

Psychological-Distress Effects of Memes: A Critical Discourse Analysis

Qurat-Ul-Ain Ayyaz

Visiting Lecturer, Ghazi University,
Dera Ghazi Khan, Punjab,
Pakistan.

Email: ukashahudafajar@gmail.com
(Corresponding Author)

Suman Khurshheed

MPhil. Student, Ghazi University,
Dera Ghazi Khan, Punjab,
Pakistan.

Sadia Aslam

Visiting Lecturer, Ghazi
University, Dera Ghazi Khan,
Punjab, Pakistan.

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Abstract: *The main purpose of this study was to explore the negative impacts of humour-created memes that disturb people's psyche and their normal routine; it leads them towards depression through imitation and parody in an ironic way to exploit their personal life in the Pakistani context. It manipulates social ideologies, beliefs, thinking and practices. Some popular Facebook pages are Lateefon Ki Dunya, and Pakistani Political memes are created and spread memes on social media. Memes often serve the purpose of puns and humiliating others (Irfan, 2021). To meet the objective of this study, ten badly effective memes were analysed. The content of these memes plays a crucial role in the production of memes' multimodal discourse because memes discourse is owned by the masses. Internet memes stimulate crowd engagement because they might be seen as a common language (McCulloch, 2019; Milner, 2016). Data were analysed under Fairclough's theoretical framework to elucidate the data detection. This research study indicated that layman uses those platforms to influence the behaviour and living of famous personalities and destroy their individuality by character assassination and they find no escape in this digital age.*

Key Words: Depression, Meme, Manipulation, Negative Impact, Social Media, Psychology

Introduction

Language, being the integral tool of expression, is necessarily regarded as a sensitive indicator that brings changes in our society. It is a system for expressing ideas by turning vocal sounds into written words (Sweet, 1899). It can redesign our sentiments, and way of thinking and perceiving social reality. These days, social media has been playing an essential part in everyday life and it has a solid Influence on social and private life. People significantly take part in social media by sharing their daily activities and

involvements through online and offline dealings. With the rise of social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram etc, the influence of social media has increased to a fair extent. Just like the world, Facebook is the most popular social networking site in Pakistan with 49.2 million active users. This research study discovers Facebook memes to explore the negative psychological impact of memes on famous personalities. Facebook users participate in online activities in such a way that they post their photos, videos, opinions, ideas, and

feeling, happening and share information, news and stories, and take part in online discussions.

Currently, Memes are considered a popular browsing activity on social media, particularly on Facebook (Rakib, 2019). Cultural and social information is shared by memes through parody, imitation, and pastiche that can be funny but offensive. Some examples of memes include catchlines, fashions, clothes, signs, gestures and political narratives. Nowadays, Meme is a new mode of communication in all social fields of society.

At present, memes sharing has developed into “the hallmark of the 21st century” in the online culture of social media (Bereheny, 2016), which points to the online discourse of internet memes as a distinguishing social discourse. Studies show that graphics or memes in our case are always coded. The depiction of memes varies from person to person because their interpretation is reliant on their historic relations and is completed indirectly without any conscious effort. A similar attitude is practised in the societies as total because together they respond to specific semiotic signs while interpreting the memes. (Leeuwen, 2004).

Multimodal discourse is a genre of discourse which is communicated by more than a single mode (Fairclough, 2001; Kress, 2009). Due to the increase in the use of the internet, multimodal discourse is becoming gradually vital which blends several modes such as text, picture, music, and video for communication. Hence, the research put on Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA) to examine the negative psychological impacts of memes on famous personalities as well as common men of Pakistani society.

