



Review Article

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From Genesis to its Zenith: A Study on Evolution of Memes as a Mainstream Media Content

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ABSTRACT

Memes a form of low culture is very popular among the masses from the 1980s to the early 2022s. Since its reception, they have gained widespread recognition and are liked by all. It molds the behavior and changes the mindsets and actions of society. It greatly impacted the audience through different ideas, styles, or behaviors and spread from one person to another. Anything creating entertainment, fun, and hilarity on the internet and enfolded in a layer of sarcasm, irony, or self-deprecation can be defined as a meme and it is reinterpreted, republished by anyone through eloquent message. The reflection of real-world emotions on a virtual platform that serves ideas of current urgency and set Meta narratives can be characterized as memes. Websites like knowyourmeme.com, memedump.com, memebase.com, 9gag.com etc. Work as an archival for the memes. One needs to understand the context beneath the memes to get the jokes that are very much relevant and relatable among the person, which is the main reason behind mass engagement of the audience. People now also use them to express their feelings or vent their frustration on pressing issues. They even help in taking pot-shots on some personality or an issue. Thus, a secondary data analysis was conducted to explore the evolution of memes from its inception to its culmination.

INTRODUCTION

Memes are a salient feature of the internet world in the 21st century and has gained popularity greatly. It captures the attention of people in unique ways through social media and user-generated content websites such as Facebook, twitter, YouTube, Instagram etc. Memes are user-generated and dynamic form of engagement with pictures and text and its main aim is to gratify or interact with large audience. It is also considered as a visual representation of a joke. According to a Google study in 2016, the keyword "meme" is searched more than the term Jesus Christ. Memes can be of different types such as dark, deep, reaction-based, political statements, funny, and many more. It can be inundated over your computer or mobile screen every day and are responsible for bringing in a hilarious trail.

The concept of "meme" was coined by Richard Dawkins in 1976 in his book 'The Selfish Gene' to explain small units of culture that spread from person to person by copying or imitation. After that, the concept has gained popularity to a large extent and became the subject of constant debate, mockery and even absolute adjournment. Through internet, memes spread from person to person in the form of videos, jokes, text, images, and every meme artifact and altered the image, text, video to give an appropriate meaning to its content for better understanding of audience.

Meme is the best concept to summarize some of the fundamental aspect of internet which Dawkins couldn't have imagined back in 1976, known as participatory or web 2.0 culture. The attributes of memes are fast delivery such as individual to society, reproduction via copying

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and diffusion and imitation through competition and assortment. Memes are not easy created as they require a lot of creativity and amusing mind to make content funny, entertaining, meaningful and humorous, which perceives everyone easily. Patrick Davison gave the first definition of meme in his essay "The Language of Internet Memes" he says, It is a piece of culture, typically a joke, which gains influence through online transmission. According to dictionary the meme is described as post embellished with text that endures funny statements or emotions to establish cultural transmissions and it is the concept of original idea altered by human creativity. Another definition states that an internet meme is "a neologism used to describe a catchphrase or concept that spreads in a fast way from person to person via the Internet" (Wikipedia).

According to Richard Dawkins memes is defined as cultural units of information that insist the ideas, cultures, and customs replicate themselves. Memes travel like a virus from person to person through simulation, distribution and replication and all memes are created with the help of some ideas but not all ideas develop into memes because all ideas are not worth passing or replicating. Survival of meme depends on its popularity and it tries to combat against one another for attention, with the most prosperous memes acclimatizing best to different contexts (Shifman, 2013; Taecharungroj & Nueangjamnong, 2015). According to Marwick, 2013 meme is considered as a frequently created joke that tries to grab attention through its digital dissemination and it is a very important form of speech that reflects everyday communication as we usually talk informal in nature and processed in chunks, the same style and form of speech is reflected in the meme.

Memes in popular culture

Memes are becoming popular day by day and it is the greatest inventions of all time and it has turn out as one of the major methods of communication on the internet. It is shared by anyone like your family member, friends, politician, etc., penetrating pop culture in an almost Meta fashion. Earlier, it was just a weird picture that tries to entertain people, but today they are the part of social media interface consumed by all. In popular culture meme grow very fast and develops into the perfect medium for facilitating information, humor and opinion of different people at different social media sites.

