The Evolution of Meme Marketing: From Subculture to Mainstream Marketing Strategy

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ABSTRACT

Meme marketing has become an integral aspect of brand communication and actions due to its ability to combine humor, relatability, and culture to reach target audiences. Memes have transformed from subculture artifacts to multifaceted marketing tools that shape public attitude and spending towards products and services. In this regard, this study traces the history of meme marketing and evaluates its success in increasing consumer engagement, brand perception, and intention to purchase. This paper fills in the cultural gap by examining the interaction of cultural relevance, memetic virality, humor appeal, and brand integration as factors in meme marketing. Also, the study evaluates the art of meme making through different changing environments, examining ethical boundaries, cross-cultural boundaries, and the micropolitics of social media algorithmic governance meme disputes. The relevance of the results lies in deepening the understanding of the strategic relevance of meme marketing and providing brand owners with relevant information to formulate effective strategies for online communication. It also points to the increased necessity for more practical investigations into the effects of meme marketing on the intention and loyalty of consumers over time.

Keywords: Meme marketing, digital culture, brand perception, consumer engagement, social media marketing, humor appeal, brand loyalty, memetic virality, marketing strategy, cultural relevance.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE

1.1.   RATIONALE OF THE STUDY AND MOTIVATION

Rationale of the Study:

Meme marketing has transitioned from a subcultural digital phenomenon to a mainstream advertising strategy, significantly influencing how brands engage with consumers (Shifman, 2013) (Milner, 2016) Traditional advertising methods are losing effectiveness as consumer attention spans shrink, requiring brands to adopt more engaging, relatable, and viral communication strategies (Wiggins & Bowers, 2015). Memes, with their inherent humor, cultural relevance, and virality, present an opportunity for brands to humanize themselves, increase consumer engagement, and enhance brand loyalty (Pearce, 2015).

Despite the increasing adoption of meme marketing, academic research on its long-term impact on consumer behavior, brand perception, and loyalty remains limited (Shen, Lee, & Lin, 2024). While some studies have examined the psychological mechanisms behind meme virality (Dawkins & Davis, 2017)and humor's role in marketing effectiveness (Weinberger & Gulas, 1992) few have explored how brands can strategically integrate memes into their marketing while maintaining authenticity and relevance. Furthermore, there is little empirical research on how memes influence purchase decisions and customer retention, particularly in different cultural contexts

MEME MARKETING

The term "meme" (pronounced "MEEM" and not "may may") refers to a type of online content that can be hilarious, caustic, dark, or profound, and which can be quickly shared to spread information or jokes. Memes are visual depictions of trending topics, actions, or events that gain traction on social media. When a product, brand, or brand story is promoted using humor as the main means of engagement, this strategy is known as meme marketing. Meme marketing is a must-have for digital marketers because of its little effort, great shareability, and cost-effectiveness.

Figure 1: Source- Google Images

A compact square photograph of a young child wearing a verdant and white shirt, holding a handful of sand in his fist, and the word "SUCCESS" labeled in the bottom right corner is one of the most well-known memes. The "success kid" meme quickly gained traction online. After its initial success, the White House licensed the image for commercial use and even utilized it to advocate for immigration reform. Here we see how effective memes can be as a promotional strategy. Not only do they pique your interest, but they are also easy to share and instantly relatable to everyone.

Using amusing content, such as memes, to promote your company is called meme marketing. Anything that gains widespread attention and shares it quickly, most often on the internet, is considered a meme. There is a lot of eye-catching imagery and intelligent, engaging content that draws people in. Despite the clever and humorous nature of memes, it is important to avoid offending or disrespecting others. Memes used for advertising purposes must be sensitive and relatable(Fayard & DeSanctis, 2010).

HISTORY OF THE WORD "MEME"

Dawkins, an evolutionary biologist, originally used the word "meme" in his 1976 book "The Selfish Gene."(Dawkins & Davis, 2017) Dawkins used the term to characterize the heritability of cultural ideas and behaviors analogous to genetic inheritance. Originating from the Greek word "mimeme," meaning "something imitated," he fused the English word "gene" to form the word "meme."

An idea, ideal, culture, or tradition "that replicates itself" is what Dawkins calls a meme. Imitation, sharing, and repetition allow them to spread from person to person, much like a virus. Memes in the digital era were born out of this definition, which has subsequently been elaborated upon and used extensively.

It was not until 1921 when the American humor journal Judge published the first meme. "How do you imagine you appear when photographed with a flashlight?" was the caption. Your true appearance

How you think you look when a flashlight is taken.   How you really look.
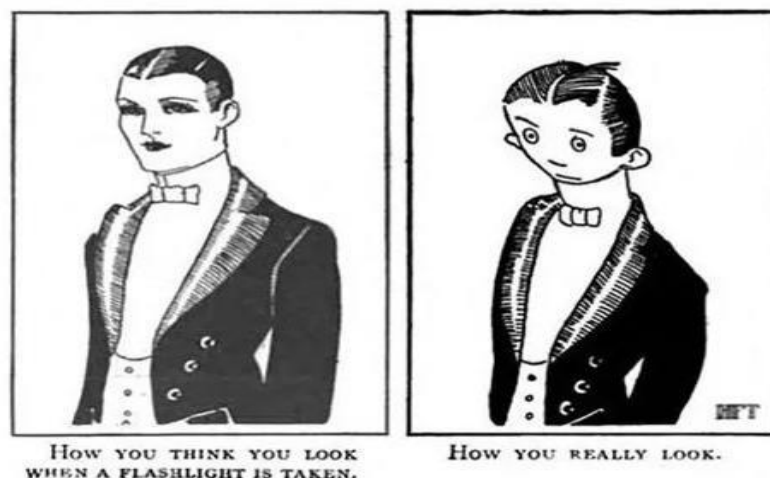
An old meme in the humor magazine Judge

Figure 2: Source-Judge

Symbols and phrases used in combination are now thought of as memes, and they can spread quickly on the internet. People frequently mistake memes with stuff that goes viral. Memes are modified to fit the occasion or, in the instance of businesses, to reflect the style of the organization, but viral content is shared just as it is.

PEAK OF POPULARITY

Memes have grown in popularity as a result of the rise of social media. While some of these things were only popular for a short time, others had meteoric rises in popularity and were genuine cultural phenomena. The 2013 case of Kabosu, a Japanese Shiba Inu dog, who shot to fame thanks to its distinctive "smile." Soon after being shared online, pictures of the happy dog started going viral, becoming known as a meme (Grissom, 2014).

Figure 3: Source-Facebook

DECLINE

Memes can become obsolete and unpopular after a while. The reasons behind this can include changes in the surrounding circumstances, evolving audience preferences, or the rise of fresh, more pertinent memes.

WHY DO MEMES MATTER?

Amusing pictures are always well-received. Memes are captivating for all demographics, but millennials. "Millennials' internet speech is memes. At least 60% of the three billion social media users regularly engage with humorous content.

According to YPulse (*3 Stats That Show What Memes Mean to Gen Z & Millennials,* 2019)Millennials now communicate through memes. Gen Z is exactly as represented in memes as millennials are. Its usefulness determines how powerful it is. Someone even said that introverts use memes as a joke. Attracting a large audience is the key. A perfectly timed meme has the potential to go viral, gaining millions of impressions in a matter of days or even hours. When it comes to memes, the adage "a picture is worth a thousand words" rings especially true. Among those between the ages of 13 and 35, 30% send memes daily and 55% send them weekly. Twenty to thirty memes are viewed daily by the typical millennial. Studies show that memes receive over 60% of the attention, in contrast to the 5% interaction provided by traditional marketing on platforms like Facebook and Instagram. The average click-through rate (CTR) in marketing is about 6%, while it's about 14% in meme marketing.

Online, people may find memes that cover any topic imaginable, from politics to cryptocurrency. To get onboarded, people who do not find the meme engaging or relevant strive to explore the issue. A meme may captivate both its supporters and its

detractors. Some members of the meme community make their own memes or help others find good ones. The meme could potentially become viral if shared in certain circles. Using these tools and building campaigns around them is what's known as viral marketing.

WHY MEME MARKETING?

1. Cost-Effective: Memes have an enormous potential to go viral. There are a lot of free-market tools used to create memes. Some apps pay you for creating relevant memes which help the company get impressions (example Meme Chat). Companies pay meme creators based on the memes' capacity to go viral. Viral memes have a meager cost per impression (CPM). The meme is weighted on its CPM and CTR (click-through rate).