Research Objectives

1. To investigate popular memes which created stress and depression.

2. To observe their severe effect on people for whom they were created and pushed them into mental stress.

Literature Review

One of the most widespread mood disorders in the world is depression. More than 264 million people are suffering from depression which includes individuals of all ages all over the world. (World Health Organization, 2020). Depression is becoming more common in our daily life because of the involvement of modern technology (Aghaei et al., 2012; Choudhury, 2014). The notion of "meme" has been perceived and sketched in a different ways by different scholars and researchers. The word meme derives from an ancient Greek word "mimeme" means "imitated" or "imitated thing". British evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins derived the term "meme" in 1976 in his internationally popular book "The Selfish Gene" (Dawkins, 1976). Memes can be defined from two viewpoints: memes as a unit of culture, and memes as an internet product. Dawkins' indication of a meme is the idea of "replicators". He refers that memes replicate themselves in the meme pool by bouncing from brain to brain through a process of forgery (Dawkins, 1976). The notion of memes has been altered with the advancement of technology. Lombard states that the internet has delivered the most productive atmosphere for imitation till today" (2014: 21). According to Davison (2012), the expression internet meme denotes "a part of a culture, usually a joke which obtain impact through the online communication." Or internet meme is a phrase, image or video dispersed over the internet. Because of memes, one can better understand the contextual meaning of the message. Without the contextual, historical and cultural background of the message, one cannot be able to comprehend the message behind the meme.

Facebook is the utmost prevalent social

networking site in Pakistan whose consumers are still rapidly growing with each passing second. Often, depression memes increase depressive mood in the occurrence of poor emotion regulation. The objective of this study is to examine the outcome of depression memes disperse primarily on social media in a depressive mood.

Research Questions

1. How does the multimode of memes represent the social and political personalities of Pakistani society?
2. What are the impacts of memes on the lives of the represented personalities?
3. What are the impacts of memes on the psyche of people?

Research Methodology

The Fairclough 3D model had been employed for the analyses of the captions and themes of those memes to evaluate memes textually and semiotically. The three interconnected processes of analysis and the three interconnected discourse dimensions make up Fairclough's (1989, 1995) paradigm for CDA. Each of these three dimensions is

- 1 The topic of the analysis (including verbal, visual or verbal and visual texts).
- 2 The methods used by human subjects (writing, speaking, designing, reading, listening, and viewing) to create and consume the thing.
- 3 The social and historical contexts that control these processes.

Each of these aspects, according to Fairclough, calls for a unique type of analysis.

Three types of analysis are used: text analysis (description), processing analysis (interpretation), and social analysis (explanation).

Data Collection

The research data consisted of 8 internet

memes on popular and common personalities. Memes had been taken from famous Facebook pages namely; Lateefon Ki Dunya, and Pakistani Political Memes.

Data Analysis

Multimodal discourse investigation considers how content draws on modes of communication such as pictures, film, video, pictures and sound in combination with words to form meaning. It has inspected print classes as well as sorts such as web pages, film and tv programs. It considers how multimodal writings are outlined and how semiotic devices such as colour, surroundings, centre and situating components contribute to the making of meaning within the text. Therefore, at this level linguistic characteristics and visual attributes of each internet meme are examined. The textual and visual analysis fulfils the requirements of this study which deals with how memes sometimes become the cause of severe depression.

Personality: Dr Aamir Liaquat Hussain

Meme 1 is about the Announcement of Dr Aamir Liaquat's 3rd Marriage



Textual and Discursive Analysis

The analysis of this meme 1 'kyu hila daala na (translation: didn't I shake you?)' textually

and visually according to the Fairclough 3D model. The sentence indicates the ironic, humorous and strong action of the person who is presented in the picture. The person shown in this figure is famous actor Rajinikanth who is well known for his powerful actions in his movies among Indians as well as Pakistanis. His facial expressions and gestures show his intense happiness. The brightness of his eyes shows something done by him cunningly. His big smile indicates that he is heartily happy with what he has done. Colour semiotics determines the meaning imparted by the sensation that an observer experiences when they look at the colour of such signs (Meulen, 2019).

Various colours in the above memes depict the whole story visually and emphasise the whole scenario. The black colour of his thick hair shows that he is a middle-aged man. The yellow colour of the text shown in the picture presents cheerfulness. It is a striking colour that enhances creativity and clear thinking. If we see the negative characteristics of yellow colour, it can induce anxiety and distress and cause people to be overcritical. So, the caption in the picture is itself presenting that the news about the discussion matter is going to be high profile. Yellow colour is an attention catcher and can be used to highlight or to warn the message. The background in the figure shows that a known character is standing in a public booth and making a very important announcement about his own doing. The red colour of the telephone highlights that there is any happy news to tell publicly.

Social Analysis

Dr Aamir Liaquat Hussain was much older than his second wife Dania Aamir. The statement in meme 2 was uttered by famous Indian action movie actor Rajinikanth “*Kyu hila daala naa*’ shows that just like his surprise moves in the movie third marriage of

Dr Amir Liaquat Hussain shocked everyone when he declared his third marriage. After three years of his second happy marriage, he got the third one with such a young and pretty girl of his daughter’s age. Although it was his matter, unfortunately, he was a public figure which is why this matter was highlighted on social media and trolled by the memers.

