

The man who unwittingly became a meme

Level 2: Intermediate

1 Warmer

- a. Which of these websites do you think has the most visits? Put them in order from 1 (most visits) to 6 (fewest visits).

Wikipedia

YouTube

Twitter

Google

Instagram

Facebook

2 Key words

- a. Find the following words in the text. The paragraph numbers are given to help you.

1. a two-word phrasal verb meaning *do someone else's job temporarily while they are not available to do it* _____ (paragraph 2)

2. an adjective meaning *using humour to criticize people and make them seem silly*
_____ (paragraph 3)

3. an adverb meaning *in a way that is not conscious or deliberate* _____
(paragraph 3)

4. a noun meaning *a humorous image that is copied and spread by internet users*
_____ (paragraph 3)

5. an adjective meaning *very rude, unpleasant, or offensive* _____
(paragraph 3)

6. a two-word phrasal verb meaning *show that something does not worry or upset you*
_____ (paragraph 6)

7. a noun meaning *a famous person, especially in entertainment or sport*
_____ (paragraph 9)

8. a noun meaning *a situation in which you get a lot of public attention* _____
(paragraph 10)

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9. a two-word phrasal verb meaning *refuse to accept that something might be true* or very serious
_____ (paragraph 11)
10. a verb meaning *describe someone using words or pictures* _____
(paragraph 11)

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'The worst person you know': the man who unwittingly became a meme

Ashifa Kassam

19 June, 2022

- 1 Soon after Spain went into Covid lockdown, Josep Maria García received a call from his brother-in-law. "He told me not to worry but that I should google the phrase 'the worst person you know'," said García. "I put it in and there I was, everywhere. It was my face, my face, my face. I thought what is going on?"
- 2 He tried to work out what had happened. The photo was taken in 2014 by his brother-in-law, a professional photographer. As his brother-in-law prepared for a photo session with an American writer, he asked García to stand in so that he could check the light. The photo of García was so good that they decided to upload it to Getty Images.
- 3 In 2018, García's brother mentioned that the image had been used to illustrate an article for a US satirical magazine. At the time, he took no notice; now he realized he had unwittingly become a global meme. The picture had been used in an article about an obnoxious colleague who normally talks rubbish suddenly saying something clever.
- 4 Online García was super-famous – a search of the phrase 'worst person you know' gets almost 2bn results – but the fact that it was in English meant that few in his hometown or in the marketing agency where he works knew anything about it.
- 5 Then a journalist posted information about him on social media. Messages poured in from across the English-speaking world, so his brother-in-law removed the photo.
- 6 But it was too late. "I've read comments that say, 'He has the face of a Nazi' or that 'there is no empathy' in my look," he said. He shrugged off the comments, adding with a laugh: "I've got a lot of photos with that look – that's my look."
- 7 One of the few people in the world with a similar experience is András Arató, a retired Hungarian engineer who, in 2019, described what it was like to discover his face was a global meme, in his case "Hide the Pain Harold". "At first, it was a shocking experience," Arató said. "I didn't know what to do."
- 8 Arató decided to wait and see. "My only hope was that, with so many new things day after day on the internet, people would slowly forget about me," he said. "I must say, I was totally wrong."
- 9 Things changed when he decided to launch his own Facebook fan page with videos and stories of his travels. Offers to collaborate soon arrived, transforming Arató into a celebrity; from a role in a Hungarian TV advert to a part in a video about Manchester City.
- 10 For years, García refused interview requests, choosing instead to stay out of the spotlight. But in recent months, he has spoken to a handful of media. He has always refused to be photographed – "in case it goes viral again", he told one newspaper.
- 11 He brushed off suggestions that his meme may have been harder to accept than others. Instead, he pointed to a debate online as to whether the photo depicts him as the worst person or whether he was photographed looking at such a person.
- 12 Even so, the negative association was reinforced during a recent appearance on Spanish TV, when he was greeted with the line: "You don't have the face of a bad person."
- 13 He has learned to rely on his sense of humour. "I find it quite funny. It doesn't disturb me or anything," he said. "But that surprises people. There are some who ask me 'Are you seriously okay with all this?'"

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3 Comprehension check

a. Are these statements True (T) or False (F) according to the article? Correct any that are false.

1. The photo of García was taken during the COVID lockdown.
2. García's brother is a professional photographer.
3. The image of García was used to illustrate a magazine article.
4. Everyone in the marketing agency where García works knew about the photo.
5. A journalist posted information about García on social media.
6. García was not worried by the comments he received about his photo.
7. Andrés Arató had a similar experience to García.
8. Andrés Arató has had job offers after his meme helped to make him a celebrity.
9. García enjoys being in the spotlight.
10. People aren't surprised that García finds his meme situation funny.

4 Key language

a. Match the verbs with the nouns or noun phrases to make expressions from the text.

- | | |
|--------------|----------------------------|
| 1. receive | a. a photo to the internet |
| 2. check | b. a request |
| 3. upload | c. a telephone call |
| 4. take | d. a comment |
| 5. refuse | e. no notice |
| 6. shrug off | f. the light (for a photo) |

5 Discussion

a. Discuss these statements.

- "There is no such thing as bad publicity."
- "The internet is a dangerous place."

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6 In your own words

- a. Use an internet search engine to find more information about András Arató. In particular, find how much money he has earned from becoming famous as an internet meme.
- b. Report your findings to the class.