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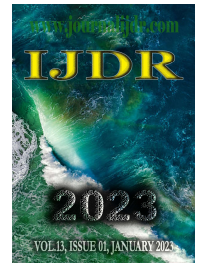
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RESEARCH ARTICLE

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SOCIAL MEDIA MEMES: A STUDY OF ITS IMPACT ON INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATIONS

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ABSTRACT

The focus of the paper is on the examination of impact of social media memes on cross-cultural communication. Memes, tiny templates carrying humorous texts and information's, in our opinion, represent contemporary realities and cultural stereotypes that are relevant and engaging to Internet users. We believe they have brought a significant change to the whole process of cross cultural communication. They led to the creation of a virtual society which in turn made the idea of globalization possible.

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INTRODUCTION

At present, memes are not limited only to laughter or joke material. It is much more than that. While discussing the effectiveness and impact of memes, we can say that if a picture is worth of thousand words, then Memes are worth of lac words because of their presentation and popularity. The biologist Richard Dawkins (1976) introduced the term "meme" to the English language in his book "The Selfish Gene" to explain how cultural information spreads. In Internet culture, the term is frequently used to describe words, videos, images, or a combination of these that Internet users widely share. In addition, this usage of the phrase has come to define a specific category of Internet artifacts composed of a combination of photos and text that are typically considered humorous by viewers (Akhther, 2021). Memes are emerging as a new tool to share information, emotions, perception, and unique point of view to look at a particular subject or event—present political scenario, entertainment industry, media, and using this tool in a meaningful way. Memes present information (content) attractively and effectively, and the best thing about them is that they are easy to share with unlimited audiences with different media. The emergence of memes as a new source of information can raise a question of credibility, but it depends on audience awareness and acceptance.

Thousands of memes pages gained the credibility and faith of the viewers. On the memes of these pages, users believe blindly. But in this era of social media, it is hard to distinguish between opinion and information; there is always a risk of misinterpretation. So, we can't deny the possibility of misleading memes floating on the internet. Looking at the trends, we will find that the industry also notes that memes are gaining more popularity continuously, and this is an eye-catching and attention-grabbing creation of a sense of humour. Various political, social, and business organizations use memes to create thought process defining objectives among the netizens, so they are hiring meme professionals, memes creators or meme makers who can create memes according to their agenda or goals. Memes are easily understandable, accessible, and easy to share the information, idea, and views regarding the context. According to popularity, it is typical for memes to speak about and relate to everyday issues that are shared by all cultures, which is why any member of the global Internet community may relate to them. Memes' popularity and ability to spread depend on their originality and unexpectedness, and these qualities also influence a meme's "lifetime" and virality (Milosavljevic, 2020). Due to linguistic barriers, accents, gestures, postures, and upbringing, people from different sociocultural origins encounter several difficulties when communicating. Memes can overcome most communication barriers, including semantic, accents, gestures, postures, and regional barriers (Rao, 2014). Memes can so significantly contribute to cross-cultural communication in this way.

The term "intercultural communication" refers to communication among individuals from different cultures or in interethnic, interreligious and even interregional communication (Gudykunst and Kim, 1997). Memes are made up of text, images, audio, and video that are easy for people of different religions, cultures, regions, and continents to grasp since, in accordance with human psychology, images and videos are more memorable than words (Majumdar, 2016). Memes are one of the best media and examples of media convergence; hence they are essential for enabling cross-cultural communication.

