

Recall value of Memes Used as a Tool of Promotion

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Abstract

Internet memes have gained prominence. Memes are a medium that communicate humor and satire. This research paper analyses how memes on social media platforms are used to invoke reactions in media consumers which generate and add to the viral factor of a meme. The research also aims to establish whether memes are a means of promotion or not. Also the research aims to establish the recall value of the memes amongst the responders. The tool of data collection for the purpose of the study is Questionnaire. The sampling is kept purposive. The questionnaire is distributed amongst a targeted responders and the data from each and every question is interpreted and further analyzed. Various conclusions are derived at the end of the study which are discussed in the last chapter but chiefly it can be stated that; the research concludes that memes can be used as an effective tool of promotion as per the current trend of Bollywood memes on social media platforms, especially Instagram where memes are most frequently seen by the media consumers. Also there exists a good recall value of the memes and a behavior of a media consumer is established, when coming across the memes, through the responses garnered from the questionnaire.

Keywords: *Internet meme, Social Media, Bollywood Meme, Recall, Promotion, Behavior*

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1. Introduction

Memes spread extremely rapidly because of the nature of both the internet and the meme. The internet is communal and interconnected by design, which allows us to find even the most obscure memes through search engines. The meme is crafted in a way that's easy to digest and instantly obvious. As opposed to books or movies, they take only a few seconds to understand and just a click to share with millions of people at once.

A meme is an idea, behavior, style, or structure that spreads from one person to another within a given culture (Dawkins, 1976). The concept of 'memes' was introduced in the book 'The Selfish Gene, (1976) by Richard Dawkins, a pioneer in the study of 'memetics'. The term meme comes from the Greek word 'mimeme' which means 'to imitate'(Dawkins, 1989). Dawkins mentions that memes are a small part of our culture. This spreads from one person to another by imitation or copying. These memes are thus an important component while media from a political science perspective. Memes have become new form of civic participation too. This concept then became a part of the popular culture. With the advent of internet and digital technologies, the term 'Internet Meme' gained popularity.

Internet meme is considered as a medium of promotion which can reach wider audience in a short span of time. The history of meme dates back to the time when emoticons were developed. The sideways smiley face which was created using punctuation marks by Scott E. Fahlman in 1982 was the first emoticon that was used in online communication. Fahlman mentioned that emoticons were required in online mode of communication as they help in understanding humor or sarcasm used in the language.

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Memes today are known mostly for their existence on the internet. There is a wide spectrum of what a meme is. A Meme, a snapshot of a picture that has a caption on it, which is the proper name that has become the vernacular for this type of meme. The Meme that is being captioned is usually centered on a specific trend or central idea. Then there are other memes

which for the case of this is anything else relating to popular internet videos, posts, jokes, or trends that are happening. Successful memes will go on to cross cultures and live on while unsuccessful memes will become extinct.

2. Scope of the study

Memes are mediums that communicate information through humor and satire. Today, internet memes have become a part of communicating humor in different forms through memes.

This research especially focuses on the Bollywood memes with special reference to the film “Sui Dhaga” to understand the trend of memes based on Bollywood film and to study if such memes can be used as a promotional strategy on social media platforms.

A typical Internet meme is presented below:

Figure 1: Typical Internet Meme



Source: Google Images

3. Objectives of the study

- a. To find out whether memes can be used as a tool for the promotion of Bollywood movies
- b. To understand the initial behavior of digital consumers when they come across movie based memes.
- c. To find the recall value of the memes.

4. Review of Literature

4.1 Memes as a Phenomenon

In the paper “Insights into internet memes”, in 2011 Christian Bauckhage states how Memes, especially the internet memes have evolved as a phenomenon that rapidly gained popularity all over the Internet. Frequently, changes or spoofs add to the original idea hence transforming it into a phenomenon that goes beyond the social and cultural boundaries. It is a common assumption that Internet memes spread virally but scientific evidence to support this assumption is hardly to be found. In this paper 150 famous Internet memes are addressed and analyzed on the basis of temporal dynamics and infectious properties. Analysis was based on time series that were collected from Google Insights, Delicious, Digg, and StumbleUpon. From this data distinct interests in the corresponding communities were identified. Among other results, we saw that users of the Digg social news service predominantly react to recent memes and users of the StumbleUpon recommendation engine came out to be more interested in sophisticated memes. The analysis is based on time series data that were collected from Google Insights, Delicious, Digg, and StumbleUpon. Mathematical equational models are used to give account of the growth and decline of memes. Through this research it is found that mathematical models and equations with constant parameters give a good account of the growth and decline patterns of memes yet lack the flexibility to characterize short-lived bursts of meme related activity. It is concluded that the majority of currently famous internet memes spreads through homogenous communities and social networks rather than through the Internet at large.

