

The who, what and why of the Ugandan Knuckles meme

 By [Andy Walker](#)

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The internet is an odd and confusing place, and the gaming world's latest meme is solid proof of this.



[Vincent Tchong Chang](#) via Flickr ([CC BY-SA 2.0](#), resized). Original © – [Memeburn](#)

If you haven't yet heard of *VRChat*, Sonic The Hedgehog's marsupial friend Knuckles, and his insulting Ugandan-accented equivalent, take a seat, because there's a lot to explain.

All in all, throw these into a casserole dish, simmer for a few months on the internet, season liberally with shares, likes and overuse, and you have yourself the Ugandan Knuckles meme.

VRChat

Let's begin with what has become the meme's primary vehicle thus far — *VRChat*.

It's a [free-to-play game](#) that lets users interact in a virtual world while adopting a costume-like 3D avatar. Users can engage in practically any activity within the realm of the game engine. And yes, as its title suggests, users can play using a virtual reality headset like an [Oculus Rift](#) or [HTC Vive](#). However, this usually expensive hardware is not a requirement. Largely thanks to the latter, the game has seen ballooning player numbers since November.

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While it was first launched in early 2017, its concurrent user numbers on Steam has [spiked as high as 16,000 this month](#), with player numbers at any time averaging well above 10,000. Each day it's pushing that limit slightly higher

Among the game's other quirks and attractions, users can also chat to one another using their microphones, and upload their own avatars to the game world, resulting in a slew of anime girls, oversized *Overwatch* characters, and more recently a spate of Ugandan Knuckles.

It's a *Black Mirror* episode just waiting to be made, and a slew of copyright strikes just waiting to be handed out.

Knuckles

This is where it gets more complicated.

[According to Know Your Meme](#), the root of the Knuckles portion of the phenomenon stems from YouTuber Gregzilla who published a review of *Sonic Lost World* to his channel in February 2017.

The 16-minute long clip featured a parody version of both Sonic and Knuckles (seen around 1:51 in the video below), but it was the latter caricature that stuck.

Notably, social analytics firm SocialBlade noted a spike of [some 13,000 subscribers](#) to Gregzilla's channel a month after the above review was published. He now has over 120,000 subscribers.

It, however, took a graphic designer, a 3D template and close to a year for the meme to evolve to its next form.

DeviantArt user tidiestflyer [uploaded a VRChat-ready 3D model](#) of Gregzilla's Knuckles parody. Practically anyone playing the game could download it, and upload it to the game. By late December, the game was inundated with tiny red marsupials scuttling about.

Where does Uganda fit in?

Its relation seems loosely tied to the movie [Who Killed Captain Alex](#), but the flick itself had no initial correlation with the Knuckles meme.

“Uganda’s first action movie” is the brainchild of Isaac Nabwana, a filmmaker from the east African country who has a knack for crafting ultra-low-budget action flicks, and Wakaliwood, Nabwana’s film company.

The film itself became internet famous in late 2015 thanks to its micro budget, and hilarious action sequences. It could be described as a parody of kung-fu movies, in similar vein to *Kung Pow*.

The movie itself has [spawned a slew of its own memes](#), in fact. And these memes have influenced Ugandan Knuckles.

The link between the movie and the gaming world is a bit more strained.

Popular Twitch streamer Forsen reportedly [watched the movie](#) while broadcasting. After this, fans were often noted following the gamer around other popular titles, like *PlayerUnknown’s Battlegrounds*, grieving him, mobbing him, and shouting at him — in badly formed Ugandan accents — quips in the same style as the movie. Sometimes, adding their own stereotypes about African culture.

A video of Forsen reacting to a stream-sniping compilation surfaced in early October 2017, gaining around 160,000 views as of the time of writing.

It became a way to annoy streamers online, and fellow gamers. And because *VRChat* simply requires a gamer tag, it became a place for players to gather and grief others in a similar vein.

Forsen has since adopted the meme entirely as a gag on his stream, providing Twitch chat users with Knuckles emotes and [promoting the overuse of the meme](#) on his channel.

The spread of Ugandan Knuckles

In late December through to early January, Ugandan Knuckles started breaching the confines of *VRChat*, stretching to the likes of YouTube.

A YouTube video titled [“You Do Not Know The Way”](#) hit the world’s biggest video site three days prior to Christmas 2017, featuring a number of both Sonic and “Ugandan Knuckles” avatars, uttering the title’s phrase, while mentioning “ebola”, drinking “blood” and clicking. It has been viewed over six million times at the time of writing.

The likes of [Loserfruit](#), [5TAT](#) and [Jameskii](#) began uploading their experiences on *VRChat* to YouTube from in December, opening the game's world (and its memes) to the wider internet audience.

Twitter also helped accelerate the spread of the meme.

“ [@Wakaliwood](#) Fixed the flag for you guys, keep up the good work, Who killed Captain Alex had me in tears laughing, glad it's finally starting to get the attention it deserves keep on making da best of da best movies! pic.twitter.com/HjpTfek3ci— cayome 💎💎 (@cayome) [January 8, 2018](#) ”

Wakaliwood's Twitter account began retweeting posts using variations of the meme, further spreading it to other social networks.

Reddit was also inundated with questions, [haikus](#) and comments related to the meme. Those on [r/OutOfTheLoop](#) helped explain the meme to others. The post received over 800 points.



