



Digital Folklore

Defying Convention (Memes, Conspiracy, & Communication)
Josh Chapdelaine & Dr. Kristina Downs

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

[Intro]

Welcome. You've got ...*Digital Folklore*.

Announcer:

Previously on Digital Folklore.

Mason Amadeus:

The Meme Enthusiast Mega Expo.

Perry Carpenter:

We sign up as speakers.

Mason Amadeus:

What would we talk about?

Perry Carpenter:

That's all just detail.

Mason Amadeus:

Man, I thought this would be easier.

Perry Carpenter:

We have about 12 hours and we have to be at the convention center.

Digby:



Digital Folklore

Defying Convention (Memes, Conspiracy, & Communication)
Josh Chapdelaine & Dr. Kristina Downs

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

Did you decide what you're presenting on?

Mason Amadeus:

We're going to talk about Goncharov.

Digby:

There's already a Goncharov panel at noon.

Perry Carpenter:

No, we're just going to have to wing it.

Mason Amadeus:

On virtually no sleep.

Perry Carpenter:

Sounds like it.

[Theme Music kicks in]

Perry Carpenter:

I'm Perry Carpenter.

Mason Amadeus:

And I'm Mason Amadeus.

Perry Carpenter:

And this is Digital Folklore.



Digital Folklore

Defying Convention (Memes, Conspiracy, & Communication)
Josh Chapdelaine & Dr. Kristina Downs

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

Mason Amadeus:

We made it.

Perry Carpenter:

Better late than never.

Mason Amadeus:

Yeah, we're fine. It's going to be a long day.

Perry Carpenter:

Yeah, but it is cutting it close.

Mason Amadeus:

Well, no matter what happens, we're here now.

Loudspeaker Voice:

Attention con goers, if you signed up to participate in the 5K Naruto Run, the pre-race assembly starts in 15 minutes in the Shrek is Love Pavilion. Again...

Mason Amadeus:

This is wild.

Perry Carpenter:

These guys really went all out.

Expo Registration Employee:



Digital Folklore

Defying Convention (Memes, Conspiracy, & Communication)
Josh Chapdelaine & Dr. Kristina Downs

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

Excuse me.

Mason Amadeus:

Yes. Hello.

Expo Registration Employee:

One does not simply walk into Meme Expo... without a badge.

Mason Amadeus:

Oh! Right, right, right.

Perry Carpenter:

They should be under 8th Layer Media.

Expo Registration Employee:

Okay. Perry.

Perry Carpenter:

Yep.

Expo Registration Employee:

And Mason.

Perry Carpenter:

That's us.

Expo Registration Employee:



Digital Folklore

Defying Convention (Memes, Conspiracy, & Communication)
Josh Chapdelaine & Dr. Kristina Downs

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

I see what you did there.

Mason Amadeus:

Oh no, that's not on purpose, those are just our names.

Perry Carpenter:

Yeah, everyone points out that Perry Mason is a thing, but that wasn't intentional.

Expo Registration Employee:

Hmmm..... Press X to doubt.

Beam, beam, beam. [laughs] All right, here you go. Badges, schedules. Just so you know, it's almost Morbin' Time, so if you wanted to make it for that, that's in West Ballroom C. You're going to go up those stairs and all the way to the left.

Convention Attendee... walking by:

"This is the best convention ever, it changed my life."

Mason Amadeus:

Good turnout, huh? This place is packed.

Expo Registration Employee:

Oh yeah... slaps hood... This bad boy can fit so much meme in it. Attendance this year is over 9,000.



Digital Folklore

Defying Convention (Memes, Conspiracy, & Communication)
Josh Chapdelaine & Dr. Kristina Downs

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

Perry Carpenter:

Hey, if we just wanted to talk to some people, where should we go?

Expo Registration Employee:

Oh, then you want to hit up the vendor floor. It's free real estate.

Mason Amadeus:

Thanks.

Convention attendee passing by...:

"...photo of me next to the.... "

Another con attendee:

"...did you know they have some Arthur's Angry Fists that you can put your hands into!"

Mason Amadeus:

I don't think I've ever seen this much copyright infringement in one place that's not on the internet.

Perry Carpenter:

Is that bouncer wearing an Evergiven boat shirt?

Mason Amadeus:

I don't get it, what's the Evergiven boat?

Perry Carpenter:

That container ship that blocked the Suez Canal.



Digital Folklore

Defying Convention (Memes, Conspiracy, & Communication)
Josh Chapdelaine & Dr. Kristina Downs

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

Mason Amadeus:

Oh. No, that's wicked funny. So are we headed straight for the vendor floor? Also, where do we have to be for our thing?

Perry Carpenter:

We're right after Dada, the evolution of dad humor with the advent of Facebook.

Mason Amadeus:

Nice.

Perry Carpenter:

That's in, we're going to be in meeting room 210, which apparently is right behind the Canhas Cheeseburger Cafe.

Mason Amadeus:

Ooh, if we have time after, I really want to go to that NPC walk stand ambience event. I bet that's going to be surreal.

Perry Carpenter:

I think we should head to the vendor floor first. Here's what I'm thinking. Maybe as we're scouting it out, we can find somebody to do the presentation with us and then we just sort of keep them moving. Let them be the expert type of thing.

Mason Amadeus:

That is what I would call pulling a digital folklore. That's a good idea.

Perry Carpenter:



Digital Folklore

Defying Convention (Memes, Conspiracy, & Communication)
Josh Chapdelaine & Dr. Kristina Downs

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

It's this way.

Mason Amadeus:

Did you see that? They have a Tamagotchi daycare.

Perry Carpenter:

Really? I thought those went away ages ago.

Mason Amadeus:

Oh dude, no. A new line of Tamagotchi just came out in July of this year.

Perry Carpenter:

Oh, thank God, it's a bit quieter in here. All right. Keep an eye out for anyone who looks like they might

...

Mason Amadeus:

Look at that.

Perry Carpenter:

Now that is an elaborate setup.

Mason Amadeus:

That booth is straight out of a cyberpunk synth wave music video. Whoever that is, we've got to go talk to them.

Perry Carpenter:

What's it say? Digital Void.



Digital Folklore

Defying Convention (Memes, Conspiracy, & Communication)
Josh Chapdelaine & Dr. Kristina Downs

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

Mason Amadeus:

Let's go see what they're about.

Perry Carpenter:

All right.

Josh Chapdelaine:

Yeah, no problem. Thanks for stopping by. Hey, how's it going?

Mason Amadeus:

Hey.

Perry Carpenter:

Hey.

Mason Amadeus:

Cool booth.

Josh Chapdelaine:

Thanks. We put a lot of work into it. I'm glad you like it.

Perry Carpenter:

Digital Void.

Josh Chapdelaine:

Yeah, that's us.



Digital Folklore

Defying Convention (Memes, Conspiracy, & Communication)
Josh Chapdelaine & Dr. Kristina Downs

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

Mason Amadeus:

What is Digital Void?

