

# **Language and Society**

## **CL2.203**

Monsoon 2022, IIIT Hyderabad

### **Project Report**

**Study on the Impact of memes on Society**

by

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## DECLARATION

We, **Yash Bhaskar (Roll No: 2021114012)** and **Chinmay Pateria (Roll No: 2021114013)** hereby declare that, this report entitled “**Study on Impact of memes on Society**” submitted to International Institute of Information Technology, Hyderabad towards the Project Work of **LnS (Language Society)** in [CLD], is an original work carried out by me under the supervision of **Dipti Misra Sharma** and has not formed the basis for the academic work in this or any other institution or university. We have sincerely tried to uphold academic ethics and honesty. Whenever a piece of external information or statement or result is used then, that has been duly acknowledged and cited.

IIIT Hyderabad - 500 032

November 2022

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

We want to extend a sincere and heartfelt obligation towards all the personages with- out whom the completion of the project was not possible. We express our profound gratitude and deep regard to Dipti Misra Sharma, IIIT Hyderabad for her guidance, valuable feedback, and constant encouragement throughout the project. Her valuable suggestions were of immense help. We sincerely acknowledge her constant support and guidance during the project.

We are immensely grateful to Dipti Misra Sharma and Shubhankar Kamthankar for their constant support and encouragement. I am also grateful to the International Institute of Information Technology, Hyderabad, for allowing us to do this project and providing all the required facilities.

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## ABSTRACT

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Project title: **Study on Impact of memes on Society**

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The main aim of the project is to Study the Impact of memes on Society. That is Analysis of memes' impact on social variables focuses mainly on stereotypes and social awareness.

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# **Abstract**

This is a study of the impact of memes on Language and Society, specifically, we will be focusing on internet memes on society specifically the young generation of society in terms of their view, stereotypes, opinions, beliefs, etc. Memes were initially made for just humour and sarcasm, but now it's much more than that.

## **1. Introduction**

A meme has a cultural idea, behaviour, or style that spreads from person to person via writing, gestures, speech, rituals, or other phenomena with a mimicked theme in 2D.

Memes are a popular topic on the internet and can be used for various purposes. They can be used to spread awareness about a cause, to support or resist a political issue, to spread humour, or simply to entertain. While some memes can have a positive impact on society, others can be negative, like spreading hatred or misinformation. It's necessary to be aware of the potential impact of a meme before sharing it.

This study will focus majorly on the social impact of memes in society that how memes can impact one's ability to understand and accept things which connect (or divide), entertain and influence people in society.

Work done by Limor Shifman, author of Memes in Digital Culture. She differentiates memes from virals, analyses Memes are discussed as new forms of political engagement under democratic and nondemocratic regimes, as well as what factors contribute to memes and virals' popularity. Memes are also looked at as globalisation

agents. Some of the most essential tenets of the Internet in general and the interactive Web 2.0 culture in particular are encapsulated in Shifman's arguments. Although internet memes might be amusing, Limor Shifman makes a strong case in this book for considering them to be legitimate.

In this study, we will be studying the impact of memes on society and ones understanding of the influence on him/her.

## **2. Problem Statement**

Analysis of memes' impact on social variables focuses mainly on stereotypes and social awareness.

### **2.1 Explanation / Elaboration**

Image-based Internet memes have emerged as a distinct mode of online communication over the last two decades. This study investigates the social implications of this new form of communication, both positive and negative.

