

## THE SIGNIFICANT ROLE OF MEMES IN SOCIAL INTERACTIONS

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**Annotation.** People constantly seek ways to reevaluate or strengthen their relationships through different actions like communication or sharing of information about them or new ideas. Memes might be quite useful in such case. Sending memes to your friends reduces uncertainty between you and prolongs friendship. This study examines meaning behind sending memes in relationships and summarizes theoretical data of it to better understand the role of memes in close relationships.

**Keywords:** sociology, social interactions, memes.

**Introduction.** Memes speak a lot about the social context where we live and what we truly think. No matter which era people live in, they always need a way of expression and confession about the unspoken or repressed truth. Memes are often creative expressions through which individuals communicate and express themselves. Majority of social media users regularly use memes in their social media interactions, especially in their informal communication. Memes were originally proposed as a cultural replicator that spreads ideas among members of distinct communities. Internet memes are a piece of online culture that takes many possible forms, whether an image with caption, an animated image, or a text-based joke with multiple possible formats, or even a short video clip. The advent of digital social media platforms such as Instagram, Reddit, TikTok, YouTube, etc. and their audio-visual potentials contributed to sharing of meanings between parties involved in communication cycle more than ever before. Though memes are more often examined from a political, cultural, or rhetorical lens, they are also interpersonal artefacts, often shared person-to-person.

The popularity of memes in social interactions amongst social media users cannot be overemphasised. When memes are used on social media platforms, there is a possibility to satirise issues and events within a social context by using laughter as a means to collectively cope with issues and news of public interest. However, the acceptability of memes in social interaction is closely linked to its potential to add meaning in a social interaction. Statistics have showed that in 2019, memes were second among the types of content most likely to be shared by Gen Z and Millennial Internet users.

Therefore, memes have diffused rapidly within online social interactions, and it has become important to examine the related dynamics among social media users in order to ascertain the credibility attached to these memes and the extent to which it persuades the social media users in an online social interaction context.

**Main part.** Though researchers have just begun to examine memes using relational frameworks, scholars have often noted the interpersonal promise and functions of internet memes. For instance, memes can be examined as a form of folklore. Importantly, one of the defining characteristics of folklore is that its importance is embedded in the small cultural groups in which it's shared – often families and small groups of friends. In examining the humour function of memes, it is possible to note that memes were often exchanged for the purpose of interpersonal communication with the goal of sharing emotional states and feelings with friends and family members (table 1).

Also, in new work teams individuals frequently share non-text, visually based forms of communication, including gifs and memes. The sharing of such content is usually undertaken with the goal of lightening a conversation. Further, because of the specificity and nuance of the humour

of memes, they could allow individuals to quickly get to know one another and gain insights into their personalities.

Table 1 – Why people use memes in social media

Variables	Percentage, %
They are funny	41.1
They are easy to use	21.2
Helps in condensing a large idea into a single message	10.4
They are more effective than texts	14.1
They can be used to secretly encode message	8.0
All of the above	5.2

Though research on memes in the context of close relationships is nascent, prior research on Internet memes provides some insight into how they are used in romantic relationships, families, and close friendships. Further, there is much work that has examined the use of humour and symbolic language in relationships that helps in framing an investigation into the use of memes in relationships.

Romantic relationships and close friendships are increasingly maintained via technologies and study suggests that the extent to which individuals can seamlessly shift between communication from face-to-face to mediated communication with their close relational partners is positively associated with the closeness and satisfaction of those relationships. Other relational characteristics also affect technology use, including whether the relationship is long-distance. Specifically, long-distance partners use mediated communication to interact with their relational partners more frequently than geographically close partners.

But we all possess limited social resources to share, so tacking time to just send a meme to your friend can display your validation towards that person. That is why media users send more memes to people they are closer to. It is a kind of constant affirmation that their friends worth the time they are investing. Meantime, if they do not value that person as much, they are also going to like their memes less or send fewer memes themselves. And the content of the meme also reduces uncertainty, because it marks that the user knows something about their friend. Further, if that friend likes that meme, that means they agree that the media user gets their humour, which strengthens the understanding of the relationship and therefore the relationship itself. Meanwhile, if they don't like user's meme, that is a disclosure of misunderstanding in the relationship. But either way it reduces uncertainty of that relationship.

**Conclusion.** Results demonstrate that the sharing of memes plays a meaningful role in many close relationships. It was revealed that social media users have an understanding of the communication function of memes. The study highlights that memes aid understanding, entertain, reinforce meanings, emotional appeal, simplify the message and invoke certain reactions or expressions in a social media interaction. Majority of media users affirm that they use memes to a large extent due to their borderless potential.

Trough acts of self-disclosure people reduce uncertainty in relationships, which can be conveniently done by sending memes. In conclusion, the study underscores that memes reflect more than just cultural and social structures — they reflect relational structures, as well.

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