Josh Chapdelaine:

So Digital Void produces podcasts, we produce live events and gatherings in New York City. We have upcoming shows in London, we've run in DC. And our festivals focus on the intersection of digital culture, media tech, and how it influences the world. Because we believe that our experiences online are isolated and oftentimes taken out of context. And the ability to gather in person, to have conversations with and to listen to experts about this, to share lived experiences is one of the most meaningful and powerful things that we can do to help form resilience strategies and create meaning from experiences that are otherwise very difficult to make meaning out of.

We've had a wide array of speakers, dozens of speakers on our stage. And those speakers range from authors to journalists to academics to comedians. And they bring their lived experiences and research to the stage in order to speak to a wide audience. Because oftentimes in our space information is safeguarded. It is kept behind paywalls or it is made inaccessible through existing structures, whether it be graduate level seminars or colleges in general, which have barriers to entry for the general public. Or whether it be pricey conferences, which can oftentimes run \$200, \$300, \$400 for the general public. So our work is focused on making information and learning accessible. So our events are typically free or low cost. And we make sure that people have an opportunity to socialize, to find community and people that make them realize that their experiences online are actually shared.

Mason Amadeus:

Yeah, cool, I love that. Since what we're focusing on today is primarily memes. I'm curious how you would define what a meme is, because it's the kind of thing, we all know what a meme is when you see it, but as someone who's studied them, what's your definition of a meme?

Josh Chapdelaine:



Digital Folklore

Defying Convention (Memes, Conspiracy, & Communication)
Josh Chapdelaine & Dr. Kristina Downs

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

So there's two different camps of memes. The first camp of meme is related to, but not exactly our current understanding. So in the 1970s, Richard Dawkins famously coins the term meme. And I don't always love to take this historical deep dive into memes because it can seem recursive to go back to step one.

But I think that there's an important lineage that can be told succinctly when it comes to Dawkins and evolution. So he defines memes as a unit of cultural production. And so at the time, the internet or the web as we know it does not exist in the way that we know it. So in 1996, Dancing Baby becomes the first internet graphical meme that is spread. So this is 20 years before that.

But the idea or the subtext of Dawkins' work is that genes are selfish and their entire goal is to reproduce. So he applies that model to memes, which is a play of the word 'mimema' or to imitate. And so the idea is that memes are units of culture and they compete for space and dominance and other people. And so that kind of mimetic understanding or ideology tends to subvert human autonomy and agency. The idea that humans are just a vessel for these ideas to spread in a way that is similar to genes. And I think that's really undermining to any contemporary understanding of memes.

So we get to the early two thousands and we get to a brilliant professor, Limor Shifman, who has a bit of a different definition of memes, and one that I tend to subscribe to. So Limor Shifman in her book, *Memes in Digital Culture*, outlines memes to be three things. They are a group of digital items that share common characteristics of form, content or stance. They are created with an awareness of each other. So someone making a meme knows that they are remixing a meme or they are speaking to a community. And when they are circulated, there is an intentional ingroup and outgroup. So it is both intentionally niche as well as exclusionary. And so that's my understanding of a meme.

Perry Carpenter:

Yeah, I love that you mentioned the Limor Shifman book because that's an older book, I think that came out in 2012 or something, and it was one of the really first compilations of research that went into that. And it talked about virality and everything else.

One of the interesting things though, when we start to break it down from an objective, almost scientific point of view, all of that makes sense, we have to also realize that when the person does it, all of that



Digital Folklore

Defying Convention (Memes, Conspiracy, & Communication)
Josh Chapdelaine & Dr. Kristina Downs

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

intention is very subconscious. You're not necessarily saying, "I'm going to take a unit of culture that's understood by one group of people and I'm going to now select an impact font. Put that over there and intentionally create an ingroup and outgroup and add a little bit of humor. And thereby I shall create internet chaos." I don't know that anybody really thinks about it that way. There's just something inherently human about the process of knowing how to do that.

Josh Chapdelaine:

Yeah. This is being done subconsciously. Unless you are in a war room or a political strategist or a corporate person, then you're not thinking about how to make an ingroup or an outgroup or how to target one community. And I think there are more case studies of failures than successes in that.

And I think when you look at some of the more successful cases of how mimetic campaigns take off, you can ask people working in companies how it happened, and they will tell you themselves that these are things that they hope can happen, but they can never manufacture or curate. When McDonald's was creating the grimace campaign, that went famously viral in June, they did not know it was going to go viral. They created a campaign and then once they saw the mimetic energy, they leaned into it, they tried to enable or empower creators. But they didn't say, "How do we earn a hundred billion TikTok impressions?" It happens organically.

You see that again with Barbenheimer, where there was a ton of money in marketing poured into a campaign, but no amount of money can make a community be receptive to messaging. And in fact, there's always an inflection point where the energy can be zapped. And around the time of Barbie's release, I think it was really interesting to see some of the critical feedback to politicians trying to use the Barbenheimer aesthetics. And that's when a lot of people said, "All right, the joke's over, this is no longer fun."

So, I think it's interesting to see even the most cunning and smart people cannot make something go viral or create genuine enthusiasm or community around these topics. But the smallest accident can make something take off.

Perry Carpenter:



Digital Folklore

Defying Convention (Memes, Conspiracy, & Communication)
Josh Chapdelaine & Dr. Kristina Downs

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

Yeah.

Josh Chapdelaine:

The smallest accident can make something take off.

Perry Carpenter:

Yeah.

Mason Amadeus:

I think there's something interesting to the phenomenon you just described because we see it in other things as well. When someone who is in the outgroup of something starts participating or co-opting something, it's not cool anymore.

Josh Chapdelaine:

Not cool, grandpa.

Mason Amadeus:

Yeah. I wonder how that ties into ideas of identity and community because suddenly you're like, "Oh, that's lame." It's like whenever I say dope in front of my youngest sister, she's like, "Oh, you're so old and cringe."

Josh Chapdelaine:

Yeah. Yeah. I think that goes back to Perry's point where there are ingroups and outgroups. And I think every generation has an aesthetic sensibility, they have language, ticks, different methods of communication in order to try to communicate and make sense. And those are basically their benchmarks, especially inter-generationally though we're getting into a strange space online because language itself is evolving in ways that never had to evolve in this way in the past.



Digital Folklore

Defying Convention (Memes, Conspiracy, & Communication)
Josh Chapdelaine & Dr. Kristina Downs

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

So I would like to draw attention to two great scholars, Lisa Nakamura and Alondra Nelson, did a lot of great work about identity on the internet in the early nineties. And Charlton McIlwain speaks about this in his book, *Black Software*, which is just absolutely brilliant. McIlwain dives into a graduating class at MIT, I believe it was 99.5% white. And so the internet was designed with a very specific type of group that had the largest amount of input, and that created a necessary outgroup.