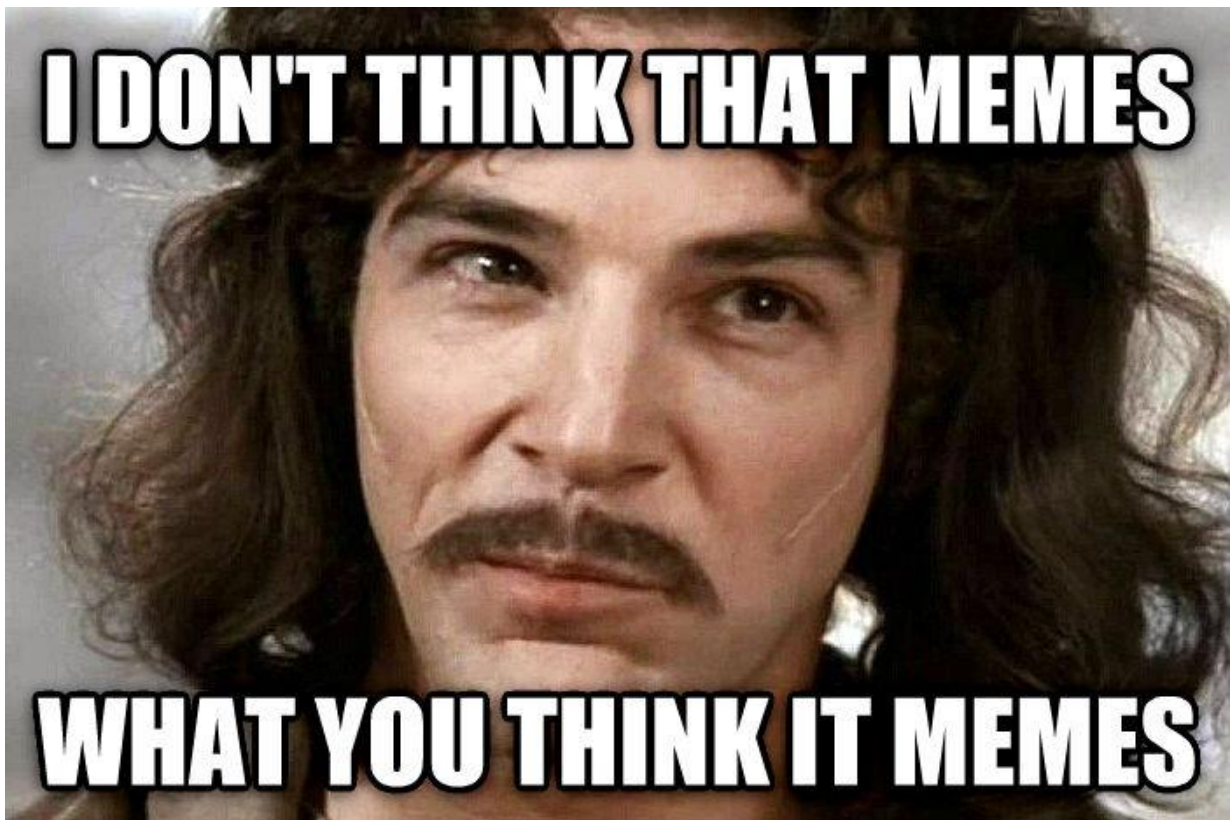
We will investigate the extreme case of internet memes. Occasionally, the images are so powerful and symbolic that political groups use them. Political memes unite and divide groups as they spread from online to offline spaces. Internet memes, a previously niche media genre, are becoming more mainstream over time. Companies are beginning to capitalise on the viral market by using memes as an advertising tool.



This begged the question, "Are Internet memes often highly influential, impacting people in various ways that are perhaps not apparent?"

### 3. Hypothesis

The hypothesis is that Internet memes have influenced the changes in society's thinking regarding various political and social stereotypes without themselves acknowledging it.



## 4. Features

### 4.1 Political Memes

One such example we can take of political memes. These sometimes could be so powerful and symbolic that political groups even use them to unite and divide people into groups. Sometimes, memes are also used by the opposition as an anti-campaign meme to win the political race. It can have both positive or negative influences but based on the situation, memes can mean completely different for example, for a good politician, even a critical meme might play as a promotion instead of defaming which is a complete backfire.

