Investigating the impact of erroneous use of memes on effective communication

Okafor, Amaka Yvonne

Department of Igbo & other Nigerian languages, Nwafor Orizu College of Education, Nsugbe,

Anambra State, Nigeria

https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0414-4381

Abstract

In the ever-evolving digital age, the influence of memes on effective communication cannot be overstated. However, their widespread popularity has also led to a proliferation of erroneous and misleading content. Guided by cultural evolution and evolutionary game theories, this study delves into the impact of the erroneous use of memes within this dynamic landscape. It explores the cognitive effects of encountering such memes on receivers and investigates the factors contributing to the dissemination of erroneous memes. This research identifies key factors contributing to the creation and spread of erroneous memes, such as confirmation bias, emotional appeal, sensationalism, social media algorithms, cognitive biases, and social reinforcement. In addition to its findings, the study provides practical recommendations for memetic literacy and responsible meme creation and sharing. This study contributes to knowledge by advancing our understanding of memes as a unique form of digital communication and their role in shaping public discourse.

Keywords: Investigation, impact, erroneous use, memes, effective communication.

1. Introduction

In digital communication, memes are pictures, videos, or text that have been combined with amusing or thought-provoking material and are frequently shared widely on social media sites. Communication is a phenomenon that is inevitable in every living creature; however, the communication process differs based on the level of each living creature. In the case of human beings, they use language for communication which can be in verbal or nonverbal form. Change

is inevitable and this spreads to the mode of communication. Some scholars opined that the concept of communication was derived from the Latin verb 'commúnicāre' which could mean the following: to discuss, chat, highlight, talk, confer or even to sensitize each other (Onuora & Obiakor, 2020). In addition, they stated that it can also mean to share or an act of conveying intended meanings from one entity or group to another through the use of mutually understood signs and semiotic rules. According to Ndimele (2001), the role of communication may be informational, expressive, phatic, directive, ideational, performative, or ludic. He further gave an extensive explanation of the listed roles of communication by stating that language plays an informational role in its use to pass information from one person to another. It plays an expressive role when people use it to make their feelings and emotions known to others. Its phatic role is ostensible when it is used to establish contacts and relationships.

The directive role is used to influence the behavior and attitudes of people. Its ideational role is to control and seek compliance with the forces of nature. Effecting a sudden change in state affairs in the real world, the role of performative communication is used. Lastly, the role of ludic is used to create amusement for entertainment. Furthermore, communication can be seen as the sharing of information between different individuals. It includes the sharing of ideas, concepts, imagination, behaviors, and written content. Communication can be simply defined as the transfer of information from one place to another. This transfer of information can be conducted in different ways. Stewart and D'Angelo (1998, p.9) viewed "Communication as an act that involves not just action but action and reaction, not just stimulus, but stimulus and response". In addition, Cherry (1957) has seen communication as a system of sharing elements of behavior, or modes of life, by the existence of sets of rules.

Communication is the only way information can be disseminated to people living in a particular geographical area, individuals living far away but are connected through various mediums, and people having different ideas and intending to reach a compromise or share it among themselves (Meier et al., 2022). It is the key that can unlock all doors of a nation as well as educate the masses on the rules that guide the nation. Communication is an act that started from the creation, down to the present-day means of communication (Kurschilgen & Marcin, 2019). The fast evolution of the present day's communication has washed the traditional way of communication down the drain that people hardly remember the mode of the then communication

process. However, we all know that this is not the case. There has always been a traditional method of communication which synergizes with the modern ways of communication. The modern way of communication is an upgrade of every new means of communication introduced in a particular period. It can simply be called an evolution of communication.

During the ancient period, verbal communication occurred through various means, such as cultural festivals, rituals, folktales, drama, dance, conflict resolution, idiophones (gongs, wooden drums), membranophones (talking drums), aerophones (flute family), symbology (paintings), signals (fire, gunshot), signs, and the like. All the aforementioned convey a message(s) to the observers or the participants. This aligns with Dringer (1982, p.6) which states that "communication is a process that started perhaps even before we knew how to write or spell the word communication"; it perhaps dates back to the advent of life itself. For him, communication is as early as the human race. The evolution of communication started with the above and later moved to the writing of letters telephones faxes email, mobile phones, and the like. However, the advent of mobile phones has led to the development of numerous applications for easy communication, including WhatsApp, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, WeChat, Telegram, Signal, and more. Initially, these applications allowed only text-based communication, but recent innovations have expanded the communication tools to include voice notes, emojis, and memes, among others. However, the use of these tools, especially emojis and memes, is often incorrect, despite their being the simplest and quickest means of communication. Communication can be categorized as one-way or two-way. It is one-way when the sender conveys information without expecting a response, but when the recipient replies to the sender's message, communication becomes a two-way process.

The motivation for the study stems from the increasing prevalence of memes in digital communication and the potential consequences of misinterpretation or misuse. Scholars (Shandilya et al., 2022; Seiffert-Brockmann et al., 2023) have highlighted the ambiguity and potential for misunderstandings in meme communication, revealing a gap in understanding how erroneous meme use affects effective communication. Additionally, a study by Krystal (2019) suggests that memes, when misused, can lead to miscommunication, causing confusion or offense.

By investigating this phenomenon, the research aims to shed light on the implications of meme misinterpretation for digital discourse and interpersonal communication, contributing valuable insights into the evolving landscape of internet communication.