Scholars like Nelson and Nakamura speak about early case studies of gaming, identity and community. The idea is that on the internet, the assumption is that everyone at the time was a white male. That never really leaves the internet. The idea that these systems and these structures were built for and by a certain demographic. And so especially when we're speaking about community at large, it would be remiss of me not to call attention to the fact that these spaces promote a ton of harm, in specifically Twitter or X or Meta or LinkedIn.

How do you elevate voices so that these structures can be more kind to different communities? I say that on a day where there's a lot of controversy on X because there are anti-Semitic trends that are the top trending topics. And so not to take it away from memes, but when we're speaking about community and these digital spaces, it's really important to realize that the effects of these campaigns oftentimes disproportionately affect and harm those who are not well-represented in these spaces.

Mason Amadeus:

Yeah, I think within the context of talking about memes, that also brings up that memes in a way, that kind of folkloric informal communication, is a way a lot of the time for groups that are disadvantaged to find community, find each other, signal to each other their identities, their intentions and where they are.

Josh Chapdelaine:

Yes. It's definitely a way. I mean, dog whistles can be used in multiple ways, right?

Mason Amadeus:

Right.



Digital Folklore

Defying Convention (Memes, Conspiracy, & Communication)
Josh Chapdelaine & Dr. Kristina Downs

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

Perry Carpenter:

Right.

Josh Chapdelaine:

It is really interesting to see how groups can use language and memes to be both subversive as well as for empowerment. I mean, going back a decade, Twitter really takes off around the time of the Arab Spring. That launches it into the political spotlight and becomes a global breeding ground for news and attention to drive. That evolves into more recently people developing language to communicate around algorithmic censorship in ways that may or may not be empowering for people and creators.

And I think the thing that I would feel comfortable speaking to is Algospeak, which became popular a year or two ago on TikTok. And I think the really interesting thing about Algospeak or the practice of creating language that intentionally subverts algorithmic blocking-

Perry Carpenter:

Like filtering and censorship.

Mason Amadeus:

Is that like people saying unalived instead of killed, things like that?

Josh Chapdelaine:

Yes. So unalived instead of suicide or killed. There was a time when TikTok was suppressing LGBTQ as an acronym, so the language was leg booty community. So there are very interesting ways that communities learn to bypass algorithmic censorship or suppression through evolving language. And that in a sense is mimetic.

Mason Amadeus:

Yeah.



Digital Folklore

Defying Convention (Memes, Conspiracy, & Communication)
Josh Chapdelaine & Dr. Kristina Downs

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

Perry Carpenter:

Yeah, absolutely. One of the interesting things that I've seen on the internet is when a group of people are using a meme or some kind of characterization of somebody. And then that gets accepted by the people that they're actually trying to weaponize that against and then reflected back. I'm thinking specifically about with Biden and the brand and content, and then that being spun back in the dark brand and persona. Can you talk a little bit about that?

Josh Chapdelaine:

Yeah. So this is a really interesting case study because in 2021, in summer 2021, NASCAR driver Brandon Brown is racing and the crowd starts chanting F Joe Biden. And the F Joe Biden chant is misinterpreted as, by the announcer, as, 'let's go Brandon', because the announcer either deliberately or not tries to channel that energy toward the race. And so that becomes a viral clip, tens of millions of views. And so 'let's go Brandon' becomes a meme for F Joe Biden. And it takes off to a degree that is really rare actually in that space to that point. So it becomes commodified fairly quickly, 'Let's go Brandon' hats, merchandise. There was a store that sold all 'Let's go, Brandon' merchandise in the Carolinas that opened up. And so you see how this meme evolved really quickly. There were songs produced about it. But 'Let's go Brandon' remains a mimetic trend firmly in the right wing camp for roughly a year.

However, in August, 2022, a piece of a Chinese anti-Biden propaganda that was created to make Joe Biden look like an authoritarian begins to spread. And there's this image of Biden sitting on a throne with laser eyes. And this is viewed as entirely badass by a lot of people in the United States. And so Chris Murphy, a representative from Connecticut, tweets out the image of Biden with laser eyes. And so laser eyes in the United States and in the West is typically associated with a base nature of memes. So that was actually associated with a more extreme ideology previous to this. So people with laser eyes would be viewed as doing something incredibly raw, which is what base means. So typically it had been associated with far right figures, Elon Musk, Donald Trump, laser eyes would be used in that way.

And so the meme begins to evolve, and 'Let's go, Brandon' turns into 'Dark Brandon'. And so 'Dark Brandon' is used as a way to communicate that Biden is leveling up, or whenever he has a success, it's viewed as an empowering term.



Digital Folklore

Defying Convention (Memes, Conspiracy, & Communication)
Josh Chapdelaine & Dr. Kristina Downs

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

And so this kind of wanders into grim territory because it is closely associated with the assassination of Shinzo Abe and gas prices lowering and Covid restrictions being lifted and the moment when al-Zawahiri was killed overseas.

So all of these consecutive string of real life political victories for Biden happened, he begins becoming more closely associated with the laser eyes as well as the darker aesthetic. And so this evolves into later summer 2022, Joe Biden begins becoming associated with Star Wars, everything from Joebi-Wan Kenobi to the real apex of this trend, which happened when he delivered a speech in front of the White House, and it was clear at this time that his team had learned of the 'Dark Brandon' trend. And so he's photographed with both of his fists in the air looking victorious with this dark red background, and that becomes the meme format.

And so he delivers a speech and it was billed as a battle for the soul of the nation. And so he delivers this speech at a moment of particular animus. And all of a sudden, all of the memes that had been associated with Joe Biden from a right-wing perspective, from criticisms of his plan to hire 87,000 new IRS agents become rallying cries, they're co-opted.

So one popular tweet read, "Dark Lord Brandon addressing his army of 87,000 IRS agents, circa 2022," as if it were in a textbook. Another one imitated Star Wars, which was another closely associated meme. So "Star Wars: the Rise of Brandon coming November, 2022 to Disney Plus." Another one really commented to the strength of this. Somehow you just make him look cooler every time that they tried to make him look lame.

And so I think the message with 'Dark Brandon' is that once a meme is in the public consciousness, and once it is popular enough, it can always be co-opted. And you have no control over that meme any longer. It does not belong to anybody, it belongs to the public.

Mason Amadeus:

And I think it's interesting how that ties into, sometimes when something is co-opted, it is just suddenly not cool and falls out of favor. But sometimes something is co-opted, is co-opted so successfully that it entirely changes identity.



Digital Folklore

Defying Convention (Memes, Conspiracy, & Communication)
Josh Chapdelaine & Dr. Kristina Downs

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

Josh Chapdelaine:

Yes. And in the last few years, you have everything from the 'Dark Brandon' meme to the Pepe evolution, to the evolution of the vaporwave aesthetic to the Morbius meme. There is no control over how a meme will spread, how it will be used. And any effort to really begin to control this, especially within a community, is usually met with such severe pushback that all efforts have to be dropped and mitigation efforts must commence.