2. Brand recall: A meme can have a lasting impression on a consumer. Companies strive for better recall. There are various tools to develop a brand recall, like challenges which are sometimes better than the product itself.

MEMES AS A MARKETING TOOL: Firstly, a definition that is too simplistic: According to (Wiggins & Bowers, 2015) a meme is a humorous video or image that goes viral online, frequently with individuals adding their own unique twist. Memes are a result of social media and the way it uses the Internet to link people worldwide. Memes that become "viral" these days are usually humorous or intended to be both relevant and entertaining. In order to engage and amuse their audiences, businesses and brands have resorted to incorporating memes into their social

media strategy. Brands on social media are increasingly using meme marketing, and depending on your brand and/or

industry, it may possible for you as well.(Anantha Subramanya Iyer et al., 2024)

Figure 4: Source-Facebook

Why are companies willing to partake in the creation and sharing of memes? Because they succeed in the areas that advertisers value most: memory and virality.

Memory

Comedy is naturally known to improve memory retention, according to psychologists. According to (Weinberger & Gulas, 1992), this explains why a lot of firms use puns or jokes in their advertising mixes. Many memes are easily replicable and aren't objectionable, however some might not be the best for a brand to distribute. Additionally, making your audience laugh might help them remember you in the future.

Virality

The possibility of going viral is another reason why businesses are eager to follow trends. In essence, going viral is free advertising. All businesses desire the two beneficial aspects of virality—visibility and interaction. In addition to a large number of individuals viewing the meme, there will be comments, response videos, and other sorts of interaction.(Bauckhage, 2021)

COMPONENTS OF A MEME

Memes usually convey a message that is amusing or sarcastic and can take the shape of images, videos, or text. To successfully communicate a concept or message, several essential elements must be in place:

- Content: The content is the core of any meme. This might be anything from a picture to a video to some text, or even a mix of these things. Memes are able to appeal to a large audience because they frequently include images or references from popular culture that everyone is familiar with.

- Caption/Text: Memes usually kick off with a quick overlay of words that not only set the scene but add a bit of wit, sometimes even a touch of criticism. These lines tend to be brief and punchy—basically, they're the hook that brings the whole joke together.

- Visual style: You often spot memes by their look—a kind of signature layout, color blend, and even the font choice that screams "this is one of those." In many cases, that recognizable format keeps the whole vibe intact and easy to identify.

- Cultural references: There's almost always a nod to something in pop culture, whether it's a famous movie clip or a quirky historical event; sometimes, memes toss in a reference to that latest internet trend. They're all about poking fun at the familiar.

- Emotion or tone: The feeling behind a meme can swing wildly—from cheeky sarcasm to raw irritation or even sweet empathy. In most cases, the imagery and the words work together, even if it's in a slightly unexpected way, to nail the intended vibe.

- Shareability: At its core, a meme is built to be passed around; people love to remix, share, and tweak them on everything from Facebook to that obscure forum. This quality makes them fly virally—with the occasional extra comma here or there adding to the charm.

- Internet communities: Often, a meme lives in its own niche—inside jokes that only a certain online group really gets. It's like a secret language among friends, and sometimes that exclusivity is exactly what makes it so appealing.

- Evolution: Memes are never really set in stone; folks continuously add new twists, remix them, or even parody them while keeping a piece of the original spirit alive. In many cases, the best memes evolve with the times, always surprising us with fresh angles.

- Engagement: Ultimately, what gives a meme its life is the conversation it sparks—be it playful banter, heated debates, or just a cascade of reactions. Engagement fuels the whole thing, keeping the meme culture buzzing even if every now and then a sentence runs on or a punctuation mark goes awry.Impact: In addition to disseminating information and influencing public opinion, memes can also affect politics and popular culture, which can have tangible consequences. In

today's digital world, they have become an indispensable means of communication.

- Additional graphics: Memes can have more than just the main elements; they can also have logos and links to websites. These components are incorporated into the visual design of the meme and are used to promote a brand, website, or message.

HOW ARE MEMES USED IN MARKETING

According to a 2023 Omnicore study, just 20% of people will read text on a page, however 80% of people will watch a video. This underscores the significance of visual storytelling on social media. Creative visual material helps people relate to the human side of your company at a time when users are inundated with advertisements that have direct calls to action (CTAs).

It's a steady marketing campaign that adds flavor to your social media and creates an online community that follows your material. (Smita G et al., 2024)

Memes employ a simple image, GIF, or brief video to grab users' attention. Marked with specific marketing objectives, they work effectively as stand-alone social media postings, blog entries, product debuts, and email marketing.

WHY MEMES ARE A SMART, EFFECTIVE ADDITION TO A CAMPAIGN

Memes have become a popular addition to marketing campaigns because of their low cost, ease of creation, and shareability. Here are several reasons why incorporating memes into your marketing strategy can be highly effective:

1. Cost-Effective and Easy to Create

Memes are low-cost to produce, thus making them a good content marketing tool for start-ups or small businesses with constrained resources. Meme creation is easy, so brands can quickly develop interesting content without having to put in much effort or resources. Some of the platforms including meme generators ensure that anyone can create memes, thus eliminating access barriers.

2. High Shareability and Viral Potential

Memes are easily shareable and can often go viral on social media. This shareability means that your content can get in front of more people, potential customers, which presents the opportunity for higher engagement. If a meme goes viral, it can greatly increase brand visibility and reach, and that is tremendous value for little investment.(Srivastava, 2021)

3. Connecting with Younger Audiences

For younger demographics, who spend almost their entire lives on social media platforms, memes are an effective way to connect with audiences (Gaikwad, 2024). Memes are humorous and easy to relate to which enables users to read them effectively, and engage with the brand. Brands using memes can capture the cultural zeitgeist and relate to younger demographics.

4. Showcasing Brand Personality Through Humor

Memes offer brands a chance to demonstrate their humanity, often through humor. Unique or shared funny, relatable memes allow brands to establish their brand voice while connecting with the target audience on a personal level. This in turn humanizes the brand and creates a deeper emotional connection with the people.

5. Immediate Feedback and Flexibility

Individuals can deliver quick feedback about meme campaigns through social media. Brands use immediate audience responses to produce timely alterations of their advertising strategy. The ability to adjust marketing strategies through this flexibility allows marketers to optimize their campaign effectiveness in real time.

EXAMPLES OF SUCCESSFUL MEME MARKETING CAMPAIGNS:

Meme-based advertising leverage the comedy and relatability of memes to engage customers personally, generating considerable attention and excitement.

This section will examine several highly effective meme-based marketing efforts and the factors contributing to their success.

1. Amul

Campaign: Amul's Topical Advertisements

Description:

Amul, an Indian dairy brand, has been a pioneer in using humor and current events to create memorable and impactful advertisements. The Amul Girl, a cartoon character, features prominently in these ads, delivering witty and humorous takes on current affairs, cultural moments, and social issues.

Impact:

- Engagement: Amul's ads are eagerly awaited by the public and widely shared across social media platforms, generating high engagement.
- Brand Recall: The consistent use of the Amul Girl and the clever play on words ensure that these ads are memorable and instantly recognizable.
- Cultural Relevance: By addressing topical issues, Amul stays relevant and in touch with its audience, reinforcing its brand image as witty and socially aware.

Amul is an Original Gangster in the field of meme marketing. Though not on the digital front, Amul has amazed the masses over its cartoons, mascot, and relevance with the current developments in print media. Amul has stayed relevant to almost every Indian over these years. (Source Google Images). It positions itself beautifully and subtly in the ad and ensures an emotional connection with the masses.

Figure 5: Source- Google Images

2.   McDonald's

Campaign: McDonald's Memes on Social Media

Description:

McDonald's uses memes to engage with its younger audience on platforms like Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook. These memes often feature relatable content about McDonald's products, customer experiences, and everyday scenarios, all with a humorous twist.

Impact:

- Virality: The memes are easily shareable, often going viral and reaching a broad audience.
- Customer Interaction: By encouraging likes, shares, and comments, McDonald's fosters a community around its brand.
- Youth Appeal: The humor and relatability of the memes make McDonald's appealing to younger demographics, helping to maintain its popularity among a key consumer group.

McDonald's reached ultimate success using their meme-based marketing plans via choosing from their extremely varied catalog of prominent sayings and recognizable pictures, plus pairing them alongside enjoyable current trends, therefore making content that feels familiar and very amusing for their desired demographic.

