked to the location of the festivals, the countries that they are based on as every country with a big festival adds their own culture to the festival (In the Netherlands more Hip Hop festivals are famous, as weed smoking there is decriminalized for personal use, which stimulates the cultural framing of Hip Hop related to drug use), the **intertextual** echoes are related to the song lyrics of famous Hip Hop songs that are trending every year. Finally the **post- textual** interpretations of Hip Hop festival Memes are related to the meaning that the fans are looking for and reading in signs (usually the interpretation is present in a form of reliance and common knowledge). With Memes, the way they are designed and interpreted, together with their purpose is all based and linked to Memes being a communication medium between communities and individuals.

Design stands midway between content and expression. It is the conceptual side of expression and the expression side of conception. Designs are semiotic resources in all semiotic modes and combinations of semiotic modes. Designs are means to realize discourses in the context of given communication situation. But designs also add something new: they realize the communication which changes socially constructed knowledge into social inter-action. In doing so, designs may either follow well- trodden paths of habit, convention, tradition, prescription or be innovative and ground- breaking, just as discourses may either express common sense or perhaps even subversive. (Gunter Kress, Theo Van Leeuwen, 2001)

The design of Memes or the purpose of someone to design one could be completely based on innovations, news related, tragedies and other topics that affect big amount of people (president elections, political issues, war, climate change, nature disasters, famous people), or they could be based on completely personal and very intimate topics that relate to small groups of people and inner circles (school inside jokes, work inside jokes, friends inside jokes). As Hip Hop festival Memes are placed to somewhere in between these groups, their background being widely famous for a big community, but at the same time not general, the design and purpose of them is the same as of every other Meme- communication tool for the insiders of this group.

However the difference is that within this specific group, the gap between the beginners and the hard core fans is quite big and as such the design and purpose of Hip Hop festival Memes shifts from being highly specific and relatable to only some insiders to very broad and relatable to everyone, and as such creating a space for many categories, each representing a certain level of understanding, forming altogether a hierarchy. The highest point of this hierarchy is reached by the insiders who can understand, interpret correctly and relate to each Meme of all categories. In that sense what is noticeable is that the purpose of Hip Hop festival Memes is divided on many levels- it becomes not only a tool for connection, but also a tool for inclusion and exclusion within the same community.

As mentioned previously, the role of Memes is to understand and connect to other people's humor and reality. In order for people to relate one another through some form, there needs to be

common sense involved. Hence, Memes need to be designed with the inclusion of images, text and language that could be interpreted in the same way by a large group of people.

Language for instance is a semiotic mode because it can be realized either as a speech or as writing, and writing is a semiotic mode too, because it could be realized in different ways, and all these media add a further layer of signification. We define communication as only having taken place when there has been both articulation and interpretation. The degree to which intention and interpretation will match depends on context. (Gunter Kress, Theo Van Leeuwen, 2001)

We constantly import signs from other contexts (social group, culture) into the context in which we are now making a new sign, in order to signify ideas and values which are associated with what other that other context by those who import the sign.

Signifiers have a meaning potential deriving from what it is we do when we produce them, and from our ability to turn action into knowledge, to extend our practical experience metamorphorically, and to grasp similar extensions made by others. In that sense, Memes play a role of signifiers by taking different contexts and transforming them into references and new symbolic meanings. Through language, text and images combined together into one form as Memes, there is a new linguistic phenomena produced and distributed as discourses in light communities, such as the community of Hip Hop festival fans.

3.6 Multimodal discourse practices within Hip Hop festival Memes

Garley (2010) notes that the Internet discussion forums are a large collection of natural language material produced by hip-hop producers and consumers, where the natural presence of language practices is common. It is therefore crucial not to miss out on the sociolinguistic creativities of popular music artists in late modernity without exploring their online interactions (Dovchin and Pennycook, 2017; Sultana et al., 2013; Varis and Blommaert, 2015).

By that meaning, when it comes to Hip Hop festivals and the culture surrounding it, in order to understand the behavior and actions of the light community that is the Hip Hop festival fans, their online interactions are a good representation of sociolinguistic creativity. The distribution of different categories of Memes show the "inside world" and background of those light communities as the "typical" together with the "abnormal" are all expressed in scripted messages, which on their part produce meaning and influence a certain kind of grouping within the community.

Within a given social-cultural domain, the "same" meanings can often be expressed in different semiotic modes. Today, however, in the age of digitalization, the different modes have technically become the same at some level of representation, and they can be operated by one multi- skilled person, using one interface.

In the case of Hip Hop related content and interactions, what is visible is the same meaning being expressed in the forms of images, texts and videos. Within multimodality, as it is with Memes, the combination of text and images provides different and multiple levels of interpretation. Images produce one meaning. For example a picture of famous rappers brings an association within the

fan community of their music and style. This image combined with text attached to it suddenly provokes a next level of meaning and interpretation, as the text provides background information and scripted message that could be selectively understood by the community.

The significance is that disconnected elements will be read as separate and independent, even as contrasting units of meaning, whereas connected elements will be read as belonging together, as continuous or complimentary.

We see multimodal texts as making meaning in multiple articulations. Discourses are socially constructed knowledges of reality. By socially constructed we mean that they have been developed in specific social context, and in ways which are appropriate to the interests of social actors in these contexts, whether these are very broad contexts or not (within the family), explicitly institutionalized (newspapers) or not (dinner- table conversations). (Gunter Kress, Theo Van Leeuwen, 2001)

When it comes down to Hip Hop festival Memes, the multimodal text is socially constructed from different cultures that apply to fans, people that have visited the festivals more than once, core fans, consumers unfamiliar with the Hip Hop background and so on. Therefore it is not surprising to find and distinguish multiple forms and categories of Memes, which represent the broad social interactions linked to the Hip Hop festivals. As discourses are socially constructed knowledges of reality, the reality in the case of Hip Hop festivals is evolving around the history and background of Hip Hop, the behavior of the performers at those festivals. In that sense the reality is connected to drug use, cursing, brutality in song lyrics, "street" style of clothing, tattoos and etc. Hence, this background and reality is adopted as discourses that need to be followed in order for an "outsider to "fit in". Or in other words, discourse and semiotics dictate what is "socially appropriate" in a community.

And while some discourses include a great deal of emphasis on the actual events and provide few interpretations or arguments, others form a storehouse of abstract interpretation and argument but make do with only a broad and general version of what warring parties actually do. In other words, discourse is relatively independent of genre of mode and of somewhat less of design. (Gunter Kress, Theo Van Leeuwen, 2001)

4. Analysis and interpretation of data

By distributing the categories of Memes into sub-sections, I will analyze in each section the use of Memes and their influence on the socio-cultural, behavioral patterns and discourses among WOO HAH! Festival's fans and consumers. The analysis and interpretation of the data will be based on digital ethnography and the conceptual framework, collected through academic literature in Chapter 3. Four social media platforms, Instagram, Facebook, You Tube and Reddit.com will be used for this data Chapter, all based on one Hip Hop festival – WOO HAH!.

