

# Digital Folklore Project's 2020 Digital Trend of the Year

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The meme “How It Started/How It’s Going/How It Ended” has been named the #DigitalTrendoftheYear by student and faculty researchers at USU’s Digital Folklore Project. “A meme that shows a picture of flowers captioned ‘How It Started’ next to a photo of a nuclear bomb captioned ‘How It Ended,’ seems to be the perfect meme to sum up how so many of us feel about 2020,” said Jeannie Thomas, who co-directs the project with Lynne McNeill. Both McNeill and Thomas are folklorists in USU’s Department of English.

The “How It Started” Twitter meme initially focused on romantic relationships, but users rapidly employed it to comment on everything from career achievements to fitness goals to gender transitions to the presidential election—and, of course, COVID-19.

McNeill said, “It makes sense that a trend that lets us all comment on the year we’ve had in both fun and serious ways was the most significant in 2020.”

Each year folklore students at Utah State University track digital trends. They then meet at the end of the year to prepare a ballot that goes out to a national panel of experts in digital folklore, which selects the winning trend. The research team places the trends into two categories that appear on the ballot: Social Issues and Serious Fun. “How It Started” is an example of an entry in the latter category. Coming in second this year were the Social Issues hashtags #BreonnaTaylor and #GeorgeFloyd, which protested and memorialized the deaths of Taylor

and Floyd at the hands of police. This runner up also highlights the staying power of the Project’s first-ever Digital Trend of the Year in 2014: #BlackLivesMatter. Other 2020 Digital Trend of the Year contenders included:

- gender-reveal memes
- presidential election memes
- Zoom meetings memes
- TikTok “Level-Up” videos of cats and dogs jumping over rolls of toilet paper
- “washyourlyrics,” an handwashing infographic that populates with different song lyrics
- The TikTok “Dreams” video (and the many videos it inspired) of @420doggface208 skateboarding while drinking cranberry juice and listening to Fleetwood Mac