4.2 Affect and Effect of Memes

Heidi E. Huntington through his research paper “The Affect and Effect of internet Memes: Assessing perceptions and influence of online user-generated political discourse” helps in understanding that light-hearted and emotion evoking content like satire on politics or entertainment counts in terms of how people participate in and perceive politics. Clearly the boundaries distinguishing media content types, as well as media producers and consumers, are blurring. Internet memes have dual functions as user generated daily discourse and as consumable, user-generated media content. By using memes as a tool to explore these blurred areas, the study examined the implications for political events resulting from viewing these forms of user-generated content.

4.3 Memes in Digital World

Limor Shifman in the paper “Memes in a Digital World: Reconciling with a conceptual troublemaker” explores the concept of “meme” in relation to digital media. The Internet turned the spread of memes into a highly visible practice, and the term has become an integral part of the internet users. In the paper, the memes are studied 3 memetic dimensions: content, form, and stance. Three features ascribed to the concept of meme were highlighted in the paper, especially useful for exploring digital culture: firstly, Memes disseminate at the micro level but take the form of macro structure of society; they reproduce by numerous means of imitations that’s one of the peculiar feature of “participatory culture” and also they follow the rule of competitive selection. It is suggested in this paper to define memes as complex yet unique form having three dimensions: content, form, and stance. When analyzing the spread of memes, they should be examined as trinities rather than as unified entities: The acceptance or rejection of each dimension should be taken in to account separately. The writer concludes by saying that the meme is necessary to be studied for studying Internet and digital culture. Behavior of Memes is not novel, but its scale, scope, and global visibility in contemporary digital environments are unparalleled

Ashley Dainis in the paper “Keep Calm and Study Memes” used conceptual blending theory to show that “Keep Calm and Carry On” meme is altered in predictable patterns. Based on this analysis the researcher conducted the survey seeking to answer: 1. How do the dimensions of the taxonomy work together in order to create humor and understanding? 2. What is the minimal number of changes that can be made to a parody while still allowing it to make sense? 3. Does how well a person “gets” an internet meme predict humor ratings?.

The results indicated that people’s ratings of funniness are highly dependent on whether or not the person feels they have understood or “gotten” the meme. Beyond this, the results varied widely between the memes studied and tended to fall into six distinct categories based on whether or not the participants “got” the meme.

4.4 Memes and Humor, Attention and Virality

Tabea Scheel in the paper Definitions, Theories, and Measurement of Humour discusses and provides an overview of conceptualizations of humor, the most prominent theories, and theories that may be a useful foundation for research on humor at work. Definitions of humor are manifold, ranging from a communicative activity with positive emotional reactions in perceivers to an individual trait (e.g., sense of humor, cheerfulness). Humor is seen as

multidimensional and includes the abilities to produce, recognize, and appreciate humor and to use humor as a coping strategy. The three most prominent humor theories are the superiority, incongruity, and arousal-relief theories. Three different theoretical approaches for the explanation of humor are mainly used, that is, incongruity, superiority, and arousal. This paper helped in identifying distinctive type of humor in different memes.