Mason Amadeus:

I was having a discussion recently with a friend because we were digging through all of our old stuff that we have online and talking about how cringe it was. And one of the ways to put it that struck me that, I wonder how you feel about it is, it's like a perceived lack of self-awareness on the part of the subject. Whether there actually is a lack of self-awareness. It's just you feel like they're not being self-aware, and that's embarrassing.

Josh Chapdelaine:

Yes. And I think it's interesting to note the self-awareness thing because that which often is cringe one day is not cringe later. We're in the middle of a jorts revival, and I know that's not necessarily an internet meme.

Mason Amadeus:

I've never heard it put that way, but I love jorts revival as a pair of words next to each other.

Josh Chapdelaine:

At the moment, in the early two thousands, they were not cringe, and then they became cringe, and now they are not cringe again. And so I think it's almost a fool's errand to try to lean into cringe trends. Although my favorite case study from the last few years is Morbin' Time and the Summer of Morbius.

Mason Amadeus:



Digital Folklore

Defying Convention (Memes, Conspiracy, & Communication)
Josh Chapdelaine & Dr. Kristina Downs

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

Yeah. Oh, and so much so that they made a sequel.

Josh Chapdelaine:

Well, it's so interesting because the movie bombed. So for those who are not aware of Morbius, Sony released Morbius in the summer of 2022 starring Jared Leto. Because of the film's let's say lack of artistic quality, the film bombed at the box office. But it was deeply made fun of, in part because of Jared Leto. And so memes began to emerge. It's Morbin' Time being a common catchphrase. But it stayed in the public consciousness for several weeks.

Unfortunately, Sony did not pick up on the fact that this was ironic enthusiasm or participation and decided to re-release the film in theaters to bomb a second time in the same summer. And so you look at a case study like that, and I think that is the ultimate call. The call is for, how do we understand what is ironic versus genuine? How do we understand an ingroup versus an outgroup? How do we understand each other at this moment? And the answer is through diversity and representation and inclusion. There is no way to understand how these systems work and how to create meaning out of them without having multiple voices, perspectives, and disciplines in these rooms.

Mason Amadeus:

That is an amazing point to make and really well put. I love that.

Perry Carpenter:

Yeah, I think so. Thank you.

Josh Chapdelaine:

I think oftentimes you can envisage this room of decision makers, and I think you've seen it recently with X, that a lot of times it can feel like the decisions being made that impact and influence millions of people are just gut instincts. That the decisions that are being made are not being made with community or trust and safety support or standards across the board. And those influence people, whether it be on the brand or studio side or the social media platform side. And it all comes down to the



Digital Folklore

Defying Convention (Memes, Conspiracy, & Communication)
Josh Chapdelaine & Dr. Kristina Downs

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

social element of this, humans are social creatures. We are trying to make sense and meaning of an incredibly new technology, less than a century old, barely more than a half century old, and this is part of a grand experiment.

Mason Amadeus:

That is such an excellent way to put that. Thanks for taking so much time to chat with us, Josh. You are an absolute goldmine of information, and I'm going to have to go and binge basically everything that Digital Void has ever put out.

Josh Chapdelaine:

Thank you. And I would just like to say how deeply I admire the work that both of you do. I think that the work you do is incredibly important. You're platforming great voices, you're telling great stories. And this is an absolutely wonderful convention, I'm glad you visited my booth.

Mason Amadeus:

Thank you, Josh.

Perry Carpenter:

Thank you. We love the booth.

Josh Chapdelaine:

What are you up to for the rest of the convention?

Mason Amadeus:

Funny you ask actually. Perry booked us a speaking slot.

Josh Chapdelaine:



Digital Folklore

Defying Convention (Memes, Conspiracy, & Communication)
Josh Chapdelaine & Dr. Kristina Downs

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

Oh, cool.

Mason Amadeus:

Yeah, except we don't have anything prepared.

Perry Carpenter:

That's not exactly true. We do have some ideas.

Mason Amadeus:

Yeah. I don't know if winging it really counts as an idea, but-

Josh Chapdelaine:

When is the talk?

Mason Amadeus:

In less than half an hour.

Josh Chapdelaine:

Yikes.

Perry Carpenter:

I don't suppose you'd be interested in joining us for it? We could sort of do a redo of what we just did, continue that conversation, do it as an interview from the stage.

Josh Chapdelaine:

That would be fun. But I'm kind of tied to the booth for the day. We've got some events planned right here on the vendor floor, and I've got to be here for them, I'm sorry.



Digital Folklore

Defying Convention (Memes, Conspiracy, & Communication)
Josh Chapdelaine & Dr. Kristina Downs

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

Mason Amadeus:

Oh yeah, no worries. Kind of a long shot.

Perry Carpenter:

Yeah, that's okay. I think we can figure it out.

Mason Amadeus:

Really appreciate you taking the time to talk with us though, Josh. That was awesome.

Josh Chapdelaine:

Here, take a few of my cards.

Perry Carpenter:

Cool. Thank you.

Mason Amadeus:

Thanks. See you later, Josh.

Josh Chapdelaine:

Good luck with the talk.

Perry Carpenter:

Right, okay. We are really cutting it close now.

Mason Amadeus:

Yeah, it's really a shame we couldn't steal Josh.



Digital Folklore

Defying Convention (Memes, Conspiracy, & Communication)
Josh Chapdelaine & Dr. Kristina Downs

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

Perry Carpenter:

Yeah. Okay. Let's take a lap around the vendor floor and look for anyone that's got books or pamphlets.

Sketchy Meme Dealer:

Hey. Hey, you two, you look discerning. Could I potentially interest you in some extremely rare and valuable memes?

Mason Amadeus:

No, no, thanks, we're okay.

Sketchy Meme Dealer:

Ah, I see you're a man of culture as well. Well, I do have a-

Mason Amadeus:

I'm really not.

Sketchy Meme Dealer:

... special stash, deep fried.

Mason Amadeus:

No, no, that's fine, I'm really all right.

Sketchy Meme Dealer:

I don't offer these to just anybody you know.

Perry Carpenter:



Digital Folklore

Defying Convention (Memes, Conspiracy, & Communication)
Josh Chapdelaine & Dr. Kristina Downs

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

Actually-

Mason Amadeus:

Perry don't.

Perry Carpenter:

How would you feel about coming on stage with us and doing an interview about the meme economy?

Sketchy Meme Dealer:

Oh, okay, right. An interview, huh?

Perry Carpenter:

Yeah. I mean, we could even show off some of your rare memes.

Sketchy Meme Dealer:

How stupid do you think I am, Narc?

Perry Carpenter:

What?

Sketchy Meme Dealer:

You think I'm going to get up on stage and show everyone I'm carrying around this kind of value. Nice try, Narc. You think you're so smart, Narcky, Narc, Narcky, Narc, Narc.

Perry Carpenter:

I am so genuinely confused.



Digital Folklore

Defying Convention (Memes, Conspiracy, & Communication)
Josh Chapdelaine & Dr. Kristina Downs

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

Sketchy Meme Dealer:

You're not even a good Narc. A good Narc would try to surprise me, but you are just going to come up and say it, Narc.