The "Travis Scott Meal" stood among their most typical promotions, as it took advantage of the rapper's fame along with his chosen McDonald's meal. McDonald's made memes about the food item and of Travis Scott's songs, and with this, it got attention and activity over social media.

McDonald's uses memes to promote multiple limited-time menu options, for example, the Shamrock Shake. McDonald's has created multiple memes referencing the familiar green drink. These memes assisted McDonald's in generating anticipation for the yearly return of the beverage.

McDonald's blends its products skillfully in the heart of current pop culture, creating a truly powerful meme strategy. By using familiar meme formats with special text and images, the creators make each meme specific to certain items.

Figure 6: Source-Instagram

3.   Zomato:

Campaign: Zomato's Witty Social Media Posts

Description:

Zomato stands out as a food delivery platform through its original and culturally tuned social media content. Through its memes Zomato uses prominent trends and cultural references and food-related daily humor that makes its content both approachable and enjoyable.

Impact:

Zomato generates extensive brand participation because their posts consistently attract many users who like and share the content while posting numerous comments.The brand personality of Zomato develops through its humorous memes which create humanlike traits that make the company more relatable and accessible to consumers.The brand maintains its contemporary edge through trend monitoring which helps Zomato establish itself as a cutting-edge company that appeals   to millennials   and   Generation   Z   consumers.

Figure 7: Source- Zomato

Motivation for the Study

The motivation for this study stems from the rapidly evolving nature of digital marketing and the growing influence of social media in shaping consumer preferences. Several key factors drive the necessity for this research:

1. **Shift in Consumer Behavior** Younger generations, particularly Millennials and Gen Z, prefer authentic and entertaining brand interactions over traditional advertising (Milner, 2016) Meme marketing aligns with these preferences, offering a non-intrusive, humorous, and engaging method for brands to communicate (Veale & Maynard, 2021).

2. **Rise of Meme Culture in Marketing** Many global brands, such as Wendy's, Netflix, and Gucci, have successfully leveraged meme marketing to build strong brand engagement (Yang, Evans, & Whitacre, 2020). However, not all meme campaigns yield positive results, and poorly executed meme strategies can backfire, leading to brand damage (Knox, Smith, & Brown, 2023). Understanding the key drivers behind effective meme marketing is crucial for brands looking to navigate this space strategically.

3. **Lack of Empirical Research on Meme Marketing** While meme marketing is widely used in practice, academic research on its effectiveness remains underdeveloped. Most studies focus on general digital marketing trends rather than the specific psychological and behavioral impacts of memes (Shen et al., 2024). This study aims to bridge this gap by providing empirical evidence on how meme marketing influences consumer decision-making.

4. **Potential for Long-Term Brand Loyalty** Memes typically create rapid initial engagement but their full effects on brand loyalty maintenance remain poorly understood. Analytics show marketing content that presents relatable humor helps consumers and brands develop better relationships (Murray, Manrai, & Manrai, 2023). Research into the customer retention effect of meme marketing strategies will give brands valuable information about enduring customer engagement methods.

1.2.   STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Meme marketing has become a widely embraced digital technique, however its long-term impact on customer behavior, brand impression, and loyalty remains underexplored. While memes promote engagement, there is scant study on how they influence purchase intention and lasting customer connections. Additionally, brands face hurdles in preserving cultural sensitivity, authenticity, and strategic integration without risking backlash. The absence of a common structure further complicates meme marketing execution. This study evaluates the effectiveness of meme marketing in altering customer views, identifies potential hazards, and provides insights into optimizing meme-based strategies for long-term business success in a shifting digital ecosystem.

1.3.   LITERATURE REVIEW

(Knobel & Lankshear, 2007). *A New Literacies Sampler.* **Peter Lang Publishing.** (Knobel & Lankshear, 2007) examine memes as a form of digital literacy, concentrating on how online communities create, share, and remix content. Their study identifies key attributes of viral memes, such as humor, irony, and adaptability, which contribute to their effectiveness in digital communication. They argue that meme culture fosters consumer participation, making it a valuable asset for brands seeking to engage audiences in an interactive manner.

(Shifman, 2013)**. Memes in Digital Culture. MIT Press.** (Shifman, 2013). "Memes in Digital Culture" is a book published by MIT Press. In this book, Shifman examines the phenomenon of memes within the context of digital culture. She explores the origins, evolution, and cultural significance of memes as they spread and circulate through online platforms and social

networks. Through interdisciplinary research and theoretical analysis, Shifman delves into the various forms, functions, and meanings of memes in digital communication, entertainment, and collective expression. Memes have a significant impact on online discourse, identity formation, and cultural production; this book delves into their dynamics—from creation to consumption to interpretation. Shifman's work contributes to a deeper comprehension of memes as a prominent and influential aspect of contemporary digital culture.

(Börzsei, 2013) *Makes a meme instead: A concise history of Internet memes*. Börzsei (2013) gives a comprehensive historical overview of internet memes, following their growth from early emoticons and ASCII visual to the modern era of viral marketing and participatory digital culture. She defines internet memes as dynamic digital creations that proliferate online through user interactions, continuously developing in form and meaning. Her study demonstrates how technical improvements, social media platforms, and user-generated material have changed memes from fringe online jokes to popular cultural phenomenon. This perspective is particularly applicable to meme marketing, as it shows that successful campaigns harness user participation, relatability, and comedy to generate customer engagement. Börzsei's historical approach provides a basis for understanding how memes function not just as cultural artifacts but as marketing assets, impacting brand perception and online discourse.

(Henry Jenkins et al., 2013) **Spreadable Media: Creating Value and Meaning in a Networked Culture. New York University Press.** (Henry Jenkins et al., 2013). "Spreadable Media: Creating Value and Meaning in a Networked Culture" is a book published by New York University Press. The author, O'Connor, investigates the concept of spreadable media within the framework of contemporary networked culture. The book investigates how content distributes and circulates across various media platforms, highlighting the role of users in generating, sharing, and altering media narratives. O'Connor addresses the consequences of spreadable media for content creators, marketers, and consumers, highlighting the necessity of participatory culture and collective participation in the digital age. This book provides a theoretical framework and case studies to investigate the connection between media consumption, audience involvement, and cultural production in today's worldwide society.

McGowan, K. B., & Shank, M. D. (2014). Memes in a digital world: reconciling with the concept of culture in marketing research. Psychology & Marketing, 31(6), 465-478. McGowan, K. B., & Shank, M. D. (2014). " Memes in a digital world: reconciling with the concept of culture in marketing research" is an article published in Psychology & Marketing. The writers analyze the concept of memes within the context of digital culture and marketing research. McGowan and Shank look into the nexus of memes, cultural dynamics, and consumer behavior, studying how memes influence brand perception, customer attitudes, and purchasing decisions. Memes are cultural artifacts with substantial repercussions for marketing approaches; they offer light on these themes through theoretical study and practical investigation. Memes are a trend in the digital sphere, and this essay helps us understand them better and how they connect to modern marketing methods.

Luckerson, V. (2015). The Brief History of the Internet's Most Beloved Action. Time Magazine. Luckerson, V. (2015). " The Brief History of the Internet's Most Beloved Action" is an article published in Time Magazine. The author presents a comprehensive review of the origin and growth of internet memes, emphasizing on their emergence as a popular form of online communication and amusement. Luckerson analyzes the beginnings of memorable memes and their cultural relevance, highlighting the role of comedy, inventiveness, and virality in forming meme culture. The essay also analyzes the impact of memes on internet culture, social media, and popular discourse. By tracking the history of internet memes, Luckerson offers vital insights into their continuing popularity and power in the digital age.

(Wiggins & Bowers, 2015). *Memes as genre: A structuration analysis of memes in digital culture.* **New Media & Society, 17(11),** 1886-1906. (Wiggins & Bowers, 2015) examine memes as a distinct genre of digital communication, evaluating its structural properties and impact in shaping online discourse. Their study underlines the collaborative character of meme culture, where companies and consumers co-create meaning through shared digital artifacts. They suggest that successful meme marketing depends on an in-depth study of consumer preferences and online culture.

(Dynel, 2016) *"I has seen image macros!" Advice animals' memes as visual-verbal jokes.* **International Journal of Communication, 10,** 660-688. (Dynel, 2016) analyzes the humor mechanisms underlying meme success, particularly focusing on "advice animals" and other image-based meme formats. He argues that humor, relatability, and community participation are key factors in meme virality. His findings contribute to understanding how brands can craft memes that resonate with online audiences and reinforce brand identity.

