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UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MALAYSIA

School of Education,
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Assignment	Project Report
Title	The Influence of Memes on UTM Skudai Undergraduates' Online Social Interaction

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Year, Semester, and Session	Year 3, Semester 1, Session 2022/2023	

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The Influence of Memes on UTM Skudai Undergraduates'

Online Social Interaction

1. Introduction

The memes are infectious patterns of cultural information that are transmitted from mind to mind, shaping and transmitting the fundamental behaviours and attitudes of a social group Knobel and Lankshear (2007). With the development of social networks, memes have become a method for propagating and circulating messages, an important aspect of cultural creation and transfer Knobel (2006). Memes as defined are a component of the online culture; they are mostly jokes that are conveyed via image+text, GIF+text, or plain text and transmitted virally and evolved across Internet-based platforms. These memes include several allusions and need an impressive amount of background knowledge. to comprehend. They comprise popular culture allusions, political and religious references, regional or national references, and references related to a particular profession or specialty. This paper only focuses on memes that contain image+text and plain text.

1.1. Background

The influence of memes in online interaction these days is very popular where the memes of image+text are also plain text as a part of the communication especially among teenagers as they prefer using memes when replying to text in whatsapp, instagram or any other social media. This topic was chosen because our group would like to see the influence of using memes as it might give positive or negative influence to other people especially for teenagers.

The memes are the easiest way to communicate with friends and family. The memes also seem to bring change in society in a way to explain something, people will use memes. In this paper, the present study aims to investigate the influence of memes on online social interaction among the UTM undergraduate students.

1.2. Objectives

1. To identify what types of memes and emojis use the most
2. To identify the functions of using memes and emojis in online conversation
3. To determine the influence of social interaction on UTM students.

1.3. Research Questions

1. What are the types of memes that UTM students use the most?
2. How do the memes function in online conversation among the UTM students?
3. Does the use of memes influenced UTM students' social interaction positively?

1.4. Significance of Project

This research is benefitted for students who are finding information on the type of memes and emojis used the most, the function of using memes and emojis in online conversation. The researcher will be able to analyse more new information on how memes and emojis are used by UTM undergraduates and they will be able to do some comparison with the other articles that related to research on memes and emojis.

2. Literature Review

The usage of social media has become a social norm in today's generation and has significantly impacted people's social interaction. The widespread interaction in social media has created new ways of interacting or responding virtually, one of which is by utilising memes as a way of communication. Milosavljević (2020) defined Memes as merged pictorial or videos and text which are conveyed through an online context. On the other hand, memes are also considered as an imitation of living things in the form of graphic, visual purposes. In addition, memes function as part of entertainment and alternatives for transmitting communication as well as to advertise something. In a way, memes have become a cultural phenomenon whereby it is collectively used for varied reasons. The concept of social interaction is established as part of a condition whereby two or more individuals would be exchanging thoughts be it in a one way or two way communication. Social interactions can be categorised as face to face interaction or by online medium and it became the main purpose for a community to unite and it holds special meaning for a society to encourage more

interchange. Based on the research conducted, Memes have brought a significant impact towards people's social interaction in online settings. Memes eventually became other alternatives for people to react, express and convey their flow of mood and conversation which add more variety to enhance the message in a greater manner.

3. Methodology

To answer the research questions of this study, the researchers had employed a qualitative method. The respondents of this study consisted of all UTM Skudai's undergraduate students from nine different faculties. The instrument of an online questionnaire had been selected since a great amount of data can be collected in a short period. To analyse the data collected, the researchers had opted for thematic analysis because according to them it is a flexible approach to qualitative analysis that enables novice researchers to generate new insights and concepts derived from data (Braun & Clarke, 2006, as cited in Delve, 2020). The following is the demographic data from our respondents.