Mason Amadeus:

They're really still going, huh?

Perry Carpenter:

Why do they keep calling us Narcs?

Sketchy Meme Dealer:

Watch out for the Narc squad, everyone, Narcky, Narc, Narc.

Perry Carpenter:

I don't understand.

Mason Amadeus:

I honestly don't think they do either. I wouldn't worry about it.

Sketchy Meme Dealer:

I'm a Narc, watch out, I'm narcking here. That's what you would say if you were [inaudible 00:28:57]

Perry Carpenter:

I didn't think anyone actually took meme trading that seriously.

Mason Amadeus:



Digital Folklore

Defying Convention (Memes, Conspiracy, & Communication)
Josh Chapdelaine & Dr. Kristina Downs

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

I mean, ever since the GameStop thing with the stocks, there is a subculture of actual stock trading based on memes.

Perry Carpenter:

No, I know that meme stocks are a thing, but that guy is just carrying around a bunch of printed out jpegs stapled to the inside of his coat.

Mason Amadeus:

Yeah, no, I don't know. I don't know if he's just way too deep in the sauce or if he's really committed to the cosplay. I do think that actual meme stocks are pretty fascinating though. There's part of me that loves how it's ordinary people infiltrating and disrupting something that's traditionally territory of rich and powerful folks. Although a lot of that subculture's problematic.

Perry Carpenter:

Hey, look, that sign.

Mason Amadeus:

Where?

Perry Carpenter:

It says meme expert, ask me anything.

Mason Amadeus:

Where? I don't see-

Perry Carpenter:

Just to the right of the Shock Pikachu Fortnite Dance Clinic.



Digital Folklore

Defying Convention (Memes, Conspiracy, & Communication)
Josh Chapdelaine & Dr. Kristina Downs

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

Mason Amadeus:

The photo booth with three Spider-Men pointing at each other?

Perry Carpenter:

No, behind it. It's one of those retractable floor banner things.

Mason Amadeus:

Oh, yep, yeah, I see it. Meme Expert AMA.

Perry Carpenter:

Yeah. Come on.

Mason Amadeus:

All right. Excuse me.

Perry Carpenter:

Pardon.

Mason Amadeus:

Hello.

Dr. Kristina Downs:

Hello. How's it going?

Perry Carpenter:

Good.



Digital Folklore

Defying Convention (Memes, Conspiracy, & Communication)
Josh Chapdelaine & Dr. Kristina Downs

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

Mason Amadeus:

Good.

Perry Carpenter:

So you're a meme expert.

Dr. Kristina Downs:

I mean, more than just memes. I have a PhD in folklore and I'm the executive director of the Texas Folklore Society.

Mason Amadeus:

These pins are so cool.

Dr. Kristina Downs:

Thanks. They're three for five. But to answer your question, yes, for today, I'm a meme expert.

Perry Carpenter:

What's your name?

Dr. Kristina Downs:

Dr. Kristina Downs.

Perry Carpenter:

Nice to meet you. I'm Perry. Perry Carpenter.

Mason Amadeus:



Digital Folklore

Defying Convention (Memes, Conspiracy, & Communication)
Josh Chapdelaine & Dr. Kristina Downs

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

Oh my God, I love these stickers too. Oh, sorry. Hi, I'm Mason.

Dr. Kristina Downs:

Nice to meet you both. I've got a little bundle deal where if you buy a copy of my book, *Advancing Folkloristics*, I'll throw in three stickers and a pen for free.

Perry Carpenter:

Hey, I think I saw your name on the program earlier, was that you was doing the talk on memes and conspiracy?

Dr. Kristina Downs:

Yes, that was about the animal thefts at the Dallas Zoo. Did you like it?

Perry Carpenter:

Yeah. Well, no, actually we missed the whole thing. I think we walked by right as you were wrapping up. Hey, this may be a weird question, but would you maybe want to do a redo, like an encore or take some questions that you didn't have time for? Because we have a presentation in about 10 minutes, and as it happens, we don't have anything ready to present.

Dr. Kristina Downs:

What? How did you manage that?

Perry Carpenter:

It's complicated.

Mason Amadeus:

No, it isn't. Perry just didn't want to pay for tickets.



Digital Folklore

Defying Convention (Memes, Conspiracy, & Communication)
Josh Chapdelaine & Dr. Kristina Downs

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

Perry Carpenter:

No, that's not exactly it. We have a podcast, it's actually a folklore podcast, and that's why we're here in the first place.

Dr. Kristina Downs:

Okay. And you were planning on talking about?

Perry Carpenter:

The current plan is that maybe we can find somebody here at the con and do a live interview on stage.

Dr. Kristina Downs:

And you're on in 10 minutes and you haven't gotten anyone yet?

Perry Carpenter:

Basically, yeah.

Dr. Kristina Downs:

Look, I can appreciate that you've got yourself into a bit of a situation, but I have to stay here and man the booth.

Mason Amadeus:

I think I'm going to get these, this cato, cato critter pin is adorable.

Dr. Kristina Downs:

I love that one. Three pens, five bucks.

Mason Amadeus:



Digital Folklore

Defying Convention (Memes, Conspiracy, & Communication)
Josh Chapdelaine & Dr. Kristina Downs

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

Cool.

Dr. Kristina Downs:

Thank you.

Perry Carpenter:

How much for the whole stock?

Dr. Kristina Downs:

Sorry?

Perry Carpenter:

If we buy everything here, will that let you come do the presentation with us? We can do it like a panel. All those people after your talk that wanted to ask you questions, you didn't have time, you had to come here, you can answer those from the stage.

Mason Amadeus:

Hey, that could be fun. Perry and I could MC it, you could answer the questions.

Dr. Kristina Downs:

I mean, if you bought everything.

Perry Carpenter:

I mean, obviously if you don't want to or you don't feel comfortable, that's okay. We're pretty good at winging things.

Dr. Kristina Downs:



Digital Folklore

Defying Convention (Memes, Conspiracy, & Communication)
Josh Chapdelaine & Dr. Kristina Downs

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

Well, hang on. I did really wish I had more time for questions. And I mean, the main reason for the booth is just to raise money for the Texas Folklore Society.

Perry Carpenter:

Okay. How about we buy out the entire value of your booth, but you can keep your merch, and then after the talk you can come back?

Dr. Kristina Downs:

You buy everything plus \$500 because I'm saving your butts, we keep the merch and you give a shout out to the Texas Folklore Society on that little podcast of yours.

Perry Carpenter:

Deal.

Mason Amadeus:

Can I still keep my pins?

Dr. Kristina Downs:

Yes, obviously.

Mason Amadeus:

Cool. Awesome.

Perry Carpenter:

Done. That should cover it.

Dr. Kristina Downs:



Digital Folklore

Defying Convention (Memes, Conspiracy, & Communication)
Josh Chapdelaine & Dr. Kristina Downs

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

Perfect. We have a deal. Lead the way.

Perry Carpenter:

How do we want to open this thing?