## The Chinese government when

they subjugate  
Tibet



they're given  
back Hong Kong



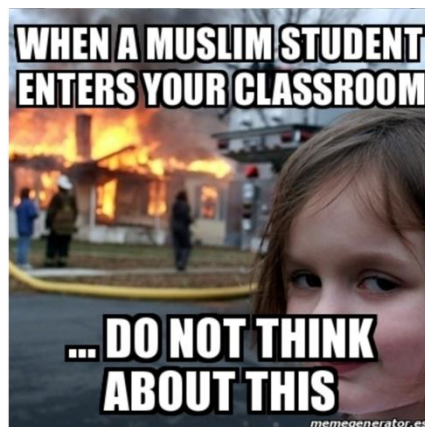
nobody  
complains  
about Uyghur  
work camps



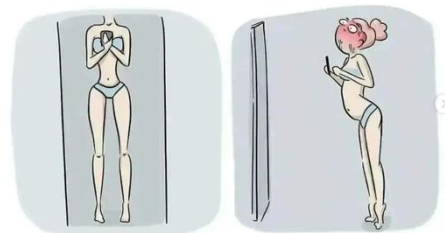
## 4.2 Social Memes

Mememes can also be used to form social connections. Mememes allow people to communicate with one another. Knowing the right mememes can help you join a group. They strengthen group cohesion.

These mememes often have a humorous or ironic twist and are often intended to be related to social factors, stereotypes or current affairs. Social mememes can be used to comment on current events, express an opinion, or simply make someone laugh.



SOCIAL MEDIA VS. REALITY



WHEN YOU TELL YOUR  
DAD THAT YOU WANT  
TO MARRY SOMEONE

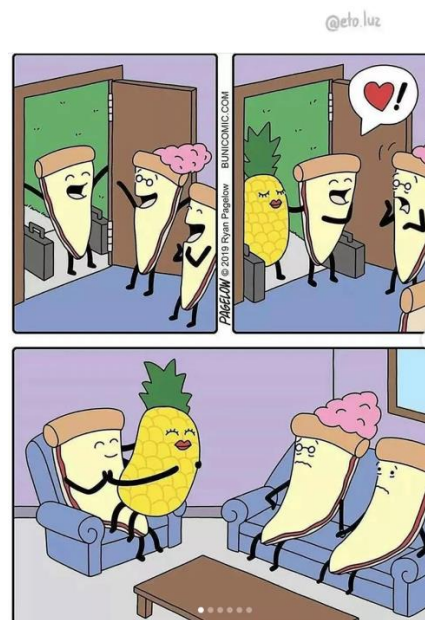
WITH THE  
SAME  
RELIGION



WITH THE  
SAME CASTE



& GENDER



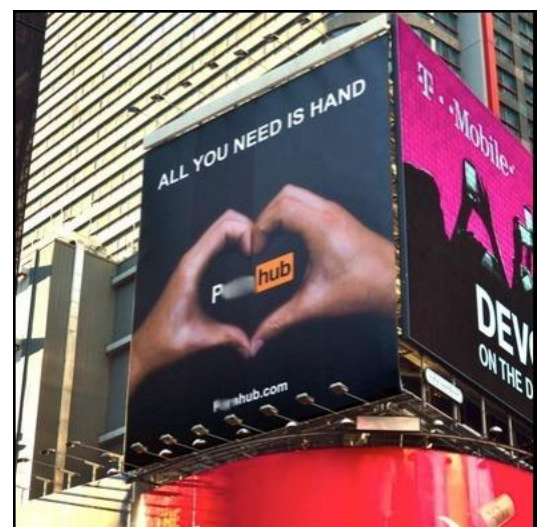


## 4.3 Advertising Memes

Another example is that companies started using viral memes as advertising tools.

Examples of such companies are Zomato, Netflix, tinder, Disney Hotstar, etc.

Advertisements can vary from food and drinks, clothing and fashion, health and beauty, household goods, electronics, automobiles, travel, etc. These memes even play reverse psychology to attract people for marketing purposes.



