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MEMES: Crowdsourcing, Social Change and Defamation

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Abstract: Since 1976 Memes are influenced our life with an attempt to explain the cultural information flow. The word meme was coined and used in the book, "The Selfish Gene" written by Richard Dawkins. This meme is an activity which evolved over few decades and adapted the new technological updates. The Internet is a revolution which is still growing in this digital age, this meme also adapted this internet and created a new subset of memes called Internet Memes. This Internet Meme was proposed by Mike Godwin in 1993. This adaptation derived the concept of the hijacking of the original idea and proposing a new dimension for it. This meme would not recreate an idea, it would still an idea and imitate with a new scenario. These internet memes are dominating the current media and online networks through its crowdsourcing.

Unlike the news articles, these memes are created by common creators, the people, and the digital natives. It works as a voice of people and spread like air. Every day, every hour, every minute new memes are created and spread by the meme creators in social media platforms. In recent times, people witnessed that these memes can bring unity, spread ideas, propagate agendas and demand the power with its sharp-edged interrogations.

Memes are adopted as an element in traditional media platforms like newspapers, televisions. These utilize memes in between their gutters and shows. But each and every element on the internet is vulnerable, memes too. Sometimes meme creators viaducts the ethics followed by media. Especially in India, these meme creators are not engaged with these ethics and moral values of media and it leads to defamation. This situation led the center and state government to establish special acts for cyberspace. This paper will interrogate recent times crowdsourced memes, memes stimulated social change and unethical approaches by meme creators which defame a personality, celebrity or politicians. This paper will be done under Causal-comparative methodology, to conclude that how memes are used unethically in the current scenario. And may recommend few tips for the meme creators to build a good platform for social development.

I. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays Memes are usual and just a laughable material online. It replaced the traditional media's cartoon which contains humour and relative information of a scenario or incident. Memes are not really cartoon; it gives some more sarcasm and black comedy. Sometimes it crosses the line of ethics, violates the moral values and hurts people. Even in print media political cartoons does the same and stand before the justice for legal fights. In the history of Indian media, two cartoonists were arrested for their work on newspapers and social media.

In 2011, AseemTrivedi was charged with sedition by the police in Mumbai for a series of cartoons on corruption and in 2017, Bala was charged for a Facebook post, a cartoon with disgracedcaricature of government officials and politicians.[i]While comparing these two cases, we can find a basic difference in the platforms that they have used to publish their work.

AseemTrivedi's cartoon was published in a newspaper; Six years later Bala's work was just posted on social media. This platform shift has occurred due to the nation-wide rise of memes culture in India.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Since 1976 memes are influenced our life with an attempt to explain the cultural information flow. The word meme was coined and used in the book, "The Selfish Gene" written by Richard Dawkins[ii]. This meme is an activity which evolved over few decades and adapted the new technological updates. The Internet is a revolution which is still growing in this digital age, this meme also adapted this internet and created a new subset of memes called Internet Memes. This Internet Meme was proposed by Mike Godwin in 1993. This adaptation derived the concept of the hijacking of the original idea and proposing a new dimension for it. This meme is not recreating an idea, it would still an idea and imitate with a new scenario. These internet memes are dominating the current media and online networks through its crowdsourcing.

In researchers' point of view, memes are viewed with positive and negative aspects to get a proper understanding of it. In a research paper titled 'Memes in Advertising Slogans'[iii], Chen Linxia, explains that the memes are well received element in advertising. This paper gives a gist of a research about memes in advertising as follows, "The meme is of great importance in the development of advertising slogans. Its replication and transmission provide a quick and an effective way to enrich advertising slogans. The paper introduces the idea of memes, explains the reason why idioms, proverbs, common sayings, famous remarks and classic poems become successful memes in advertising slogans according to the life cycle of memes. It also analyses genotype and phenotype of advertising slogans. Based on an analysis of the memetic phenomena in advertising slogans, the author tries to provide some useful hints and references for creating powerful memes."

To get more clear understanding about internet memes, Christian Bauckhage's paper titled 'Insights into Internet Memes'[iv] explains as follows,

"Internet memes are phenomena that rapidly gain popularity or notoriety on the Internet. Often, modifications or spoofs add to the profile of the original idea thus turning it into a phenomenon that transgresses social and cultural boundaries. It is commonly assumed that Internet memes spread virally but scientific evidence as to this assumption is scarce…. this issue and investigate the epidemic dynamics of 150 famous Internet memes… analysis is based on time series data that were collected from Google Insights, Delicious, Digg and Stumble Upon… From this data, we identified distinct interests in the corresponding communities. Among other results, we saw that users of the Digg social news service predominantly react to recent memes and users of the Stumble. Upon recommendation engine appear to be interested mostly in sophisticated memes"

Michele Knoble and Colin Lankshear jointly presented a paper in the Annual NRC, Miami in 2005 titled, 'Memes and affinities; Cultural replication and literacy education'[v] to explore memes in a different way as follows, "the social practices of propagating memes as a dimension of cultural production and transmission within internet environments. Memes are contagious patterns of cultural information that are passed from mind to mind and that directly shape and generate key actions and mind-sets of a social group. Memes include popular tunes, catch-phrases, clothing fashions, architectural styles and ways of doing things, and so on."