4.1 Memes about typical personalities and behaviors recognized in the attendants of WOO HAH! Festival, produce a certain discourse within the light community.

With Hip Hop music festivals like WOO HAH!, by observations and research based on the behavior and interactions of fans online, it becomes clear that going to such festivals is not only about the music and the artists who are in the line ups each year, but the overall experience of a festival, which includes much more than what a concert would be.

The light community of the festival is active not only offline, but online. With the Facebook groups, named after the festival- WOO HAH! Festival 2017-2021, it is 43,713 people following the events, interacting in comments, shares, distributing information and most importantly sharing personally designed Memes, images and videos. The same goes for the other most famous media platform- Instagram , where the festival community of practice and light community are equally active, by an official page named @woohahfest with 67, 300 followers and unofficial @woohahmemes with 2 400 followers. These two media platforms, Instagram and Facebook, prove to be the main source of information and place for interaction for both communities, where the fans express negative and positive feedback, while the organizations working for the festival take that feedback and use it for promotion and data.

Image 1

Image 2
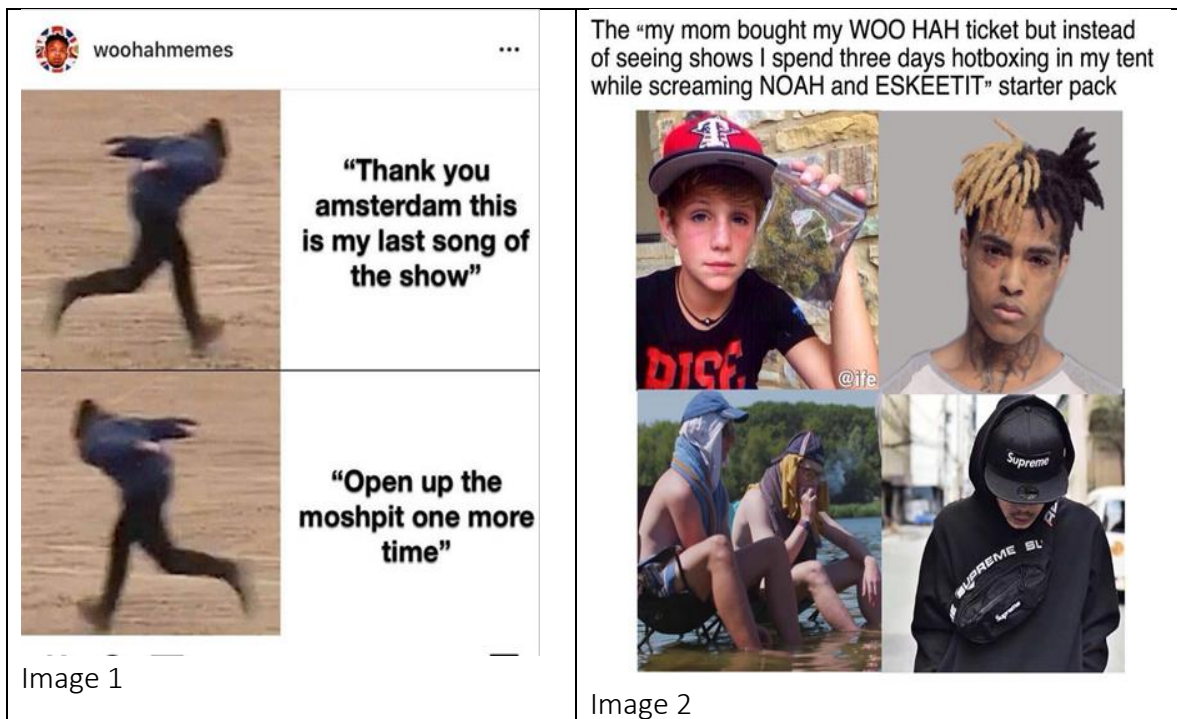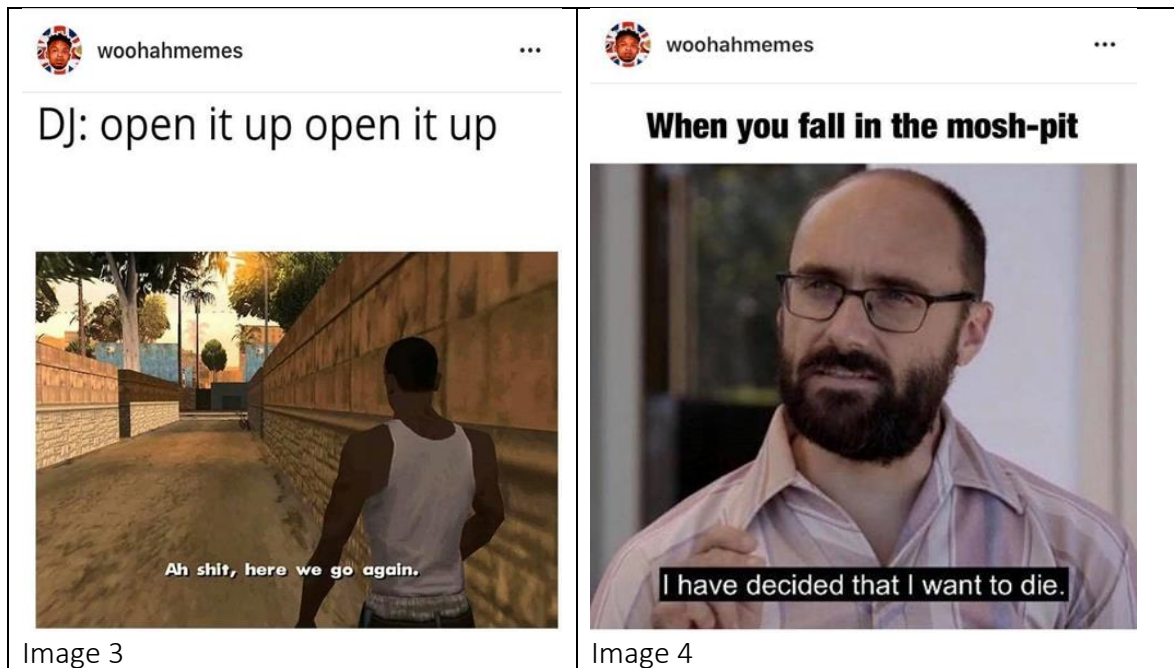
²*Figure 2.* *Memes from the Instagram page @woohahmemes representing "typical" behavioral*

³*Figure 3.* *Memes from the Instagram page @woohahmemes, representing one of the most common activities shared amongst the WOO HAH! Fans – smoking marijuana.*

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² Figure 2, with Images 1, 2, 3 and 4 were retrieved from source: https://www.instagram.com/woohahmemes/ on 6th of May 2020.