Meme no. 2 is about the Announcement of Amir Liaquat’s Departure from Pakistan



Figure 2

Textual and Discursive Analysis

A single image is presenting two types of moods. In the upper picture, a person is looking very depressed about something very serious done to him. It seems, he is begging for some kind of merciful attention from everyone. Dark circles around his sad eyes are indicating as if he is upset from a long time ago. His sitting position and his eye contact with his viewers in front of the camera identifying that he is complaining about something very disheartening. It seems, he is a social victim and wants justice. The black colour of his dress is describing his sadness

non-verbally. The screen behind the person is switched on, indicating that the issue which disturbed him is very recent. Whereas, the lower picture with a caption is taken from a funny Indian Movie in which a gathering of people is discussing something. A young man is talking to another person about the man in a picture who is holding a file in his left hand. The third person in the picture seems upset at not being taken seriously. The file in the left hand indicates that he has been convicted publicly. A young man is looking educated and decent in his office dress. But his body language is narrating his negative personality. On the other hand, the second person is listening to him attentively. The caption in the picture “50 rupya kaat over acting ka” is again a declarative sentence which is clearly defining that the third person is being mocked by people for what he told them. They both are not ready to believe what the third one has told them. The background in the picture is looking at a public place which is highlighting that the matter is going to be discussed publicly.

Social Analysis

In the upper part of the above meme, Dr Aamir Liaquat Hussain is very depressed and crying badly. He had made a public announcement through social media to leave Pakistan. He was complaining about the ill-treatment of the public for his third marriage. Moreover, a very personal video was leaked by the third wife from his bedroom with lots of allegations. Social media activists made a lot of fun of that video which ethically should not be very viral. Users share information on social media network sites about various products and events. It affects the target individual's state of mind and behaviour expands (Latane, 1981). Everyone was blaming him for his third marriage. Because of bitter allegations of his third wife and consecutive poking memes, he was in deep pain. When he got tired of defending himself, he announced to leave the country forever.

Despite seeing all this, he was suffering from mental trauma, people did not take him seriously. They kept appearing to criticize him and ignored his statements. They also kept saying that he should not be taken seriously for his usual overacting.

Personality no. 2: Gormint Anty (A Woman Who Got this Title of Gormint Anty Right after Giving an Interview)

Meme 1 is of a Person Writing Ye Bik Gayi Hai Gormint in his Official Journal



Figure 3

Textual and Discursive Analysis

The analysis of this meme 1 ‘yeh bik gayi hai Gormint’ is according to the Fairclough 3D model, textually and visually. The sentence directs an informative sense and focuses on the action of the individual who is shown in the picture. The meme shown above is divided into two parts: In the first part, a person can be seen as busy writing something. His proper formal dress makes him look like a man of some high status. His body language and eyes consciously gazing at the paper gives an indication that he is very focused on the task he is performing. While the second part comprises of text ‘yeh bik gayi hai GORMINT’ which means ‘the government has been sold’ is a declarative sentence. Through this text, we can interpret that the writer is not satisfied with some decision or that something is happening without his will. Numerous colours in the above meme portray the entire story visually

and highlight the whole situation. The gray colour of his hair illustrates that he is a man of middle age. As black colour symbolizes authority, power, elegance and sophistication (Smith, 2011), accordingly, his dress represents that this man holds power, his personality has elegance and sophistication but in the interpretation of the text, the black colour can be seen as a symbol sadness and anger which the person may be feeling while writing it. In general, red colour represents danger so the curtains in the background are an indication that maybe a career is in danger. The background in the figure seems to look like his office which includes many framed pictures of various official events.

Social Analysis

In July 2016, the woman from Karachi, popular as 'gormint aunty' got viral after her expletive-ridden rage about the government. She was asked by the interviewer about the current situation of government and load shedding which she responded in abusive language. Soon after her interview got viral, a flood of memes began to spread on different social media platforms and was used by people to represent different situations. Her neighbours and relatives started laughing at her which affected her psychological health badly. She was not allowed to go outside her house because people would start chanting her viral slogans. Social media users took the famous phrase 'yeh bik gayi hai Gormint' to the west, as various people have stated how President Donald Trump's government can also be considered as an instance of this meme. Yeh bik gayi hai gormint slogan used by the people against Donald Trump's government in the anti-trump rally which made this slogan more famous at the international level.