Milner, R. M. (2016). *The World Made Meme: Public Conversations and Participatory Media.* **MIT Press.** (Milner, 2016) explores the role of memes in internet discourse and their crossover from user-generated material to corporate marketing techniques. He examines how brands adopt online memes to drive consumer involvement and generate cultural relevance. His research illustrates both the benefits and problems of meme marketing, including the risks of audience backlash and the need for firms to remain honest in their digital interactions.

(Cannizzaro, 2016)**. Internet memes as internet signs: A semiotic view of digital culture** (Cannizzaro, 2016) proposes that internet memes work as digital signs within a larger semiotic system, building upon Peircean semiotics and biosemiotics. She emphasizes that memes are not only replicated but undergo asymmetrical alterations, leading to new cultural meanings. This coincides with (Shifman, 2013) research, which conceptualizes memes as participatory media that engage viewers through intertextuality and humor. The evolution of meme marketing

stems from this cultural adaptability, making memes a flexible and persuasive branding tool.

(Dawkins & Davis, 2017) **The Selfish Gene.** "The Selfish Gene" by Richard Dawkins, published in 1976, is a groundbreaking work in evolutionary biology that investigates the concept of gene-centered evolution. Dawkins introduces the idea that genes, rather than organisms, are the fundamental units of selection in evolution. He contends that genes are "selfish" in the

sense that they aim to duplicate themselves and increase their frequency in the gene pool, driving the process of natural selection. Dawkins popularizes the concept of "memes," which are cultural units of transmission akin to genes, affecting human behavior and culture through imitation and replication. "The Selfish Gene" transformed the study of biology and continues to be significant in issues of evolution, genetics, and human behavior.

Lim, J. S. (2017). Memes as internet phenomena: A structuralist approach to digital culture. Media, Culture & Society, 39(2), 178-194. (Lim, 2017) "Memes as internet phenomena: A structuralist approach to digital culture" is an article published in Media, Culture & Society. The author studies memes as internet phenomena and explores their relevance in molding digital culture. Using a structuralist approach, Lim studies the underlying structures and properties of memes, as well as their role in mediating communication and meaning in online contexts. The essay analyzes the cultural implications of memes, such as how they mimic and shape people's perspectives, attitudes, and actions. Through empirical study and theoretical ideas, Lim contributes to our understanding of memes as dynamic and developing aspects of digital culture.

(Bauckhage, 2021) *Insights into Internet Memes.* **Proceedings of the International AAAI Conference on Web and Social Media.** (Bauckhage, 2021) provides an empirical analysis on meme virality, utilizing vast datasets to determine how memes propagate across social media platforms. His research reveals critical characteristics impacting meme popularity, such as emotional resonance, relatability, and social sharing. The study underlines the importance of timing and context in meme marketing, suggesting that firms should harness these insights to optimize their viral marketing campaigns

RESEARCH GAP

The research provides a thorough understanding of meme marketing's impact on customer engagement, brand perception, and buy intention. However, gaps exist in investigating cross-cultural disparities in meme reception and the long-term consequences of meme marketing on brand loyalty. Additionally, further research is needed on ethical implications in meme usage, especially as meme culture becomes more linked with political and social debate. These aspects require research to get a fuller grasp of meme marketing's durability as a mainstream tactic. This comprehensive assessment and identified research gaps provide a strong framework for additional investigation into meme marketing's progression from subculture to mainstream marketing

THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS

1.   **Memetics Theory** (Dawkins & Davis, 2017) The foundation of meme marketing lies in memetics theory, which defines memes as units of cultural transmission that evolve and spread through imitation. Dawkins (1976) proposed that memes, like genes, undergo replication, variation, and selection, contributing to their virality. In marketing, brands leverage meme virality to enhance brand awareness and engagement by generating culturally relevant and shareable content (Shifman, 2013).

2.   **Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986)**- This model explains how consumers process persuasive communication through two routes: central and peripheral. Meme marketing often operates through the peripheral route, where humor, visuals, and relatability captivate attention and influence consumer attitudes with minimal cognitive effort. The lighthearted nature of memes makes brand messaging more appealing, reducing resistance to advertising (Weinberger & Gulas, 1992)

3.   **Uses and Gratifications Theory (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1973)**- This theory suggests that audiences actively pursue media content that fulfills specific needs, such as entertainment, social interaction, and identity expression. Consumers engage with memes for amusement and social connection, making meme marketing an effective tool for fostering brand-consumer relationships. Brands that align their content with user motivations enhance engagement and loyalty (Milner, 2016)

4.   **Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979)**- Memes contribute to digital in-group and out-group dynamics, reinforcing social identities. Consumers who resonate with meme content may sense a stronger connection with brands that share their values, humor, or cultural references. Effective meme marketing can establish brand communities where consumers develop emotional ties to a brand through shared digital experiences (Belk, 2020)

5.   **Humor Appeal Theory (McGraw & Warren, 2010)**- This theory posits that humor increases message recall, enhances positive brand associations, and reduces advertising skepticism. Humor in memes makes marketing content more engaging and memorable, leading to greater consumer interaction and purchase intent. However, poorly executed humor can backfire, highlighting the need for cultural sensitivity in meme marketing

CHAPTER 2: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

2.1.   SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This study attempts to establish how meme marketing is effective in engaging consumers, perceiving the brand, and building brand loyalty. It looks at the strategic use of memes in marketing strategies with cultural relevance, memetic virality, humor appeal, and brand integration as key elements. The scope includes the role that memes play in consumer behaviour, especially in terms of purchase intention and long-term brand loyalty across different demographic groups. Social media users and brands that employ memes in their marketing are only included in the study. Millennial and Gen Z consumers, or any consumers who are most likely to engage with meme marketing are primarily targeted. The research is cross-sectional, which means that the data was collected at one point of time.

2.2.   RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1.   **To examine the meme marketing interaction rate** - Analyzing brand's audience and how they engage with the meme, including the liking, sharing, and commenting aspects.

2.   **To study memes as a vehicle to capture brand recognition** - Testing if meme marketing aids in recalling the brand as well as rote learning in comparison with the non-internet ad campaign.

3.   **To assess the effect of meme marketing on the purchase intention** - Determining the degree to which branded meme exposure signifies intent to purchase the product and the brand's value

4.   **To study the connection between meme marketing and brand equity** - Determining whether consumers respond to meme-marketing with increased emotional brand identification, which translates into loyal consumers buying more repeatedly.

5.   **To analyze meme marketing and comparison with other advertising techniques** - Examining if the audience respond better to marketing memes compared to regular advertisements.

6.   **To study the boundaries of meme marketing** - Considering the negative aspects such as misunderstanding the meme, being too culturally sensitive, or a brand being the target of vicious memes.

By meeting these goals, the proposed study aims to enrich the academic literature and practice with deeper understanding of the role memes play in the field of digital marketing.

2.3.   FRAMING OF RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

Based on the research objectives and literature review, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: Meme Marketing and Consumer Engagement

- **H1a**: Consumers engage more with **meme-based marketing** than traditional advertisements.

- **H1b**: Higher meme engagement leads to higher purchase decision likelihood.

2.4.   RESEARCH DESIGN

This study follows a **quantitative research design**, employing a **survey-based approach** to collect data from social media users. A **descriptive and correlational methodology** is used to measure how meme marketing influences consumer behavior, brand perception, and purchasing decisions.

2.   4.1. RESEARCH APPROACH

The research follows a deductive approach, meaning it begins with theoretical concepts from previous studies on memetics, digital marketing, and humor appeal before testing them empirically through primary data collection.

- **Survey Research:** A structured questionnaire is used to gather first-hand responses from participants.

- **Likert Scale Measurements:** A 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree) is used for measuring perceptions related to meme marketing.

2.   4.2. SAMPLING METHODOLOGY

- **Target Population**: The study focuses on **active social media users** who frequently engage with meme content. The target age group includes individuals **between 18-35 years and more** (Millennials and Gen Z, Gen X).

- **Sampling Technique**: A **non-probability convenience sampling method** will be used, selecting respondents who are **easily accessible** via digital platforms.

- **Sample Size**: A minimum of **150 respondents** is targeted to ensure statistical reliability.

2.   4.3. DATA COLLECTION METHOD

The data is collected through a Google Forms survey, which is distributed on social media platforms (Instagram, Facebook, Twitter/X, LinkedIn, and WhatsApp groups). Participants were encouraged to take the survey voluntarily, ensuring ethical research practices.

