Internet Memes: A New Visual Tool for forming Public Opinion

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Abstract

The funniest thing we found on the internet is the memes. With the ev-er-increasing use of the internet and social media, the usage of memes has increased a lot. Social media provide a platform for people to share content in the form of text, images (JPEG, GIF, and others), videos, and hashtag technology has provided users to explore content that makes it easier to find information with a theme or specific content. Memes have covered all the social media platforms whether it is Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, or any other. Memes can also be in the form of images and videos which convey or send specific messages often humorous or satirical. Memes are also an effective tool while election campaigning. Memes become viral on the internet. Internet memes are one form of user-generated, digital media content that may have real-world effects on people who view them. This research paper will analyze the role of internet memes in the internet era and their role in forming a public opinion for the urban youth.

Keywords: Digital Media; Internet memes; Social Media; Social Media Memes.

Introduction

The word meme was given by evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins. The meme comes from the Greek word "mimema" meaning "something imitated". Internet memes are different from traditional memes. The internet memes also known as Internet fads or Internet phenomena have the potential of getting viral in the forms of email messages, text messages, instant messages, and others. Internet memes are created by the people and spread through social media platforms on contemporary subjects like social commentary, urban myths, and many others. A common form of meme resembles a rapidly constructed cartoon, with block text and edited

or combined images. In the discourse of netizens, internet memes have a short span of life and last for a short period of life for a month, week, or a year. The major types of internet memes are:

Classics: A type of meme that never dies and lives on forever.

Above is the example of the classics memes as the salary gets credited every month in everyone's account and there are many sequels of Hera Pheri movie.

Trenders: These are basically on the contemporary issues which last for a month and are unlikely to be ever seen again.
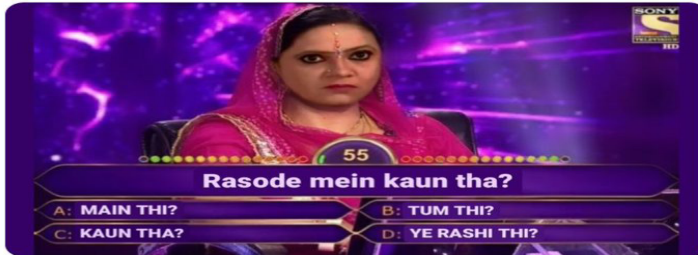

It is the example of the trenders type of memes as it got popular when the PUBG game was banned in India and Indian parents were happy about this.

One hit wonder: The type of meme that you will never see them again and only happen once.

Difference between traditional memes and internet memes:

In the past time, the artists use the images of skulls, cartoons, hourglass and other symbols in their paintings and sculptures, that tradition got popular and in the internet era those sarcastic messages through pictures and sculptures got popular in the form of Internet memes consisting of images with famous characters, text, audio and videos.

Here are the pictures and descriptions of some famous memes of 2020, 2021 that got viral on the internet:


This was the meme that was related to Anushka and Virat that relates with the movie of Anushka, Sui Dhaga. It depicted that Anushka is not happy with the performance of Virat in the match performance and looks sad

and depressed. This meme got viral on social media and people shared it a lot. The netizens blamed Anushka for the poor performance of the Virat.

This meme is related to the recent NCB raid on a cruise in which Aryan Khan, son of Shahrukh Khan the famous film star got arrested and netizens relate it to a famous dialogue of Drishyam movie starring Ajay Devgan. This meme says that it will be proved in some days that Aryan Khan will get bail and will be proved that he was with the family of Vijay in Panji. This meme got viral on social media as it talks about the power of money and the fame of Shahrukh Khan and his son.
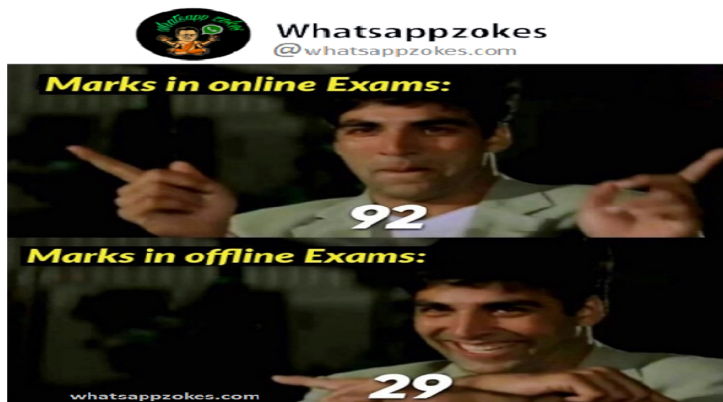
This meme is related to the exam pattern which the student faced at the time of the pandemic. This depicts the reality of the students and their performance during the online exams. Netizens used the picture of Ak-

shay Kumar for this sarcastic showcase. This meme got viral on social media and people enjoyed it a lot with the meme.

