Matthew Yanzer

CSCI 330-Spring-2020

Dr. West

Due March 23, 2020

Ethics Paper Memes

Memes are one of the most prevalent forms of media and entertainment today. Whenever any circumstance arises, someone will always have a meme to show related to it. Although memes are a primary source of universal humor, that humor comes at a price. More often than not the entertainment memes display often come at someone's expense, and the consequences of this price can be severe. This paper will discuss the ethics of memes and whether laws should be passed setting guidelines for meme creation.

First, it is important to define what harm is in terms of memes. The ACM Code of Ethics states, “In this document, ‘harm’ means negative consequences, especially when those consequences are significant and unjust. Examples of harm include unjustified physical or mental injury, unjustified destruction or disclosure of information, and unjustified damage to property, reputation, and the environment” (Section 1.2). This definition's mentioning of "unjustified mental injury" and "unjustified damage to … reputation" are key for discussing memes specifically. Take the meme "Star Wars Kid" for example, a classic example of a meme that was made with malicious intent. When Ghyslain Raza's classmates leaked a video of him online sparring air with a tennis ball retriever, Raza became the target of mockery as several students made fun of him and even told him to commit suicide. These events drove Raza into severe depression, and he was admitted to a psychiatric institution shortly after to receive mental therapy. As seen above, Raza's schoolmates utilized memes in a malicious way by intentionally humiliating Raza. But another question arises: should such behavior invoke legal action to prevent future instances?

I personally think that laws dictating guidelines for meme creation would be virtually impossible to make; however, I also think that alternate solutions exist that do not leave people as potential targets of this form of bullying. First, people should recognize that comedy is blind to pain. A lot of these instances of bullying would not exist or would not be as severe if the subjects of memes like "Star Wars Kid" knew how to laugh at themselves. Of course, I do not want to ignore the depression such mockery could cause, but I also know that enforcing the extreme of never making a joke at another's expense is infeasible, if not impossible. Second, people who make memes should give more consideration to the topic their memes address and the consequences their memes might bring. The ninth element of the IEEE Code of Ethics states that information sent to the internet, including memes, should be sent so as, " to avoid injuring others, their property, reputation, or employment by false or malicious action” (IEEE Code of Ethics). Memes cover a broad category of subjects, and people who make them need to be mature enough to determine if the memes they make will bring more harm than joy. Of course, my suggestions are not enforceable because these ideas depend on how well they are received by others. However, I do not think that legal action is a possible solution. Restricting good memes for the sake of preventing bad ones is infeasible because memes are too broad of a concept to be contained by legal wording.

In conclusion, memes are a very influential form of comedy that must be handled carefully. Whenever someone decides to make a meme, its important to remember Luke 6:31, which states, “And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them” (English Standard Version). The universal application of this verse alone would be enough to change memes for the better.

Works Cited

Association for Computer Machinery. “ACM Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct.” *ACM*, Association for Computing Machinery, 22 June 2018, [https://www.acm.org/code-of-ethics.](https://www.acm.org/code-of-ethics.%20) Accessed 22 March, 2020.

English Standard Version. Bible Gateway, <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+6%3A31&version=ESV>. Accessed 22 March, 2020.

Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers. “IEEE Code of Ethics.” *IEEE*, Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers, <https://www.ieee.org/about/corporate/governance/p7-8.html#top>. Accessed 22 March, 2020.