

MEMES – NEW WAY OF COMMUNICATION

The article explores the concept of the Internet meme, its evolution as a modern means of communication, typologies and cultural impact.

Wikipedia defines meme as a cultural item (such as an idea, behavior, or style) that spreads across the Internet, primarily through social media platforms [1]. Internet memes appear in diverse formats such as images, videos, GIFs, and various other forms of viral content. The term was originally introduced by Richard Dawkins in his 1976 book *The Selfish Gene*, where he described it as a unit of cultural transmission – an idea, behavior, or style that spreads from person to person within a society. In the context of today’s digital culture, memes have evolved into a distinct form of online expression, shared primarily through platforms such as Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, and others.

While the standard definition provides a general understanding of what a meme is, it can also be helpful to define the concept based on everyday experience as an Internet user. Typically, when people think of a meme, they imagine an image combined with a caption or short piece of text—this is probably the most familiar and widespread format. In many ways, memes are the digital descendants of traditional jokes, delivered not just through language but also with visual elements that enhance the message or humor.

However, memes are not limited to static images. Videos are also commonly used, sometimes with sound and sometimes without. One especially popular format is the GIF—a short, looping video clip (usually around 3 to 5 seconds long) that plays continuously and usually lacks sound. Music plays an important role in meme culture as well. Certain songs are used to reference specific events, people, or online trends. In some cases, a song can even inspire an entire meme genre. One example is *Mississippi Queen* by the band Mountain, which has become closely associated with a specific meme format that will be explored later.

In short, while many memes consist of a combination of text, image, video, and/or music, none of these elements are strictly required. Each can function as a meme on its own, depending on the context and how it is shared online.

It is important to note, however, that attempting to categorize all existing memes is an almost impossible task due to their constantly evolving nature and the sheer diversity of formats and styles. Nevertheless, it is still possible to identify and describe some of the more prominent types.

One such type is the *copypasta* – a meme format that consists solely of text. The term “copypasta” is derived from the words “copy” and “paste,” referring to the ease with which these texts are spread by simply copying and pasting them across platforms. Copypastas are often long, exaggerated, or absurd blocks of text, and their repetitive circulation contributes to their meme status. A classic example is the widely known “I own a musket for home defence” monologue, which humorously spirals into increasingly ridiculous justifications for owning outdated weaponry [2]. A more recent example is the “Mercedes CLR GTR” copypasta, which gained popularity in early 2024. This particular text, which appears to be AI-generated, includes a detailed and overly technical description of the Mercedes racing car’s performance. It originally appeared in the comments section of car-related posts but quickly spread as it was

reposted by various user accounts and bots – many of which tend to recycle content from one another.

The cypypasta's rise was further accelerated by meme accounts that began to repost it ironically, using it to mock the repetitive nature of content and highlight how easily platform algorithms could be manipulated. In effect, this block of text became a tool to boost engagement, leading more users to include it in their posts either to gain visibility or simply to join in on the joke. This phenomenon illustrates how even AI-generated or seemingly random content can evolve into a widely recognized meme when shaped by user interaction and platform dynamics.

Another recognizable meme type is the so-called *Stare* meme. While not as distinct in structure as the cypypasta, the *Stare* meme has developed its own stylistic variations and cultural significance. Typically, this meme features an image or video of a person, fictional character, or even an animal staring directly into the camera. The expression is often ambiguous – simultaneously conveying intense emotion and emotional emptiness – which gives it a flexible and relatable quality.

The origins of this meme format can arguably be traced to the 2000 film *American Psycho*, where, near the end of the movie, the main character Patrick Bateman stares into the camera during an internal monologue, as the shot slowly zooms in. This scene has since become iconic and is frequently referenced in meme culture for its unsettling and introspective tone.

Well-known variations of the *Stare* meme include the "1000-yard stare," "Kurt Angie stare," "Ghost stare," and "Titan stare," among others. Many of these are based on images of fictional characters or real individuals captured in moments of emotional intensity—or complete detachment. It is also worth noting that the format has been widely adapted using images of cats and other animals, which adds a humorous and relatable layer. Given the Internet's longstanding affection for pet content, it is no surprise that animal-based versions of the *Stare* meme are especially popular.

This type of meme demonstrates how a simple facial expression can be repurposed in countless contexts to convey irony, exhaustion, existential dread, or absurdity, often depending on the accompanying caption or context [3].

When categorizing memes, it's useful to consider both where they come from and why they are created. Most memes gain popularity on social media platforms like X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, and TikTok, though many originate on more niche forums such as Reddit, 4chan, and Tumblr—spaces known for shaping early meme culture. As for their purpose, memes often serve as a way to cope with everyday problems or frustrations through humor. However, they can also be used to spread positivity, share relatable moments, or simply entertain. Many are inspired by day-to-day life and reflect common experiences and emotions.

In short, while memes vary in format, tone, and origin, they are united by their connection to real life and the emotions people experience in the digital age.

Examining the cultural value of memes, their influence on society, and their role as a new form of communication I would like to mention that memes have the power to “revive” older media – particularly songs and films by recontextualizing them for modern audiences. A strong example of this is the previously mentioned *Mississippi Queen Gun Meme*, which combines segments of educational 3D animations about firearms with the 1970s rock classic *Mississippi Queen*, along with an exaggerated or absurd caption describing a frustrating situation.

While the meme may appear dark, perhaps even controversial, it highlights a broader pattern in digital culture: the use of memes to express and manage mental health challenges. Often employing irony, self-deprecation, or dark humor, these memes resonate especially with individuals experiencing depression, anxiety, or other psychological difficulties. In many cases, they serve not just as entertainment, but as a form of emotional validation, peer connection, and even psychological relief.

Since memes often reflect real-life events, societal reactions, and current opinions, I believe they can be considered “21st-century graffiti.” For example, political memes can serve as valuable historical and cultural artifacts. A recent example is the meme “*Mr. President, we’re tired of winning,*” which reflects public dissatisfaction with Trump’s policies. It juxtaposes a 2016 speech where Trump claimed victory with images of declining stock markets, implying that the American public disapproved of the economic consequences of his tariffs. Another example is “*Day in the life of a true Brexit geezer,*” which satirizes British stereotypes while commenting on the Brexit referendum. Memes like these capture public sentiment and provide insight into the opinions and reactions of society, making them significant for both the present and the future. Future historians may not only learn what happened but also understand the public’s perception of these events.

Memes also raise important questions about freedom of speech. As the saying goes, “*Winners write history,*” meaning that those in power often control the narrative. However, with memes, this dynamic shifts. They are easy to create, share, and save, meaning that once a meme is posted, it often lives on and can spread rapidly. Memes can highlight societal issues such as the “*short attention span*” meme, which points to the growing difficulty of focusing on longer content due to the rise of platforms like TikTok that prioritize short-form videos. Popular memes can offer future generations valuable insight into our culture, but they also present a risk: in some cases, memes can be used to manipulate public opinion or provoke outrage, a tactic that requires critical thinking and media literacy to navigate effectively.

To sum everything up, I want to state that memes overall are a valuable piece of culture, they are and they should remain free, they reflect our society, thoughts, issues, beliefs and can be of a great help to the future historians. You might even call them an art.

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