This is a real sarcasm on Indian politics. It is showing the positive angle of BJP and the negative image of Arvind Kejriwal and Rahul Gandhi. Lots of memes are focused on Rahul Gandhi showcasing the image of him as Pappu. Arvind Kejriwal and Rahul Gandhi both have a negative image on the netizens because of the memes that are being viral on the internet.

Above are some of the famous memes which got viral on social media and are very common among people.

According to Arifin, 2010, opinion is an expressed statement that is widely expressed in words, signs, cues, or other ways containing meaning that is easily understood. Public opinion is the views, attitudes, beliefs about a particular topic. Public opinion is also described as the distribution of the population's beliefs about politics and issues concerned with society.

Review of Literature

"Internet Memes: Leaflet Propaganda in the Digital Age"- According to the article by Nieubuurt, with the ease of creation, internet memes have become a competent tool that allows for mass influence across international borders. Internet memes level the playing field and they open the door for an era of mass digital manipulation.

"The Use of Meme as a Representation of Public Opinion in Social Media: A Case Study of Meme about Bekasi in Path and Twitter," 2020 - According to Handayani in his article, he says that to draw the public attention, internet memes are text, images that contain social critic and human interest issues.

Public opinion is easier to represent in the form of memes as they are more favourable because it could be multi- interpretation and more attention grabbing. A picture speaks thousand of words so a meme has many meanings attached to it. A meme can be a representation of public opinion but it has the drawback that it does not last for long.

Internet Meme and Political Discourse: A Study on the Impact of Internet Meme as a Tool in Communicating Political Satire - Kulkarni, in her research article, found out that traditional methods are still most popular among people and they are widely used. Memes though produced and distributed by the netizens, political views and voting behavior are not affected by them. Internet memes are also developed by political parties as a tool for propaganda.

Shifman in her book ***Memes in Digital Culture*** defines internet memes as digital content units with common uniqueness, created with attentiveness of each other, and disseminated, imitated, and altered via the Internet by many users. People become responsive of memes through their wits, people repackage memes in order to pass them to others by processing them in their minds. As the growing digital sphere people often share content and spread memes, as it has become a essential part of what the social media participants' experience.

Internet Memes and Society: Social, Cultural, and Political Contexts by Denisova, says that memes act as sensitive indicators of public opinion, trending themes and collective identities, though they may not change the world. They oppose the propaganda however inform, educate and entertain. She gave the name "fast food media" and "political mind bombs" to the internet memes.

Objectives

- To find out the role of an internet meme in framing public opinion.
- To find out the comparison between the effect of Internet memes on public opinion over traditional methods.
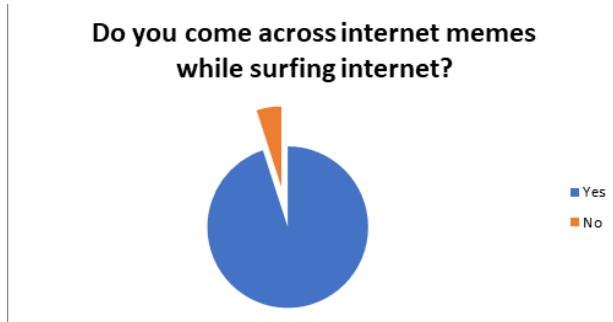- To find out the effect of internet memes on netizens.

Hypotheses

- Internet memes mold public opinion.
- Internet memes have more effect in framing public opinion as compared to traditional methods.

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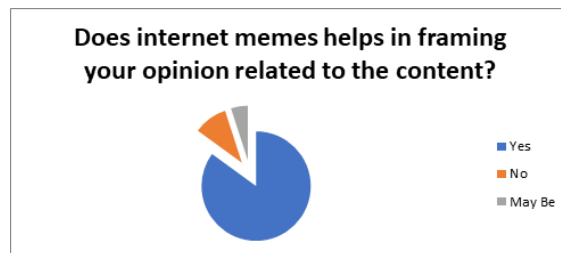• Internet memes provide information, education, and entertainment.

Data Analysis

Table 1

The above graph represents that 95% of people come across internet memes while surfing social media websites. Internet memes are used widely all over the internet.

Table 2

The above chart represents the opinion of the people regarding the use of internet memes in framing public opinion. 85% of people agree that memes help in framing the opinion related to the subject while 10 % of people say no and 5% of people responded as may be.

Table 3

Which tool is more effective Internet Memes or Traditional methods?