It spread as an important image edit that tries to make people laugh into eloquent devices that transfer information to millions of people and is considered one of the major important mediums today. "Memes and pop culture go hand-in-hand now," wrote Kaitlyn Tiffan in The Verge. "They don't sit in subforums and Subreddits; they crop up in group chats and on your local diner's Instagram account." According to Cohen and Kenny "some memes

enter our culture in the form of slang or knowledge, such as the terms "bae", "selfie", or fail, and some enter our mind as something culturally relevant and unforgettable. Memes connect with everyone and somehow, it will touch your life with its content. It is the easiest way of communication these days for internet users; people can see memes or experience different emotions such as joy, sadness, happiness, fear etc. It encourages shareability and participation across a wide range of platforms. Memes are considered to be a powerful tool for shaping and changing public opinion and also helps in diffusing uncomfortable situations by using irony and humor.

It allows you to be a part of the community and contribute to it. Many memes creators participate on platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Weblogs, Instagram etc. It allows them to interact with their friends and loved ones through memes and incorporating other multimodal features. The creator can remix, repackage or redistribute the content whenever they need.

OBJECTIVES AND METHODS

The research aimed to explore the evolution of memes from its genesis to its zenith as mainstream media content. For this purpose, secondary data analysis was carried out. Books, Research Papers, and Research Articles were analyzed to explore the evolution of memes from its inception to its culmination.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research articles on the topic by researchers such as Limor Shifman, Richard Dawkins, Alice Marwick, Blackmore, Patrick Davison and Heylighen were analyzed. Also, books such as "Memes in Digital Culture" by Limor Shifman and "Internet memes and Society" by Anastasia Denisova" and "The Meme Machine" by Susan Blackmore was studied to gain deeper and better understanding on the topic.

Origin

The term meme existed before the evolution of the internet during 79AD in a Pompeii ruin and as late as the 1970s, in graffiti in the movie lord of rings trilogy as a fictional character after that it occurred in the early 1990s by Mike Godwin issue of wired and later "meme" was introduced by Richard Dawkins in his book selfish gene (1976) to describe gene- which is infectious units of culture that spread from person to person by imitation. Just as gene meme can spread around the internet including different types of content, there was no particular genre for it. Meme extract from the Greek word mimema which signify 'something which is imitated and replicated' which Dawkins explain as rhyme with gene and this term was similar to signify cultural evolution which appeared in 1980s.

The term "meme" first appeared in India in the year 2000, when social media networks began to open up their platforms to user-generated content, and people began

making memes on different sites like Rajnikanth versus CID Jokes, Meme Mandir, Hera Pheri, JCB Ki Khudayi etc. The ethnicity of meme had an enormous impact on the millennial in India and gradually, it has become a profession for people. As the internet flourished and became more accessible to people, memes continued to grow in social media sites like Reddit, 9GAG, and 4 Chan with countless visitors. Now, Dawkins' concept turned into the hilarity that we know as Internet culture, which started from the west in India and became a major source of fame.

In 1996 the meme of 3D dancing baby is considered to be the first digital meme that hit on the television series Ally Macbeal after that Hamster Dance came and the Grumpy Cat launched 1000 memes which spread globally through its text and images.

Dawkins explained memes' three basic properties: longevity, fecundity, and copy fidelity. The internet and online meme transmission enhances all has higher copy fidelity (that is accuracy) than communication through other media. Fecundity (the number of copies made in a time unit) is also increasing daily; longevity may also increase because information can be stored indefinitely in numerous archives. He made an analogy of meme with gene in human body and explained that meme has similar gene characteristics. Just as gene propagate them in gene pool by leaping from body to body via sperms or eggs same as memes propagate themselves by leaping from brain to brain via process in broad sense it is known as imitation. According to Kirby Conrad, a professor at Swarthmore College Pennsylvania, the concept of meme is a self-replicating chunk of information, joke or jingle which is shared by anyone and stuck in the head for 20 years and it is just an idea that rips through the public consciousness. The word "meme" has passed from a semantic shift over the point in time in an internet-saturated era and their meanings are co-constructed by many users in social media Jennifer Nycz, an Associate Professor and director of undergraduate studies at Georgetown University's Department of Linguistics, said.

Meme is also defined as a composition that is repurposed to transfer a social, cultural or political expression, basically through humor or irony and it has the capability to capture insight in a way that is in complete alignment with the spirit explained by popular meme creator Saint Hoax, who has three million Instagram followers. Memes have the capability to assist TV shows or even songs develop popularity by becoming the basis of a viral trend, said by Samantha Sage who is co-founder and chief creative officer of Betches, a media company which regulates toward millennial women. Further, she elucidates that the evolution of memes existed through word of mouth and later it has adhered in solid substances like clay tablets, cave walls and paper sheets and achieve endurance through printing presses, magnetic tapes and

optical disks. It reaches via broadcast towers and digital platforms in the form of stories, skills, recipes and legends or fashions.