2. Electronic Communication, Memes, and the Art of Digital Discourse

Electronic ways of communication have revolutionized how we interact in the digital age. These methods encompass a range of technologies, from email and text messaging to social media and video conferencing (Xia et al., 2023). They offer the immediacy and convenience of real-time exchanges, connecting people across vast distances. This shift has led to a fundamental transformation in how information and ideas are disseminated. Within electronic communication, memes have emerged as a prominent feature. Memes are units of cultural information, often humorous or satirical, that spread rapidly through the internet (Iloh, 2021). They can take the form of images, videos, text, or even behaviors. Memes are shared widely, often reaching viral status, as they resonate with various groups, whether based on shared experiences, humor, or social commentary (Wang & Wang, 2015).

The nature of memes lies in their ability to simplify complex ideas into easily digestible formats, frequently using humor, exaggeration, or recognized symbols. They serve as vehicles for cultural transmission, influencing public discourse and shaping opinions (Pishghadam et al., 2020). Memes not only convey messages but can also create a sense of community or belonging among those who understand them. However, the erroneous use of memes poses challenges to effective communication. When memes are misinterpreted or used inappropriately, they can lead to confusion, offense, or miscommunication. Understanding the nuances of meme culture is essential to avoid such pitfalls and utilize memes effectively in online exchanges.

3. Communication and role of memes in the digital age

The digital age has ushered in an unprecedented revolution in the way we communicate. With the advent of the internet and the proliferation of digital devices, communication has evolved into a dynamic and multifaceted landscape. In this context, memes, as a form of cultural expression, have gained prominence as a means of conveying ideas, emotions, and information.

However, their erroneous use can significantly impact effective communication. Memes, in the digital realm, refer to images, videos, or text accompanied by humorous or provocative content, often shared virally across social media platforms (Pilipets & Paasonen, 2022). They serve as powerful tools for encapsulating complex ideas into digestible and shareable formats. Memes have become an integral part of online discourse, enabling individuals to engage with a wide audience and express their opinions on various subjects.

However, the explosive popularity of memes has led to a proliferation of erroneous and misleading content. The ease with which memes can be created and disseminated means that factual accuracy is not always a top priority. Elmore and Coleman (2019) pointed out that misinformation, misinterpretation, and manipulation of memes have become prevalent issues in the digital age, posing significant challenges to effective communication. One of the primary reasons behind the impact of erroneous meme use on effective communication is the rapid spread of misinformation (Wagner & Schwarzenegger, 2020). Memes can convey misleading or false information in a succinct and attention-grabbing manner, making them potent vehicles for spreading inaccuracies. When individuals encounter such memes, they may accept the content at face value, leading to the dissemination of false information and the erosion of trust in credible sources.

Moreover, memes often rely on oversimplification and reductionism to convey their messages. Oversimplification and reductionism involve simplifying complex concepts or systems to make them more understandable. Oversimplification, often found in communication and problem-solving, can omit crucial details, leading to misunderstanding. Reductionism, a scientific and philosophical approach, seeks to break complex phenomena into simpler parts, valuable for certain investigations but inadequate for capturing emergent properties in complex systems (Drees et al, 2021; Beusch, 2022). Both approaches can lead to a loss of nuance and misrepresent reality. While useful in specific contexts, they should be applied with caution, as they may limit predictive power and hinder comprehensive problem-solving, necessitating a more holistic perspective in certain cases for a more accurate understanding of complex phenomena. While this brevity can be effective for humor or satire, it can also result in the distortion or oversimplification of complex

issues. This oversimplification can hinder nuanced and constructive discussions, as memes encourage quick judgments rather than in-depth analysis.

The emotional impact of memes further compounds the challenge of effective communication (Boudana et al., 2017). Memes are designed to evoke emotional responses, whether through humor, shock, anger, or empathy. Erroneous memes that prey on emotions can lead to polarization and the reinforcement of preexisting beliefs. Individuals may be less inclined to engage in rational discourse when emotions run high, impeding the exchange of ideas and hindering effective communication. Additionally, Pelletier-Gagnon and Pérez-Trujillo (2021) observed that memes often rely on cultural references and context, which can lead to misinterpretation when shared across diverse audiences. What is humorous or meaningful to one group may be offensive or confusing to another. This cultural disconnect can inadvertently perpetuate stereotypes, reinforce biases, and hinder cross-cultural understanding.

The role of memes in digital communication extends beyond individual interactions. Memes often influence public discourse and shape the narratives surrounding important issues. Erroneous or misleading memes can distort public perception and contribute to the spread of conspiracy theories or unfounded beliefs. This can have real-world consequences, such as the dissemination of health misinformation during a pandemic or the distortion of political discourse.

In the digital age, the emergence and role of memes have transformed the way we communicate, disseminate information, and engage with one another. Memes, often humorous or thought-provoking images, videos, or text, encapsulate cultural references and convey ideas in a concise and shareable format. Memes, in the context of digital communication, emerged as a cultural phenomenon in the early 21st century. The term "meme" itself was coined by Richard Dawkins in his 1976 book, "The Selfish Gene," to describe the way cultural ideas and behaviors spread and evolve within societies, much like genes in biological evolution. In the digital realm, memes represent units of cultural information, often characterized by their virality and rapid dissemination. The rise of internet culture and social media platforms provided fertile ground for the proliferation of memes. Internet users began creating and sharing these bite-sized, visually appealing pieces of content that could convey complex ideas, emotions, and humor (Greene, 2019).