From the above literature review it is clear that the research papers are concentrated on memes and marketing and advertising strategies.

III. OBJECTIVES OF THE PAPER

1) This paper tries to explore the creation of memes.

2) This paper attempts to find why this creation reached peak on internet.

IV. METHODOLOGY

For this paper, only 10 memes were taken from the internet to analysis five different categories of internet memes. This paper used casual-comparative methodology to analysis these 10 memes.

With the hypothesis that due to the lack of censorship and controlling board, these memes creators are losing control and defaming personalities, which is doom of the law.

V. ANALYSIS

Unlike the news articles, these memes are created by common creators, the people, and the digital natives. It works as a voice of people and spread like air. Every day, every hour, every minute new memes are created and spread by the meme creators in social media platforms. In recent times, people witnessed that these memes can bring unity, spread ideas, propagate agendas and demand the power with its sharp-edged interrogations.

Memes are adopted as an element in traditional media platforms like newspapers, televisions. These utilize memes in between their gutters and shows. But each and every element on the internet is vulnerable, memes too. Sometimes meme creators viaducts the ethics followed by media. Especially in India, these meme creators are not engaged with these ethics and moral values of media and it leads to defamation. This situation led the center and state government to establish special acts for cyberspace. This paper interrogates recent times crowd sourced memes, memes stimulated social change and unethical approaches by meme creators which defame a personality, celebrity or politicians.

For the analysing purpose, this paper divides memes into five types as follows: Political memes, Info memes, Comical memes, Disgusting memes and Adult memes. Each one of its types is classified with their subject, sense, notion, emotion, content and expressions.

Political Memes:

Political memes are quite usual nowadays; we can find it in all over the world. No nation has constituted a perfect law for its entire people. So the rebels are found everywhere. Protests in all nations can embrace the statement. A new tool for the digital natives to protest against the power is meme and we call it as 'political meme'. But they do not follow any order to oblige the personalities. For example, the following memes are taken for analysis of political memes.

| **Figure 1 Political Meme 1** | **Figure 2 Political Meme 2** |

Figure 1 and 2 are categorised under political memes because of the content which is related to the current Tamil Nadu politics. And these memes takes a satirical stand on the ruling party and blames the activities of the ministers.

Info Memes:

Each and every memes would have some information which will relate the original visual and the new content taken for sarcasm. Meme creators with sensible ideas are working to disseminate useful information through their memes. Unlike other memes, these info memes are trying to provide useful information for daily life. These news are not just real, but also interesting. Daily newspaper gives news for the people, but these info memes are quick and gives the same news with different perspective and visuals. Even in the news item, these references are found rarely, but in info memes the visuals grabs more attention than the info and provides a quick understanding.

| **Figure 3 Info Meme 1** | **Figure 4 Info Meme 2** |

Figure 3 and 4 are giving some peculiar news items from newspapers with a comical visual relation of comedians and their comedy scenes.

Comical Memes:

Comical memes are entirely different from all other categories. These memes are just for fun which gives some one-liners from movies and relate it to the taken ideas and scenarios. This category does not possess to mean anything to the people, but a pure entertaining element.

| **Figure 5 Comical Meme 1** | **Figure 6 Comical Meme 2** |

Figure 5 and 6 are relating the comical scenes from the movies and the kid's perspective which gives laughs. This category contains soft, easy, jovial kind of comedy which is happening in our regular life.

Disgusting Memes:

Disgusting but most of the world loves this category memes. These are not offensive by law, but take serious distasteful and unpleasant stand of any subject.

