Twitter, Memes, and the Commodification of Humour

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The commodification of interaction on the internet is prominent, persistent and incredibly complex. The delicate ecosystems that exist on social media apps and websites are often flooded with advertiser friendly and brand centric content. As modern humans, we are often so entrenched in the world of internet culture, it is not easy to see the ways in which our communication space has been affected by these companies. This essay will dissect the ways in which brands utilize internet humour and ‘memes’ as a way to integrate themselves into an audiences online spaces as a means of advertisement. Additionally, this essay will cross analyze this concept with *Commodifying Free Labor Online: Social Media, Audiences and Advertising* by Nicole Cohen.

On the internet there is a common lexicon understood by all participants, which contains humour known as ‘memes’. Memes can be a collection of words, images, soundbites or videos that contain humour that is easily changed and edited to fit different contexts. This is to say; an individual creates a joke, and others pile on with there own iterations and versions. In this social media sphere this creates a sort of inside joke for all participants. This is where a lot of brands find opportunity. Brands participate in whatever is trending by adapting the meme to the product they sell. The brands attempt to appear as relatable and real, and less like a massive corporate entity. In *Commodifying Free Labor Online: Social Media, Audiences and Advertising,* Nicole Cohen introduces the idea that social media pushes consumers into becoming producers, and that this productivity is turned into a profit for companies (Cohen 178). This becomes undoubtedly true when looking at brand memes, as the original meme is created by a consumer, and then taken by the brand to use as advertising. Simply by participating in online discourse, commentary or trends, users will find their own thoughts and experiences open to be harnessed for corporate channeling.

Advertising firms are quick to jump at the opportunity to engage with memes online. In fact, it has become necessary for brands to engage with humour and memes in order to be popular, or important online (Losse). A quick Google search for ‘brand memes’ or ‘how to do corporate twitter’ will reveal a slew of articles and think-pieces written about the secret to having a successful run as an online corporation. Brands are desperate to understand the power of remixable memes, as the success it can bring is not to be understated. *Vulture* published a timeline of brand Twitter to show how the accounts have changed overtime to become more liked and connected with (Allebach). Looking at this timeline, twitter accounts like ‘Denny’s’ are shown to have great outreach, even being labelled by Forbes as the ‘King of Twitter’. This is because Denny’s engages with micro-trends, conversations and niche internet jokes. When looking at the success of the Denny’s twitter account, it is understood what Nicole Cohen meant when she wrote; “Instead of flattening power relations between consumer and producer via social media, firms harness the activity of Internet users and frame this practice in a discourse of benign interaction….” (Cohen, 181). Brands and ad firms are trying to hide this power relation and frame their advertising as ‘benign interaction’, and for the most part this has garnered them huge success. The internet’s collective lexicon, memes, jokes and culture are being transformed into something of value, at no expense to the corporation (Cohen 181). *Vulture’*s timeline refers to this as the ‘attention economy’ and states; “Advertising is designed to misinform and blend in with culture”(Allebach).

When Nicole Cohen wrote *Commodifying Free Labor Online: Social Media, Audiences and Advertising,* she stated; “Soon, it might not seem unreasonable to have an advertisement whispered directly in you ear” (Cohen, 188). This seems to be the creeping sentiment online. This is the fear for users, and the hope for advertisers. Twitter is an easy social media to concentrate on when analyzing this topic, as it is perhaps most prevalent there, but this is not to say all social media platforms are not affected in the same way. Meme culture is complicated and delicate, and so brands and corporations dedicate huge amounts of time to analyzing how to capitalize on it in a way that does not lose the favour of their consumers.

Works Cited

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