³ Figure 3, with Images 1 and 2, were retrieved from source: https://www.instagram.com/woohahmemes/ on 6th of May 2020.

In Figure 2. the Memes taken from the Instagram page @woohahmemes and created by fans, all illustrate something that could be considered as a "typical" behavior by fans who attend the festival. In three of the images (Images 1, 3 and 4), the context is all related to mosh-pits. The reason behind the creation of such Memes is because the festival goers tend to participate in mosh-pits that could be violent and dangerous, especially in a crowd as big as it is one at such music festivals. Hence, two of the Memes from Figure 2. include text such as "*I have decided that I want to die*" (Image 4) and "*here we go again*" (Image 3), where the text is applied sarcastically together with an image of a video game and of a confused person. The sarcasm applied to this Memes, together with the images, apply what seems to be a very common activity and behavior on the festival. The reason for the violence expressed through those mosh- pits are not only stimulated from the artists on stage, who provoke the crowds to participate in them, but together with the intense texts of the songs, the overall stimuli which surround the experience of going to hip- hop and rap concerts is roughness and aggression.

In Figure 3. both of the Memes represent probably the most common activity amongst the festival goers as well as what seems to be an image associated the most with rap and Hip Hop music- marijuana smoking. Weed consumption is taking big part in the overall experience and image of Hip Hop festivals. Again as it happens with mosh- pits, smoking marijuana is promoted and stimulated by the artists, who give personal example, and their songs. The consumption of weed specifically when it comes to WOO HAH! Festival takes bigger part than other festivals, as this one is located in the Netherlands, a country famous for decriminalizing the personal use of weed. Therefore the consumption and overall stigma that surrounds marijuana is regarded in a different way, firs because of the location of the festival and second because of the Hip Hop culture that applies it. In that sense going to such a festival brings a certain feeling of freedom and escape from the outside world, thus the reason for the popularity and interest from different nationalities in this festival.

Going back to Figure 2. - one of the Memes with the text : " *My mom bought my WOO HAH ticket but instead of seeing shows I spend three days hotboxing in the tent while screaming Noah and Esketit starter pack*" (Image 2) captures the overall experience of the festival by mocking with sarcasm the most typical image found amongst the festival attendants. The combination of images relate to young people smoking marijuana, dressing in brands that are promoted from the festival and from the artists, such as Supreme, Off White, Gucci.

The people in the crowd become identical. They all wear the same brands, they all smoke marijuana, they all scream the world "Eskeetit" , which for non-Hip Hop fans this word has no meaning, but real fans refer to this word as part of a very famous rap song. They all join in mosh-pits and in general share the same behavior and actions.

But all of these characteristics related to Hip Hop festival goers are identical to the general images that come with the Hip Hop culture. As explained previously in Chapter 2, under the sub-topic "Hip Hop culture in festivals", the gangster behavior that is associated with Hip Hop comes from the history of this genre, where Hip Hop was used as an expression of poor, neglected and dangerous

communities, the tough life on the streets of poor neighborhoods and so on. Later to this association was added another one that included marijuana smoking, the escape through drug use from the real world of inequalities and injustice. Nowadays Hip Hop and rap have switched to rappers moving from the poor communities to the upper class in societies. The new Hip Hop songs produce images of rappers being incredibly wealthy, driving super cars, showing off golden and diamond chains and using drugs.

In that sense Hip Hop history influenced the style of clothing, communication, habits and behaviors within that community, which on their side distribute those habitus through social media interactions and Memes. For this reason the fans want to wear the same brands as the rap artist that they idolize, to smoke weed, use drugs, buy fake or real golden chains, get tattoos and express the same behavior.

Elaboration likelihood model (ELM) of management explains how persuasion is used as a tool to affect opinions. There are two ways of persuasion. One that focuses persuasion through cognitive way that elaborates what is presented and the second route where an argument is formed to persuade a person and his/her opinion is manipulated. This is the peripheral route of persuasion. Memes are a tool of discourse that uses the cognitive and the peripheral route to communicate and to influence public opinions. This tool of discourse uses humor and satire as elements for persuasion. (McClure, 2016)

The role of Memes in the distribution of this discourse among the light community of Hip Hop fans is in the way that they capture and transfer meaning, which is common and shared. In that sense, Memes that are relatable and understood only from a specific groups, creates the feeling of unity and exclusiveness. For example the Memes showed in Figures 2 and 3, are used as a tool not only as a communication between the inner circle of the group, but as a *transtextual* framework that produces multiple levels of meaning through text and signs related to the history, culture and the social context of Hip Hop.

This framework is formed by symbolic images and text that are only understood and used within a context, in that case characteristics of the Hip Hop culture, combined with the social interactions of the light community and discursive patterns. In other words, the Memes created by fans, which are related to the typical behavior of WOO HAH! fans, are used in order to produce meaning that can only be understood by this same group. The need for such interaction is because the fans relate to eachother through the Memes by showing the same patterns of behavior, and by relating to one another they form a community. The Memes and the Meme-ing are used as a way of "fitting" in that particular group. Through Memes, the light community produces certain discourse that determines what is acceptable and not in this group, what is "funny" and not, the way that people should dress, talk, participate in order to be part of the "real" festival goers.

Discourse and Memes impact the way we view the world. . And what you read, watch, hear about, talk about, know about… is all you have to work on when you form opinions about people, the way the world works, and how it ought to work. And the way we think about the world, of course,

entirely dictates how we act within it. Knowing how language creates a specific kind of thought and action, by hiding or minimizing some things and focusing on others, is just as important as knowing facts and statistics. (R. Roberie, 2017)

By that meaning Internet Memes deliver scripted messages, that are specifically selected in order to fit not only what society wants to see and read but what they should see. The combination of selected images and texts is a selection of what message we want to deliver. Therefore the meaning that we take from it is selected and contextual. Hence the WOO HAH! Memes are a selection of the Hip Hop culture that generalizes what the light community of fans needs to think, see, remember and do.

4.2 Memes about the performers at the festival influence the marketing and business of WOO HAH! Festival.

The community of Hip Hop festival fans creates "inside" jokes related to the performances of artists, the quality of their music, their mistakes and their relationship to multiple Hip Hop festivals. A connection between these types of Memes and the marketing strategy of the festival organization is established.

