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Ethics & Memes

Memes are a modern form of expression and either love them or hate them, restricting any form of expression is a dangerous route for any society to take. The creation of memes should not be restricted but their effects and impacts should be considered and avenues for appropriate action should exist. The original core idea behind memes is humor, to be satirical in nature to communicate a humorous idea amongst those who are of a like mind. However, if all memes were fun and games there would be no need to have an ethical discussion about them.

As many of us witness in recent years when memes are political in nature or controversial in any way, the rapid spread of these memes through the general population can cause distress and be ultimately damaging. This is especially true when memes are taken as factual, and their satirical nature is lost on the viewer. These rapidly spreading memes are menacing because they are extremely effective at getting people to adopt ideas. (Hyman)

It is in these controversial scenarios that maybe action should be taken to mitigate the spread of false information. That responsibility would ultimately fall on the platforms in which memes

are commonly posted. This raises the question do we really want massive tech companies to dictate what we not only post to the internet but also what they deem appropriate for us to view?

The creation of memes sometimes utilizes images of people or copyright material without express permission. In the U.S. many memes are covered under the fair use act, which promotes the unlicensed use of copyright material for a limited and transformative purpose (Stim). As far as images of people goes, most everyone knows that if you put an image on the internet of yourself or any other without a copy right then it is fair game for others to use. Though meme creators have the legal right to do so that does not mean it is the ethical choice.

Memes are a form of expression and communication that should not be regulated by legal restrictions or guidelines. Much good comes out of this popular culture and yes some do use memes unethically but ethical decision making comes at an individual level not a governmental level. As individuals we can choose to not play a part in harmful memes by not contributing to their viral spread. Trying to make a society ethical by government regulation happens by stripping away freedoms one by one. Freedom of Expression and Freedom of Speech are blessings that we take for granted all too often. If you truly want to make a society ethical you must change the culture not the laws. Culture is changed through the thoughts and actions of individuals. We should all strive to conduct ourselves in such a manner. "Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving." (ESV, Ephesians 5:4)

References

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