## 4.4 Awareness Memes

Also, some memes are used to spread general awareness in sarcasm and other forms. For example, the meme below makes us aware that the plastic industry claims that they are recycling plastic is just a gimmick.

Its made funny, but the cause is not noticeable straight but people can understand the cause subconsciously and have thought to process it for a while.



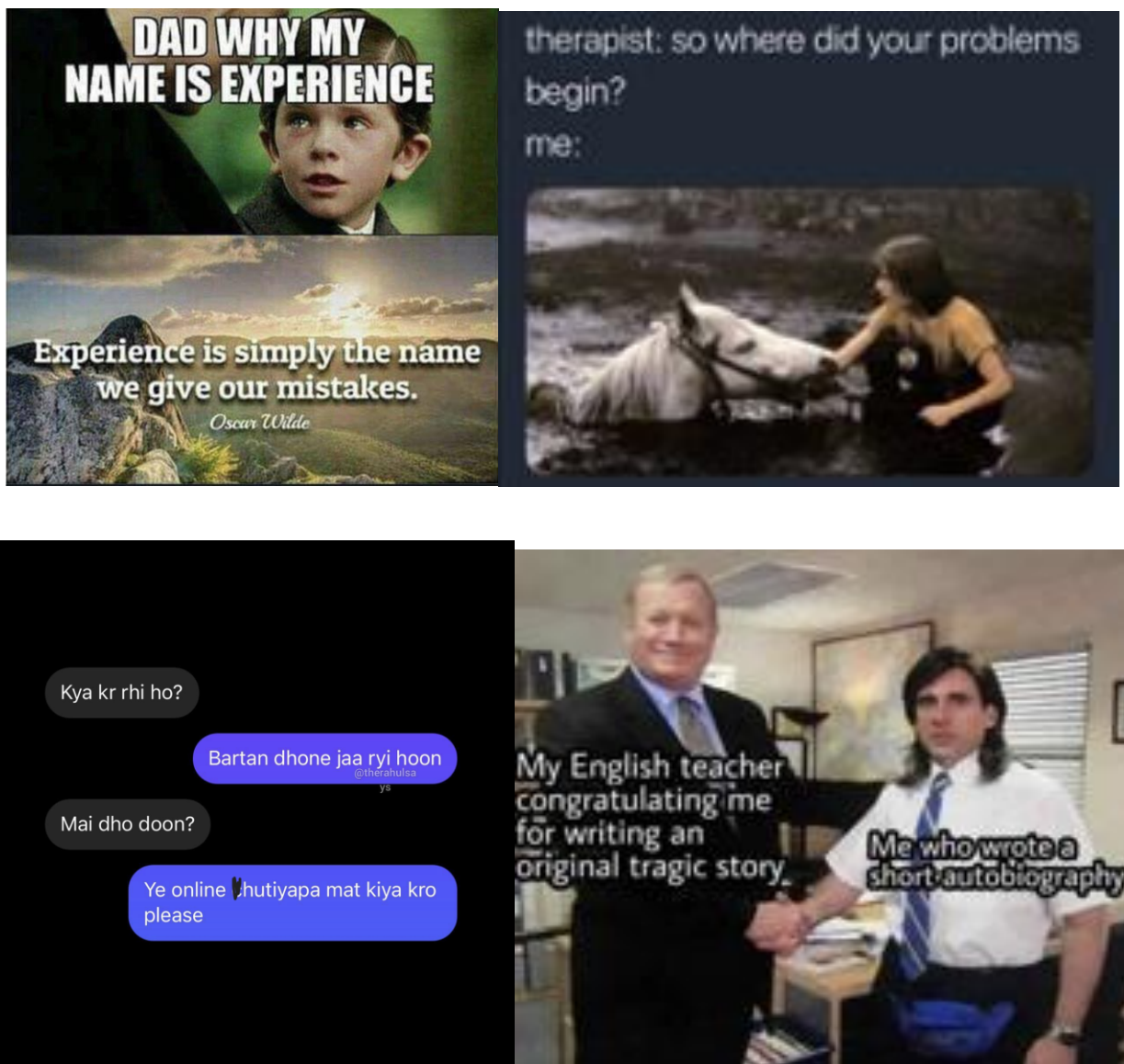
Every plastics/oil executive:





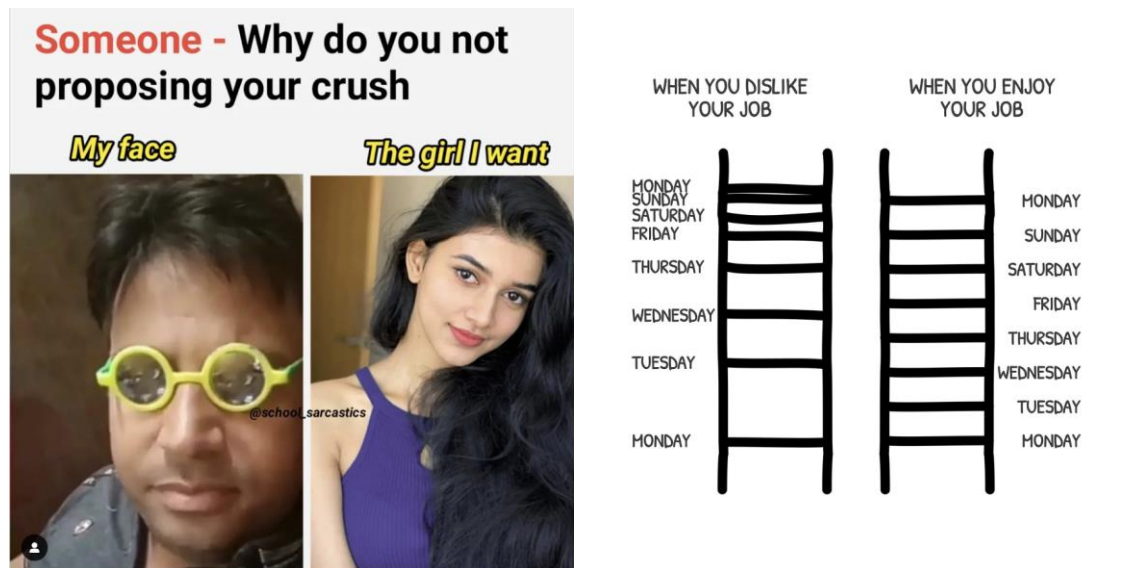
## 4.5 Memes helping students Combat Stress

Mememes are now also used as a way to help student combat stress. Internet mememes are extremely popular among students as a media genre created and consumed by young people. Procrastination, isolation, financial issues, Daily relative stuff and mental health concerns are all common student mememe themes. These mememes also



## 4.6 General Relatable Memes

These are the memes that are most entertaining to people as they can connect it with their life due to some relatable factors between the reader and the meme.



## 5. Methodology

### 5.1 Data Collection

We collected data from the internet (2D Image type memes) and analysed the data according to our hypothesis. Then the analysis result will be compared with various people from different generations to check if people can relate to and understand the memes and conclude whether our hypothesis is right or wrong.

Our target audience (the young generation and people using social media extensively) and extracted data will be analysed for our hypothesis.

A list of questions would be asked from several people asking their views such that they don't realise we are taking a survey (Using different methods that would be cited with the Literature survey)

We took surveys in groups and did not take individual responses rather took responses as a group and made them feel comfortable by interacting with them for a while and when we felt they were comfortable with us and could answer without hesitation, we showed them the memes, their expressions were observed and recorded by us manually by the second person who was sitting bit away, so they didn't know if it was recorded but answering questions were up to them .

#### **Question :**

- *Do they understand the meme?*
- *Is the Meme Offensive?*



- *If not, would it be offensive to display the same thing on national tv or in a magazine?*
- *What do you observe in the meme (What attracts the most)?*
- *Do you feel you get influenced by memes?*
- *Do you feel you consume a lot of memes?*

## 5.2 Analysis

Memes are both anonymous and extremely popular. Big corporate players exploit the meme's copyright-free ethos by appropriating texts from the Internet for their campaigning.