By that meaning when it comes to Hip Hop festival Memes, there is a category among the WOO HAH! Memes that is significantly marked by promotion content. Internet Memes are used as a tool nowadays in many areas as promotion materials, propaganda, playing a big role in the formation of the public's opinion towards political, social and cultural topics. The same goes for Hip Hop festival Memes.
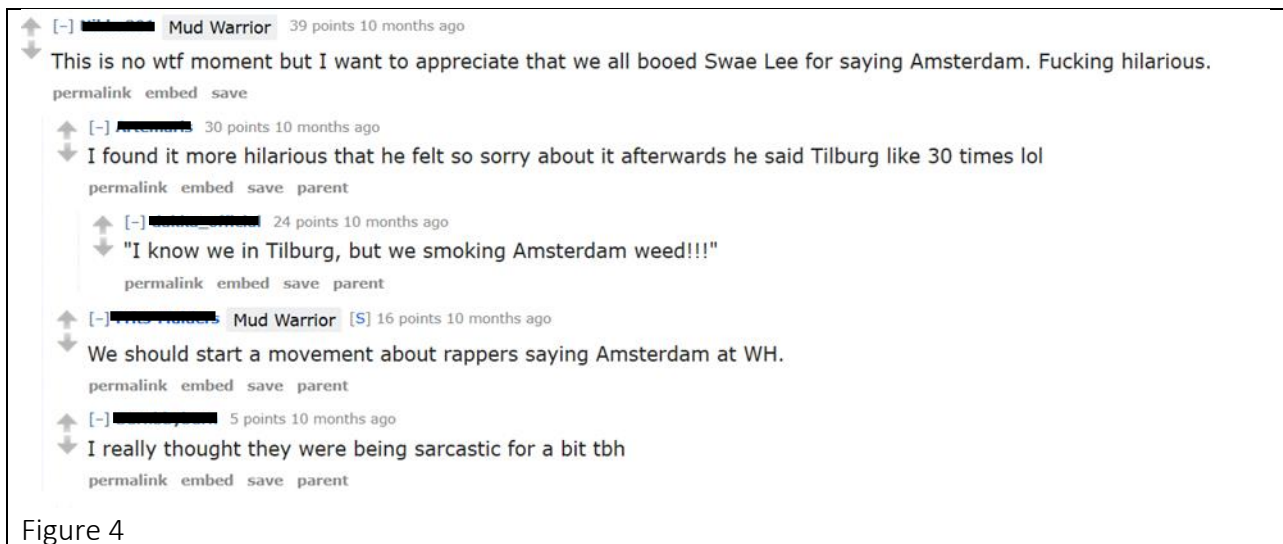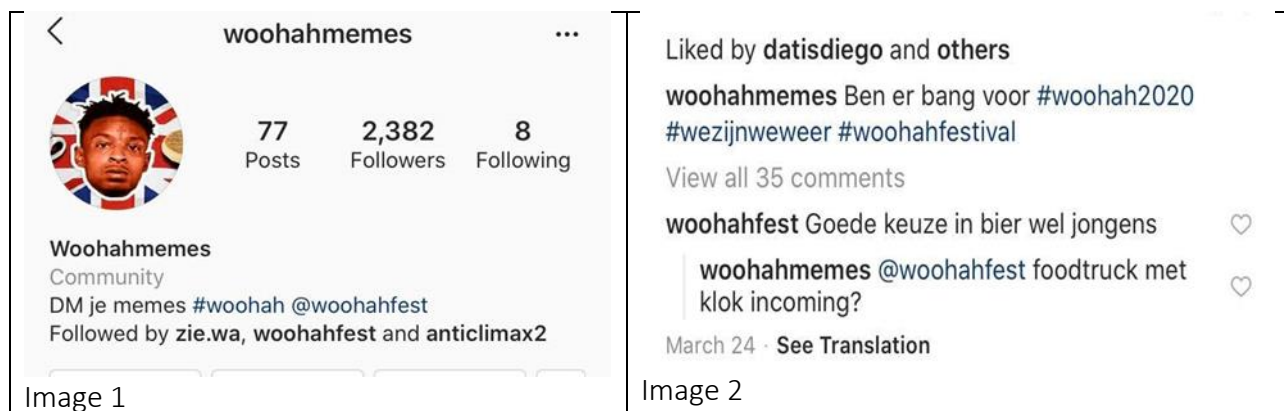

Figure 4

[4]*Figure 4.* Comments taken from WOO HAH! fans from the official Reddit.com page for WOO HAH!

On the official Page for WOO HAH! on Reddit.com, a famous website for discussions, the festival fans leave comments in regards to their experiences from WOO HAH!, as well as sharing information and feedback in the form of discussion. In one of the discussions regarding WOO HAH! 2019, there are multiple comments that can be found in regards to the performances of the artists on the festival that year and their behavior. In Figure 4, some of the comments state: "*We should start a movement about rappers saying Amsterdam at WH*" and "*This is no wtf moment but I want to appreciate that we all booed Swae Lee for saying Amsterdam. Fucking hilarious*".

For anyone reading these comments that have never been to WOO HAH! Festival at that exact year, they would bring no meaning whatsoever. However for people who did attend the festival that exact year, these comments are not only making sense, but are much relatable. As it happens, during the festival in 2019 many artists were being made fun of and booed, due to their behavior on stage and more specifically because of their mistake to welcome the crowd of fans as referring to them all coming from Amsterdam or being in Amsterdam, while the festival is located near the city of Tilburg, Netherlands.

In that sense, the communication and discussion between the fans on Reddit.com is highly contextual and coded. The fans are sharing mutual agreement regarding the performers and their behavior, they all share the same experience, although they don't necessary know eachother and as such they form a light community that is based on the same background and shares the same characteristics regarding their view of the world around them.

