

Why Does The Internet Love Cats?

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Cats populate just about every corner of the Internet--from forums to blogs to social networks--in the form of [photos](#) or [videos](#) or [animated GIFs](#). But why does the Internet love cats so much?

"It's a clear fact that the Internet is made of cats," says Chris Torres (aka [prguitarman](#)), the creator of [Nyan Cat](#). We don't doubt this, but to get a fuller explanation, we asked around and did a little research to try and unravel the mystery behind this online feline phenomenon.

Even Before the Internet, Cats Ruled the Memes

Surprisingly enough, the first captioned cat photos predate the Internet by several *decades*. According to [Know Your Meme](#), placing witty captions atop cute cat pictures dates back the early 20th century, with [Harry Whittier Frees](#)'s trademark postcard designs. The [Wikipedia entry for Lolcats](#) trace the beginnings of the lolcat all the way back to the 1870s, with the work of [British photographer Harry Pointer](#).

In the 1970s, the popular "[Hang in there, Baby](#)" motivational posters featured a picture of a cat hanging from a washing line or tree.

The earliest known Internet cat meme was actually an award-winning animated GIF by [Hirose Takuro](#) entitled CatBread (aka Kitty Loaf). While we don't know when CatBread was originally created, it dates back to at least 2002, [as evidenced by a thread](#) on Geo-Neo, a retro gaming forum.

Stalker Cat surfaced in 2003, and later became Ceiling Cat in 2006. Cat memes gained additional popularity thanks to 4Chan's [Caturday](#)--each Saturday, members would upload funny photos of cats doing various things. The following year, [Eric Nakagawa started I Can Has Cheezburger?](#) (iCHC), a blog dedicated to these captioned photos, now better known as lolcats. Ben Huh purchased iCHC later that year, and has since [built a meme empire of sorts](#) around it.

Cats Outnumber Dogs



According to the [American Pet Association's 2011-12 survey](#), there are 86.4 million cats kept as pets in the US, and 33% of households have at least one cat. A little over half of US cat owners (52%) have two or more kittens.

By comparison, there are 78.2 million dogs kept as pets in the US, and most dog owners have only one canine companion. Given this, it isn't too surprising that cats are so popular online.

Ben Huh actually owns a dog, but he understands the kitten craze.

"I love cats, but I am allergic to them," Ben tells GeekTech. "We still have our very cat-like dog, but even as a dog owner, it was clear that the cat-world on the Web was far more vibrant and far-reaching.

"Cats are the perfect storm for popularity on the web. There are tens of millions of cats in the US, making it the most popular domestic animal."

For cat owners, Ben says, it's harder to meet like-minded people on the street. While dogs and their owners have parks, cats are more independent, so you're less likely to see a cat club gathering.

"Dog owners can socialize by walking their dogs. Cat owners are a more hidden bunch and there is very little owner-to-owner socialization, so they turned to the Web," Ben adds.

Cats Are Easy to Personify

Like humans, cats are notoriously adventurous and they can express a variety of emotions.

"Because cats can be so emotive (far more than dogs) they make a great canvas for our creative expression," Ben explains. "Also, because there are frequently more multiple-cat households, we can be a quiet observer in their lives, making up stories along the way."

Put all this together and throw a camera into the mix, and you can get some pretty great shots of cats doing things that are either freakishly human or just plain funny. That cats are so easy to personify makes it extremely easy to mold them into our own way of thinking and to capture our everyday life, hence the creation of memes such as [LOLcats](#) (and the LOLspeak captions), [Serious Cat](#), and [OMG cat](#), to name just a few.

Chris Torres based [Nyan Cat](#)--the flying, rainbow-exuding animated cat--on one of his own cats, a gray kitten named Marty.

"In my opinion, I honestly don't think any other animal would have suited the part better. There's just something about cats that fits the carefree and happy attitude I was going for. With a cat flying through space you don't really have to question it. You just see it and go "Well, of course a cat would do something like this!"

Naturally, Chris can relate to the reasons behind cats taking off in such a big way on the Net.

"Cats have shaped a massive Internet culture based on nothing but images and videos of cats playing pianos, jumping in boxes, riding invisible bikes, taking naps, or breaking your furniture. I think cats are easily relatable to people due to how quirky and expressive they are, and any cat-related media seems to keep the attention of even the fastest-browsing Internet viewer."



Kittehs Are Cute!

But maybe we're overanalyzing this. The Internet's love for cats might not even be so complicated or deep--it could simply be because cats are cute. Sure, puppies and baby rabbits are also cute, but there is something about a cat and its facial expressions that makes you go gooey inside.

Chris explains: "It can be a very therapeutic experience to open up an image of a cat at work and get a heartwarming experience by looking at it. Chris pointed us toward [this XKCD strip](#) that he says "sums up cats pretty well."

So, while there seem to be a number of reasons why the domestic kitty rules the Internet, its personable temperament and how much it features in our everyday life are clearly big factors. The best way to sum it up, though? We keep coming back to Chris's suggestion: Maybe the Internet really is made of cats.