

Zack Wedding

Prof. Songhui Yue

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Ethics Paper

Memes have been a popular form of entertainment over the past 10 to 15 years. We mindlessly scroll without thinking of the human being that is part of the memes we look at. To some of the people who became a meme, they embrace it and do all that they can to make the most from it; to others, it can ruin their reputation and put them in a terrible state of mind. When looking at this aspect of memes, a few questions arise; some of these questions are if there should be laws pertaining to memes, if memes can be used for slander, and if there should be guidelines for memes. We should be looking for is best for our peers and users of the internet.

Currently, there are no laws pertaining to memes. I believe that there should be some form of legislation dealing with the use of memes saying that the person whose image is being used in the meme must consent to it being used. Nobody should be surprised to see themselves become famous because of a meme. In the ACM Code of Ethics, section 1.6 talks about respecting the privacy of others (ACM). If someone consents to being used in a meme, then their privacy would be in no way invaded, thus abiding by the ACM Code of Ethics. Gaining this consent could solve many issues with someone's image being used in a meme.

When using someone else for a meme, the person creating the meme should certainly know the person that is being used. If you use somebody random in a meme, you likely do not

care about their well-being and how they feel about being used in a meme. By having a personal relation to someone being used in a meme, it is unlikely that the meme is being made with malicious intent. In terms of slander, it goes back to the consent of the person being used in the meme. If they are fine with being slandered and have no issue with it, then I do not see an issue with the creation of the meme. However, if they do not consent to the meme and there is slander involved, then this could be considered bullying. Section 2.8 of the IEEE Code of Ethics states “to not engage in harassment of any kind, including sexual harassment or bullying behavior” (IEEE). Slandering somebody without their consent would be a direct violation of the IEEE Code of Ethics. Once again, consent can solve this issue.

There should definitely be some guidelines that creators should follow when creating a meme. The number one guideline should be the golden rule as seen in the Bible. Luke 6:31 states, “Do to others as you would have them to do you” (NIV Bible). If someone creating a meme asks themselves how they would feel if the meme was created about them, they could think it over and not release the meme if they view it as hurtful. Another guideline should be that the creator pays the person being used in the meme. If they are using their image and profiting from it, then the person in the meme deserves some of the money as well. After all, the meme would not be possible without them. The last guideline should be, of course, that the person in the meme must consent to being used.

The issue with memes destroying somebody’s life can be solved quite simply by getting their consent. Some people will not care if they are a meme while others want no part in it. However, if someone is being used in a meme, they should be compensated by the creator with money. We want to ensure that the internet is a fun and safe place for everybody. When in doubt, one should follow the golden rule found in the Bible; treat others the way you wish to be treated.

References

ACM. “ACM Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct.” Association for Computing Machinery, Association for Computing Machinery, 22 June 2018, www.acm.org/code-of-ethics

IEEE. “IEEE Code of Ethics.” Ieee.org, IEEE, June 2020, www.ieee.org/about/corporate/governance/p7-8.html.

The NIV Bible.