Meme 2 is of a Woman Standing in a Queue, Waiting for the Assistance of a Government Worker, Saying Gormint Bhot Busy Hai.



Figure 4

Textual and Discursive Analysis

The analysis of the meme 2 'GORMINT BHOT BUSY HAI' by Fairclough's 3D model. The sentence which means 'government is busy' is a satire on the government from a woman standing among a group of people waiting to get their work done while the facilitator is not paying any heed to them but rather busy entertaining herself. A computer, printer and other stuff can be seen in the picture which makes the place look like some government office. Inside the small cabin, a woman is sitting and working in the office. She is wearing a saree which is an indication that she is an Indian by nationality because it is an Indian culture to wear sarees in daily routine. Her rough ponytail makes her look like a simple and middle-aged woman. People are standing in the queue which means that it is office timing but instead of doing her job she is playing games on the computer. This absurd and careless behaviour of her towards her job confirms that she is not loyal to her job. A woman is standing at the front desk

waiting for the response or completion of her work. Through her appearance, she seems to belong to the middle-lower class of society. Her big round eyes which are catching the attention of the viewer show her bafflement at where the woman (facilitator) inside the cabin is exactly busy.

In colour semiotics, the grey colour is associated with loss or depression (Bourn, 2010) the grey hair of a woman makes her woman of middle age. Red colour, in general, represents passion, desire, love and anger (Bourn, 2011). So, the red circle around the computer symbolizes her love and endless desire for playing games as well as the danger of losing her job if she gets caught by her boss. As white colour denotes clarity, innocence and purity therefore the colour of the text completely represents the clear scenario where people are waiting for a response from the facilitator while she is busy amusing herself.

Social Analysis

The word 'gormint' got very famous soon after being used by a woman, now popular as 'gormint aunty'. She badly bashed the government using abusive language and whatever come into her mind when the reporter of a news channel asked about the position of load shedding in their area. Right after she got viral, memers couldn't get chilled and started linking the word 'gormint' in every possible way and situation they can. This fame of her made not only her life miserable but her family's as well. They stopped meeting neighbours and relatives to avoid the expected embarrassment. The Son of the lady claimed in an interview that the situation became so worse for them that they were unable to find suitable matches for their girls because of the mockery, they faced from their relatives' neighbours and netizens due

to memes. This meme is created by an Indian which shows not only her popularity but her popular word 'gormint' as well. They created this meme to show the negligence of the government that how the masses are waiting for their services but the government are busy, tempting themselves.

Personality no. 3: Ahmed Godil, a Man Who Got Viral in a Very Humorous Way Right After Hosting an Opening Event of PSL 2020

Meme 1 is about the People's Aggression and Response after Hearing the Host

Every Pakistani Rightnow:
#AhmedGodil #PSL5ComesPakistan
#Psloopeningceremony



Figure 5

Textual and Discursive Analysis

The analysis of this meme 1 'kon Bhonk Raha Hai Ye Badtameez' (translation: who is baking ill-mannered?) textually and visually according to the Fairclough 3D model. The sentence in this image shows the abusive, aggressive and strong reaction of the person who is speaking in the picture. The person in this image is famous Indian actor Vijay Raaz who is famous for his comedy acting in Indian Movies. His body language and way of

speaking show his intensive reaction to something. The anger in his eyes demonstrates that someone has done or uttered something which he disliked. Even though his expressions portray him as some angry kind of person but his colourful t-shirt and hat indicate that he is one jolly kind of personality. Even though his expressions portray him as some angry kind of person but his colourful t-shirt and hat indicate that he is one jolly kind of personality. The scene is indicating, he is a movie director by profession. The other person sitting on the left side can be seen as confused and focused at the same time on the current situation. His eyes and facial gesture show that he is paying attention to what the other person is pointing out. His dress portrays him as a kind of secretary by profession. Yellow colour stands for sunshine, hope, and happiness, but on the other, it represents cowardice, deceit and a warning too (Bourn, 2011). The black colour of his thick hair shows that he is a middle-aged man. The yellow colour of the text shown in the picture presents anger and offensiveness. In general, the yellow colour symbolizes optimism and happiness but the undesirable characteristic is that it can bring worry and sorrow, as a result, making people overcritical. The greenery Background in the picture shows that the characters are sitting on the ground.