Memes quickly became a universal language of the internet, transcending linguistic and cultural barriers.
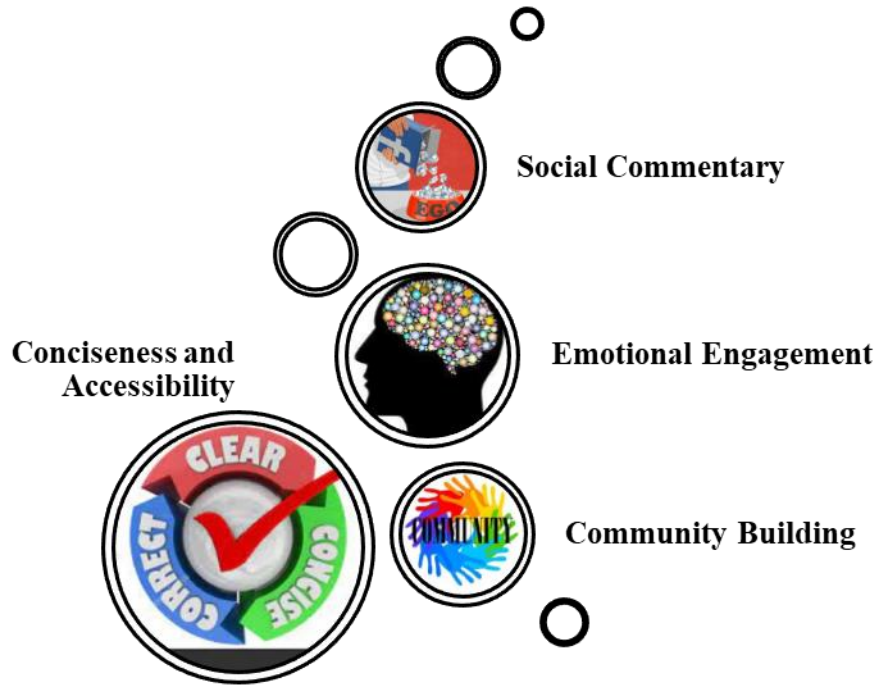

Figure 1: The Role of Memes in Communication

Memes serve several vital roles in modern communication as captured in Figure 1. Memes distill complex concepts into easily digestible formats, making them accessible to a wide audience. They rely on cultural references and symbolism, allowing individuals from diverse backgrounds to understand and engage with the content. Memes excel at evoking emotional responses. Whether through humor, satire, or empathy, they tap into the emotions of the audience, creating a strong connection between the content and the viewer (Rentschler & Thrift, 2015). Memes often serve as tools for social and political commentary. They enable individuals to critique and challenge prevailing narratives, institutions, or ideologies in a format that is both impactful and shareable. Memes create communities of like-minded individuals who identify with and share common memes. These communities foster a sense of belonging and shared identity, often reinforcing specific values or beliefs (Boudana et al., 2017).
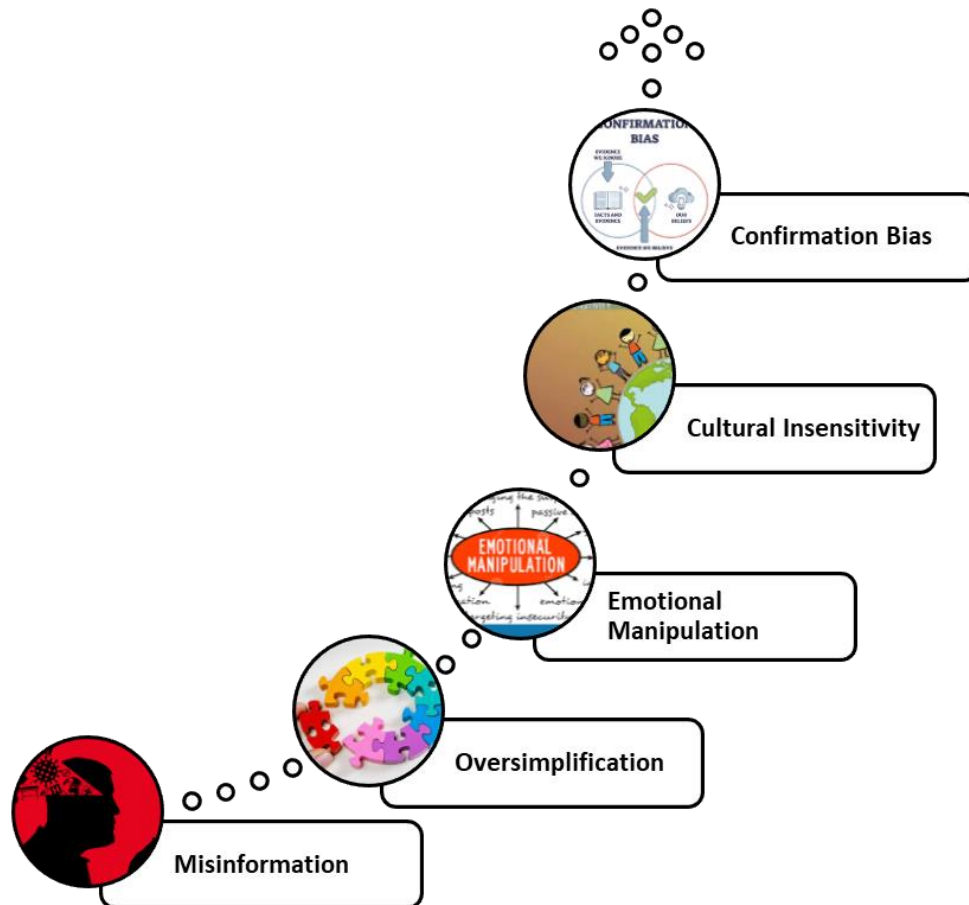
Figure 2: Impact of erroneous use on effective communication