Those reviews and the feedback that comes from the fans online is highly specific and influences the way that people view the festival, the reputation of the artists and the reputation of the festival itself. For that same reason the official page of the festival on Instagram- @woohahfest is following other Instagram pages run by fans that are related to WOO HAH!, such as @woohahmemes, and interact with the fans on that same page under comments. (See Figure 5, Images 1 and 2)
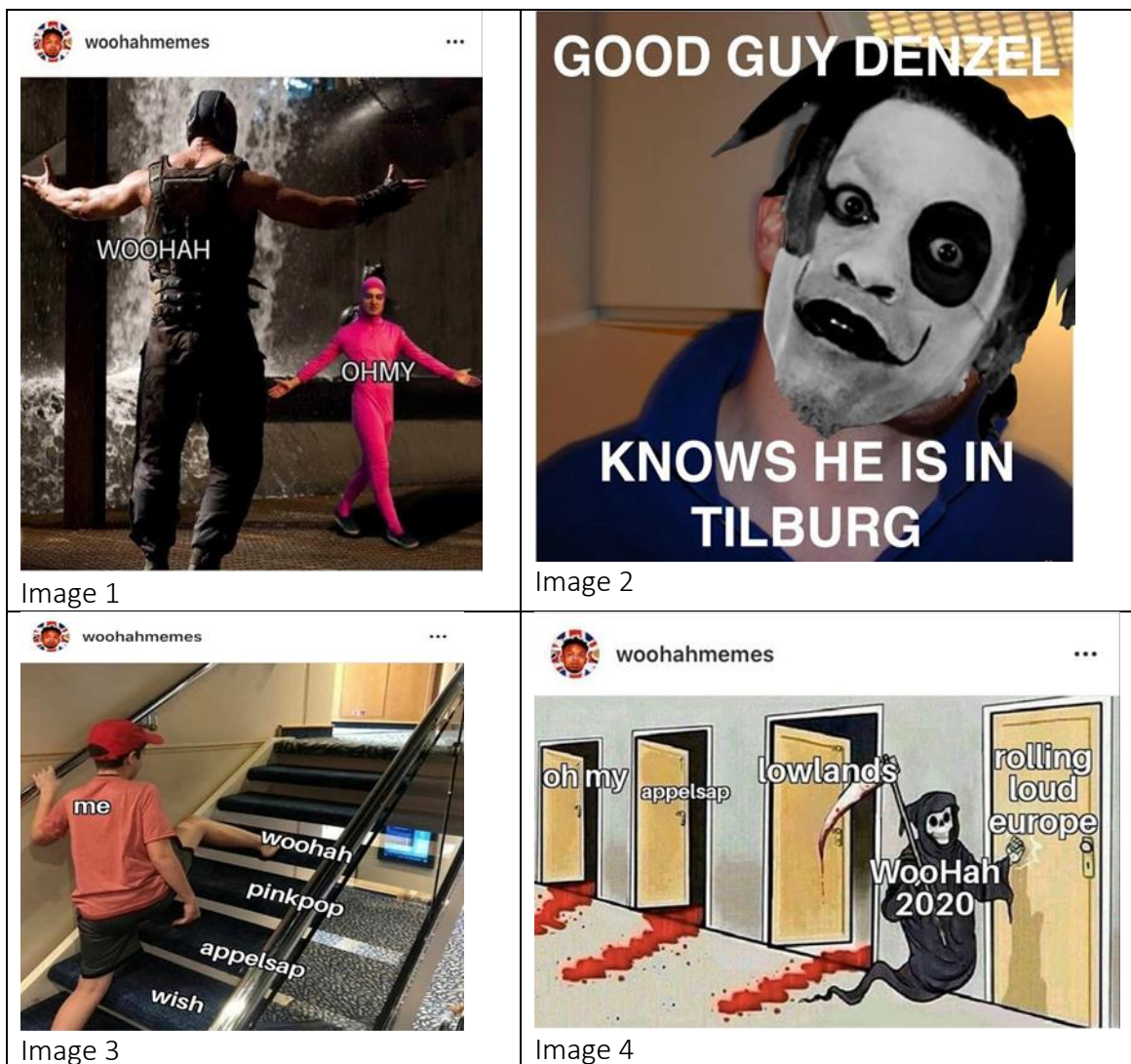

Image 1

Image 2

This direct interaction between the fans and the festival is not only a way for the organizators of the festival to collect data and feedback that would help them fix their flows and market their services better, but most importantly it creates the illusion that the fans are being paid with special attention, that they are a group community and that they are in close connection with the festival.

Depending on those social media interactions on various platforms and based on real life events, as Memes represent parts of reality that is illustrating in a sarcastic manner public events, individuals, cultural patterns, behaviors and actions, on one of the Instagram pages created by fans- @woohahmemes, there are a lot of Memes that can be found, all related to Hip Hop and rap artists, their performances and the competition to other festivals with the same genre.

Image 1

Image 2

Image 3

Image 4

In Figure 6. three of the selected Memes (Images 1, 3 and 4) represent the competition between WOO HAH! as a festival and other big music festivals in the Netherlands- Lowlands, Appelsap and Oh My! Festival. In all of them there is apparent superiority shown from WOO HAH! depending on the fans. Specifically the first Meme (Image 1),which illustrates a big man with the name "WOO HAH!" on his head, standing in front of a small man with the sign "OHMY" , is providing a clear message, through metaphor and sarcasm that WOO HAH! has advantage over other festivals.

On one of the other Memes (Image 2), there is an image of a famous rapper called Denzel Curry with the text: "*Good Guy Denzel knows he is in Tilburg*". That specific Meme is also related to the same comments found on Reddit.com, where it becomes clear that Hip Hop artists are mistaking or are being misinformed on the location of the festival. It appears to be an "inside joke" between the fans of the festival that rappers are mistaking Tilburg for Amsterdam, hence the Meme here is a confirmation of that "inside" discussion, which can be understood only by this specific group of people and no one else, simply because of the context and the shared experience. In that case, the Meme not only expresses a statement that the artist Denzel Curry is superior depending on the inside criteria made by the fans on who is a better artist- the one that knows where he performs, but it also shows that Memes can produce multiple levels of meaning at the same time.

On the one hand, Memes are used, by producing meaning through signs and language, as a proof of the existing "inside world" when it comes to the light community of WOO HAH! fans. Their experiences from the festival are combined with their social interaction online and offline, producing rules, criterias and discursive characteristics that form one group of people that can be distinguished by others. On the other hand, these Memes also represent promotion material for the festival.

The reason behind it is the power of Memes in the way that they stimulate recognition and reliance. People relate to other people, people look up to what other people do. Memes and their meaning are related to exactly that reality- what people do, the way they do it, what is wrong and what is not. In that case, here is where Meaning Making and Meme-ing comes into place, in the way that opinions and actions are influenced, as well their reach to a huge amount of people.

For that reason as well, companies and organizations, such as WOO HAH! rely on Memes for their marketing campaigns, for the purpose of the creation of positive Memes.

4.3 The Community of practice feeds by other satellite communities though Memes related to the inside life of the festival (camp side, full weekend attendance).

What is even more important regarding the development and adaptation of Memes through cultural fields is their role and influence on the consumer and online user. In light communities, such as Hip Hop festival fans, online social interactions take huge part in their discourse.

The culturally dominant paradigm in the public domain is now that of a "lifestyle": it organizes advertising and its discourses as much as it is beginning to dominate other social and political domains and their discourses. Semiotically the shift entails a distinct move towards (greater) individuation: that is, the self- definition of individuals through forms consumption accompanied by an ideological current in which individuation is more intensely emphasized. The semiotic significance arises from the fact that in a period such as this, individuation is achieved through consumption of commodities as signs. There is a pressure on social individuals to differentiate themselves in their individuality through semiotic practices. (Gunter Kress& Theo Van Leeuwen, 2001)

By that meaning, the pressure on individuals to be part of a group, also comes from the pressure of society to be adaptive and to "fit in" in a certain group. People are automatically attached to a certain group in society depending on their incomes, ethnicity, gender, sexuality and so on. Everything we do is categorized. A person is identified through different cultural and social groups that one belongs to. A person from a wealthy family is identified by being part of the upper class. Because of his success he is distinguished from other social groups. But this person is also interested in Hip Hop music which puts him in another category and group, mixed with other people who don't share the same status in society but within this group they are equal in their interests. What they share is united by their equal consumption of commodities as signs.