Social Analysis

Ahmed Godil is a Pakistani model, host, actor and former VJ. he became well-known and, in the spotlight, after his memes got viral on social media about his PSL 5 hosting back in 2020. He became the prey of cyberbullying which left him depressed and gloomy. Ahmed is the part of Pakistani industry and has been hosting for a long time. The statement in meme 1 was uttered by famous Indian action movie actor Rajinikanth 'kon

Bhonk Raha Hai Ye Badtameez' the important word is the verb "Bhonk", which is a metaphor used for someone who is speaking foolishly. The important word is the verb "Bhonk", which is a metaphor used for someone who is speaking foolishly.

Meme 2 is about Referring to the PSL's Host as Cheap (Sastsy wala)

PCB: PSL ka liya host tu dekhana
 Me: Sir mahngay Wala ya Thora sasta sa
 PCB: sastsy Wala hi dekhao Bhai
 Me: la sir #Ahmedgodil

[Translate Tweet](#)



Figure 6

Textual and Discursive Analysis

The image of the above meme is taken from PSL 2020. The important word in this picture "Sastsy-wala" (cheap product), is a simile probably portraying the host of the show itself sasta. In the picture above a person can be seen standing in an energetic mood. His dressing style which is a black pent-coat indicates that he performing something in a formal setting. In his left hand he is holding a mic which indicates that he is hosting an event and in his right hand, he is pointing something to the audience. His cool hairstyle and spectacles specify something energetic is going on. As the green colour represents

growth and prosperity so the background of the picture is an indication that something progressive is being done. Since the colour of the Pakistani flag is green as well, it can also be interpreted that some national event is going on.

In general, the black colour symbolizes mystery, elegance, power and sophistication but in terms of emotions, it represents emotions like sadness and anger. So, the lines in the above picture can be used in the interpretation of the very same emotions of anger and sadness, probably on the person shown in the picture by calling him 'sasta' and complaining to PCB for not choosing a host who is worth being a host. People complained that PCB was out of budget so what was coming in their desired budget they choose him and gave him a huge responsibility which he failed to complete. His way of hosting ruined the expectations and excitement of the audience by having a host who got failed to entertain the audience during the opening ceremony of the PCB.

Social Analysis

This is the common scenario in our society to criticize people and with the rise in the use of social media, this task of commenting and judging people is being done through memes. Ahmed Godil is a Pakistani model, host, actor and former VJ. he became well-known and, in the spotlight, after his memes got viral on social media about his PSL 5 hosting back in 2020. He became prey to cyberbullying which left him depressed and gloomy. Right after the event, memes after memes began to appear in which people disapproved of Ahmed godil's hosting skilling and gave him different titles one of which was 'sasta host'. All these memes badly affected the host he not only cried but parted his way from PCB hosting.

Personality no. 4: A College Girl was Trolled for using Incorrect Situational English after Giving an Interview

Meme no. 1 is about the Girl's Excitement Saying we are Proud of you Nonpareil to the Context.

Yeh sab dekh kar kasam se daddo mazza scene hogaya hai aur...
@RizwanPehelwan @RizWanKenobi_
@palwashaminhas



Figure 7

Textual and Discursive Analysis

According to the Fairclough 3D model, the girls shown in this picture are simple family girls. Her facial expressions and gestures show her excitement. The brightness of her eyes shows that she was living a worthy life and enjoying the weather. Her smile expresses that she was heartily happy for giving an interview with the reporter. The skin colour of her cap shows that she is a simple girl. The white colour of the text shown in the picture shows purity. As it indicates purity and stands for everything for good and right. The dark background of the picture is creating a negative story.

Social Interpretation

There is another example of a girl who was with her group of friends and they were excited and enjoying the weather on Murree mall road. A reporter came to them and asked

a question about the first fog of the season. In excitement one of the girls answered almost irrelevant, “We are enjoying and we are proud of you (bohat maza araha, we are proud of you). And soon this phrase became the next sensation on various social media pages. Even different forums started making funny videos and memes about the girl. That put bad effects on the health and mind of the girl. She left the college and didn't go again. She cried at the top of her voice when her friends asked her why she was not coming to college. The girl was so depressed and told that she wanted to die rather than go to college again in such an embarrassing situation. As we all know that we live in a society where relate lots of negativity. This young girl with her friends enjoyed herself a lot but she didn't know that soon she was going to be trolled by social media. Making fun of others should be in limit because it may not bother us but maybe it can cause depression for the victim.