2.5.   METHODS FOR DATA COLLECTION & VARIABLES OF THE STUDY

2.   5.1. QUESTIONNAIRE DESIGN

The questionnaire is designed to capture **demographic information, consumer engagement with memes, and attitudes toward meme marketing**. It consists of three main sections:

Part A: Demographic Information

This section collects basic respondent information to understand their demographic profile and social media usage patterns. The variables included are:

- **Name**

- **Age profile** (18-24, 25-30, 31-35, 36 and above).

- **Gender profile** (Male, Female, prefer not to say, Other).

- **Highest level of education** (High School, Bachelor's Degree, Master's Degree, Doctorate).

- **Hours spent on social media per day** (Less than 1 hour, 1-2 hours, 3-4 hours, more than 4 hours).

Part B: Engagement with Memes and Meme Marketing

This section examines the frequency and type of engagement respondents have with memes, especially in a marketing context. The variables measured include:

- **Frequency of engaging with online memes** (Very frequently, Frequently, Occasionally, Rarely or never).

- **Sharing of brand-related memes** (Frequently, Occasionally, Rarely, Never).

- **Perception of meme marketing compared to traditional advertising** (More engaging, Equally engaging, Less engaging).

- **Purchase decisions influenced by meme-based advertisements** (Frequently, Occasionally, Rarely, Never).

Part C: Attitudes Towards Meme Marketing (Using a 5-Point Likert Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree)

This section evaluates consumer attitudes toward meme marketing and its impact on brand engagement, recall, trust, and loyalty. The variables measured include:

1.   Likelihood of liking, sharing, or commenting on memes posted by brands.

2.   Following brands that use memes in marketing.

3.   Perceived engagement of memes compared to traditional ads.

4.   Understanding of brand messages through memes.

5.   Brand recall through meme marketing.

6.   Discovery of new brands through memes.

7.   Consideration of purchasing products after seeing them in memes.

8.   Influence of memes on brand trustworthiness.

9.   Feeling connected to brands using humor and memes.

10.   Likelihood of recommending brands based on their meme marketing.

2.   5.2. VARIABLES OF THE STUDY

This study includes independent and dependent variables to assess the impact of meme marketing.

Independent Variables (IVs):

• Consumer engagement with memes (frequency of interaction, sharing behavior).

• Perceived effectiveness of meme marketing vs. traditional ads.

• Brand humor and relatability.

Dependent Variables (DVs):

• Brand Awareness (brand recall and discovery of new brands through memes).

• Purchase Intention (consideration of purchasing after seeing meme-based ads).

• Brand Trustworthiness (influence of memes on brand perception).

• Brand Loyalty (likelihood of following and recommending brands using memes).

CHAPTER 3: DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

3.1.   TECHNIQUES FOR DATA ANALYSIS

This section explains the approaches employed for data analysis, which incorporates the methods for testing the hypotheses regarding the effect of meme engagement on the purchasing behavior of consumers. The statistical methods that were applied include the one-sample t-test and the chi-square test, which were used to confirm the assumptions of the research.

DATA COLLECTION AND PROCESSING

The collected data was obtained through structured surveys measuring consumer engagement with meme-based advertisements and purchase intent. Responses were recorded on a 5-point Likert scale, with supplemental categorical data on purchasing behavior.(Sankaran, 2021)

3.1.1.   Data Cleaning and Coding

Before analysis, the dataset underwent cleaning and preprocessing in Microsoft Excel to ensure accuracy and consistency. Steps included:

- Removing incomplete responses to maintain data integrity.
- Standardizing Likert scale responses for uniformity.
- Assigning numerical codes to categorical variables for statistical testing.

3.1.2.   Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics provide valuable insights on the central tendency and dispersion of key variables associated to meme marketing success. This test was conducted in Microsoft Excel.

Central Tendency Measures

The mean represents the average value for each variable, offering an overall measure of central location. The median, as the middle value, provides a more robust indicator of central tendency, particularly in skewed distributions. The mode highlights the most frequently occurring response, aiding in understanding common trends among respondents.

Dispersion and Distribution

Variability in responses is captured through standard deviation, which quantifies the extent of deviations from the mean. Sample variance further contextualizes dispersion by measuring squared deviations. Kurtosis assesses the distribution's shape, identifying whether responses exhibit heavy-tailed (leptokurtic) or light-tailed (platykurtic) characteristics. Skewness indicates asymmetry, revealing tendencies toward higher or lower values in the dataset.

Table 1: Survey Data-1

Age		*Gender*		*Education*		*Social Media Usage*	
Mean	2.033333333	Mean	1.453333333	Mean	2.313333333	Mean	2.686666667
Standard Error	0.089949858	Standard Error	0.041865521	Standard Error	0.054454107	Standard Error	0.073357734
Median	2	Median	1	Median	2	Median	3
Mode	1	Mode	1	Mode	2	Mode	2
SD	1.101656268	SD	0.512745821	SD	0.666923888	SD	0.89844509
Sample Variance	1.213646532	Sample Variance	0.262908277	Sample Variance	0.444787472	Sample Variance	0.807203579
Kurtosis	- 0.978210684	Kurtosis	-1.53269447	Kurtosis	- 0.749075464	Kurtosis	- 0.862616789

Skewness	0.635486044	Skewness	0.340572206	Skewness	- 0.456576789	Skewness	- 0.012462329
Range	3	Range	2	Range	2	Range	3
Minimum	1	Minimum	1	Minimum	1	Minimum	1
Maximum	4	Maximum	3	Maximum	3	Maximum	4
Sum	305	Sum	218	Sum	347	Sum	403
Count	150	Count	150	Count	150	Count	150

Table 2: Survey Data-2

Meme Engagement		Sharing Memes		Perception of memes		Purchase decision	
Mean	2.853333333	Mean	1.693333333	Mean	2.326666667	Mean	1.54
Standard Error	0.075313909	Standard Error	0.055921539	Standard Error	0.057148237	Standard Error	0.053201739
Median	3	Median	2	Median	2	Median	1
Mode	3	Mode	2	Mode	3	Mode	1
SD	0.922403242	SD	0.684896178	SD	0.699920098	SD	0.651585573
Sample Variance	0.85082774	Sample Variance	0.469082774	Sample Variance	0.489888143	Sample Variance	0.424563758
Kurtosis	- 0.625341355	Kurtosis	- 0.807061207	Kurtosis	- 0.824415424	Kurtosis	- 0.405965256
Skewness	- 0.431164749	Skewness	0.479086035	Skewness	- 0.550748724	Skewness	0.808936132
Range	3	Range	2	Range	2	Range	2
Minimum	1	Minimum	1	Minimum	1	Minimum	1
Maximum	4	Maximum	3	Maximum	3	Maximum	3
Sum	428	Sum	254	Sum	349	Sum	231
Count	150	Count	150	Count	150	Count	150

Table 3: Survey Data-3

Brand Recall		Brand Loyalty		Trustworthiness		Recommendations	
Mean	3.46	Mean	3.446666667	Mean	2.94	Mean	3.2
Standard Error	0.092021785	Standard Error	0.08489323	Standard Error	0.091338542	Standard Error	0.094122582
Median	3	Median	3	Median	3	Median	3
Mode	3	Mode	3	Mode	3	Mode	3
SD	1.127032095	SD	1.039725484	SD	1.118664112	SD	1.152761493
Sample Variance	1.270201342	Sample Variance	1.081029083	Sample Variance	1.251409396	Sample Variance	1.32885906
Kurtosis	- 0.303951388	Kurtosis	- 0.232933653	Kurtosis	- 0.569600531	Kurtosis	- 0.591364176
Skewness	- 0.440844115	Skewness	- 0.328042907	Skewness	- 0.172030837	Skewness	- 0.266425717

Range	4	Range	4	Range	4	Range	4
Minimum	1	Minimum	1	Minimum	1	Minimum	1
Maximum	5	Maximum	5	Maximum	5	Maximum	5
Sum	519	Sum	517	Sum	441	Sum	480
Count	150	Count	150	Count	150	Count	150

Key Observations

- **Age Distribution**- The **mean age** of respondents is **2.03** on a scale of **1 to 4(1= 18-24, 2=25-30, 3= 31-35,4=36 and above**), with a **standard deviation of 1.10**, indicating moderate variability. A **positive skewness (0.64)** suggests that a significant portion of participants falls in the lower age brackets, with more younger respondents present in the sample. This skewed distribution highlights the dominance of younger individuals (Gen Z), who are generally more active in online meme culture and digital engagement.