Figure 7 Disgusting Meme 1
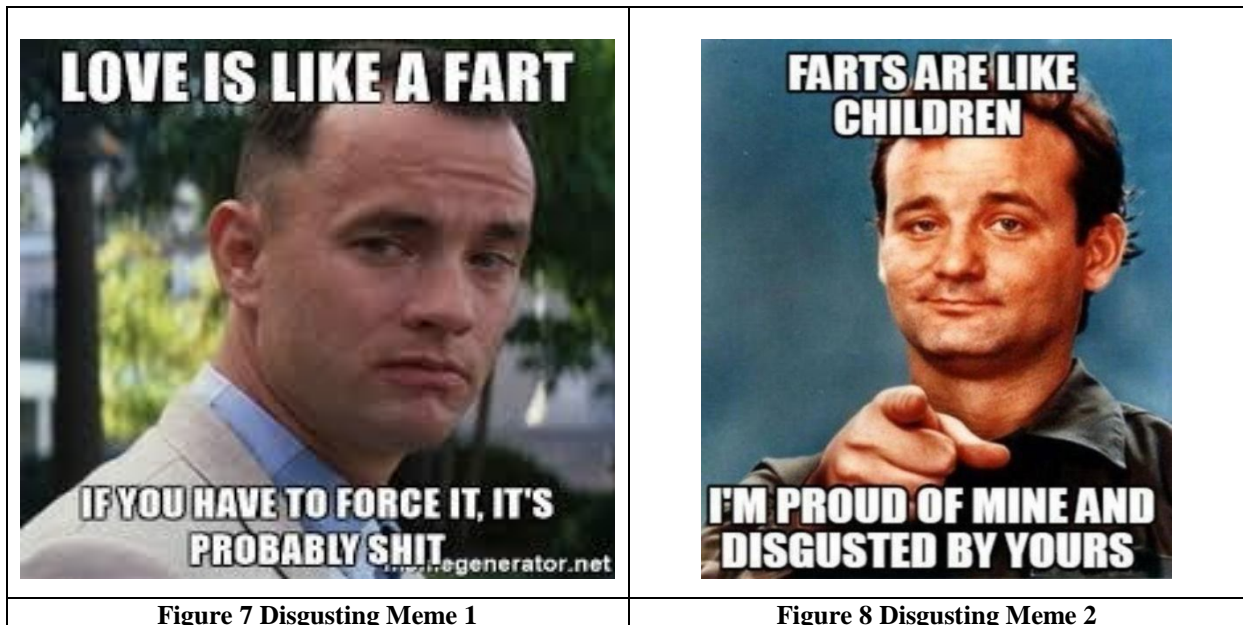

Figure 8 Disgusting Meme 2

Figure 7 and 8 are good examples for disgusting memes; those took farting as their content and compared with love and children which are not a decent comparison for the general world. But this meme compares those two different poles of content and tries to make laugh, without thinking about the censors.

Adult Memes:

There will be no signs or symbols will be provided for these kinds of memes, but the content itself a sign for the people to understand that these memes are meant for adult. In traditional media, the censor board certificate will give some warning for the people to have a parental control over their children. But in new media this control is not available. Memes are new media element, so anybody can see these memes, even kids and these memes gives details which is for adulthood.

Unlike other meme categories, this adult memes are not extremely violating the censorship of new media and forcibly intruding into all social media platforms, like Whatsapp, Facebook, twitter, Instagram, etc. In this meme category, not only the content, but also the visuals fall under adult category.

Figure 9 Adult Meme 1

Figure 10 Adult Meme 2

Figure 9 and 10 deals with the content marked as adult category, from the visuals and also from the comparison. Unlike adult movies, these memes are circulated through new media and reach all aged people. It may reach children too and affect them psychologically, and may confuse them with the content they don't understand, sometimes they do not want to understand at their age.

All these categories are created by meme creators who are mostly unemployed and educated professionals in new media creations. They do have more knowledge in cinema and society. Trying to pull people attention to change ideas with fun filled memes. Sometime their memes creates by whirl and flashes in every mobile and computer screens. Memes played a major role in Jallikattu protest 2017, that incident showed how to engage with youth and gather them with precise self-esteem.

But some memes are not created for social change, but for defaming politicians for their activities. Meme creators take stand and do memes with the politician's activities. Most of the defaming memes are coming under political memes only. Without censorship, new media has opened a big loop hole for the authorities and people, through this hole, people can defame anyone and create debates, discussions, stir any goings-on happenings in society. These memes are not published in any particular webpage or journal, so that this crowd sourced creation goes on and on from one screen to another, one's mind to another. It's a stirrer in the digital world.

VI. CONCLUSION

Memes may fall on any category that this paper classifies, but it tries to communicate something happening around us and compares it with movie visuals and scenes to get a different perspective and fun. But the Info category memes are really useful for the social development and appreciable attempt for the new media platform. But in reality, these info memes are not circulating as much as the adult and political memes. Negative news item attracts people more than positive, this statement is not only applicable for newspaper, movies, TV shows, but also applicable for new media platforms. Meme creators should understand that they can drag any content, any visuals, any scenes from movies, but the society needs them for a development, not just for entertainment space.

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