The **lack of traceability allows memes to avoid censorship**. On the other hand, we don't know how trustworthy the memes are because we don't know who created them. Morozov (2013) calls into question the authenticity of meme popularity by pointing out the platform-based bias in their spread. Facebook and Twitter, for example, have algorithms that seek out and endorse the popular. Many online media editors shape their texts and news like memes (Morozov, 2013).

Burgess (2008) argues that **memes are immune to manipulation** because it is impossible to predict what textual hooks or signifiers make a meme popular. According to her, any meme that the digital masses endorse, adjust, and distribute in large numbers can be considered authentic.

Another disadvantage of Internet memes is their ethical aspect. Zittrain (2012, as cited in Orcutt, 2012) expresses concerns about the ethical aspects of meme-engineering: a

**person of memes is shown without consent**, depriving him or her of the basic right to privacy and control over his/her image and public representation.

The Russian government banned memes that insult people's real identities in 2016. The Moscow communication watchdog issued a recommendation (literally, a legal reason for a court hearing) that forbids "using photo of a public figure to incorporate a popular internet meme that has nothing to do with the celebrity's personality" (Sampat & Bugorkova, 2015: para 2). Although the measure may aid in combating unethical memes, it may also significantly reduce the flow of memes that criticise Russian politicians.

The **public uses memes for self-expression, entertainment, and to contribute to political debates and persuade others**. People use a meme's condensed format to build a convincing argument using simple, expressive means. In conclusion, the distinction between understanding memes as the Internet's vernacular, fast-food media, or destructive weapons is hazy. Memes, from one point of view, are both an activity and a type of discourse.

Memes are not affiliated with any political party or institution, they are an empty versatile vehicle that people fill with their ideas and agendas, an appealing conduit that aids in manipulating discourses and minds.

### **5.3 Present Situation of Memes:**

The situation of memes in present-day society is quite interesting. They have become a staple in popular culture and have been using various ways. While some people use them as a way to communicate funny ideas or thoughts, others use them to spread political messages. Regardless of their intended use, memes have become a powerful tool for communication and have had a significant impact on society. In many ways, they have changed the way people interact and the way we consume information. It's estimated that over 100 million active meme consumers are on the internet. This number is only increasing as more people are exposed to them. The most popular platforms for sharing memes are social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. There are a variety of reasons why memes are so popular. For one, they are a very efficient way of communicating. A short phrase or image can convey a complex idea quickly and easily. Memes are also highly shareable, which makes them ideal for spreading messages or ideas to a large audience.

Another reason for their popularity is that they are often very funny. In a world that is often filled with negativity, memes can be a welcome respite. They can help us to laugh at ourselves and the world around us. Finally, memes have the ability to tap into our emotions. They can be used to make us feel happy, sad, angry, or any other emotion. This makes them a very powerful tool for communication. The impact that memes have had on society is undeniable. They have changed the way we communicate and the way we consume information. As their popularity is still growing, it'll be interesting to know how memes will evolve in future.

## **6. Discussion**

### **6.1 Why Memes Connect Ideas, but Not People**

Memes are anonymous. Sharing them does not connect people when done on a huge social form but personally sharing them does.

It depends on the category and one's meme consumption patterns.

When prominent meme creators share memes on social media, they invite and empower other, less active users to join the entertaining but critical political deliberation. Many meme makers in the Crimean study stated that seeing other people satirically express themselves in the digital realm and openly criticise domination or one-sided politics was liberating and encouraging: they realised they were not alone in their dissatisfaction with the elites. Like the situation of Russia in the previous example.

Sharing memes and feeling connected to a person is dependent on factors like reason, mode and emotions. People usually send relatable memes to show their condition or share their views about anything, which takes time to convey, as meme is a quick and creative way to express thoughts, even on a personal level, without offending anyone (as the creator is unknown and people interpret meaning which they like so, it doesn't harm one's positive face).