- Traditional Methods
- Internet Memes
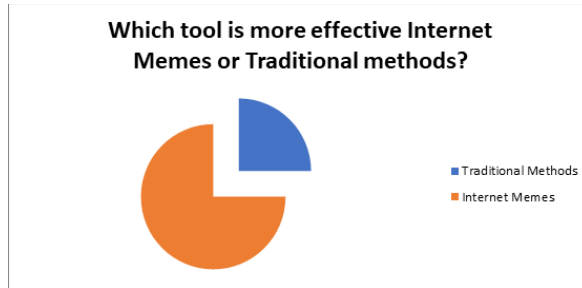
According to 75% of people, internet memes are a more effective tool as compared to traditional methods. While 25% of people still believe that traditional methods like television ads, newspaper ads, transit, and other ways of advertising have more effect on people. People get more entertained by internet memes and along with entertainment it also provides information in a sarcasm form.

Table 4

Do you share internet memes with others?

- Yes
- No
- Sometimes
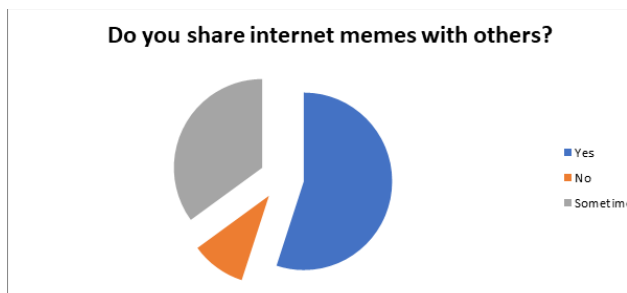
According to the above graph, 55% of people share internet memes, 10 % of people said they don't share while 35% of people sometimes share the memes on social media sites. They share the internet memes they like with their friends so that they can also get entertained. People flood their walls with memes so that friends added to their accounts can also view the memes.

Table 5

Which type of meme do you like most?
- Politics
- Bollywood
- Cricket
- International
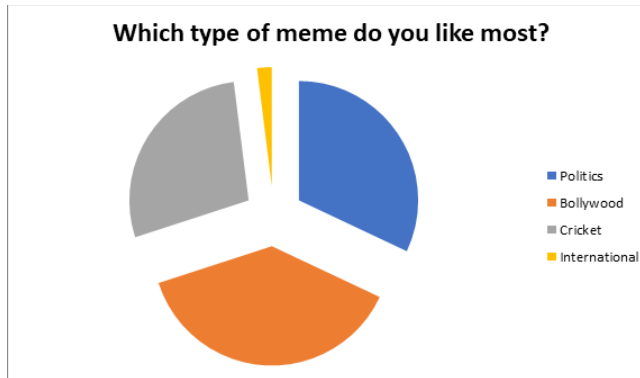
32% respondents like memes of politics, 38% respondents like Bollywood, 28% cricket while 2% respondents like more memes related to international subjects. The interest of the respondents is more towards the subjects of politics and Bollywood as compared to cricket and international areas.

Findings

1. Internet memes are more used by netizens to make the people entertained and inform and educate them.
2. People are more interested in watching the memes related to the subjects that are more in trend.
3. People watch memes related to politics, Bollywood, and cricket.
4. Internet memes have more effect on people as compared to the traditional methods of entertainment.
5. Internet memes are used widely and people share more and more memes related to their choice.
6. Not only netizens but memes are also used as a source of propaganda by the political parties.
7. Internet memes are only a part of new/ digital media while people come across other traditional ways in their day-to-day life.
8. Internet memes in a slow way help in framing the public opinion for a short span of time.

Conclusion

With the increasing use of the internet and social media sites by people all over the world, people are now using memes more and more for en-

tertainment. Internet memes are considered as part of Internet Culture. There is no single pattern that a meme follows. Memes are more commonly made using the stock photos of Bollywood and netizens mix the subjects like politics and Bollywood or Bollywood with cricket and real-life and others. In the recent corona times, people got a broad subject of virus and the effect it had on the life of the people. Memes are also made on the online classes and exams. Not only viruses but the subject of the memes is also related to every current topic. Like in the recent time memes are more focused on the Aryan Khan the performance of the Indian Cricket team in the ICC World Cup.

People are more framing their opinion based on the type of meme they come across. A picture speaks more than words so people agree that memes have more effect on the people rather than a long 100 or 200 words message. Memes can be in the form of text, images, gifs, and videos or can also be mixed form of any of the means. Memes are considered as humour or sarcasm to comment on a person, idea, ideology in a sarcastic manner. Internet memes are also spread by the media organizations as earlier sarcastic cartoons were made by cartoonists. It helps in framing issues in the minds of people.

A meme could be a representation of public opinion. This study has lots of limitations like it doesn't talk about the negative effects of the memes. Internet memes also have limitations like once a thing gets viral it automatically vanishes from the mind of the people in a very short span of time. It doesn't last for long. Sometimes the subjects of the memes are very sensitive and they negatively affect the mind of the people. Topics related to farmer suicide, fat-shaming, depression, and others.

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