



Decoding the Metaphor of Humor: Understanding Why Filipino Cybernauts Cannot Stop Clicking on Internet Memes

Al M. Lolos*, Ashley A. Etrata, Kendra Clarisse I. Gonzales, Megan B. Lipura, Hassanal P. Abusama

Sultan Kudarat State University, the Philippines

*Correspondence: E-mail: alolos@sksu.edu.ph

ABSTRACTS

Internet memes have become popular among the Filipino youth cybernauts community. It is so pervasive that it's difficult not to encounter one on any of the social media platforms. However, even if they are popular, little is known about why they are widespread. This study aimed to know why Filipino youth cybernauts always share memes on the Internet. Specifically, it answered the following questions: (1) How do they perceive Internet memes?; (2) How do Internet memes affect their connections with other people?; and (3) What are the implications of Internet memes on them? To gather data for the study, interviews, with the use of an interview guide, were conducted with the participants selected through purposive sampling. Data collected were analyzed through thematic analysis. The participants were ten (10) Filipino youth cybernauts. This study shows the following points: (1) Internet memes are perceived as a way of showing to others their humanness; (2) Internet memes strengthen the connections and the relations they do have with others; and (3) Internet memes make them feel emotions that drive them human. From the study's findings, it was concluded that Internet memes play a big role in the life of most Filipino youth cybernauts, and it is, therefore, recommended that they should be properly guided in the Internet realm on how they handle activities concerning Internet memes in general.

ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Submitted/Received 16 Jul 2022

First revised 21 Aug 2022

Accepted 29 Aug 2022

First available online 30 Aug 2022

Publication date 01 Sep 2022

Keyword:

Cybernauts,
Filipino youth,
Internet memes,
Internet,
Memes,
Social media.

1. INTRODUCTION

The 21st century has become the germ of the digital world and the Internet where Internet memes are prevalent. Internet memes are pieces of culture shared across the online realm (Kostadinovska-Stojchevska & Shalevska, 2018). They come in the form of texts, videos, pictures, audio, or in a combination of the aforementioned formats. Internet memes are a sensation that expeditiously gained popularity on the internet. Internet memes are a representation of the communication formats that have thrived in tandem with the digital world's inception (Blackmore *et al.*, 2000). Memes, intrinsically, propagate slowly among people (Knobel, 2006). The digital world and the Internet, which is a center of communication or exchange of ideas, however, have augmented the rate at which culture is shared (Kostadinovska-Stojchevska & Shalevska, 2018). This phenomenon has affected every part of popular culture as well as our emotions. People may express and convey their views and ideas about specific issues by sharing appropriate memes. Memes enable intercultural expression because everyone is a part of this "virtually-connected universe". They elicit specific feelings in people concerning the material. So, Internet memes are just as aesthetically appealing as literature. Little is known about why the youth share a lot of memes on different social media platforms and websites. In the Philippines alone, they have seeped into the systems of interactions in the Internet communities due to their inherent communicative capabilities (Bernarte *et al.*, 2016). Thus, this study sought to understand why Filipino youth cybernauts are so engaged in Internet memes. The purpose of this study was to know the different reasons of people in identifying as part of Filipino youth. We also consider why people share a lot of Internet memes on many social media platforms and the Internet in general.

2. METHODS

This study utilized a qualitative research design. Specifically, phenomenology was used as the approach to answering its queries. This was conducted online utilizing Google meet due to the COVID-19 pandemic. We used a guided interview structured to elicit the necessary information from the participants. Lastly, thematic analysis was used to evaluate the data collected.

2.1. Participants of the Study

For this study, the participants consist of ten (10) cybernauts that are part of Filipino youth. In addition, youth is described by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization on 2021 as people whose age range falls between 15-24 years old. Respectively, the participants must fulfill the following criteria: Filipino in terms of nationality, 15-24 years old, and active on the internet sharing a lot of Internet memes on some social media platforms.