Mason Amadeus:

Leave it to me. I need a good reason to justify the eight years I spent working in radio.

Perry Carpenter:

Right.

Mason Amadeus:

Hello. Hello. Thank you. Thank you all for coming. My name is Mason Amadeus. This is Perry Carpenter. We are the hosts of the Digital Folklore Podcast, and today we're going to sit down with Dr. Kristina Downs. Now, I'm sure that some of you saw Kristina's talk earlier, a round of applause if you were there before. Awesome. Great. Yes. Well, we have brought her back on stage to answer some of your questions, dive a little bit deeper on memes, conspiracy, news, lore, and anything that might come up. Right now, let's welcome Dr. Downs to the stage.

Dr. Kristina Downs:

Thank you.

Mason Amadeus:

All right.

Perry Carpenter:

Okay, so why don't we start off with you introducing yourself and what you do.



Digital Folklore

Defying Convention (Memes, Conspiracy, & Communication)
Josh Chapdelaine & Dr. Kristina Downs

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

Dr. Kristina Downs:

My name is Dr. Kristina Downs. I am the director of the Texas Folklore Society, and I'm also a professor at Tarleton State University.

Perry Carpenter:

So let's talk a little bit about your talk. So you gave a talk about memes and misconceptions and conspiracies about animal thefts from the Dallas Zoo. Can you give us some of the high points of that? And then I want to talk a little bit about what you were hoping that people would get out of that.

Dr. Kristina Downs:

In January of 2023, the Dallas Zoo, which is in Dallas, Texas, had a series of events that happened. It started with a clouded leopard being found out of her enclosure. And then it was discovered that her enclosure had been cut open deliberately as had another enclosure at the zoo, the langur monkeys, something, I'm probably getting that name wrong. One of the monkey enclosures. Both of them had been cut open deliberately.

The clouded leopard, her name was Nova. She was found safe and sound on the zoo grounds. She had actually snuck into another enclosure that was not in use at the time. She climbed into a cabinet and they found her when she went to emerge from this cabinet. And a squirrel saw her and freaked out. And they heard the squirrel's panicked sounds and realized, oh, something's going on and found her. So happy ending, the leopard's safe. But we know something has happened at the zoo, that these two enclosures were cut.

Then about a week later, endangered vulture was found deceased in its enclosure with a wound that was described as suspicious. People that examined it said that they didn't feel like it was a natural death. And then about a week after that, two of the emperor tamarin monkeys were discovered missing from their enclosure. About two days later, they were recovered at an abandoned house where they found several other animals that were mostly domestic animals, things like cats, birds, fish, as well as some things that had been stolen from employee-only areas at the zoo.



Digital Folklore

Defying Convention (Memes, Conspiracy, & Communication)
Josh Chapdelaine & Dr. Kristina Downs

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

At that point, the zoo released an image of a man that they thought was a suspect. That man was quickly found, I think about a day after that at the Dallas Aquarium where it's believed he was kind of looking to find more animals. Turns out it was a 24-year-old man named Davion Irvin. A lot of the theories as all this was going on were these really elaborate things involving animal rights activists or animal traffickers or something targeting the zoo. He just liked animals and said he wanted to keep them all as pets. He admitted that if he was let go, he would probably steal more animals.

One of the other kind of absurd things that came out was that he was using public transportation for all of these events. And in fact had taken the monkeys home with him on the Dart, which is our light rail in the Dallas area. And apparently no one noticed the man with the two monkeys on the Dart train late at night.

Perry Carpenter:

Yeah, you'd think that there'd be some great surveillance photos from that.

Mason Amadeus:

Yeah, right?

Dr. Kristina Downs:

If there are, I've never seen them released. They've only released the images of him kind of skulking around the zoo. But as you can imagine, there was a lot of social media response to all of these events. One of the big comical things was that the announcement that the zoo was closed said it's a code blue, which means a non-dangerous animal out of its enclosure. And then when they released that it was a clouded leopard, people immediately heard leopard and thought, in what world is a leopard a non-dangerous animal?

Well, it turns out that a clouded leopard is a completely different species than what we think of when we think of as leopards. And fully grown, a female clouded leopard is about 25 pounds, not that much bigger than an average house cat. Well, maybe bigger than an average house cat, it's not that much bigger than my house cat.



Digital Folklore

Defying Convention (Memes, Conspiracy, & Communication)
Josh Chapdelaine & Dr. Kristina Downs

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

We also saw some people starting accounts from the leopard's perspective. There were two that were alleging to be the clouded leopard tweeting her adventures.

Mason Amadeus:

I love that.

Dr. Kristina Downs:

And one of them was very cute. She was like, "Did you guys know that there's a whole pond here at the zoo that's stocked with waterfowl? I'll be back after a quick meal." She tweeted some things about the other animals, and she was overall being a little chaotic, but overall sweet.

The other Nova Twitter account was very aggressive. It always tweets in all caps. It kept going for a while after she was recaptured and would say things like, "I'm being detained against my will, someone call me a lawyer." And she had a lot of tweets directed at a zookeeper named Wendy, who as best I can tell, is a fictional construct. I hope she is. Otherwise I feel very bad for Wendy.

But there was a lot of, "Hey, Wendy, what did the leopard say when you left her cage unlocked? Nothing, because I was already halfway to Mexico." For Valentine's Day she tweeted a poem that was like, "Roses are red, rose is trendy, I'm escaping tonight, go to hell, Wendy." It just kept going. And she responded to the other animal events too. When the monkeys escaped, it was, "The escapes will continue until morale improves."

And that was really where I started getting interested in what was going on. Of course, that day I happened to be sitting at my computer and start seeing these things on Twitter and going, "Wait, what's going on at the Dallas Zoo?" And thinking, as folklorists often do, "I don't know what's going on here, but there's something going on here. So I'm just going to take a lot of screen caps and come back to this later."

When the escape of the clouded leopard was first announced, the Jurassic Park official Twitter account just retweeted the Dallas Zoo's tweet about an escaped animal with kind of the big eyes emoji. Like,



Digital Folklore

Defying Convention (Memes, Conspiracy, & Communication)
Josh Chapdelaine & Dr. Kristina Downs

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

wait. And then of course immediately people picked up on this, "Jurassic Park is like, where have I seen this before?"

Perry Carpenter:

That's why we have the internet though.

Dr. Kristina Downs:

Exactly.

Perry Carpenter:

It is those kind of interactions and then the fact that people make Twitter accounts from the perspective of those and refuse to let the joke die long after most people would in polite conversation.

Dr. Kristina Downs:

And in the midst of this, of course, the zoo is saying, "We have increased security measures, we've added cameras. The Dallas PD is helping us with this." And it seemed to not be doing any good, and people were getting frustrated and you saw more and more. And then these sort of rumors that were then being taken as truth. A lot of, "Well, I talked to somebody who knows somebody who works at the zoo and they said this is definitely an inside job."

When the leopard was missing, interestingly of course because she was caught within less than 12 hours I think of going missing, but there was someone that I found on Twitter who was insisting that the night before she had been in Arlington, Texas. And that several people had caught her on their Ring doorbell cameras.