Variable	Group	Total	Percentage %
Sex	Male	23	46
	Female	27	54
Total		50	100
Year of Study	1st Year	4	8
	2nd Year	9	18
	3rd Year	29	58
	4th Year	8	16
Total		50	100
Faculty	Faculty of Civil Engineering	6	12
	Faculty of Mechanical Engineering	8	16
	Faculty of Electrical Engineering	4	8
	Faculty of Chemical and Energy Engineering	3	6
	Faculty of Computing	5	10

Faculty of Science	3	6
Faculty of Built Environment and Surveying	4	8
Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities	17	34
Total	50	100

Table 1 Demographic data of respondents

There are several stages for collecting research data in this study. First, researchers prepared several questions related to the topic discussed. The questions in the questionnaires were made based on the result of the researchers' discussions by exploring subjects related to the topic. Second, the researchers created Google Forms to distribute questionnaires and collect data. Third, researchers began distributing the form to respondents who fit the criteria as research subjects: UTM Skudai's undergraduates. Fourth, researchers collected the data recorded in Google Forms in a week. Fifth, with the existing survey data, the researchers analysed the data using thematic analysis method.

4. Findings



Digital platform is a place where everyone can reach a wide area and spread information quickly. For example, Instagram, Twitter, WhatsApp, Facebook and many more. Millions of people are familiar with using social media in various forms of existing platforms. This questionnaire has collected 50 respondents and, of course, social media now has various platforms with various advanced features. We have compiled the platforms that respondents use to communicate with memes actively on WhatsApp as present in **Table 2**.

Platform	Total	Percentage %
Twitter	6	12
Instagram	8	16
WhatsApp	33	66
Other:	3	6

Table 2 Digital Platform for Memes Exchange

4.1. Types of Memes

Identifying the respondents preferred digital platforms to exchange internet memes has helped the researchers to answer the first research question which is “What are the types of memes that UTM Skudai undergraduates use the most?”. In the questionnaire, we only inserted four types of memes which are Macro Image, Image without words, GIF and Words Only Image as in **Table 3**. Apparently, the most used memes among the respondents is Macro Image. The researchers have also discovered that they use Macro Image most of the time because it gives more meaning to the context of their conversation and humour purposes. They stated that it would be alot easier for the receiver to understand the idea and joke the sender try to convey.

Types of Memes	Total	Percentage %
Macro Image	17	34
		
Image without words	14	28
		
GIF (animated image)	13	26



Words Only

6

12



Table 3 Types of Memes

4.2. Purpose of Using Memes

To find answers for research question 2 and research question 3, the researcher used open-ended questions in the questionnaire to give the respondents the freedom and space to answer in as much detail as they like. The data collected then were organised through a synthesising process by putting together the respondents' ideas in order to make overall points. From the analyses, the researchers are able to identify specific reasons of the respondents to use memes in their online interaction through three (3) themes as in **Table 4**. The findings for the second research question have been identified in two themes (1) Establish Meaningful Online Interactions and (2) Deliver Thoughts and Feelings.

Theme	Code	Supporting Data
Establish Meaningful Online Interactions	Increase Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● make the conversation more interesting between the sender and receiver. ● make conversations feel light-hearted and not too serious. ● increase the mood of the conversation.
	Adding a Sense of Humor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● conversation becomes more funny and enjoyable.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● conversation feels less boring and dry. ● create a fun conversation
Deliver Thoughts and Feelings	Expressing Relevant Ideas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● everybody can relate to the memes ● depict the sender's words and ideas. ● easy to make the receiver understand the context.
	Communicate Inner Emotion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● expressing and describing one's feelings. ● ensuring the reader understands the tone of the sender. ● to avoid awkward situations. ● to represent one's reaction

Table 4 Purpose of Using Memes on Online Interaction

Theme 1: Establish Meaningful Online Interactions

The use of internet memes is very popular especially among the millennials and Gen Z. Undoubtedly, the benefits of memes in online interactions can make the conversation between two individuals or parties be more interactive and meaningful. To ensure this purpose is effectively executed, they would utilise and share memes among themselves to make the interactions become more relevant and lively. This is just their way to increase engagement in any kind of matter they are talking about. It would be more interesting and light-hearted to discuss. Sending memes is also another way to make the online conversation colourful with some humour and relevant jokes so it would not be too tense, but less dull and dry.