2.2. Research Instrument

To gather data for the study, we used an interview guide to elicit responses from the participants. Our interview had 2 parts: 1) The first step was to determine whether the participant's profile was appropriate for the interview. 25 For the criteria, we extensively analyzed the participant's history, as well as if they had a better grasp and insights into the study; 2) The second part of the interview was performed utilizing the interview guide to acquire information from the participants. We conducted one-on-one interviews using the interview guide with the participants through Google Meet.

2.3. Data Gathering Procedure

To gather data, we first wrote the pertinent letters that approved the conduct of the study. Inclusion criteria were formulated by us to select participants that would give answers to the problems stated. From those, we chose participants by giving them both letters and the interview guide. Then, we conducted one on one interviews with the participants. We utilized Filipino and English languages. Each of the interviews was recorded for the accuracy of the information and better interpretation of collected data with the participants' consent. We then translated the data collected into a single language and transcribed it so that it is easy to understand and discuss. The responses from the participants were analyzed according to the thematic analysis in qualitative research wherein the responses from every participant were grouped according to their similarities.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Memetic Utility

Internet memes are useful for Filipino youth cybernauts. The participants were asked for their perceptions regarding Internet memes. They had enough knowledge of memes as they shared many of them on different social media platforms (Du *et al.*, 2020). Most of their general impressions of memes are associated with entertainment, humor, and laughter. Some of the participants mentioned ways how through Internet memes, they may express their feelings to other people. They said that they could also impart knowledge that they have learned from school, home, and different aspects of their lives. Some are even able to convey their culture through Internet memes. Moreover, Internet memes for them aided them in participating in the movement of society through societal issues that are timely and relevant. Overall, they can learn many things through Internet memes.

3.2. Memetic Strings

Internet memes serve as a string that connects Filipino youth cybernauts with their peers and social groups on the internet. They were asked how internet memes affect their relationships with other people. Most of them stated that they relate with each other and create a connection through memes as they always share them on social media. They have also stated that memes are great topic generators and give them a chance to connect and share their thoughts and feelings with their peers. Some can regain contact with their friends because of the memes that they share. Furthermore, Internet memes for them were somehow a way of communicating with other people. In social media apps, they have mentioned that they interact a lot through memes with their Internet friends and people they know present in Internet spaces. Internet memes have spiced up their way of communicating with other people, ultimately making them somewhat good tools of communication. Thus, Internet memes are a great way of interacting with other people to that they relate.

3.3. Memetic Effects

Sharing Internet memes affects people. The participants have mentioned that Internet memes usually have implications on their emotional, mental, and physical well-being. When sharing, most of the time, they would feel certain feelings associated with the certain meme such as joy, sadness, and anger. In Internet memes also, when they relate and they see other people do too, it sort of becomes a ground for belongingness where they wouldn't feel that they aren't alone and that others have it too. In some cases, Internet memes even get to touch their way of thinking, diverting them in certain ways one could imagine. They can also

be a way of coping mechanism for them where pent-up emotions may be eased through the quick laughter and light feelings, they may get through Internet memes.

4. CONCLUSION

We concluded that Internet memes have breached the communicative pathways of Filipino youth cybernauts on numerous social media platforms and the Internet in general. Because of the memetic properties of Internet memes, it has enabled the transfer of ideas, emotions, cultures, beliefs, and so on over the Internet. As a result, it is profoundly established in society as a developed component of the human psyche. According to the findings, Internet memes have served a variety of functions spanning from intrapersonal to interpersonal communication. Internet memes have evolved into a tool for expression, a source of emotions, a channel for engagement, and a variety of additional functions that include the totality of human communication. However, for some, Internet memes may serve as a means for nasty jokes that are commonly regarded as amusing, or they may be used to disseminate misinformation. Overall, it's a double-edged sword, but that's what makes it standard. Miscommunications will always occur in society as a result of diversity and individuality. However, this only demonstrates that Internet memes are a viable means of communication among Filipino youth cybernauts.

5. ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This research is a product of the perseverance and determination of we together with the help of individuals, to whom we give their deepest gratitude for making the fulfillment of this research possible.

6. AUTHORS' NOTE

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article. Authors confirmed that the paper was free of plagiarism.

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