4. Erroneous use of memes and communication

While memes have become an integral part of online discourse, their erroneous use poses significant challenges to effective communication (McReynolds-Pérez, 2022). Figure 2 shows that one of the most significant issues is the spread of misinformation through memes. Erroneous or misleading memes can convey false information, leading individuals to accept inaccurate content as fact (Wagner & Schwarzenegger, 2020). This can erode trust in credible sources and hinder informed decision-making. Memes often rely on simplification and reductionism to convey messages quickly. While this brevity can be effective for humor or satire, it can also result in the distortion or oversimplification of complex issues, hindering nuanced discussions. Erroneous memes that exploit emotions can lead to polarization and reinforce preexisting beliefs. When

memes play on emotions without presenting a balanced perspective, they discourage rational discourse and constructive dialogue (McGrath, 2013). Memes can sometimes perpetuate stereotypes or offend cultural sensitivities, leading to misinterpretation and miscommunication. Content that is humorous to one group may be offensive or confusing to another, causing unintended harm. Erroneous memes that confirm individuals' existing beliefs can contribute to confirmation bias, where individuals only seek out information that aligns with their preconceived notions (Parekh, 2020). This can hinder open-mindedness and the willingness to consider alternative viewpoints.

5. Types of Erroneous Memes

Erroneous memes have become a prevalent and concerning aspect of online communication (Lantagne, 2017). These memes encompass a wide array of misleading or inaccurate content shared through digital media, including social media platforms and messaging apps. The impact of such memes on effective communication is substantial, as they can contribute to the spread of misinformation, misunderstanding, and confusion within online communities. One common type of erroneous meme involves the dissemination of misinformation (Natsuma, 2023). These memes may contain false statistics, fabricated stories, or misleading quotes presented as factual information. The ease with which memes can be created and shared allows misinformation to spread rapidly, potentially influencing public opinion or leading individuals to make decisions based on false premises.

Manipulated images are another form of erroneous memes. Through photo editing software or other digital tools, images can be altered to convey a false narrative. This can range from humorous photo edits to more sinister uses, such as creating fake news images that appear legitimate. Such visual deception can significantly impact effective communication, as visual content often carries great persuasive power. Out-of-context quotes are a subtler but equally impactful form of erroneous meme (Rizzi et al., 2023). By presenting a quote or statement without its full context, memes can distort the intended meaning, leading to misinterpretation or misrepresentation of the original message. This can hinder meaningful dialogue and contribute to misunderstandings. Satirical or parody memes, while often humorous and intended as social commentary, can also be sources of erroneous communication (Steele, 2023). Viewers may

mistake satire for genuine news or opinions, especially when the line between satire and reality is blurred. This can lead to the spread of satirical content as fact, further complicating effective communication. Erroneous memes can exploit emotions to manipulate viewers, playing on fear, outrage, or other strong emotions to gain attention and shares (Roy, 2017). While these memes may not necessarily contain false information, they create an emotional response that can hinder rational discourse and objective analysis.

The proliferation of erroneous memes, particularly in the digital age, has sparked a need for a comprehensive understanding of their role in shaping modern communication and culture. The study of memes has given rise to questions about their origins, their modes of transmission, and their impact on society. To effectively address these questions, a solid theoretical foundation is essential. This is where theoretical frameworks in memetics, such as Cultural Evolution Theory and Evolutionary Game Theory, come into play. These frameworks provide us with the tools to analyze and make sense of the complex dynamics of meme creation, dissemination, and adaptation in the digital landscape.

6. Theoretical Frameworks in Memetics

In the digital era, memes, including erroneous ones, have reshaped communication. Two key theoretical frameworks, Cultural Evolution Theory, based on Richard Dawkins' concept of memes, and Evolutionary Game Theory, developed by John Maynard Smith and George R. Price, illuminate the evolving landscape of modern communication and its interaction with memes. These theories are crucial for understanding this phenomenon and the strategic decision-making involved in meme sharing.

Cultural Evolution Theory: The ideas underlying cultural evolution have developed over several decades, with Richard Dawkins' concept of memes introduced in his book "The Selfish Gene" (1976) serving as a foundational work. Cultural Evolution Theory posits that cultural information, including memes, evolves through mechanisms similar to biological evolution. Key tenets hold that memes are cultural units of information that replicate through imitation, communication, and cultural transmission. Memes can undergo changes or variations as they are transmitted from one individual to another. These variations can be intentional or accidental. Cultural information,

including memes, undergoes a process of selection. Memes that resonate with individuals or have a practical advantage tend to be preserved and propagated. Memes are transmitted from one generation or individual to the next through imitation, teaching, storytelling, and various cultural practices (Rutar, 2021).