The fans of WOO HAH!, no matter of their social status, their nationality or gender, form a social group of people that are entirely equal. They are consumers of the merchandise produced by the festival, they all sleep at a camp together during the festival, they all communicate online in the same social media platforms and most importantly they all interact with one another through shared experiences and signs. Memes play a significant role in the way people of this group unite, in the way that they all are part of the "inside jokes" and they all identify to the WOO HAH! Memes. By this meaning a form of a "lifestyle" is created.

But the sharing and posting of Memes online for the fans is not only just a way of entertainment. If an observer who is not part of such community tries to identify with the story behind Hip Hop festival Memes, they can find it quite difficult. The reason is that those particular Memes are also a symbol of inclusion and barrier. The people that really "get them" are the ones that are included and are real fans, the ones that know the depth, history of Hip Hop as a genre and participate in it by all means.

Now the interesting part begins, when the observer becomes a full participant and starts to go to such festivals, joins the social media interactions and comments. What happens is, by taking as an example WOO HAH!, is that, as the audience of this festival is participating offline, the interactions that happen live are transformed digitally into social medial discourse, usually through Memes, that backfires once again back into the offline field, but this tame transformed into profitable symbols such as merchandise, advertisement and so on, that once again produces the feeling of exclusion and inclusion.

A good example of such online and offline interaction is taking place at WOO HAH! 2018, when at the camp of the festival one night, as everyone from the campers is asleep , they are all awaken by the shouts of one fan, seeking for his partner in the dark, by screaming with all of his power the name "Noah". By the morning everyone that participates in the festival, not only the campers, finds out about this short anecdote, as there is an instant flow on Memes on the official Facebook group of the festival , as well as on the discussion page for WOO HAH! on Reddit.com.

On Reddit.com under the comment section of "*WOO HAH 2019 WTF moment*" there are 111 comments left by fans who share their experiences and amusing stories from the festival. (See Figure 7.) On one of the descriptions it states: "*It's a wrap Noahs.. The camping became our little crazy village for three days*".

Figure 7

[7]*Figure 7. Comments taken of WOO HAH! fans from the official Reddit.com page.*

This description indicates that the fans of WOO HAH!, by sharing the same experience on the camp side during the festival, started identifying themselves under the name of "Noahs". In that way, not only that an inclusion and inclusion is created for anyone who did not participate fully on the three days weekend of the festival and therefore was not present when the situation where the name "Noah" was mentioned, but the names also transformed into a semiotic sign. It becomes a

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[7] Figure 7 was retrieved from source: https://www.reddit.com/r/WooHah/ on 19th of May 2020.

sign, because it is used for identification and interpretation that produces meaning only to selected ones that can understand it. For anyone else it becomes a sign of exclusion.

By the next festival day every participant is aware of the story of "Noah" because of Memes, such as the ones in Figure 8, taken from the Instagram page- @woohahmemes. This small anecdote produces a large scale of interest, as not only the fans start screaming the name Noah during the festival as an inside joke, but the performers take part of it as well, which creates an even bigger exclusiveness of the festival. Suddenly the fans are sharing an inside joke with their idols. This illustrates the power and influence of Memes, shared in small communities.

Not only that the online interaction influenced the offline, but in the next year with WOO HAH!2019, in the advertisements of the festival and the merchandise, the "Noah" inside joke from the last year festival, is now incorporated into the next years discourse and marketing strategy coming this time from the organization itself.
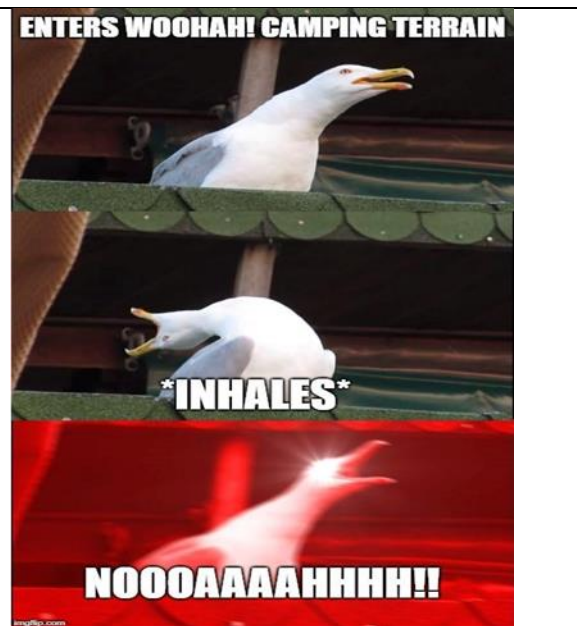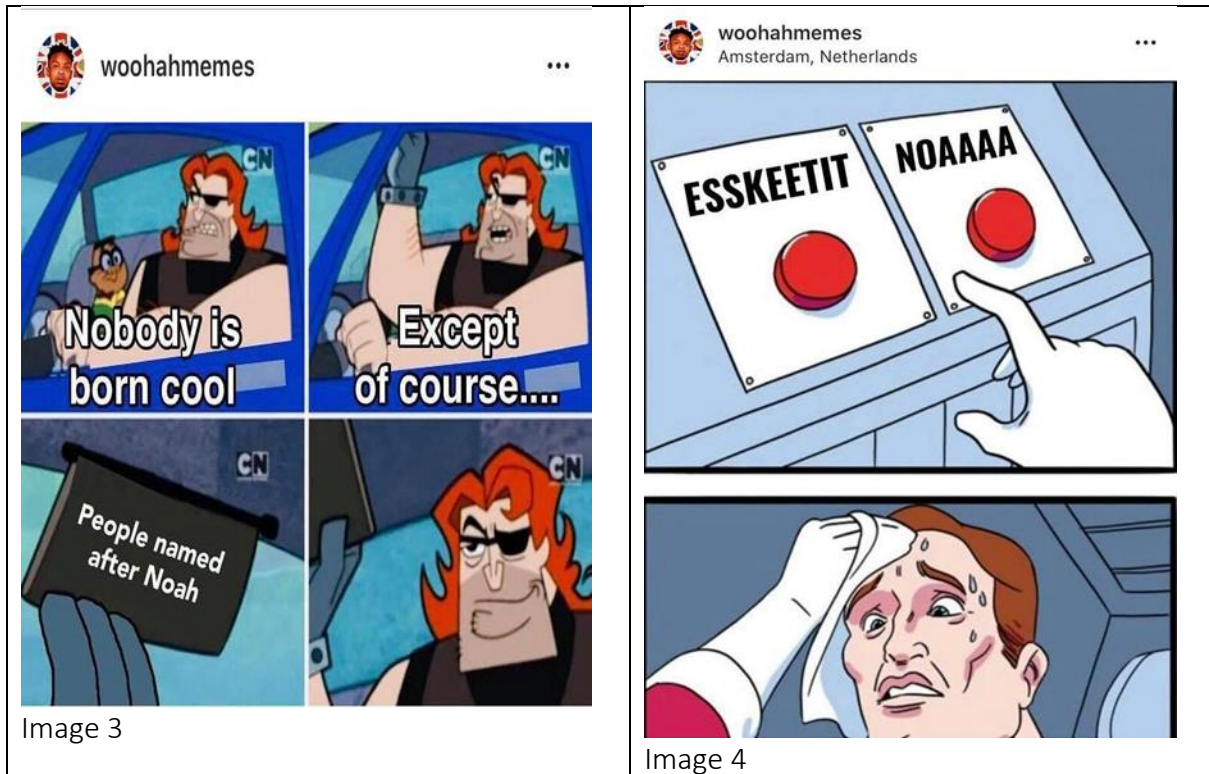

Image 1

Image 2

Image 3

Image 4

Image 1

Image 2

In Figure 9. the images show pictures from the official Instagram page of the festival, where the merchandise of the year 2019 is presented. The merchandise features the name of "*Noah*", together with the text "*Search party*", as indicators of the background story from the campsite of the previous year, together with the logo of the festival.