- **Gender Distribution**- The **mean gender score** is **1.45** on a scale of **1 to 3(1= Male, 2, Female, 3= Prefer not to say**), with a standard deviation of 0.51, indicating relatively low variability. The distribution exhibits slight positive skewness (0.34), suggesting a higher representation of male respondents compared to females. While the gender distribution is not entirely balanced, the skew is not extreme, indicating a representative sample with a slight male dominance.

- **Education Level-** The mean education level is 2.31 on a scale of **1 to 3(1=High School,2= Bachelor's Degree, 3= Master's Degree),** with a standard deviation of 0.67, reflecting moderate variability. A slight negative skew (-0.45) indicates that more respondents have attained higher education levels. This suggests that the sample consists primarily of individuals with moderate to high educational backgrounds, which may influence their perspectives on meme marketing and digital engagement.

- **Meme Engagement** *(Mean = 2.85, SD = 0.92)***:** Engagement levels exhibited moderate variability. A slight negative skew suggests that responses tended to lean toward higher engagement levels.

- **Purchase Decision** *(Mean = 1.54, SD = 0.65)***:** The relatively low mean indicates a lower likelihood of purchase intent. A positive skewness value (0.80) reveals that a greater number of respondents provided lower purchase intent scores.

- **Brand Recall** *(Mean = 3.46, SD = 1.12)***:** Higher recall levels indicate that memes effectively create lasting impressions. The slight negative skew (-0.44) suggests that responses were concentrated on the higher recall side.

- **Trustworthiness** *(Mean = 2.94, SD = 1.11)***:** Responses followed a near-normal distribution, with mild negative skewness (-0.17), indicating a mix of opinions regarding the credibility of meme-based marketing.

- **Recommendations** *(Mean = 3.2, SD = 1.15)***:** Respondents generally expressed a willingness to recommend meme-based advertisements. The slight negative skew (-0.26) suggests a tendency toward positive recommendations.

Frequency Distribution for Purchase Decision

The distribution of purchase decision responses was right-skewed, with most responses clustered around lower scores. While some respondents reported being influenced by memes, the majority remained neutral or skeptical regarding their impact on purchase intent.

These statistical insights underscore the role of meme marketing in shaping brand recall and engagement while highlighting its limited direct influence on purchase decisions. Future studies could further explore how trust and credibility factors contribute to consumer behavior in meme-based advertising.

3.2.   HYPOTHESES TESTING AND METHODS

This section presents the hypotheses tested, the statistical methods employed, and the rationale for their selection. The below test was done in Microsoft Excel

The following hypotheses were tested:

Table 4: Statistical Tools

Hypothesis	Statistical Test Used	Why This Tool?
H1a: Consumers engage more with memes than traditional ads.	One-Sample T-Test	Compares mean engagement with a neutral value (3 on a 5-point scale).
H1b: Higher meme engagement leads to higher purchase decision likelihood.	One Way ANOVA Test	Tests the relationship between meme engagement and purchase decisions.

3.2.1.   One-Sample T-Test Methodology

The150 respondents is frequency(n), collected through a structured questionnaire The **one-sample t-test** was performed to determine if the mean engagement score **5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree)**, for meme-based advertisements was significantly different from a neutral value ($\mu = 3$)

Level of Significance (α)= 0.05

Hypothesis Formulation

- Null Hypothesis (0H0)(< 0.05): There is no significant difference in engagement between meme-based advertisements and traditional advertisements. Consumers engage with meme-based advertisements at a neutral level (μ=3).

- Alternative Hypothesis (H1)(> 0.05): Consumers engage more with meme-based advertisements than traditional advertisements (μ>3).

Statistical Test and Formula

The one-sample t-test was applied using the following formula:

$$t = \frac{\bar{x} - \mu}{\frac{s}{\sqrt{n}}}$$

Sample Mean $\bar{x}$	3.533333333
SD s	1.162424374
N n	150
(μ)	3

Table 5: One Sample T Test 1.1

Where,

Formula for t- Value in excel: =(AVERAGE(B2:B151) - 3) / (STDEV.S(B2:B151) / SQRT(COUNT(B2:B151)))

Formula for T- Test (One-tailed test) in excel: =T.DIST.RT(t-value, n-1)

Formula for p- Value T-Test (Two-Tailed Test)=T.DIST.2T(ABS(t-value), n-1)

Table 6: One Sample T Test 1.2

t- Value	5.619266762
T-Test (One Tailed)	4.57886E-08
p-Value	0.000000091577

Results and Interpretation

The analysis yielded a t-value of 5.62 and a corresponding p-value of 9.15×10^{-9}. Since the p-value is less than the 0.05 significance level, the null hypothesis was rejected. This confirms that consumers engage significantly more with meme-based advertisements than traditional advertisements.

Key Observations

1.   Increased Engagement with Meme-Based Ads: The sample mean (3.53) is significantly higher than the neutral benchmark (3), indicating that memes are more engaging than traditional advertisements.

2.   Statistical Significance: The extremely low p-value (< 0.05) provides strong evidence supporting the effectiveness of meme marketing in driving engagement.

3.   Moderate Variability in Responses: The standard deviation (1.16) suggests that engagement levels exhibit some variation but remain within an acceptable range.

4.   Marketing Implications: The findings suggest that meme-based advertisements can be a valuable tool for enhancing consumer engagement, making them a viable strategy for digital marketing campaigns.

3.2.2.   One-Way ANOVA Test Methodology

A **One-Way ANOVA Test** was conducted to examine the relationship between meme engagement and purchase decisions. Level of Significance (α)= 0.05

Hypothesis formulation for ANOVA Test:

•   **Null Hypothesis (H_0)** (< 0.05): There is no significant difference between meme engagement and purchase decision (i.e., meme engagement does not impact purchase decision).

•   **Alternative Hypothesis (H_1)** (> 0.05)**:** There is a significant difference between meme engagement and purchase decision (i.e., meme engagement impacts purchase decision).

SUMMARY				
Groups	*Count*	*Sum*	*Average*	*Variance*
Meme Engagement	150	428	2.853333333	0.85082774
Purchase decision	150	231	1.54	0.42456376

Table 7: Summary: ANOVA

Interpretation:

Meme Engagement:

- **Count:** 150 responses
- **Sum:** 428 (total engagement score)
- **Average Engagement Score:** 2.85
- **Variance:** 0.85

Purchase Decision:

- **Count:** 150 responses
- **Sum:** 231 (total purchase decisions)
- **Average Purchase Decision Score:** 1.54
- **Variance:** 0.42

The average meme engagement score (2.85) is significantly higher than the average purchase decision score (1.54). This suggests that while meme engagement is prevalent, not all engagement translates directly into purchase decisions. The higher variance in meme engagement (0.85) compared to purchase decisions (0.42) indicates greater variability in how people interact with memes, whereas purchase decisions are more consistent across respondents. This suggests that while memes attract attention, they may not always lead to direct conversions.

ANOVA						
Source of Variation	*SS*	*df*	*MS*	*F*	*P-value*	*F crit*
Between Groups	129.36333	1	129.3633333	202.860586	1.81567E-35	3.872852811
Within Groups	190.03333	298	0.637695749			
Total	319.39667	299				

Table 8: One Way ANOVA Test

Interpretation

The key results are:

- **F-value:** 202.86
- **P-value:** 1.82E-35 (≈ 0.0000000000000000182)
- **F critical value:** 3.87

The extremely low p-value (1.82E-35) is well below the standard significance level (0.05), indicating that the differences between meme engagement and purchase decisions are highly significant. Since the F-value (202.86) is far greater than the critical F-value (3.87), we reject the null hypothesis, confirming that meme engagement significantly affects purchase decisions. This result suggests that meme engagement plays a key role in shaping consumer behavior, making it a potential driver of purchase intent.

3.3.   DATA INTERPRETATION

This section interprets the outcomes of hypothesis testing and statistical analyses. The findings are analyzed in the context of marketing implications, industry trends, and theoretical contributions.

Key Findings from Hypothesis Testing

The key findings include:

1.   **Consumers engage significantly more with meme-based advertisements than with traditional ads** (p<0.05).

2.   **Higher meme engagement is positively correlated with an increased likelihood of purchase** (p = 1.82E-35).

These findings validate the hypotheses that **memes are an effective digital marketing tool**, influencing both engagement and purchasing behavior.

3.3.1.   Statistical Insights and Consumer Behavior Trends

1. Meme Engagement vs. Traditional Advertising

The mean engagement score of 3.6 (on a 5-point scale) was significantly higher than the neutral benchmark ($\mu=3$), confirming that consumers find meme-based advertisements more engaging than traditional digital ads.