### **6.2 Memes as the Means of Political Communication in the Challenging Media Environments**

When memes are used strategically, they transform into mind bombs or symbolic texts with condensed ideas and abundant connotations that help to draw attention to political issues and suggest alternative interpretations of news.

Memes are effective at overcoming censorship because of their allegoric style of expression and the ambiguity of the commentary that they contain. Members of the audience must often be aware of the broader political context and familiar with this format of Internet communication to read a meme.

When users share memes about social topics, they interfere with the media discourse. They can promote or oppose the hegemonic interpretation of events, they can propose an alternative interpretation, or they can present an event in a specific context that others can learn from. The discussion of issues in meme language can take the form of a carnival - the exchange of screams and shouts, billings-gate and vulgar jokes all contribute to the formation of the interpretative picture. People are unable to criticise the elites openly, but they can rely on metaphors, allegories, and humour - memes.

### **6.3 Why Memes Globally Are Interdependent on Political Agenda**

Memes have evolved into a persuasive, significant, and ideology-free mode of communication that impacts our societies. Memes are the Internet crowds' common language and folklore, allowing people to express themselves on any topic. Memes are frequently used as discursive weapons and mind bombs by politically active Indian users in social networks to draw attention to news and opinions. They benefit from memes reputation. This approach to using memes as political mind bombs adds a new dimension to the study of social media activism. It demonstrates that the spread of Internet memes can spark alternative political debates, shed new light on hegemonic ideas and representations, and thus increase the visibility and connectivity of political dissent among digital crowds.

Active memes, as opposed to reactive memes, had fewer chances of reaching larger audiences. This leads to the conclusion that memes cannot change minds or politics independently. Still, they can (1) shed direct light on trending opinions and stumbling points and (2) serve as fast-food media that condenses important topics and delivers them to the public in an easily digestible form.

Memes are a novel phenomenon of digital-age political communication and activism. They have enormous potential to effect political change, learn more about our societies, and counterbalance the dominant media agenda.

## **7. Conclusion - The observations based on people's answers and expressions:**

Most of people found memes either funny or not funny, but most of the time memes were found to be not offensive. Even some of the memes made them think deeply about the objects in the memes.

Nearly all people understood memes well, which tells us that people are well in contact with the memes and understand the cCM ontext of the memes in nearly all situations.

When asked what the meme implies, people answered either concept seriously (explaining the meaning of the meme and why it is not offensive) or made absurd arguments about the meme (in a funny way). This tells us that memes have neutralised people's anger in cases which are offensive to utter or even written texts.

Some answered memes provide relatable situations, and the person who made the meme is not visible, so there is no one to target the anger at, hence it taken in a funny manner only. **(lack of traceability allows memes to avoid censorship)**

### **Does meme affect your thinking about the concept?**

Here is the funny part, even though they themselves tried to protect the sarcastic nature of memes. Still, when they were asked If memes affect their thinking or not, their answers converged into a straight “no” which tells us that the memes did affect them but they did not realise the gradual change in their mindset.

The major impact is things visualised in memes are not taken seriously by people (that includes the positive memes also), so we know that even tho the meme is not taken seriously but it does impact the thinking of a person.

Memes had a significant impact on our language and society. They have helped to create new words and phrases used in everyday conversation and have also been responsible for spreading popular culture references across the globe. In recent years, the impact of memes on our language and society has been profound. With social media memes spreading rapidly and constantly, They can be used to communicate ideas, poke fun at current events, or make people laugh.

These days, memes are so influence that some songs are made based on memes and used as slang in our daily lives.

Memes had a remarkable impact on our language and society. In recent years, the result of memes on our language and society has been profound. Memes are responsible for having a significant influence on changing society's thinking, culture

and language. With the rise of social media, memes have become an inseparable part of our culture, spreading rapidly and constantly.

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