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Trolling with memes is a common trend now in Kashmir. Since, the people of Kashmir are very much fond of memes; consumption is high among the youth of Kashmir. Though memes are not easy to understand, they help gain more information than any other source.

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Muzafar Hamid [α] & Dr. Syeda Afshana [σ]

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Trolling with memes is a common trend now in Kashmir. Since, the people of Kashmir are very much fond of memes; consumption is high among the youth of Kashmir. Though memes are not easy to understand, they help gain more information than any other source. Social media in Kashmir has evolved into a new forum for discussion and debate on contentious issues, providing an opportunity to sway public opinion. It has many people who are end-users of troll memes and provide a forum for its creators. Using questionnaires as a tool of data collection, the research concludes that memes are used as a tool for trolling people, but their impact on people is not long-lasting, though it improves the digital engagement of students on digital platforms in Kashmir.

Keywords: memes, social media, internet memes, kashmir, trolling.

I. Introduction

Memes

According to Merriam-Webster Dictionary, a meme is "a thought, behavior, or fashion that becomes a craze or is in the form of satire on any individual using a mix of photographs, text, or video combined and is used for fun." This meme can spread through imitation from person to person within the culture or outside of the culture and carries its symbolic meaning and represents a particular phenomenon or theme (Merriam-Webster, 2021). A meme is a cultural idea, symbol, or practice that can be conveyed from one mind to another by writing, speaking, gestures, rituals, or other repeatable events. People who support the concept of memes as cultural units of communication define memes as cultural analogs to genes, as they respond the same as genes: they self-replicate, mutate, and can withstand selective pressures (Graham, 2002).

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a) Digital Natives

A Digital native is a young person who has grown up in the digital era, having grown up through computers, Internet, video game consoles, and later mobile phones, social media, and tablets (Prensky, 2001). The term digital native is frequently applied to millennials, Generation Z, and Generation Alpha; the latter two are sometimes referred to as "neo-digital natives," "genuine" digital natives, or "digital integrators" ((Wikipedia contributors, 2022)). Many academic scholars regard the phrase "digital native" as a persistent myth that is not based on empirical evidence, and many call for a more nuanced approach to understand the relationship between digital media, learning, and youth (Margaryan, 2011) (Bennett, 2008).

b) Internet memes

Memes created and spread through Internet from one person to another are known as "*internet memes*." Internet memes are an element of online culture (Börzsei, 2013). They are easy to create and do not require high technology to spread because social media platforms are enough for their dissemination. Internet memes are produced for any known or unknown person and can make that person famous within no time. They impact people from small children to the elderly (Shifman, 2013).

In many memes, there are marks of popular culture (particularly in picture macros of other media), which can sometimes lead to copyright concerns. Many recent memes have bizarre, illogical, and non-sequitur elements and "dank" memes have evolved as a new type of image macro memes. Mimicry and remix are two methods that have been proposed for the spread of Internet memes (Shifman, 2013). When the original meme is remixed, it is altered somehow, whereas imitation occurs when the meme is copied differently from the original. The study's findings, 'Online Memes, Affinities, and Cultural Production,' suggest that the internet contributes to a meme's durability (Knobel, et al., 2018).

Memes do not have to follow a definite format (YS, 2022). Superimposing writing over photographs of people or animals, especially stock photos, can convert them into memes. Rage comics are a subgenre of memes that illustrate a range of human emotions and end with a satirical punch line (Boutin, 2012).

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Webcomics are frequently used as sources for these memes. Other memes, such as Keyboard Cat, are entirely viral phenomena. Several contradictory studies on media psychology and communication have attempted to characterize and analyze these notions and representations to make them accessible for academic inquiry. As a result, Internet memes can be thought of as information that spreads via the Internet (Castaño, 2013). This unit can multiply and mutate. Instead of being generational (Dawkins, 1989), this mutation follows a viral pattern, giving Internet memes a limited lifespan (Zetter, 2008). The behavior, nature of change, and teleology of Internet memes are some of the other theoretical issues (Castaño, 2013). Dominic Basulto (2013), in an article in the Washington Post titled "Have Internet memes lost their meaning?" writes that, as a result of the Internet's growth and the marketing and advertising industries' practices, memes have come to transmit fewer snippets of human culture that could survive for centuries, as Dawkins had envisioned, and instead transmit banality at the expense of big ideas.

c) Trolling

The word "troll" gets its etymological root from hunting and fishing lingo. The noun "troll" comes from an Old Norse word for a monster beast, while the verb "troll" has been derived from the Old French hunting term "troller," according to the Online Etymology Dictionary. According to Merriam-Webster, the English verb 'to troll" refers to the process of gently dragging a lure when fishing for bait. "To annoy (others) online by purposely publishing inflammatory, irrelevant, or rude remarks or other disruptive content" (Merriam-Webster, 2018). Trolls, the perpetrators of these crimes, can be divided into numerous categories. Insult trolls, persistent debate trolls, show-off trolls, vulgarity trolls, grammar trolls, and others exist (Moreau, 2018).