Erroneous memes can replicate rapidly in online spaces, often because they are attention-grabbing or emotionally charged. The act of sharing and re-sharing these memes serves as a form of replication. Memes can vary widely in terms of content and interpretation. For example, a meme featuring a popular catchphrase or image from a TV show may be understood and appreciated by fans of that show but could leave others confused. Similarly, political memes can be open to different interpretations depending on one's political beliefs. The versatility of memes allows for humor, satire, or commentary, making their content and meaning highly dependent on the context and the perspective of the viewer. Erroneous memes may undergo variations as they are shared, with individuals adding their comments or modifying the original meme's message. These variations can contribute to the spread of misinformation. Erroneous memes may be selected for transmission based on their sensationalism, emotional appeal, or alignment with preexisting beliefs. Memes that evoke strong emotions or confirm existing biases are more likely to be shared widely, even if they are inaccurate. The transmission of erroneous memes can have a significant impact on communication. When individuals encounter and share memes that contain false or misleading information, they contribute to the propagation of inaccurate beliefs and ideas.

Evolutionary Game Theory: John Maynard Smith and George R. Price are notable contributors to the development of Evolutionary Game Theory. Evolutionary Game Theory emerged in the mid-20th century, with foundational works published by John Maynard Smith in the 1970s. Evolutionary Game Theory is a mathematical framework used to study strategic interactions and decision-making processes in evolutionary contexts. Individuals decide whether to share memes based on various factors, including their perception of the meme's impact, the potential emotional response it may trigger, and its alignment with their own beliefs. Erroneous memes that elicit strong emotional responses may be strategically shared more frequently. In the context of meme sharing, payoffs can be viewed as the perceived benefits of sharing a meme. Erroneous memes may offer emotional satisfaction, social validation, or confirmation of preexisting beliefs as

payoffs for sharing (Newton, 2018). Memes that are more successful in terms of eliciting emotional responses or reinforcing existing beliefs may be more likely to be shared and, thus, reproduced. This can lead to the proliferation of erroneous memes that impact effective communication by reinforcing false or misleading narratives.

Therefore, Cultural Evolution Theory and Evolutionary Game Theory offer valuable frameworks for understanding the spread and impact of memes, including erroneous ones, in the context of effective communication. Cultural Evolution Theory helps explain the replication, variation, selection, and transmission of memes, while Evolutionary Game Theory sheds light on the strategic decision-making processes involved in meme sharing and propagation. These theories provide essential insights for investigating how erroneous memes can influence communication dynamics in the digital age.

7. Factors Contributing to Erroneous Memes

Erroneous memes, often characterized by false or misleading information, have become a prevalent issue in online communication. Understanding the contributing factors to their creation, dissemination, and persistence is crucial for addressing this challenge. Courtois and Frissen (2023) noted that one of the primary factors contributing to erroneous memes is confirmation bias. People tend to seek out information that aligns with their existing beliefs, and when they encounter memes that confirm their viewpoints, they are more likely to share them. This bias creates an echo chamber effect, where individuals are exposed to and propagate information that may not be factually accurate (Denisova, 2019). Emotional appeal is another significant factor. Memes that trigger strong emotions like anger, fear, or humor tend to go viral. People share content that makes them feel something, whether it is outrage over a perceived injustice or laughter at a clever joke. Unfortunately, this emotional response often takes precedence over fact-checking (Hajimichael, 2021).

Sensationalism is another driver of erroneous memes. Memes with sensational or provocative content, even if false, attract attention. Individuals are drawn to content that shocks or challenges conventional norms, making them more likely to share it without verifying its accuracy. The role of social media algorithms cannot be understated (Contreras, 2021). These algorithms prioritize content that generates high levels of engagement, such as likes, shares, and comments.

Erroneous memes that prompt emotional reactions and intense discussions are favored by these algorithms, leading to their rapid dissemination. Cognitive biases also play a significant role. For instance, the availability heuristic leads people to rely on readily available information, which can include erroneous memes encountered frequently (Lahey-McCoy, 2022). Additionally, the illusion of truth effect causes individuals to believe that information is true simply because they've seen it repeatedly. Media literacy, or the lack thereof, is a critical factor. Many individuals lack the skills to critically evaluate the information they encounter online. Without the ability to distinguish credible sources from unreliable ones or to fact-check memes, they are more susceptible to misinformation (Elmore & Coleman, 2019).

Social reinforcement within one's network is a powerful influencer. If a person's friends or family members share erroneous memes, they are more likely to accept and propagate them without scrutiny. Trusted social connections can inadvertently amplify false information (Journell, & Clark, 2019). Also, economic incentives contribute to the proliferation of erroneous memes. Content creators may generate revenue through advertising linked to their memes. Therefore, they may be motivated to produce and promote sensational or false content to attract clicks and views.

8. Cognitive effects on receivers

One prominent effect is misinformation acceptance. When receivers encounter memes that contain inaccuracies, they may not immediately recognize the errors. The catchy or humorous presentation of memes can make the false information appear credible. Over time, if individuals do not fact-check or critically evaluate the content, they may unintentionally accept the erroneous information as fact (Wong & Holyoak, 2021). This can lead to a distortion of their understanding of various topics, potentially resulting in misguided beliefs or decisions. Erroneous memes can also reinforce confirmation bias, a cognitive tendency to seek out and accept information that confirms one's preexisting beliefs while dismissing contradictory evidence. Memes that align with an individual's existing views are more likely to be shared and endorsed (Kahan et al., 2017). When receivers encounter memes that confirm their biases, it further solidifies their convictions. This reinforcement can make it challenging for individuals to engage in open and objective communication, as they may dismiss information that challenges their established beliefs.