One of the articles in the “Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media” named “Networked Cultural Diffusion and Creation on Youtube: An Analysis of Youtube Memes” discusses Memes represent a new concept in cultural diffusion. Web 2.0-based cultural diffusion underlies two components: virality and memes. Although virality is a direct gauge of the popularity of certain cultural content, with the platform’s participatory nature, cultural diffusion has come to involve not only the dissemination of the original cultural object but also the user-initiated creation of new cultural symbols. and ideas centered on the original object. Therefore, memes underlie a new value creation process in that they add new meanings to the original culture. An examination of memes requires scholars to look beyond a single cultural object and analyze the derived cultural ecosystem as a whole. Such a systematic perspective is supported by the use of content and network analysis methods. This study reveals the content of various memetic creations as well as their salience and influence based on structural connections in networks of memetic videos. The study first maps and visualizes a cultural ecosystem and shows the salience of its various genres of memetic videos by the frequency of their appearance. Then the study explores the connections between various parts of the ecosystem for a better understanding of how various modes of cultural creation and user participation are integrated by mutual audience attention and actions. Third, the study takes a longitudinal approach to examine the change in salience and connections during a 3-month period of cultural diffusion. The results provide some important insights

First, the viral GS video sparked a sizable amount of user creativity manifested in different forms of user-generated content created. User-driven cultural creation was the most prominent type of GS-inspired video. The two most prominent types pointed to two forms of participation: digital creation and physical acting. The former was exemplified by remix videos, whereas the latter, by clips of viewers dancing. A physical cultural imitation is arguably an extension of a digital culture to some physical reality. In addition, this imitation may influence popular culture offline. From a theoretical perspective, Shoham, Arora, and Al-Busaidi (2013) introduced three types of engagement on YouTube: passive engagement reflected in viewing and video channel subscription, active engagement reflected in

commenting, and interactive engagement illustrated by interacting with other commenters. This typology can be extended to include physical imitations as a separate form of engagement representing a higher level of participation. Noteworthy is that cultural creation (through parodies, cover songs, and dancing) may take more time to emerge than simply cultural critiques. This may be because producing cultural critiques is less likely to require technical skills and cognitive input. Overall, various types of videos identified in the study demonstrate the memetic value of the cultural remix and recreation enabled by average users. In addition, they show the constant shifting of the importance of various memetic elements. Second, different modes of cultural imitation and recreation may draw disproportional levels of audience attention and engagement. On the one hand, remix and imitation videos (dance videos) as a whole drew the largest number of participants, but audience attention and actions for this type of video were not equally distributed across individual videos. This implies that a small set of videos in the category drew more mutual attention than others. Sporadic user responses to such videos raise the question of the influence of GS-inspired memetic videos. Although there was ample memetic production, the majority of memetic creations were weak because they failed to draw attention from engaged viewers who evaluated more than one memetic creation. Therefore, memes remained largely inspired and dominated by original cultural symbols and a minority of outstanding memetic creations. By contrast, reaction videos sparked a large number of cross-comments and substantial mutual attention, possibly because the content of reaction videos was controversial and thus provoked collective reactions from the audience. This pattern is not surprising in that reaction videos generally conveyed opinions. Taken together, these patterns imply that opinion-laden cultural critiques draw more concentrated audience attention than neutral cultural imitation and remixing. However, it should be noted that this high level of collective commenting by users in reaction videos could not be sustained because the influence of these videos diminished over time, as indicated by the density and total number of ties in the genre. This may be because viewers' interest in the cultural phenomenon of the GS video wore off, resulting in fewer reaction videos being produced. Accompanying reduced production, viewers' opinions on the video were not as divided as they were immediately after the release of the GS video. This implies the gradual acceptance to a new cultural trend. Also noteworthy is that there were many subcomponents in video categories underlying cultural imitation and remixing. This implies that there were various nuanced thematic differences within the same category. However, the number of subcomponents decreased, showing that these nuanced differences gradually dissipated as viewers became more accustomed to the culture shown in the GS video. Overall, the pattern

illustrates that various memetic components played different roles in memetic cultural creation and that their importance and influence varied over time. Third, in terms of the source-authority-hub distinction, the role of authority figures, namely the traditional mass media, continued to be prominent in the memetic cultural ecosystem. This is illustrated by the central position of mass media content. This central position indicates two things: mass media videos were extensively linked to other videos because they were reviewed and commented on by a group of engaged viewers involved not only in one-time consumption but in the continuous consumption and evaluation of a variety of similar content. Videos with high betweenness centrality drew engagement from a group of audience members who reviewed and commented on various types of videos. Videos by authority figures were prominent in the early stages of diffusion, whereas user-generated content grew to prominence afterward. This indicates that established media organizations facilitated the fame of the original video, sparking user creativity in later stages.

5. Methodology

5.1 Design of Research

The research is descriptive in design.