To understand what trolling was like in the 1990s and what trolling is like now, the terms "classical trolling" and "anonymous trolling" can be used interchangeably (Bishop, 2013). It started with "RIP trolling," when online users bombarded obituaries and tributes to the deceased with hateful comments (Greenfield, 2011). The term "troll" first appeared on Internet in the late 1980s. However, the oldest recorded occurrence of the word "troll" on record dates December 14, 1992, in a message on the Usenet newsgroup alt.folklore.Urban.

Through its use on the Usenet group alt.folklore.urban (AFU) in the early 1990s, the phrase grew in popularity, and by the late 1990s. Urban newsgroups had become so popular that trolling had frowned upon. Similar behaviours were observed since the days of Multi-User Dungeons (MUDs) in the late 1980s through "griefing," intentionally causing distress to other players in an online game. Moreover, flaming instills hostility or unpleasant exchanges in online forums, which also emerged through Usenet newsgroup discussions.

Surprisingly, in America, although just 45 percent of U.S. adults have heard of the word "troll," 28 percent acknowledged hostile online behavior directed at someone they did not know, according to an Omnibus poll (Gammon, 2014). Of those who have ever uploaded anything, 23% admit to having intentionally disputed with a stranger over an opinion, and 23% admit to maliciously arguing over facts. Males were twice as likely as those aged 55 plus to engage in trolling activities and millennials aged 55plus to get into a nasty disagreement. Trolls tend to be particularly fond of Twitter (Case, King, and Case, 2019).

According to a survey of 134,000 unpleasant social media posts, Twitter accounted for 88 percent, making it one of the worst platforms for online bullying and trolling (Fearn, 2017). Twitter, on the other hand, has been making changes. In 2017, Twitter improved the procedure for reporting abusive tweets, halted the establishment of new abusive accounts, created safer search results, collapsed abusive or low-quality tweets, and minimized notifications that people had been blocked or muted from conversations begun by individuals (Ho, 2017).

d) Trolls by memes

A troll, as defined by *Collins English Dictionary*, is someone who posts inflammatory, insincere, digressive, extraneous, or off-topic communication in an online community (like as on social media platforms (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, etc.). It can be a newsgroup, forum, chat room, or blog) "to provoke readers into displaying emotional responses or manipulating others' perceptions," (Ziff Davis Publishing Holdings, 2009). Trolling is usually done for the troll's entertainment or to achieve a specific goal, like disrupting a competitor's online activities or influencing a political process. On the other hand, Internet trolling can purposely create confusion or harm other users, online for no apparent reason (Buckels et al., (2014). The noun and verb variants of the word "troll" are linked with internet discourse. In recent years, the media has associated trolling with internet abuse. According to The Courier-Mail and The Today Show, the word "troll" is used as "a person who defaces Internet tribute sites with the intent of bringing anguish to families" (Toder, 2010). In addition, famous fictional works such as Home Box Office and HBO's television show “The Newsroom" contains trolling depictions. A significant character confronts annoying people online and tries to enter their circles by posting unpleasant sexual comments (Hanna, 2012).

Trolling is a catch-all term for online communities' norm-defying patterns of conduct. Trolls are forum users who "act repeatedly and intentionally to cause disruption or trigger disagreement among

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community members" (typically anonymously). Trolling undermines the idea and function of genuine public discourse by encouraging incivility and division (Munger, 2017; Starbird et al., 2019). Trolling is also contagious: anyone can become a troll by exposing antisocial messages (Cheng, et al., 2017). Ivarez-Benjumea and Winter (2018) found that most online communities include a formal or informal set of injunctive norms about undesirable conduct, including how the community sanctions trolling. If a deviation is detected, preventative and remedial actions are available (Fichman & Sanfilippo, 2015; Sanfilippo et al., 2017).

Troll-face is a rage comic meme depicting a character with a sly grin, which is used to represent Internet trolls and trolling. It is one of the most famous and well-known comedic faces (Hagedorn & Connor, 2012). La Tercera has been dubbed "the father of memes" by Troll-face (Christiansen, 2018). In March 2012, a viral video showed fans of the Turkish team Eskişehirspor holding a banner with Troll-face and the message "Problem?" to protest a rule change (Fruzsina, 2020).

Even though they live and travel on internet and social media, trolls are not like memes. Trolls are never meant to be amusing but rather to disgrace and embarrass another person over internet. Trolls are cruel, and their goal is to make people laugh or mock them for whatever reason they have. The next day, I came across a remark entirely faithful to the current situation of having the habit of being urged to trash and troll anyone without hesitation. Trolling is often taken as negative comments on a person's physical behavior. Trolling mostly takes place on social media platforms. Sometimes it takes the lives of many people when it becomes extreme. Trolling has physical, mental, and economic influences on people. Memes are an essential tool for trolling because of their reach. It goes a long way and reaches thousands of people within seconds (Duberstein et al., 2004).

e) Social media memes

Internet memes are a new discourse popular in online forums, social media, and general Internet culture. The word "Internet meme" has become part of the netizen lexicon and has elevated meme distribution to a high-profile activity. According to Jenkins (2009), Internet memes are artifacts of participatory digital culture. Memes mostly placed on social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc., are known as "social media memes." Memes become viral instantly, and their virality depends upon their content. The success of memes is often linked to their content (Shifman, 2013).