On the other hand, when individuals encounter memes that contradict their existing beliefs, it can trigger cognitive dissonance. Cognitive dissonance is an uncomfortable feeling that arises from holding conflicting ideas. To resolve this dissonance, individuals may need to invest substantial cognitive effort in reevaluating their beliefs and potentially altering them (Wong et al., 2022). This process can be emotionally challenging and may hinder effective communication, as individuals grapple with the discomfort of revising their viewpoints. Additionally, Paciello et al., (2021) noted that the condensed format and often humorous or satirical nature of memes can discourage critical thinking. Memes are designed for quick consumption, and they often lack the nuance or context necessary for a thorough understanding of complex issues. Receivers may be more inclined to accept meme content at face value without conducting further research or verification, especially when the content aligns with their existing beliefs.

Erroneous memes are also adept at evoking emotional responses. Whether through humor, anger, or outrage, memes can trigger strong emotions. When erroneous memes prompt emotional reactions, receivers may become emotionally engaged, prioritizing their feelings over objective analysis. This emotional engagement can impede rational and evidence-based communication, as individuals may struggle to set aside their emotions and engage in a more reasoned discourse (Paciello et al., 2021). Moreover, frequent encounters with erroneous memes can lead to a decreased trust in online information sources and social media platforms. When receivers repeatedly come across false or misleading content on these platforms, they may become increasingly skeptical of the reliability of information found online. This skepticism can undermine effective communication within digital spaces (Chaudhry & Wald, 2022).

9. Memetic influence on public discourse

In recent years, memes have emerged as a powerful force in shaping public discourse. These easily shareable and often humorous or satirical images, videos, or text blurbs have transcended their origins as internet humor to become a prominent means of communication and influence in the digital age. One of the key attributes of memes that contributes to their influence is their accessibility and virality (Parekh, 2020). Memes are designed for quick consumption and sharing, making them highly shareable on social media platforms. This rapid dissemination ensures that memes can reach a broad audience, including individuals who might not typically

engage with longer-form articles or traditional news sources (Tindale, 2017). As a result, memes have the potential to introduce and propagate ideas, perspectives, and narratives to a wide and diverse audience.

Memes are powerful tools for simplifying complex issues and conveying relatable content. They distill intricate topics into easily digestible formats, often using humor, exaggeration, and universally recognized symbols. Memes simplify subjects like climate change, making them accessible and sparking discussions. Examples like the "Distracted Boyfriend" and "Two Buttons" memes illustrate how they tap into shared experiences and emotions (Herrera, 2017; Munir, 2019). Their bite-sized nature enables quick consumption and easy sharing, making them a gateway to deeper discussions and a means of raising awareness about diverse issues in an engaging and accessible way in the online world. This simplification can be an asset in conveying key messages, making them more accessible to a broad audience. However, Ponton and Mantello (2021) noted that it is essential to recognize that this simplification can also have drawbacks, as it may oversimplify nuanced subjects and potentially distort the public's understanding of complex issues. While memes can serve as conversation starters, they may not provide comprehensive analyses (Milner, 2013).

Memes are adept at evoking emotional responses. Whether through humor, satire, empathy, or outrage, memes can tap into the viewer's emotions, making them highly engaging. Emotional engagement can be a powerful tool for shaping public sentiment and driving discussions. Emotionally resonant memes can have a profound impact on online discourse. During the COVID-19 pandemic, humorous memes about lockdown life garnered widespread sharing and prompted conversations about shared struggles (Cancelas-Ouviña, 2021). In social justice movements like "Black Lives Matter," powerful and emotional memes became symbols, driving discussions on critical issues (Dynel & Poppi, 2023). Memes addressing environmental concerns, featuring distressed animals and climate change messages, evoke strong emotions and lead to conversations about sustainability and activism. These examples illustrate that emotionally charged memes not only go viral but also serve as catalysts for meaningful conversations, fostering a sense of community and driving increased participation in discussions related to the topics they address.

Additionally, memes can serve as instruments for agenda-setting. By selecting particular memes to share and discuss, individuals and groups can prioritize specific issues or viewpoints,

influencing what topics gain prominence in public conversations. Memes can set the agenda by making specific subjects more salient or by framing them in particular ways (Kozhamkulova & Foster, 2019). They can shape public discourse by drawing attention to specific concerns, values, or narratives. However, it's essential to acknowledge that memes can also reinforce echo chambers within online communities. These echo chambers can limit exposure to diverse perspectives and hinder constructive discourse. When memes are primarily shared within like-minded groups, individuals may find themselves surrounded by content that reinforces their existing beliefs and discourages engagement with dissenting viewpoints.