The role of merchandises on such festivals and concerts is used as a way for the community of practice to feed through the satellite communities of consumers. By purchasing merchandise, the fan signs an invisible confirmation of participating in a social activity/event. Those merchandise clothing pieces simply mean *"I have been there"*, used by fans as a tool of identification to somewhere they belong to, being part of it with other people.

As a new comer to the festival and not previously participating, this merchandise and advertisement is not relatable nor understandable. Only the true fans can "get it", but that is a way of the organization to stimulate what is already created as a bond within the community. The real fans feel as if they are really part of something exclusive that only they can understand. The results indicate that Memes are not simply semiotic resources for online communication, they also represent the taste and micro-hegemonic identity of their users.

The online Hip Hop festival fan community is light, as there are no shared traditional bureaucratic parameters to bind members together, but its influence is heavy and it spills offline. The light community can generate a strong sense of belonging offline. Other more consequential influences are reflected in fans' enthusiasm in rewarding and buying merchandise. In this sense, the **taxonomy** of Memes in the Hip Hop festival discourse has hatched a new economic practice, a new type of cultural industry.

4.4 The "outside world" makes a connection between the community of practice and light communities through Memes.

As mentioned previously, Memes represent events, people, cultures and trends in the way that they become sources of information about the world. People rely on Memes not only as a type of entertainment but as a way of presenting news and getting people involved with what to be aware of and what to talk about. For that reason there are Memes related to politics, fashion, celebrities, actions, nature disasters and anything that affects the society at large.

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9 Figure 9 with Images 1 and 2 were retrieved from source: https://www.instagram.com/woohahfest/ on 30th of January 2020

The most popular Memes of 2020 are related to the Covid-19 outbreak, as the pandemic affects all countries and becomes the top issue of the year. It is not a surprise that the quarantine, which affected millions of people, together with the world economy, forcing the instability of many industries, including the entertainment one, stimulated a lot of attention, speculations and discussions on all social media platforms. In that sense all types of Memes related to the virus overloaded the Internet.

WOO HAH! 2020, representing a danger for the population of the Netherlands in the form of being a festival and attracting many people at one place, was forced to be canceled, due to the new regulations from the government and the safety of the fans. The circumstances caused a lot of discussions amongst the community of WOO HAH! fans online and for that reason Memes related to the quarantine in 2020 and the closing of the festival were created and distributed.

On the official Facebook page of the festival, WOO HAH! Festival 2020, where usually the fans would send appeals to the organization to "fix" some acts from artists that they want to see in the next year's list of artists attending the festival, suddenly, because of the quarantine and the "outside factors" affecting the festival, the fans expressed their regret by posting Memes related to it.

As it happened at the beginning of the outbreak of the virus, in all countries around the world, people were stocking on supplies for their homes, which lead to the supply and demand gap of toilet paper. The stocking on toilet paper becomes a shared joke by all users on the Internet during the pandemic, together with the demand of face masks and medicine.

In Figure 10. , where there are Memes taken from Facebook as an example, except the very commonly shared Meme of the toilet paper and the caption "fix"(Image 3), there are other creative ones that combine both the festival and the virus. For example, one of which includes an image of a grave with the name of the festival on it and a happy person next to that grave with the caption "coronavirus" on him (Image 1). The meaning behind this Meme, expressed sarcastically, is the dead of this season's festival because of the virus. The other two Memes are both sarcastically referring to the name of Corona, being also a drink, by playing with the Name of the virus and the name of the festival (Image 2). As it is known, the virus was first recognized in Wuhan, China and spread from there around the world. The fans take the name of the Chinese city and applied it to the name WOO HAH!.

The interesting here is the fact that the jokes regarding the Corona virus and the closing of the festival are not only coming from the fans, but from the organization of the festival itself. On one of the images (Image 4), where the beer Corona is attached to the image of the virus, the official page on Facebook of the festival applied also the text: "*Corona has been added to the #WH20, line up playing Friday July 10*". This action of the community of practice, or in other words, the organization of WOO HAH!, creates a connection between them and the fans. Suddenly the organization itself, just like the fans, is creating Memes.

Image 1

Image 2

Image 3

Image 4

[10]*Figure 10. Memes regarding the Corona Virus Covid- 19 on the official Facebook page of the festival – WOO HAH! Festival 2021*

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[10] Figure 10 with Images 1, 2, 3 and 4 were retrieved from source:
https://www.facebook.com/events/694511074303747/?active_tab=discussion on 25th of March 2020

The community of practice and the light community of WOO HAH! , although being separated from one another in their functions, represent one affinity group that is entirely connected to the wellbeing of the festival and that particular affinity space. As the Coronavirus is an issues that affects both communities in a different way, they are connected into one. The Memes from Figure 10, represent exactly that message- "we are all affected one way or another and thus we are equal".

4.5. Memes distinguish the "true fans" from the "beginners", stimulating inclusion vs. exclusion behavior within the light community.

Through the social media interactions between communities of Hip Hop festival fans, some Memes prove to show that there is a difference amongst the fans. In particular, when it comes to Hip Hop festivals and Hip Hop culture, naturally there are consumers and fans that are more dedicated, involved and consistent in their attendance to concerts and festivals than others. This is noticeable through their behavior as "experts", their clothing and "style", their knowledge and practices. Therefore these details are expressed through language and visuals in Memes, in a way that they apply and stimulate a discourse of inclusion and exclusion within the community.

For this exact reason, Memes prove to have "power" in the way that they initiate control over light communities and how do they influence acceptance within the community. One thing is sure – as Memes are created in order for people to connect and relate to eachother, in the same manner Memes are used for people to distinguish themselves from others. Understanding comes with misunderstanding, and one that does not relate nor understand a meaning behind a Meme becomes simply an "outsider".