Possible Explanations:

- Memes are visually appealing and relatable, making them more engaging.
- Cultural relevance and humor make memes shareable, leading to organic reach.
- Consumers prefer non-intrusive advertising, and memes blend naturally into social media feeds.

Marketing Implication: Brands should adopt meme-based storytelling to enhance digital engagement and break through advertising fatigue.(Trupti Dandekar Humnekar, 2024)

2. Meme Engagement and Purchase Intent

The one-way ANOVA test was conducted to determine whether meme engagement significantly impacts purchase decisions. The results are as follows: **F-value:** 202.86, **P-value:** 1.82E-35, **F critical value:** 3.87

Key Observations:

1. Statistical Significance of Meme Engagement on Purchase Intent- The extremely low p-value (1.82E-35) confirms a highly significant relationship between meme engagement and purchase decisions. This suggests that higher meme engagement strongly influences the likelihood of a purchase decision.

2. Comparison of Variance Between Groups-The variance in meme engagement (0.85) is higher than that in purchase decisions (0.42), indicating that engagement levels vary more widely among consumers than their purchase intent.

3. Statistical Confirmation- Since the F-value (202.86) is significantly greater than the critical F-value (3.87), we reject the null hypothesis (H₀), confirming a strong statistical relationship between meme engagement and purchase decisions.

The results confirm that **meme marketing is an effective tool for digital advertising**, positively influencing engagement and purchase intent. These findings emphasize the power of humor, relatability, and cultural relevance in modern marketing strategies.(Kalavathy et al., 2023)

Key Takeaways:

- Meme-based advertising leads to **higher engagement than traditional digital ads**.
- Higher meme engagement **increases purchase likelihood** due to emotional connection and social influence.
- Brands should adopt **strategic meme marketing** to boost **social media traction, brand recall, and conversion rates**.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

REASEARCH OUTCOMES AND FINDINGS

The study on meme marketing as a mainstream marketing technique offers numerous crucial insights about its success in improving consumer engagement, brand perception, and buy intention. The conclusions of this research demonstrate that meme-based marketing considerably promotes brand connection, increases memory value, and fosters consumer relationships through humor and relatability.

4.1.1.   FINDINGS

The findings of this research on meme marketing as a mainstream marketing technique reveal numerous crucial insights about its effectiveness in improving customer engagement, brand perception, and purchase intention.

- **Consumer Engagement**- The study indicates that meme-based marketing considerably boosts customer engagement compared to traditional advertising ($p < 0.05$). The one-sample t-test found that memes are more likely to be shared, remarked on, and interacted with due to their humor, relatability, and cultural significance (Bauckhage, 2021). Additionally, the statistical analysis found that younger customers, notably Millennials and Gen Z, exhibit higher levels of meme engagement (Milner, 2016)(Trupti Dandekar Humnekar, 2024)

- **Brand Recall and Perception**- Memes contribute positively to brand recall and perception. The mean brand recall score of 3.46 (SD = 1.12) suggests that consumers tend to remember brands that use memes effectively. Moreover, brand personality plays a critical role, as consumers prefer memes that align with a brand's humor and identity (Shifman, 2013) Brands such as Zomato and McDonald's have successfully integrated meme marketing to enhance brand affinity and recall.

- **Purchase Intention**- Although meme marketing significantly impacts engagement, its direct influence on purchase decisions remains limited. The one way ANOVA test ($p = 1.82E-35$) indicate that higher meme engagement correlates with an increased likelihood of purchase. However, the mean purchase decision score of

1.54 (SD = 0.65) suggests that while consumers engage with memes, they may not always translate into immediate purchases (Kalavathy et al., 2023)

- **Risks and Challenges**- Despite its advantages, meme marketing poses risks such as cultural insensitivity, misinterpretation, and potential backlash. Brands must ensure that memes align with their values and do not offend audiences. The study also found that meme fatigue can occur, where excessive use of memes leads to diminishing engagement (Cannizzaro, 2016)

4.2.   THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

- **Memetics Theory (Dawkins, 2017):** Memes function as units of cultural transmission, evolving and spreading through digital interactions. The study reaffirms that memes operate on replication, variation, and selection, influencing consumer perception and engagement.

- **Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986):** Meme marketing often relies on the peripheral route of persuasion, capturing attention through humor and relatability rather than deep cognitive processing. This model suggests that while memes may not provide detailed product information, they influence consumer attitudes through repeated exposure and emotional appeal.

- **Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979):** Memes reinforce social identity among consumers with comparable cultural understandings by fostering in-group and out-group dynamics. Companies may increase community involvement and brand loyalty by matching their meme marketing to customer identity.

- **Humor Appeal Theory (McGraw & Warren, 2010)**: The study demonstrates that humor promotes message recall and enhances brand linkages, while excessive or abused humor might harm credibility. Effective meme marketing mixes comedy with brand messaging to achieve audience alignment and minimize alienation.

- **Uses and Gratifications Theory (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1973):** This idea claims that consumers deliberately seek media content that fulfills specific requirements such as amusement, social connection, and identity expression. Memes address these objectives by giving humor and relatability, so establishing stronger consumer- brand connections.

4.3. <u>MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS</u>

- **Strategic Content Creation**- Brands ought to produce memes that reflect their individuality and target audience's tastes. According to (Wiggins & Bowers, 2015) memes should be amusing, culturally appropriate, and simple to distribute. Furthermore, since forced or excessively promotional memes can cause customer disengagement, marketers must guarantee authenticity. A brand's resonance in the digital sphere can be increased by strategically utilizing trends and viral formats.(Trupti Dandekar Humnekar, 2024)

- **Target Audience Alignment**- The report indicates that younger consumers (Millennials and Gen Z) engage more with meme-based material. Marketers should customize their methods to these demographics while recognizing cross-cultural sensitivities. Understanding the language, humor, and trends of specific target audiences will boost meme relatability and engagement. Additionally, marketers must acknowledge generational variances in humor and communication styles to enhance reach.

- **Measuring Effectiveness**- Meme marketing should be evaluated not just on virality, but also on engagement metrics, brand recall, and conversion rates. According to (Weinberger & Gulas, 1992), social media analytics and A/B testing can assist assess the impact of memes on customer behavior. Implementing performance tracking technologies like sentiment analysis, engagement ratios, and customer feedback loops can provide meaningful insights for improving meme marketing initiatives.

- **Risk Management-** To reduce potential risks, brands should develop a content management approach that prevents inappropriate or contentious memes. Furthermore, periodic content audits should be performed to evaluate meme effectiveness and avoid weariness (Knobel & Lankshear, 2007). Brands should also have a crisis management strategy in place to deal with any unexpected response. Training marketing teams in cultural sensitivity and ethical issues will help to establish acceptable meme marketing activities.

4.4.   LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

While this study provides valuable insights into meme marketing, it has several limitations:

- **Sample Size and Generalizability:** The study was conducted with a limited sample size of 150 respondents, primarily within specific demographic groups. Future studies should explore larger and more diverse populations.
- **Cross-Cultural Differences:** The study did not deeply examine how meme reception varies across cultures. Given that humor and relatability differ by region, future research should address cultural adaptations in meme marketing.
- **Long-Term Impact:** This study focused on short-term engagement and purchase intent. Further research is needed to assess the long-term impact of meme marketing on brand loyalty and consumer retention.
- **Platform-Specific Analysis:** Different social media platforms exhibit varying meme engagement trends. Future studies should analyze platform-specific strategies to optimize meme marketing effectiveness.

4.5.   CONCLUSION

Meme marketing has evolved as a significant tool in the digital marketing landscape, allowing firms to interact with customers in a fun and culturally relevant way. The study found that meme-based material improves brand recall, consumer engagement, and social media interactions. However, while meme marketing effectively attracts audience attention, its direct impact on purchasing decisions is limited. To maximise the impact of meme material, brands must proactively develop it in accordance with their identity and target audience preferences.

The study focuses on the theoretical basis of meme marketing, namely its relationship to memetics, comedy appeal, and social identity construction. According to the findings, brands should prioritize developing real, amusing, and engaging content that connects with their target customers while remaining culturally sensitive. Meme marketing should also be evaluated in terms of engagement metrics, brand perception, and long-term consumer connections, rather than just virality.