10. Ways of mitigating the impact of erroneous meme use on effective communication

To mitigate the impact of erroneous use of memes on effective communication, several steps can be taken. Promoting digital literacy and critical thinking is crucial (Shomova, 2020). Individuals should be equipped with the skills to discern credible information from misinformation, critically evaluate content, and fact-check memes before sharing them (Mihailidis, 2015).
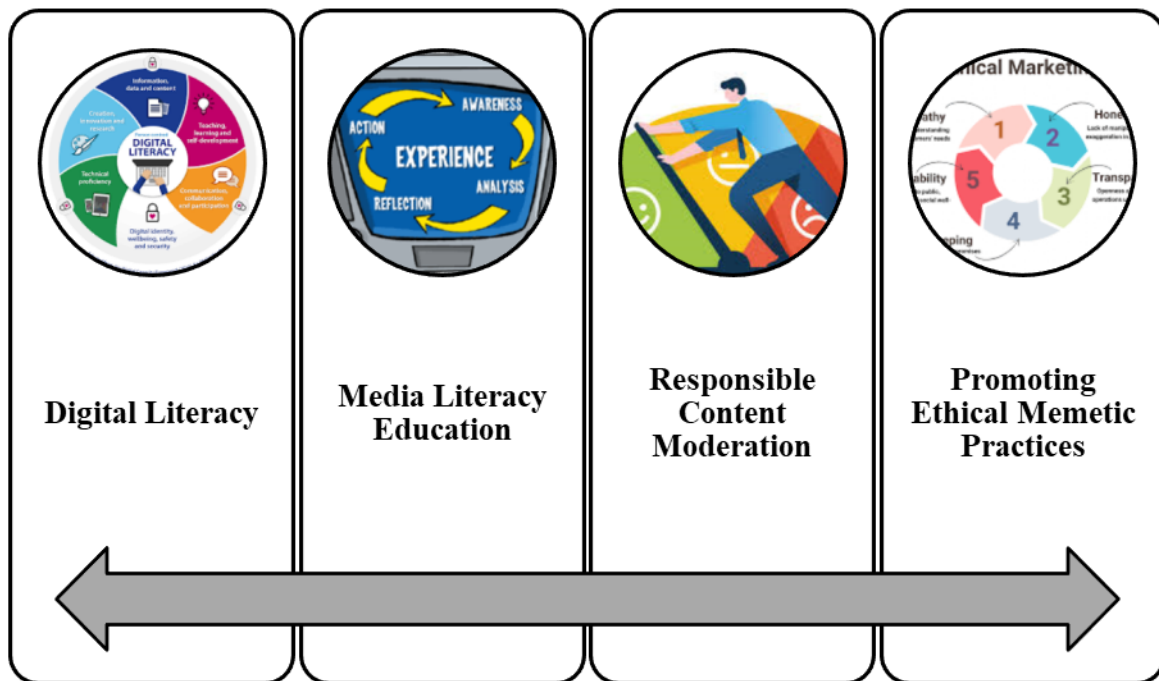

Figure 3: Ways of mitigating the impact of erroneous meme use on effective communication

Educational initiatives should focus on media literacy to empower individuals to navigate the digital landscape effectively. Schools, institutions, and online platforms can play a role in providing resources and training on media literacy. Social media platforms and online communities have a responsibility to enforce policies that curb the spread of false or harmful memes (Chowdhury & Chakraborty, 2021). This includes fact-checking mechanisms, reporting features, and transparency about content moderation practices. Encouraging ethical meme creation and sharing is essential. Users should consider the potential impact of their memes on others and be mindful of cultural sensitivities, misinformation, and emotional manipulation (Fei et al., 2021).

11. Road Map to Memetic Literacy

Education systems should integrate media literacy and memetic literacy into their curricula. This would ensure that students learn how to critically assess and engage with meme content from an early age. Workshops, seminars, and online courses on memetic literacy can also help educate individuals of all ages about the complexities of memes and their influence on digital communication. Encouraging critical thinking is paramount. People should be taught how to question information sources, seek evidence, and assess the reliability of meme content. Emphasizing the importance of fact-checking before sharing memes or accepting their content as accurate is essential. Actively support media literacy programs that teach individuals how to assess the credibility and bias of online content, including memes. These programs should guide recognition of common misinformation and disinformation tactics employed in meme creation.