One of the Instagram hired meme creator Saint Hoax who covered the Met Gala as its first-ever meme correspondent, examines that "Memes are the essence of editorial cartoons for internet age and the power lies in its transmissibility and unique flair for being cross-cultural, it has the ability to detain a moment while distracting people from veracity. Memes remind us that everything which exist on earth is not made up of seriousness it has some funny or entertaining content in it. Memes are shareable by nature. "In a world where you are scrolling through news feeds for hours a day, the meme format catches your eye and most of them can be read and understood within seconds," said Samir Mezrahi, the deputy director of social media at BuzzFeed, who also runs Kale Salad, a meme account with nearly four million followers. Creating and sharing memes facilitates a sense of community online while maintaining a feeling of exclusivity.

"Memes bring people together through humor and can act as a catalyst for creating social or political commentary," said Kit Chilvers, the chief executive and founder of Pubity Group, a collection of social media accounts that has more than 80 million total followers. "Often, memes can be quite exclusive, as only people who are familiar with the origin of the meme will understand it," Chilvers added.

Meme as a tool of social and Political Domain

Amusing pieces of content which enhanced virally on social media and enjoyed by all are known as memes. It covers everything, ranging from humor or satire, gibberish to ridiculous, hilarious to unserious and sometimes it depreciates life with repeated viral assaults on our rational sensibilities. Memes are considered a prevailing tool of ideas when they gain popularity and play a vital role in social change such as #MeToo memes. Today memes are surrounded by some degree of weirdness connected with real-life situations of a person; it can be parent-child dispute, relationship problems, poverty, etc. are popular memes of society and they try to gain people's attention through these issues. It can also be an effective coping tool that helps to express critical thoughts and give people the courage to fight tough situations.

According to experts' lucidity of memes makes them an efficient way of spreading social and political ideas from one place to another through its content and creativity. It can easily emphasize beliefs, depress critical thinking, and involve political discussion polarization. Research reveals that this polarization is very much spread offline compared to online and it imitates existing social changes more than they construct change in the society. Memes also attract those who are normally less interested in politics and not all memes have a clear political message that people grasp



at first glance. The inherent attraction of this indirect connection with politics leads many to believe that due to their 'funny nature,' these memes are not changing the political discourse, an argument that is supported by research into the impact of Internet memes on digital natives and migrants in India (Kulkarni 2017, 16). They are also becoming the platform for expressing frustration and anger through political issues. The explosion of memes through mass replication has formed a powerful tool for conducting political war against the opposition party. For survival and formation of narratives that foster democracy and pluralism, innovation policy and ideas should be implemented. To protect freedom of speech, disgust communication dispersed via memes and the huge production of forged accounts to amplify its belongings must be tackled with calm and peace. To elucidate memes as a trending mode of communication, which the internet offer to its users with new advancements and creativity, it is also important to resolve the fight against political issues or parties in a better way through meme culture and generate interest among people for the political and social issues which occur in our surroundings.

According to Dawkins there are some promises and pitfalls for analyzing memes in social culture such as three main attributes ascribed to memes are of particular relevance to the analysis of contemporary digital culture. First, memes may best be understood as cultural information that passes along from person to person yet gradually scales into a shared social phenomenon. A second attribute of memes is that they reproduce by various means of imitation. In oral communication, people become aware of memes through their senses, process them in their minds, and then "repackage" them in order to pass them along to others. A third attribute of memes that makes them appealing for scholars interested in digital culture is their diffusion through competition and selection. Memes vary greatly in their degree of fitness, that is, their level of adaptiveness to the sociocultural environment in which they propagate (Aunger, 2000). While cultural selection processes are ancient, digital media have allowed researchers to trace the spread and evolution of memes (Shifman & Thelwall, 2009).

Iconic memes of the decade

The culture of the meme are growing very fast and in a few hours it went viral on social media sites. It can be defined as an important creation of the digital era and today, thousands of meme makers in India are involved in creating memes on different issues ranging from social, cultural and political. Some of the famous memes of the decades are as follows footnote dalo

JCB ki Khudayi *Chodd di khudayi maine tere liye* The meme, which originated when Indians were obsessed with watching footage of the excavation machine known as a JCB, which is used to dig up dirt, was maybe the weirdest

or most random meme to emerge in 2019. Millions of Indian users watched the JCB action footage on YouTube. The subtle yet hilarious humor of JCB Khudayi jokes. Evidently, the jokes focus on how unemployed people must be for them to watch JCB digging videos on YouTube, which receive millions of views.