Literature Review

Intercultural communication is the "skill of knowing, and being understood by, the audience of another culture," according to *Sitaram (1980)*, who also noted that "the audience might be one person or more and not necessarily a huge group." Intercultural communication happens whenever a person from one culture sends a message to be processed by a person from a different culture", accords to *Samovar, Porter, and McDaniel's (2009)*. In his book, *Kassing (1997)*, explains intercultural communication. Intercultural willingness to communicate, which is described as "one's propensity to initiate intercultural communication interactions," is conceptually similar to willingness to communicate. *Chen and Starosta (1996)* in their study found that Cultural awareness is essential for communicating efficiently with individuals from various cultures. *Jandt (2017)* described competence of intercultural communication as "the capability in negotiating cultural senses and for executing applicably effective behaviours of communication which distinguish the interactants' several identities over a specific surrounding". The research deals with intercultural communication and new communication tools. Inter-cultural communication has much relevance in this century as international communications have become very common due to the internet facility available, *Chen (2012)*. *Jafarova (2017)* conducted research to find the role of social media on intercultural communication and adaptation processes. According to research, social media encourages culturally diverse groups to work together and depend on one another. Social networking is an excellent instrument for bringing together people from various socioeconomic, cultural, and religious backgrounds. *Rubtcova & Pavenkov (2019)* conducted a study on "an internet meme as a means of intercultural communications" and came to the conclusion that The description of the cultural meanings that Internet memes included in these genres have is connected to the possibility of success of various speech genres typical of Internet communication (understanding and comic effect). A community of pertinent presuppositions and elements of the participants' cultural baggage must coincide for an accurate understanding of Internet memes. *Alierta (2010)* conducted a study Digital communication has reduced time and space while the affordability has made people from different strata of the society access information quickly. The government or any religious group has no control over the information that is freely available for everyone to share. *Akhther (2021)* conducted a study on "Internet Memes as Form of Cultural Discourse: A Rhetorical Analysis on Facebook". The study concentrated on the usage of memes as a form of communication. Internet memes are also considered in the context of how prosumers encounter them. Internet memes are thus a form of popular creativity that employs images to convey cultural practises. The authors and remixers of memes use characters and sentences to convey their thoughts on societal, political, and personal issues. As a result, cultural elements are transmitted from one individual to another. The Internet and user-generated material have made it possible for the Internet meme to overcome racial and physical boundaries. *Chen (2012)* The "Impact of New Media on Intercultural Communication in Global Context" is the study's main topic. The study's findings demonstrate how new media has increased human contact and society's level of complexity and interconnectedness while also posing a threat to the basic notion of intercultural communication in its conventional sense.

Objective: Examining memeseffects on cross-cultural communication and their identity-defining function in participatory media culture is the major goal of the current study. It is specifically designed to point

out how intertextual memes are a distinct type of cultural discourse that social media users have shared.

Research question

1. To investigate the trend of distributing memes online
2. To look at how Internet memes affected cross-cultural dialogue
3. To investigate how memes influence popular culture and consciousness

METHODOLOGY

In the study that follows, we make an effort to comprehend the function memes play in cross-cultural communication. Memes' effects on intercultural dialogue and users' growing cultural awareness on social media. To monitor the practise in this case, content analysismethod has been applied. The role of the memes will be closely examined to see whether they had a beneficial or negative effect on their viewers. This exploratory qualitative study will investigate the secondary data that is currently accessible. The information will come from websites where users may access social media accounts, articles, news, and user comments on the subject. The study's main objectives are as follows:

1. Identify briefly how memes affect cross-cultural conversation.
2. Analyse the negative and positive effects of memeson intercultural communication.
3. Describe how memes encourage intercultural dialogue.

Internet memes' cross-cultural discourse: Internet memes are produced depending on how people see and assume their own culture, according to the data and research on how they are represented online. According to the studies cited above, online memes are similar to rumours, jokes, and urban legends in that they frequently make fun of or remark on current events. To express their cultural viewpoints, concerns, anger, and fears, internet users are encouraged to take part in such intercultural debates. As a result, this conversation creates identities and shapes people's thoughts and attitudes by fusing disparate viewpoints. The features of online memes that genuinely represent the cross-cultural communication of social media users were discovered by this study. Analyses of internet memes are given below. Memes as discussed are the means of communication where either the image on the template or the text speaks. Its relevance and popularity among viewers is the key hack to get success in this field. We have tried to collect as much data regarding the cross cultural communication possible. To begin with we selected this man, from Italy who teaches life hacks online. He does not even utters a word to do so, his expressions are sufficient. He simplifies things for the netizens. The man is Khaby Lame, who calls himself a solution provider to various simple yet complex problems in day to day life. With him people connected themselves a lot, they learned about his origin and in turn took part in the inter cultural dialogue.

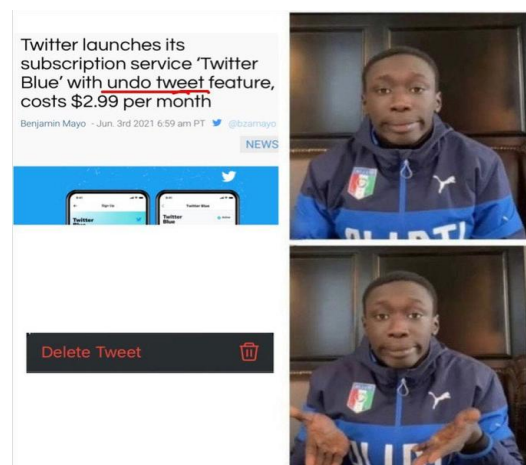


Figure 1.

In the next template, there is a mocking statement about Japanese people, as Japan does not consider Christmas worthy for a holiday. Christians are spread all across the world, still Japan does not consider it as a festival worth a holiday.

JAPANESE STILL DON'T UNDERSTAND CHRISTMAS



Fig. 2.