Theme 2: Deliver Thoughts and Feelings

Sending memes is also a helpful mechanism for internet users to share ideas and express personal struggles and inner feelings. They believe that memes are able to show what we, as humans, feel, do or think; things which many may not feel comfortable expressing. Therefore, they have memes to do that for them. Be it happiness, sadness, enchantment, admiration, relief, calmness, confusion, nostalgia, entrancement, or boredom, memes help them vent it out. Memes are like a vocabulary for emotions. Sometimes, memes also can send

a signal of one's tone like giving an idea of how the message should be understood by conveying the mood, attitude or emotion of the sender.

4.3. How Memes Influence Online Social Interactions

The answer to the third research question is presented in **Table 5**. There are two themes the researchers have found on how the memes have influenced the respondents' online social interactions which are (1) Psychosocial Well-Being Improvement, and (2) Barrier-Free Interaction.

Theme	Code	Supporting Data
Psychosocial Well-Being Improvement	Social Connectedness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Easy to connect to people ● Bridge the gap among the online community ● Improve virtual social belonging ● Make more engaging interaction
	Emotional Strengths Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Lighten up one's mood ● Promote humour in online interaction ● Allow the emotion to speak through memes ● Conversation becomes more entertaining
Barrier-Free Interaction	Limitless of Self-Expression	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Exhibit one's personality ● Help introverts to maintain conversation virtually ● Memes as a mechanism to express oneself
	Accelerate Message Transmission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Provide straightforward messages ● People get the meaning of the message instantly

Table 5 How Memes Influence the Respondents' Online Social Interactions

Theme 1: Psychosocial Well-Being Improvement

From the respondents' response to the question posed in the questionnaire, they perceived that memes give great impacts on their social connection and develop their emotional strengths between the sender and receiver. Based on the data, people on social

media are able to connect across digital platforms via sharing a meme during online conversations that facilitate improving their engagement virtually. The results of building social connections online lead to providing social belonging where everyone in the digital community feels connected to one another. Besides, sharing memes also contributes to emotional strength development as the act of sending memes can boost the state of the conversation to become entertaining and fun. Most of the time, the sender shares a meme because it is relevant to the context of the interaction and just to express emotions that cannot be explained through words.

Theme 2: Barrier-Free Interaction

Based on the respondents' response regarding the memes, they recognised memes as a way of barrier-free interaction which includes limitless self-expression and to accelerate message transmission. For instance, Introverts tend to have difficulties in expressing themselves especially when meeting face to face. Hence, having memes would aid Introverts to maintain conversations virtually as memes can act as a mechanism to express oneself through visual representation. Next, according to the respondents' answers, memes can function as tools to accelerate messages easily. As we are all aware, memes are a combination of photos, or videos which could grab one's attention. Besides, it proved that the memes provided straightforward messages and could be used in any context of conversation. In addition, the creation of memes also helps people to immerse and get the meaning of messages from their peers, colleagues, or even family easily. Hence, memes do bring out greater impact on one's life especially in keeping relationships lasting longer.

5. Conclusion & Recommendation

In conclusion, we found out that the influence of use of memes in online interaction among UTM Skudai's undergraduates is positive. Undergraduate students feel that memes have a lot of functions that help them to understand each other better. All of the objectives and research questions were answered based on the google form distributed to UTM undergraduates. This research shows that the types and the functions of memes do determine the influence of social interaction by using memes in their normal online conversation among UTM students. This shows that students nowadays prefer using memes as it is a lot easier to use and also to be understood by everyone.

Our recommendation for future research is to explore more about the functions of memes as in memes as marketing strategy. We would love to explore how memes can help businessmen or women to promote their item by using memes especially entrepreneurs who are still students. In the future research, we would love to find out if using memes can help to increase the students marketing strategy. Thus, we can see the correlation between our previous research and our future research.

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