Chai Pi Lo *Garam hai* When her 15-second video encouraging people to drink tea went viral on the Internet, Somvati Mahawar, a passionate vlogger on Vigo Video, an app that enables users create and distribute short movies across social networking sites, became India's unofficial brand ambassador for chai. Mahawar served more than just chai in her videos, including watermelons, mangoes, and even paneer.

KBC "Aap chahe toh quit kar sakte hai", "Aaiye me aapko is khel ke rules samjha du", "Bahut hi umda kheli aap. Taliya bajti rehni chahiye" are a few lines from Amitabh Bachchan's massively popular quiz show that launched a thousand memes ever since Kaun Banega Crore Pati returned to television with its 9th installment in 2017.

MDH Chacha *Asli masale sach sach.* MDH MDH One of the best things that have ever happened to the Indian web sites is definitely the Facebook page dedicated to photoshopping Mahashay Dharam Pal Gulati, better known as "Chachaji" from those MDH advertisements, in unexpected locations.

Sonam Gupta Bewafa Hai This one has a strong sense of nostalgia. Sonam Gupta Bewafa Hai (Sonam Gupta is unfaithful) was scrawled on a 10 Rupee note by an alleged jilted lover, sending the nation into a panic.

Exasperating Farrago In a tweet from 2017, Congressman Shashi Tharoor criticized a TV network and a journalist for accusing him of hiding the truth about the passing of his wife, Sunanda Pushkar. While Tharoor shared the post in full seriousness, the tweet quickly rose to prominence among Twitter users, who now eagerly await the eloquent minister to sling Daedalian English terms their way.

Peeche Toh Dekho The viral Pathani kid from Pakistan made the world turn back with his adorable video. Ahmad Shah is not camera-shy. In fact, he has a YouTube channel called Cute Pathan Ahmad Shah and has almost a million subscribers watching him.

Mature Bag The Internet unpacked its meme bag and made Vaibhav Vora aka "Mature Bag Guy" an overnight star after he uploaded a TikTok video explaining how to look attractive in college. According to him, one shouldn't carry the same bag they carried to school while in college. They must opt for a "mature bag" to look more attractive.

Kiki Challenge An Internet challenge that requires you to jump out of a moving car and dance along it? Sounds dangerous and completely avoidable, right? People took it up nonetheless, including Indians.

Hera Pheri Zor zor se bolke sabko scheme bata de. Priyadarshan's Hera Pheri (2000) and its sequel Phir Hera Pheri 2 (2006) by Neeraj Vora are timeless pieces of art.1

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSIONS

The 21st century is a society that mostly uses the internet for visual communication. Memes are among the most common and expressive of the countless visual expressions available on the internet. Internet memes are the most popular videos and photos on the internet that express or send a particular message (often amusing), and whose codes and meanings are well-rooted in the worldwide society. Since the beginning of social media, youngsters have been increasingly interested in meme culture and attempt to share what they see, discover, and enjoy with others. Memes play an increasingly important part in the lives of internet users, and this trend is growing day by day. It is considered as a powerful tool for modifying and framing public opinion in a better way. It also helps in disseminating uncomfortable situations through irony and humor and effectively persuades the recipients through its content and creativity. Different social media sites such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Reddit memes develop as a global phenomenon and alter people's thinking about different issues in an interesting way and help in describing any topic easily. For example, suppose Congress leader Rahul Gandhi has spoken something funny about elections and a meme is created for this, so the people will easily understand the whole issue with just one look at that meme.

With the help of memes, people can connect and respond to any issue in a better way. The culture of meme is growing at a very fast momentum and its future is uncertain, and with the evolution of the internet, it emerged as a mode of communication for people and assists them in knowing the issues in a better or more interesting way. Memes can exist and pass away by culture and society which either accepts or rejects its content depending on the richness and nuances of certain sentiments into a single communicative unit and sometimes it acts as a selfish gene because of competitiveness with other memes due to their struggle to prevail (Brown, 2017). Memes can address different issues fascinatingly, such as social evils, ideals, and concerns, including abortion, good music, and gun violence. Memes are currently the newest and most effective type of

satire, addressing social problems, anxieties, and values in a funny and relevant way. Individuals can share their opinions on personal, national, and international issues with people all over the world via memes. Internet memes have changed how individuals share their ideas and criticisms, whether they are making fun of a public figure, pointing out a comical expression in an old photograph, or bringing up a trend in the world of video games. They are a sub-form of speech, yet they can be considered a legitimate form of commentary if the consequences are minimal or nonexistent. Memes represent a new period of freedom that has evolved alongside the internet over many years.

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