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The subreddit dedicated to Sonic The Hedgehog was forced to implement a ban on the meme.

"Sorry guys, the meme has gone out of control. As a temporary measure, Ugandan Knuckles and other related content will now be considered low effort and / or spam for the time being and will be removed on sight," a mod [wrote](#) on the subreddit.

This week, a Snapchat filter of the Ugandan Knuckles meme also debuted on the social network, [made in Lens Studio](#). It boasted around 9000 points and 230 comments at the time of writing.

What's going on with VRchat and Uganda?

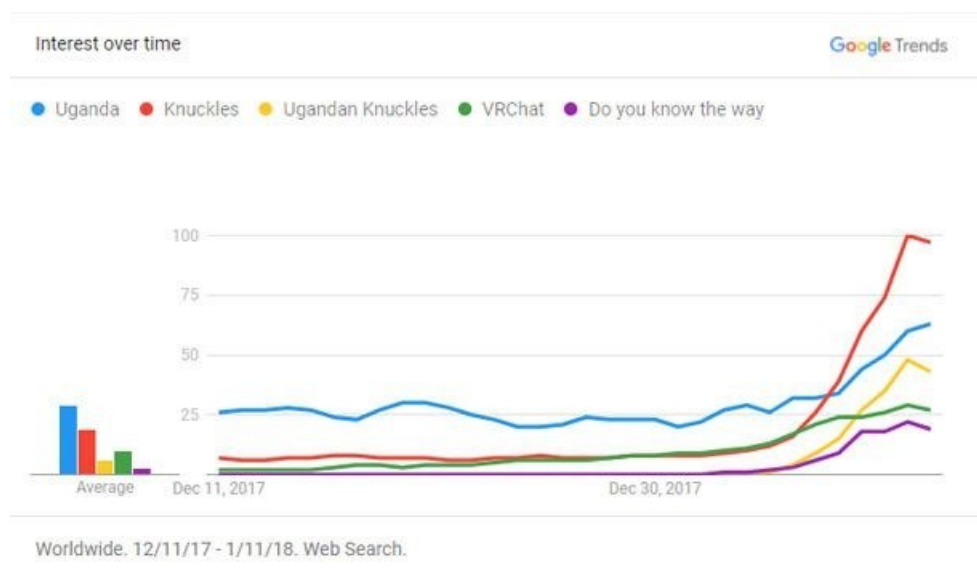
I've seen tons of memes and Reddit comments mentioned both VRChat and Uganda, as well as these red and blue creatures wearing gloves. What's up?



r/OutOfTheLoop • Megasteel32 • 9d ago
725 points • 69 comments

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Google has also noted a worldwide uptick in search queries for "Uganda", "Knuckles", "VRChat" and "Ugandan Knuckles" for the past two weeks.



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Notably, the meme is seemingly yet to spread to Uganda itself. When narrowing said search area to the east African country, “Ugandan Knuckles” lacks notable search trends.

Why the meme is problematic

While the meme is odd, confusing and tragically contagious, it has portrayed a number of falsehoods and stereotypes of Africa. And because of the viral nature of memes, this misinformation will only continue to spread.

Mention of “ebola” is common to users, however, Uganda itself did not record any cases of the disease [during the most recent outbreak](#).

Some on social media have suggested that the meme has put Uganda in the internet’s collective consciousness, which should be regarded as a positive. But generally memes that centre around Africa ensure that Africa and Africans themselves are at the root of the humour.

Third World Success is [another example](#) of this, centering on a dancing African child dressed in a loin cloth. Quips include “9th birthday party — beat life expectancy” and “found water — wasn’t contaminated”. Instead of highlighting the issues inherent on the continent, these issues are used as punchlines.

It, along with comments from world leaders, only [propels the “shithole countries” narrative](#), casting Africa as a backwater slum with no prospects or, more importantly, dehumanising its residents.



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The unexpected positive impact

There are some instances where the meme has inadvertently had some positive impact.

The official Sonic The Hedgehog Twitter account subverted the meme to encourage users to donate to crowdfunding projects in Uganda.

“ Let us show you the way... to make the world a better place. <https://t.co/7x1O3xAvA1> pic.twitter.com/Pt06bB5Zcx—
Sonic the Hedgehog (@sonic_hedgehog) [January 11, 2018](#) ”

“Let us show you the way... to make the world a better place,” it wrote, linking to a Global Giving page. The tweet received over 20,000 likes and 8,300 retweets at the time of writing.

The official Wakaliwood Twitter account has also [gained some 3,000 followers](#) since the year began, largely in part to the meme. Its YouTube page saw a [surge of 300,000 views](#) and around 4,000 subscribers in the past 30 days.

Is it dead already?

Well, yes.

Memes gain popularity in the internet's niche communities because of their obscurity. The more esoteric they are, the easier it is to keep a meme fresh, limiting the number of people who actually understand it. However, the moment a meme becomes part of the popular zeitgeist, it tends to fizzle out.

One could say the Ugandan Knuckles meme is well on its way to the latter. But for now, as long as *VRChat* numbers continue to grow, and Google Search data suggests an uptick in interest, you'll probably be hearing a lot more about this meme this year.

ABOUT ANDY WALKER

Camper by day, run-and-gunner by night, Andy is editor at Memeburn and prefers his toast like his coffee -- dark and crunchy. Specialising in spotting the next big Instagram cat star, Andy also dabbles in smartphone and game reviews over on Gearburn.

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