In the following templates we can see the politics around the world and their impact on various cultures. Be it Britain or the US, both remain at the high ends of gaining attention, even at the small issues. The first template below suggests the popularity of Biden, joining the office and the whole fuss he brought in with the change. His blunt and straight forward opinions on various controversial issues have been highlighted with this template.

Biden when asked about The Uyghur Genocide



Fig. 3.

In another political meme below, there is the mention of two culturally diverse places on earth who were once together and have now been separated. Their very co-existence has led to various satires as well. The following memes stresses on one such issue between these two countries and their culture. Another memes to this category brings a new story, where a man is supposed to be behind the origin of white people in North America. Yakub, there are hundreds of memes available on this man online. A report says, he is a North American man with a very large head whose experiments eventually led to the creation of white people. He has been mocked by the netizens a lot.



Fig. 4.

When Allah tells you not to create white people because they'll take over the world but you decide that you're just going to do it anyway



Fig. 5.

India which is often praised and at times bullied for the deep rooted cultures have various memes on them online. Here the following memes addresses the fact how Indians are more caring towards their parents than any other kid in the world, as it is in our culture.



Fig. 6.

RESULTS

With above mentioned content we tend to analyse the fact how they have largely impacted the idea of intercultural communication among masses. How they have been able to bring the whole world at a single forum as far as their diversities are concerned. We found;

1. There is a pattern of distribution of memes on the internet. Everything available is there for a reason. Although memes have been referred to as a content like news which is relatable with the current events around, any issue or any happening. There are various types of memes depending on the audience, like as specific as science to as common as everyday news. They are available in any type possible.
2. The impact of internet memes on the cultural discourse is evident from the fact that almost 50% of the total population of the world is available on social media platforms. As far as the cultural discourse is concerned, people have dived into a virtual community thing and that's what leading them towards a more globalised surroundings.
3. Moving ahead to the cultural consciousness, memes have done a splendid job, by not only introducing the person and his content to diverse people but also the whole cultural values behind it. The social media platforms where these memes float, is not just an entertainment platform, but a information, idea and cultural sharing one. People tend to learn about various cultures and countries from here. Its no more a necessity for anyone who wishes to learn something about other culture to visit that place, one can even do it from the social media platforms.

CONCLUSION

The new media era has accelerated daily living and altered how people communicate. Diverse sciences are conducting research on the meme phenomenon. The purpose of the paper is to develop a conceptual and methodological framework that could aid in the study of memes as a component of cross-cultural communication. Comparing it to earlier media, the Internet is a more effective medium. There are millions of websites, blogs, advertising, forums, and other online resources that have been made by one person, a group of people, or an organisation. It creates an infinite space for knowledge and amusement. Interactivity and hypertextuality are key aspects of the Internet that help memes proliferate. Additionally, the culture of mass entertainment consumption in the internet era has facilitated the growth of the virtual public sphere, where users primarily gather for entertainment but end up sharing and discussing social and political issues. In this context, memes are playing a significant role in cultural discourse. The attribute that enables synchronous and responsive user communication is interactivity. The term "interactivity" refers to a situation in which a number of players engage in reciprocal interaction, meaning that both parties experience change as a result of the other's actions, which in turn causes changes in the first party. When information is systematically linked in a nonlinear, web-like manner, this is known as hypertextuality. In a hypertext, text, images, and videos are presented using hyperlinks. It is possible to think of those who share and receive online memes as nodes in a (social) network.

A meme spreads over the internet in a chain reaction that starts with an individual internet user and continues with other online users. The boundary between communities is lessened because of the absence of geography and time constraints on the Internet. Any Internet unit (sentence, phrase, text, melody, picture, video, etc.) can become a meme because of the intensive and scale-free communication structure. Memes may interact with one another and successfully spread to new users if they conform to the communication paradigm. What does this indicate about global meme spread? Like parasitic organisms, memes have a similar life cycle. Throughout the

transmission phase, crucial meme features include the capacity to replicate, copying fidelity, non-alteration policy, structural cohesiveness, simplicity, repetition, and survival. Memes' ability to cross cultural barriers might depend on the stage of their communication lifecycle. A community of pertinent presuppositions and elements of the participants' cultural baggage must coincide for an accurate understanding of Internet memes. We came to the conclusion that the definition of cultural implications that Internet memes contained in these genres have is related to the likelihood of effective implementation of various speech genres typical of Internet communication (understanding and humorous impact). A community of pertinent presuppositions and elements of the participants' cultural baggage must coincide for an accurate understanding of Internet memes. As a result, memes serve as relics of participatory digital culture that highlight the duality of structure and explore memes as a type of rhetoric, both of which further our understanding of how memes operate in a participatory media culture. As a result, it can be claimed that the universe of Internet memes is immense; the quantity of cultural products produced every day is remarkable, rapidly transitioning readers into authors and critics before returning them to their original role as readers.

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