In Figure 11. there are two Memes (Images 1 and 2), taken from the Instagram page @woohahmemes, both representing one of the common practices amongst the festival fans – mosh pits. As explained previously, the mosh-pits are not only a very popular activity at Hip Hop festival, but a stimulated one as part of the Hip Hop culture and style of the music. Especially in festivals, people that participate in mosh pits risk to be smashed by other people in the crowd, as the activity is quite violent and as such not everyone participates in it.

WHO WOULD WIN?

a crowd of 32.500 people from 60 different countries

one dusty boi

Image 1

woohahmemes

Wanneer je neer gaat in de moshpit

- First time? @woohahmemes

Image 2

Weekend tickets

Zaterdag en zondag tickets

Losse vrijdagtickets

Image 3

Je rug na een weekend Woohah

Image 4

¹¹Figure 11. *Memes taken from the Instagram page @woohahmemes*

The first Meme (Image 1) includes a text that states: "a *crowd of 32 500 people from 60 different countries.. one dusty boi*", which refers to the huge amount of people all united by doing mosh pits and by that causing the spread of dust clouds, happening around the stages, during the concerts, as they are located on sand. The second Meme (Image 2), as it is in a Dutch language,

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¹¹ Figure 11 with Images 1, 2, 3 and 4 were retrieved from source: https://www.instagram.com/woohahmemes/
on 6ᵗʰ of May 2020.

translated in English the text that states: "*When you don't go in the mosh- pit ..First time?*", represents how the fans distinguish themselves from new comers to the festival, as apparently participating in mosh-pits is used as a criteria to test who is really dedicated and has been part and understands the community for long.

The last two Memes of Figure 11. are both in Dutch Language. The first one (Image 3) is applied with the image of 3 dragons and a text, which translated in English language, means from left to right: "*Saturday and Sunday tickets, Weekend tickets and Friday tickets*". The sarcastic metaphor used to send a message through this Meme, because of the face expression of the dragons and the third one with the sing "*Friday tickets*" looking respectfully goofy and stupid, represents the way that the consumers view the festival. As it seems the first day of the festival is less important and not that spectacular in comparison to the other days. This characteristic and review of the quality of the festival can be only understood by people who attended all the days of the festival and can relate to it. The same meaning goes to the last Meme (Image 4), with the text in Dutch language being translated into English as the following: "*Your back after one weekend at Woo Hah*", together with an image of a person in pain. Only people that have attended the full weekend of the festival could relate to those Memes.

All of the Memes from Figure 11. in one way or another represent inclusion and exclusion in between the participants of the festival – from the "true fans" and the ones that have attended the festival from the beginning to the "newcomers" who have only attended the less exciting acts, have not bought any merchandise, have not participated in the activities fully nor "get" the inside jokes. As it happens with the Memes about the lost boy Noah, all of the Memes are used as semiotic signifiers to one's belonging at the light community of WOO HAH!.

In this community, as any other, there are certain characteristics and rules that keeps the concept of belonging together through discursive patterns of behavior. Or in other words, the Memes produced by and for the fan community of WOO HAH!, through the use of specific language and signs as mediums, represent those patterns of behavior and distribute them in a way that the community adapts what is considered normal and abnormal for fans of Hip Hop.

As previously explained the culture of Hip Hop dictates marijuana and drug use, street and trash style of clothing, tattoos, mosh pits and so on. These characteristics are what distinguish Hip Hop fans from heavy metal fans, and by that they are a criteria for being an outsider of the social group. People identify to those characteristics and by them relate to others. Memes therefore are used as tools to navigate the right and wrong behavior. They stimulate exclusion and inclusion by their significance and their meaning, through the shared experience of people. For anyone who does not share the experience the Memes are simply meaningful, but they are used as is a sign for the light community, whether one is an "outsider" or not, by simply understanding the meaning behind those signs.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

Memes are not just virally transmitted images embellished with text, usually sharing pointed commentary on cultural symbols, social ideas or current events. (Gil, P.2020) They serve different purposes and as it was established, through the collection of data from various social media platforms, when it comes down to socio- cultural events, just like WOO HAH! Festival, they play an important role in the marketing and business development of the Festival and its image.

A very well-functioning cycle is created that starts with the Hip Hop festival culture and the fans that are taking part of this culture. Through the making of Memes that carry messages related to the specific festival culture, the experiences of fans and their "inside jokes", the organization of WOO HAH! Festival connects to the needs and interests of the fans. In that way the community of practice (WOO HAH! Festival) uses the Memes and the Meme-ng coming from the fans for promotion and marketing purposes. How does that happen? The Memes become the main connection between what the consumer (the fan) wants and what the seller (the company management team of WOO HAH!) provides. The ultimate goal for the provider is profit and for the consumer is symbolic capital – a confirmation for their belonging to a community. The Memes become a tool for the fans to distinguish among themselves who can be included and who not in the specific community.

The inclusiveness and exclusiveness come in different ways, but they are all connected to whether a fan can understand and relate to the meaning of a Meme about WOO HAH! Festival. Due to, the different levels of involvement of the fans with the Hip Hop festival culture, there are also different categories of Memes. Within all the WOO HAH! Festival related Memes, there is a category about typical personalities and behaviors recognized in the attendants of the festival (smoking weed, dressing up as rappers), Memes about the performers at the festival, Memes about the inside life of the festival (camp side, full weekend attendance), Memes concerning the connection of the festival with the "outside world" (such as competitions to other festivals in the Netherlands) and Memes distinguishing the "true fans" from the beginners (exclusion vs. inclusion).

All of the above mentioned categories contribute to the overall image of what WOO HAH! Festival is like, the behavioral patterns recognized in the group of people that are involved in the festival and the ones that attend it. Together with their characteristics, these categories represent a confirmation that the community linked to the festival distinguishes itself socially and culturally from any other fan community of Hip Hop festivals in the Netherlands. There are several "rules" and regulations that the fans follow in order to identify to the festival culture. Those rules are part of the regulation system that comes with the WOO HAH! Festival's discourse, which dictates what the fans should wear, how they should communicate and behave. The discourse is distributed online, advertised indirectly through Memes and offline through merchandise and commodities, produced by the consumers, later adapted from the producers and then consumed again from the same consumers.   In that sense, Memes are not simply semiotic resources for online communication, they also represent the taste and micro-hegemonic identity of their users, later adapted into a commodity.

Therefore, the *taxonomy* of Memes established in the festival's online and offline discursive engagement, becomes a center figure in a successful entertainment industry. The Memes becomes special and powerful, because anyone who can understand them and use them contains specific knowledge. That knowledge is what distinguishes them as a specific social and cultural group. The Memes become a label. Anyone that does not understand the meaning of the Memes could not achieve a social status in this community and could not use the label of a true WOO HAH! fan. Finally, the cycle closes around the profit that Memes produce, whether it would be economic or symbolic, the end result is: Memes become the main tool for *cash cow* (in business jargon, is a venture that generates a steady return of profits that far exceed the outlay of cash required to acquire or start it) in the industry surrounding WOO HAH!.

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