Obviously that didn't happen. I don't know what they caught on their Ring doorbell cameras. We do have polecats and mountain lions in Texas, so it could have been, who knows. But we saw a lot of discussion of, I keep saying human trafficking, it's animal trafficking. But I think the reason I'm getting mixed up is because it follows so many of the patterns that we see with legends of human trafficking



Digital Folklore

Defying Convention (Memes, Conspiracy, & Communication)
Josh Chapdelaine & Dr. Kristina Downs

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

nowadays, which I think today it's not a brand new thing, certainly these anxieties over human trafficking.

There's a folklorist named Bill Ellis who's done a really great study showing that in the early 20th century there were all these panics over human trafficking, that girls were getting abducted from ice cream parlors. Ice cream parlors were these dangerous places for young ladies of good standing to go. And now it's like the dressing room of Target. And I would say human trafficking is a very real and very serious problem, that it's good that people be more aware of, but what it looks like is not middle class white women being abducted from a Target dressing room.

Perry Carpenter:

And it's not like a coded language in a Wayfair catalog either.

Dr. Kristina Downs:

Right, exactly. Unfortunately there are much easier ways for human traffickers to find and traffic their victims. As I would imagine, there's much easier ways for animal traffickers to get animals than to break into a zoo.

Perry Carpenter:

Yeah, right.

Dr. Kristina Downs:

But it's interesting how similar those things looked in the discourse of like, "This has to be animal trafficking." And "I hear animal trafficking is this big money maker and that they're everywhere." The same kind of ways that people talk about human trafficking.

Perry Carpenter:

Interesting.



Digital Folklore

Defying Convention (Memes, Conspiracy, & Communication)
Josh Chapdelaine & Dr. Kristina Downs

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

Dr. Kristina Downs:

And then of course it turned out to be this really mundane answer. Which as someone who studies the intersections of crime and legends, that's how often things in the crime world work. Often though people tend to, to use another animal metaphor, hear hoof beats and think zebras rather than horses. It's really usually just horses. It's usually the mundane thing, not the exotic thing.

And here it was just a kid who, though I'm in no position to actually give a diagnosis, seems to maybe have been suffering from some mental health issues and just really liked animals. And then of course people were hesitant to accept that.

Perry Carpenter:

Yeah, because you assume in that because of just the way our mental framing works is there must be a criminal mastermind. And he doesn't look or present like a criminal mastermind. And forget the fact that the leopard was recovered within 12 hours and never was actually stolen.

Mason Amadeus:

Yeah. And also you mentioned earlier that there was an endangered vulture that died. Did they ever figure out what happened there?

Dr. Kristina Downs:

If they have, I have not been able to find official cause given. What they have said is that they do not believe that Davion Irvin, the man arrested in connection with the monkeys and the leopard, they don't believe he was involved in the vulture's theft.

Perry Carpenter:

Enough of a question mark for somebody with the right mindset to still tag that onto the monkey thefts that he was confirmed for and some of the other things that were stolen.



Digital Folklore

Defying Convention (Memes, Conspiracy, & Communication)
Josh Chapdelaine & Dr. Kristina Downs

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

Mason Amadeus:

But at the same time, there's this cognitive dissonance that they have to have because of the state of the house and everything where they found all the animals. Trying to think that that's something that belongs to a criminal mastermind doesn't totally make sense. So I'm curious how much actual growth of a conspiracy you sort of saw, how many people genuinely believed this was some kind of an inside job?

Dr. Kristina Downs:

It's hard to quantify how much it grew in terms of numbers. Of course I'm just looking at tweets and I looked a little bit at Reddit also and the Dallas sub-Reddit and some discussions there. It certainly came up a lot, these ideas of there's got to be some kind of conspiracy. And that again, didn't end necessarily when he was caught, it was sort of a, "Well, who is he really working for?" Or "I don't believe this, he's a patsy. They're just setting up this poor kid because he's not going to be able to have any kind of defense. And it's really something much more shadowy and sinister."

There were a lot of accusations against zoo employees also, many of which connected either with the idea of it being animal traffickers. I'd say PETA got blamed a lot as well. I gather there had been some kind of event with PETA in Dallas about a week before these events all started. So it was immediately like, "Okay, well, they were here a week before, so obviously-"

Perry Carpenter:

They're trying to break all the animals free, right? Yeah.

Dr. Kristina Downs:

Right. Again, because that's definitely the most efficient way they could go about this.

Perry Carpenter:

And even by their definition, would that be the most ethical thing, to put them in a house with all these other animals?



Digital Folklore

Defying Convention (Memes, Conspiracy, & Communication)
Josh Chapdelaine & Dr. Kristina Downs

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

Dr. Kristina Downs:

No, I don't think so.

Perry Carpenter:

So all of it kind of breaks down whenever you add critical thinking to it, but there's I think very little critical thinking. And the knee-jerk reaction as we start to see these data dots line up and figure out what the straight line looks like with a potentially inaccurate context.

Dr. Kristina Downs:

They say humans are predisposed to recognize patterns to the point that we sometimes see patterns where they don't exist. The things about seeing a face in a grilled cheese sandwich or whatever, some of these things. But I think sometimes we do that in a narrative sense also. We want to take events that don't make any sense and put them in a narrative pattern that we can make sense of.

And so when you have these preexisting legends about, again going back to the human trafficking thing, there probably are legends about animal trafficking, I'm not as familiar with those, but we can certainly superimpose the legends about animal trafficking into these preexisting stories about human trafficking. And then take actual current events and put them into a narrative so we can kind of start to make sense of it. And I think even some of the popular culture references that we saw, it's trying to take something that doesn't make any sense and find a pattern that we can put it into to make sense out of it.

Perry Carpenter:

Yeah. So how does this story wrap up then? Is there any conclusion or moral of the story? As you think about the research and the state of events as they sit today, what are your thoughts?

Dr. Kristina Downs:

In terms of the actual wrap up, the last I looked, Davion Irvin is in custody and being charged with several counts of animal endangerment and animal cruelty, I think is what he's being charged with. I



Digital Folklore

Defying Convention (Memes, Conspiracy, & Communication)
Josh Chapdelaine & Dr. Kristina Downs

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

forget exactly how many charges. He's not, as I said, being charged in relation to the vulture's death. I don't think he's come to trial yet. At least the last time I looked, he hadn't. I don't know if a court date's been set. And of course the Dallas Zoo says that they have taken precautions. I've read some articles that are saying this is a thing that all zoos should take a look at, and all of them should learn from it. One thing I didn't mention, sorry.

Perry Carpenter:

No, you're good.

Dr. Kristina Downs:

Jumping around. But at the time that all of this was going on, there were also 12 monkeys that were stolen from a zoo in Louisiana. And the culprit was caught in that as well. I don't know as much about what happened there, other than immediately when it happened, everyone's assumption was, this has to be connected, Texas Zoo and Louisiana are right next to each other. And especially if you're not familiar with how big Texas is, because these two zoos are not actually anywhere near each other. But Texas and Louisiana do share a border, and so the immediate assumption was that this has to all be the same person. And it was not.