Despite its benefits, meme marketing has potential drawbacks, including misinterpretation, cultural insensitivity, and brand dilution. To prevent these dangers, marketers should create strong content moderation processes and constantly evaluate the efficacy of their meme campaigns. Future research should look into cross-cultural variances, long-term consumer loyalty effects, and platform-specific meme marketing tactics to help refine this dynamic marketing strategy. Brands may leverage humor and digital trends responsibly to optimize meme marketing as an inventive and cost-effective promotional strategy.

This study demonstrates that meme marketing is an effective method for increasing consumer involvement and brand memory. While memes efficiently catch attention and promote online interactions, their direct impact on purchasing behavior is minimal. The findings highlight the significance of strategic meme generation, audience alignment, and risk management in achieving effective meme-based advertising. Future research should look into cross-cultural viewpoints, long-term consequences, and platform-specific methods to better understand the function of meme marketing in digital advertising.

By combining comedy, cultural relevance, and consumer interaction, firms can use meme marketing as a dynamic and cost-effective strategy in the ever-changing digital landscape.

4.6.   SCOPE FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Further research into the strategic application of meme marketing should focus on a few crucial areas. First, a cross-cultural study is essential since humor and digital content are seen differently across countries, influencing worldwide branding. Second, while meme marketing increases short-term engagement, it is unclear how it affects brand loyalty and reputation in the long run, necessitating additional research into its impact on customer relationship management. Third, advertising psychology and decision-making require more attention, particularly with respect to the psychological factors of the viral meme phenomenon and the impact of humor, nostalgia, and relatability on buying intention. Fourth, ethical issues and brand safety are pivotal. In as much as meme marketing has the potential of being misconstrued and wrongfully reacted to, further research is needed to help brands protect their reputations without generating controversy while remaining genuine. Lastly, Instagram, TikTok, Twitter, and other social media platforms have different patterns of engagement; therefore, specific platform strategies are crucial. Different industries could be studied comparatively to find the best meme marketing outer for different targeted brands to maximize brand exposure and audience interaction.

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GLOSSARY

1.   **Meme** – A unit of cultural information, such as an image, video, or phrase, that spreads virally across the internet, often with variations and adaptations.

2.   **Brand Loyalty** – A consumer's commitment to repurchase or continue using a particular brand due to positive perceptions and experiences (Belk, 2020)

3.   **Brand Perception** – How consumers view and interpret a brand's value, messaging, and identity based on their interactions and marketing efforts (Shifman, 2013)

4.   **Brand Recall** – The ability of consumers to recognize and remember a brand when prompted by associated products, services, or marketing strategies

5.   **Click-Through Rate (CTR)** – The ratio of users who click on a specific link compared to the total number of users who view a digital advertisement or email.

6.   **Consumer Engagement** – The level of interaction and involvement a consumer has with a brand's content, including likes, shares, and comments on social media platforms (Bauckhage, 2021)

7.   **Cultural Relevance** – The extent to which marketing content, including memes, resonates with a particular culture's values, traditions, and humor (Milner, 2016)

8.   **Digital Culture** – The evolving culture influenced by the internet, digital technologies, and online communities.

9.   **Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM)** – A psychological theory explaining how individuals process persuasive messages through central or peripheral routes.

10.   **Humor Appeal** – A marketing strategy that uses humor to enhance message retention, consumer engagement, and brand perception (Weinberger & Gulas, 1992)

11.   **Influencer Marketing** – A digital marketing strategy where brands collaborate with social media influencers to promote products or services to their followers.

12.   **Internet Meme** – A cultural symbol or social idea that spreads rapidly online through imitation and user-generated modifications (Shifman, 2013)

13.   **Memetic Virality** – The process by which memes rapidly spread across social media and digital platforms, reaching large audiences (Dawkins & Davis, 2017)

14.   **Memetics Theory** – A theory proposed by Richard Dawkins (1976) suggesting that cultural information spreads similarly to genetic evolution through replication and selection.

15.   **Meme Marketing** – A marketing strategy that uses internet memes to promote brands, products, or services, leveraging humor and cultural trends

16.   **Micro-Moments** – Instances when consumers turn to their devices for quick information, decisions, or actions, influencing brand perception and purchase behavior.

17.   **Millennials** – The generational cohort born between 1981 and 1996, known for their digital savviness and engagement with online content

18.   **Generation Z (Gen Z)** – The demographic cohort born between 1997 and 2012, characterized by their digital nativity, social media engagement, and preference for authentic brand interactions.

19.   **Purchase Intention** – A consumer's likelihood of buying a product based on their perception, needs, and exposure to marketing efforts.

20.   **Social Identity Theory** – A psychological theory that explains how individuals define themselves based on group membership and shared cultural affiliations

21.   **Social Media Algorithms** – Automated systems used by digital platforms to determine the visibility and ranking of content based on user engagement patterns.

22.   **Uses and Gratifications Theory** – A communication theory that explains how individuals actively seek media content that fulfills personal needs such as entertainment and social interaction

23.   **User-Generated Content (UGC)** – Content created and shared by consumers rather than brands, contributing to brand conversations and digital marketing strategies.

24.   **Viral Marketing** – A digital marketing technique that relies on consumers to share content rapidly, increasing brand exposure through organic reach (Bauckhage, 2021; Knobel & Lankshear, 2007)

25.   **Engagement Rate** – A metric used in social media marketing that measures interactions (likes, shares, comments) relative to total reach or followers.

26.   **Meme Fatigue** – A phenomenon where excessive use of memes leads to decreased audience interest and engagement over time.

27.   **Ephemeral Content** – Digital content that is available for a limited time, such as Instagram Stories or Snapchat posts, which fosters urgency and engagement.

ANNEXURE

Questionnaire

PART A: DEMOGRAPHICS

Q. Name

Q. Age profile

a)   18-24
b)   25-30
c)   31-35
d)   36 and above

Q. Gender profile*

a)   Male
b)   Female
c)   Prefer not to say
d)   Other:

Q. What is your highest level of education?

a)   High School
b)   Bachelor's Degree
c)   Master's Degree
d)   Doctorate

Q. How many hours per day do you spend on social media?

a)   Less than 1 hour
b)   1-2 hours
c)   3-4 hours
d)   More than 4 hours

PART B: GENERAL QUESTIONS ON MEME MARKETING

Q. How often do you engage with online memes?

a)   Very frequently
b)   Frequently
c)   Occasionally
d)   Rarely or never

Q. Have you ever shared a brand-related meme?

a)   Frequently
b)   Occasionally
c)   Rarely or never

Q. How do you perceive meme marketing in comparison to traditional advertising?

a)   More engaging
b)   Equally engaging
c)   Less engaging

Q. Have you ever purchased a product/service because of a meme-based advertisement?

a)   Frequently
b)   Occasionally
c)   Rarely or never

PART C: OPINION-BASED QUESTIONS (USING A 5-POINT LIKERT SCALE)

Q.I frequently like, share, or comment on memes posted by brands.

a)   1 **(Strongly Disagree)**
b)   2
c)   3
d)   4
e)   5 **(Strongly Agree)**

Q.I follow brands on social media that use memes in their marketing.

a)   1**(Strongly Disagree)**
b)   2
c)   3
d)   4
e)   5 **(Strongly Agree)**

Q. Memes make brand advertisements more engaging than traditional ads.

a)   1**(Strongly Disagree)**
b)   2
c)   3
d)   4
e)   5 **(Strongly Agree)**

Q.A well-made meme helps me understand a brand's message better.

a)   1 **(Strongly Disagree)**
b)   2
c)   3
d)   4
e)   5 **(Strongly Agree)**

Q. I remember brands better when they use meme-based marketing.

a)   1 **(Strongly Disagree)**
b)   2
c)   3

d)   4
e)   5 **(Strongly Agree)**

Q. I have discovered new brands through memes.

a)   1 **(Strongly Disagree)**
b)   2
c)   3
d)   4
e)   5 **(Strongly Agree)**

Q. I have considered buying a product after seeing it in a meme.

a)   1 **(Strongly Disagree)**
b)   2
c)   3
d)   4
e)   5 **(Strongly Agree)**

Q. Memes influence my perception of a brand's trustworthiness.

a)   1 **(Strongly Disagree)**
b)   2
c)   3
d)   4
e)   5 **(Strongly Agree)**

Q. I feel more connected to brands that use humor and memes.

a)   1 **(Strongly Disagree)**
b)   2
c)   3
d)   4
e)   5 **(Strongly Agree)**

Q. I am likely to recommend a brand if I enjoy their meme marketing.

a)   1 **(Strongly Disagree)**
b)   2
c)   3
d)   4
e)   5 **(Strongly Agree)**