MEME 2 is about Trolling the Same Girl's Famous Line 'we are Proud of you' in a Different Context in which the Waiter asked about the Order.

Waiter: What would you like to order mam?
Lahori girl: We are proud of you!

Figure 8

Textual and Discursive Analysis

This meme is created in a dialogue form. Where a waiter wants an order. In return, the girl replies differently. Her answer is not relevant which is making the situation interesting as well as funny. Simply creating a meme with the use of many colours. depicts a very simple situation made humorous by connecting with different scenarios.

Social Interpretation

A college girl was bullied by members after her beside-the-point answer to a news reporter. Her answer was entertaining but people exaggerated her words and made her shameful. Whatever she said in the interview was just her excitement. It does not mean that she was illiterate and did not know how to reply but people made humorous comments to entertain each other. One of the friends of the Lahori girl said that her confidence in her friend would be shattered for the rest of her life and she might never join the college again and not even talk to anyone because of awkwardness.

Findings and Discussion

Miltner (2014) and Milner (2016) asserted that Internet memes have become well received as they evoke emotional attachment; people like and share memes because they relate their emotional betrothment with them. Hence, these memes are easily in everyone. People enjoy these memes if they create fun. But not all the time do memes create enjoyment; sometimes they become the source of stress and depression. Psychologically “Sharing Mental Health Memes are Making Things Worse, Not Better” (Ali, 2021). Perceptibly, memes can vary in their emotional tones. Some memes are humorous and create laughter, but many of them are more negative because of stressful life events. Some situations become worse when they are continuously trolled through memes. There is a limit to everything, but when things start crossing the limit, they get wrong.

The textual analysis of the above memes disclosed that linguistically and visually they were created to criticise people negatively and made their situation even worse; not only socially but also psychologically. The linguistic description of memes was dominated by Negative representations of people. Depreciating language and mocking

Images were used as a medium to increase their depression. Linguistic Analysis has proved that language plays a significant role to create any event better or worse. In the description stage, Vocabulary, grammar, syntax, and colour semiotics are systemically analysed. The choice of Vocabulary is a powerful tool (Fairclough, 2001). In the social analysis stage, it is found that Memes on Pakistani Facebook spread negativity by stretching social and personal issues and generating stress and depression. The findings of this study are relevant to the social context of Pakistan. The results of this research confirm that the significance of memes and their psychological effects on people will proceed to grow their popularity positively or negatively.

Recommendations

- The findings of this research suggest some recommendations to eliminate the negative impact of memes.
- There should be censorship when it starts crossing the limit to trouble someone personally or socially.
- This research will be a walking track for other researchers who want to analyse the critical impact of memes in the current scenarios. Memes are not a good way to convey the utmost thoughts on a racial situation. This is because they ignore the diversity and problems of mental health (Paul Thagard, 2013).
- This research will be a walking track for other researchers who want to analyse the critical impact of memes in the current scenarios.
- This research can create awareness and precautions measures about the negative effects of targeted memes.
- This research can show that fun-created memes are a kind of cyber-bullying and cyber-crimes

- The researcher will be able to measure the intensity of such kind of life-disturbing memes.
- The future-researchers can work on the language of memes for mitigating the chance of negative side effects on the targeted personality.
- The researcher can show and warn the public about fun-created memes can be sometimes absolute heart-wrenching for others.
- The researcher can portray the exact and damaged condition of the targeted personality.
- The reader in the future can conduct the same type of study in a broader social and cultural context.
- In the future readers can conduct their research in the broader general area of Pakistan as well as outside Pakistan.
- The Reader from the future can analyze the memes from a social, political and cultural perspective.

Conclusion

Memes are not always tasteful. By making jokes out of serious issues; they can mess up the situation by increasing anxiety and depression. People who are going through tough situations are easily influenced by everything which they read or consume. It can hurt them psychologically. The data analysis manifests that the negative representation of people through memes is not only systematized linguistically but is also augmented and created visually. The words exhibit that many times people's depiction in the memes is negative. By associating images with text, memes constitute a negative impact on the psychology of people many times. It brings results that excessive criticism through memes on social media can be a disaster for a person psychologically.

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