Encourage the habit of verifying the source of a meme before sharing it. Stress the importance of looking for the original creator or the context in which the meme was generated. Remind individuals that understanding the source is critical to interpreting the meme correctly. Teach individuals to cross-check information presented in memes with reliable sources of information, such as reputable news outlets or official websites. Educate them on using reverse image searches or online fact-checking tools to verify the authenticity of images and claims. Explain the significance of context when interpreting memes. Memes often rely on contextual knowledge, and without it, the intended message can be misinterpreted. Train individuals to consider the broader context of a meme, including any cultural, historical, or social references it may contain.
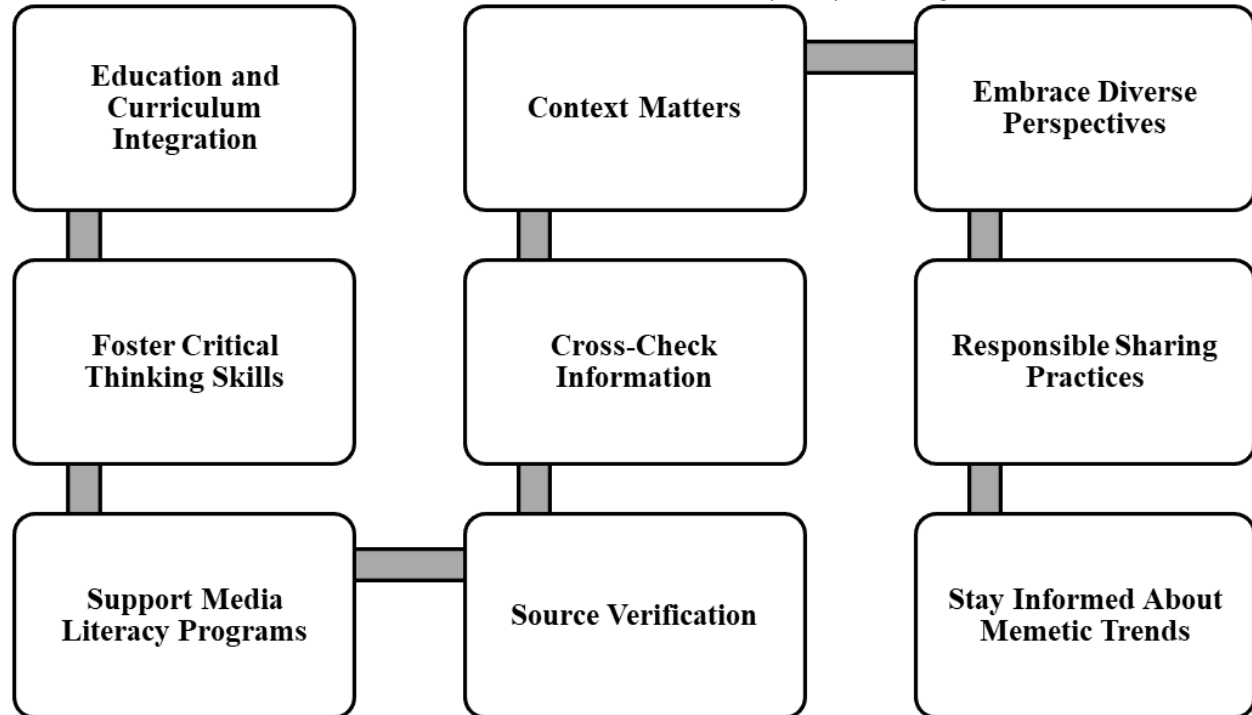
Figure 4: Recommendations for Memetic Literacy

Encourage individuals to actively seek out and engage with diverse perspectives and viewpoints, both online and offline. This practice helps counteract echo chambers and promotes more balanced discussions. Highlight the value of respectful dialogue and open-mindedness in online interactions. Promote responsible meme-sharing practices. Encourage individuals to weigh the potential consequences of sharing a meme, especially if it contains sensitive or controversial content. Remind users that sharing a meme amplifies its visibility and potential impact, so they should be mindful of what they choose to propagate. Stress the importance of staying informed about evolving memetic trends. The landscape of internet humor and communication is constantly changing. Awareness of current meme culture aids in understanding the context and significance of memes, making it easier to discern their intent and meaning. By adopting these recommendations and fostering a culture of critical thinking and responsible online behavior, individuals can navigate the meme-filled digital landscape more effectively. This, in turn, contributes to a more informed and responsible online discourse, where memes can be appreciated for their humor and cultural significance without compromising the accuracy or integrity of public discourse.

12. Conclusion

This study has delved into the impact of the erroneous use of memes on effective communication in the digital age. The study showed that memes wield significant influence in shaping public discourse. Their accessibility, virality, and ability to evoke emotional responses make them potent tools for conveying messages and influencing attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. Memes have the power to set agendas, reinforce echo chambers, and even impact political processes. The study has highlighted the cognitive effects of memes on individuals. Memes, through humor, satire, and persuasive techniques, can influence cognitive processes, including memory, attention, and information retention. Emotional engagement with memes can also impact decision-making and online behavior. Furthermore, this research underscores the importance of media and digital literacy. Individuals must develop critical thinking skills and the ability to discern credible information from erroneous content, especially in an environment saturated with memes.

The contributions of this study to knowledge are multifaceted. It advances our understanding of memes as a unique form of digital communication and their role in shaping public discourse. The study emphasizes the need for digital literacy education to navigate the digital landscape effectively. It provides insights into the cognitive effects of memes and their impact on information processing and memory. This research sheds light on the ethical considerations surrounding meme creation and sharing in the online sphere. It extends our knowledge of political communication, agenda-setting, and the role of memes in political messaging.

The practical implications of this study are far-reaching. It underscores the importance of media literacy programs and interventions to enhance individuals' ability to critically assess meme content. The findings inform strategies for responsible meme creation and sharing, encouraging users to fact-check and verify information before dissemination. Educators can incorporate memetic literacy into curricula to prepare students for responsible digital citizenship. Policymakers can use insights from this study to develop guidelines for online content, including memes, that promote responsible communication and combat misinformation.

Despite its contributions, this study is not without limitations. It primarily focuses on a specific aspect of memetic communication and may not capture the full breadth of the meme landscape. Additionally, the rapidly evolving nature of meme culture presents challenges in

keeping research up to date. The study's findings may be influenced by contextual factors and the dynamic nature of online communities.

There are several avenues for future theoretical research. Further exploration of the intersection between memes, cognitive psychology, and communication theories to deepen our understanding of the cognitive effects of memes. Investigation of the evolving role of memes in political communication, especially in the context of election campaigns and policymaking. Exploration of cross-cultural differences in meme interpretation and creation, considering how cultural contexts shape meme content and reception. Continued research into the ethical implications of meme creation and dissemination, particularly in addressing the spread of harmful or misleading information.

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