The population chosen for this study encompasses the students of two Government universities of Delhi state i.e. Delhi University and GGSIP University. Survey through a web based questionnaire is used for the purpose of study. The study involves statistical surveying which makes the research exploratory in nature. The data is collected through the direct responses in the questionnaire by the respondents. Purposive Sampling is done.

Limitations in the study: The selection of sample size is based upon the objectives of the study and also on financial constraints, time period of the study and on the basis of average time individuals depend on social media.

Tool of data collection: Questionnaire

The questionnaire has a total of 9 questions. It has both textual and visual content, i.e. with texts memes which are used as examples, and is used to serve the purpose of study so that the data can be quantified easily without any discrepancies in the result. Human involvement while answering a questionnaire is minimum which increases the chances of reliability and

validity of data. Since the researcher is not present, while the questionnaire is being answered, both Participant Bias and Researcher Bias is checked.

Attributes of Sample:

Sample Size: 100

Age group: 18-30 years

The age group is chosen as according to a recent digital report by Reuters Institute, India Digital News Report published in early January 2019, youngsters, also known as digital natives are found to be spending hours on the internet. This fact has helped in the completion of the above stated objective (and adds to the reason of selecting the method of purposive sampling)

Questionnaire was used as the data collection tool.

Following memes are the 5 most trending memes from the Instagram. They are taken from Instagram because in the previous study it was found out that it is the social media platform Instagram on which the memes are seen the most by the media users.

Figure 2 : Trending Meme Example 1



Source: Google Images

Figure 3 : Trending Meme Example 2

Saying goodbye to your crush
on the last day of college



Source: Google Images

Figure 4 : Trending Meme Example 3



Source: Google Images

Figure 5: Trending Meme Example 4



Source: Google Images

Figure 3 : Trending Meme Example 5



Source: Google Images

6. Data Analysis

6.1 Summary

The results from the responses of the questionnaire can be summarized as:

Our 100 respondents were of the age group of 18-30 years with the majority of being 22 and 23 years of age which were 22 and 24% respectively. 80% of them were graduates. Out of

100 responses, 94% of the responses were affirming they could relate to the meme. This implies immense recall value of the memes.

84% of the participants agreed on seeing more of similar memes based on the same film on social media. This indicates the trend of movie based memes is currently active on social media platforms. As established from the previous research that the memes are most visible on the social media platform Instagram followed by Facebook. The same trend is seen on both of these platforms. 78% of the media consumers also saw, recently the memes which were borrowed from other films as well.

Majority admitted the frequency of seeing these memes was, every day and often, before the release of the film. It is indicative of the fact that social media is actively used to disseminate memes in order to create a wide outreach. The character and the scene used in the meme did create an intrigue in the audience which becomes an appeal for the film as shown by the responses that around 52% of the audience felt curious about the movie.

The memes do elicit some response from people as 68% of the respondents did either like, tagged a friend, and shared the meme. All of the responses help us understand the level of involvement with the ongoing trends on social media, and also, these responses do generate and add to the virality of a meme. The responses also suggest that the majority of people concur that the memes can be used as a tool for movie promotion.

The time when these memes first surfaced on the social media platforms was September 2018. This happened before the release of the film, “Sui Dhaga” and is still in the memory of audiences, making it an even more effective tool of creating a buzz and capturing public attention. Further, we see, that how these memes lead to priming in memory of the audiences, that one meme, starts a cycle of recall.

7. Conclusions

7.1 Conclusions

The following conclusions can be established from the study

A good number of the respondents came across one or more memes and recalled them, related to the movie, they also were able to recall the movie. A sizable portion does react to memes, creating or adding to the virality of the memes. Also more than half the sample believed that memes are or can be good tool for movie promotion using the social media platforms.

- a. The memes have strong terms of recall and have created a familiarity with all the memes based on the film.
- b. High circulation of these memes on social media just when the release of the film was around the corner indicates the virality of memes just before the release of the film.
- c. These memes do invoke a reaction to them in various forms such as likes, share and tags along with developing the curiosity as well.
- d. Due to high outreach and easy accessibility on various social media platforms the memes the responders (around 3/4ths) do agree that the memes on social media are a tool for movie promotion.

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