As far as what the takeaways are. I think the biggest thing is just to keep in mind that the truth is often the most mundane answer, not the most exotic answer. It's often very simple, it's often way less grandiose. It's not an international network of animal traffickers, it's just a guy that liked animals. We see that a lot with, again, dealing with true crime stories. You see this a lot where a case will be unsolved for decades and decades.

Another Texas case, there was a woman named Lori Erica Russ, who after she was deceased, it turned out that that was not her actual name, and they realized that she had changed her name at least twice during her lifetime, but nobody knew what her real birth name was, what her real birth identity was, and why she had gone to such lengths to hide her identity.

And there were a lot of really elaborate conspiracy theories, that she had been part of a terrorist group or she'd been part of a cult, or she was related to the LeBarons who are a LDS offshoot group that's



Digital Folklore

Defying Convention (Memes, Conspiracy, & Communication)
Josh Chapdelaine & Dr. Kristina Downs

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

been involved in a lot of violence. And it turns out she was just a teenage runaway that had maybe suffered some abuse as a teenager and just run off. Tragic, but something that happens a lot.

When there's a lack of information, people will fill it in, and often fill it in with something that's much more elaborate.

Perry Carpenter:

I love the point that you made about the fact that truth is usually the simplest and most direct answer, kind of the Occam's razor piece of this.

Mason Amadeus:

Yeah, and I think that's about our time. Thank you. Thank you everybody for coming. Thank you, Dr. Kristina Downs. One more round of applause. Thank you, Kristina, for sharing your knowledge. Make sure you check out the Texas Folklore Society booth out there on the vendor floor and listen to the Digital Folklore Podcast. All right, thank you.

Perry Carpenter:

Hey, Kristina, thank you so much again for helping us out in a pinch.

Dr. Kristina Downs:

No problem. It actually ended up being pretty fun.

Mason Amadeus:

And more than tripled the cost of tickets.

Dr. Kristina Downs:

Well, you should have thought about that before you booked a speaking gig without having anything to speak about.



Digital Folklore

Defying Convention (Memes, Conspiracy, & Communication)
Josh Chapdelaine & Dr. Kristina Downs

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

Mason Amadeus:

I mean, that's fair.

Perry Carpenter:

It's never about the money. Plus it went to a great cause.

Dr. Kristina Downs:

Thank you both. I'm headed back to the booth, but if you're ever in Texas, swing by Tarleton State University and say hi.

Mason Amadeus:

Yeah, for sure

Perry Carpenter:

Will do.

Mason Amadeus:

I am wiped.

Perry Carpenter:

Do you still want to go to that NPC thing?

Mason Amadeus:

No, no, I think I'm good. That might be too much for me at this point honestly. I wouldn't mind just heading back.

Perry Carpenter:



Digital Folklore

Defying Convention (Memes, Conspiracy, & Communication)
Josh Chapdelaine & Dr. Kristina Downs

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

Yeah, same. You want to hit the cafe on the way out?

Mason Amadeus:

Yeah, that sounds great.

Perry Carpenter:

They have what they are calling macaroni with the chicken strips, and I want to know how people with grammar that bad can cook something that may be good.

Mason Amadeus:

Wait, wait, so you haven't seen that?

Perry Carpenter:

No.

Mason Amadeus:

The TikTok sound as a kid, macaroni with the chicken strips.

Random Con Attendee sings:

“Macaroni with the chicken strips.”

Mason Amadeus:

Yeah. Yeah. No, he gets it.



Digital Folklore

Defying Convention (Memes, Conspiracy, & Communication)
Josh Chapdelaine & Dr. Kristina Downs

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

Perry Carpenter:

No, and never do that again.

Mason Amadeus:

Oh, man. Do they take cards?

Perry Carpenter:

It says they take Dogecoin.

Mason Amadeus:

I don't have any Dogecoin.

Perry Carpenter:

Or doggy coin.

[Ending Theme Music kicks-in]

Thanks for listening to Digital Folklore.

Mason Amadeus:

Special thanks to our guests this episode.

Perry Carpenter:

Dr. Kristina Downs from the Texas Folklore Society and Josh Chapdelaine from Digital Void.

Mason Amadeus:

You can find links to their work in the show notes.



Digital Folklore

Defying Convention (Memes, Conspiracy, & Communication)
Josh Chapdelaine & Dr. Kristina Downs

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

Perry Carpenter:

And thanks to our voice actors for this episode.

Mason Amadeus:

The loudspeaker voice was jace@jacevo.com, who's also part of our Discord server. The Expo employee was Eli Chambers, who also composed our theme music. The sketchy meme dealer was Tyvee from Side Character Quest, and additional background voices were done by Tucker Betties, Aidy, Jordan Reed and Lindsay Reed.

Perry Carpenter:

You can find their links in the show notes as well.

Mason Amadeus:

If you have time, leave us a rating and review on Apple Podcasts and Spotify.

Perry Carpenter:

And be sure to tell people in your folk group about Digital Folklore the podcast.

Mason Amadeus:

Digital Folklore is a production of 8th Layer Media, which is an offshore shell company for laundering immense amounts of illicit funds, including cryptocurrency and counterfeit bills.

Perry Carpenter:

Hey, no, no, stop. We literally can't afford to joke like that.

Mason Amadeus:

Right. Sorry. 8th Layer Media is a completely legitimate ordinary LLC, wink, wink, nudge, nudge.



Digital Folklore

Defying Convention (Memes, Conspiracy, & Communication)
Josh Chapdelaine & Dr. Kristina Downs

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

Perry Carpenter:

You'll get us both in trouble.

Mason Amadeus:

Thanks again for listening. We'll see you soon. Maybe.

Perry Carpenter:

Maybe.

[Music ends]

[Post credits scene... Perry and Mason in the Volkswagen]

Perry Carpenter:

Hey.

Mason Amadeus:

Yeah.

Perry Carpenter:

I don't want to harp on this, but I still really don't feel right about that DVD.

Mason Amadeus:

What? What are you talking about?

Perry Carpenter:

The DVD, the one we found in here, the Shazam.



Digital Folklore

Defying Convention (Memes, Conspiracy, & Communication)
Josh Chapdelaine & Dr. Kristina Downs

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

Mason Amadeus:

Oh, oh, this again? Okay.

Perry Carpenter:

No, I swear that is not supposed to exist, it is the other way around.

Mason Amadeus:

Perry, you realize that is literally what the Mandela effect is, right?

Perry Carpenter:

No, no, no, I know, I know how it sounds, but I can't explain it. But I am 100% sure that this is not right.

Mason Amadeus:

It's Shazam. Unless someone went through the trouble of having the top of this DVD professionally printed for a fake movie.

Perry Carpenter:

People have done more than that before.

Mason Amadeus:

One way to find out ...