Communication on active social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter are evolving daily. People are increasingly interested in viral and hilarious content. Interment Memes link individuals on social media sites through comedy and variety, and people connect globally through sharing and commenting (Viriya, 2015). Social media applications are a group of Internet-based applications built on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content (Kaplan & Haenlein 2010). The new electronic independence re-creates the world in the image of a global village (McLuhan, 1964).

II. Review of Literature

Trolling on social media has become the trend among today's live sportspersons, film stars, politicians, or any other person who can be trolled on social media by trollers. Trolling negatively portrays any person's physical, social, or physiological state by trolls in a negative way. It can start with a simple saying between different people and affect them physiologically. A few studies look into trolls and their effects. Sarada says trolls create a public platform for candid reviews and satires. It may injure a person without lenity at times, yet it has a broader range of applications. When trolling is used as a constructive brighter element, it functions as a social change agent (Sarada, 2016). However, the concept of trolls or the existence of trolls alone explains why individuals can not have nice things in the online world. Trolls are undoubtedly annoying, and they can make life challenging. (Whitney, 2012).

One of the first attempts to chronicle and explain online to trolls was Erin Jansen's Internet Dictionary book "Netlingo," published in the mid-1990s (Jansen, 2006). Trolling is classified as playful trolling, tactical trolling, strategic trolling, and conquest trolling, according to the Internet lexicon NetLingo. Morrissey claims that one of the goals of trolling is to make the victim appear dumb in front of other users on a social media network, causing embarrassment (Morrissey, 2010).

In a 2005 study, Nicole defined memes as "a message sender that focuses on their audience first" in social media networks (Boyd & Ellison, 2008). Meme senders investigate the passively exposed people to the messages to analyze the target audience. When it comes to competing memes, such as rumor corrections, the first goal is to see whether the form of the meme can go viral or reach a larger audience.

Celebrities on social media, particularly well-known Hollywood couples, are also affected when trolled on internet (Pham, 2019). In all seriousness, a prominent Indian actress has said that Pakistani Internet users are better trollers due to their superior sense of humor (Afzal, 2019).

Trolling has become normal behavior on Internet, where a single comment may cause a hornet's nest to erupt. The "Do not feed the Trolls" guideline, an age-old saying, prohibits people from feeding the

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animals that reside beneath bridges and making them strong enough to spring out when they wish to terrify passers-by. The goal behind adopting this to modern times is to stifle any potentially destructive debate by refusing to respond to the first unpleasant comment made (Cole & West, 2016).

According to a study, "Personality qualities and social motives are linked to those who participate in online trolling, particularly on Facebook." As per the study, 'The Dark Tetrad personality characteristics (i.e., narcissism, Machiavellianism, psychopathy, and sadism) were studied for their predictive usefulness in trolling behaviours on Facebook.' The Global Assessment of Facebook Trolling (GAFT), The Dirty Dozen, The Short Sadistic Impulse Scale, and The Social Rewards Questionnaire were all completed by 396 people. "Traits of psychopathy and sadism predict Facebook trolling behaviour," but they discovered, "negative social potency has the most predictive utility." Furthermore, these findings suggest that "negative social reward motive may be a stronger predictor of individual trolling behaviour than negative personality features." (Craker & March 2016).

An experiment was conducted with 667 volunteers recruited using a crowdsourcing site to study if trolling is an intrinsic character fault or if environmental conditions might encourage people to act like trolls. An experiment was conducted with 667 volunteers recruited using a crowdsourcing site. "According to the study, "First, individuals were given a test that was either extremely simple or very challenging," according to the study. Second, their moods were evaluated, and "those who completed the difficult exam were in a worse mood than those who did the simple test." "Subjects were invited to read an article and participate in the discussion section." "each new day," they were told, "they were required to leave at least one comment." "Three-fifths" of those who took the simple test and read impartial messages later wrote troll remarks. When "the individual either took the hard exam or saw trolling remarks," the trolling percentage jumped to 50%. "People exposed to the challenging exam and the troll postings trolled around 68 percent of the time," the researchers added. The findings show that "poor moods foster trolls and trolling breeds trolling" (Moscaritolo, 2017).

Trolling is seen as a severe public issue and a concerning situation. An important example of severe trolling may be witnessed on the social media networking site Twitter. Twitter is the primary site where trolling has occurred for some years. Governments and society have yielded to popular demand to restrict and prohibit trolls from using the site but to no avail. Women are disproportionately targeted for chauvinistic trolling, with horrible trolls intimidating and threatening them (Nycyk, 2017). Trolling on Twitter is becoming more popular daily, causing considerable psychological damage and even death among its users. Charlotte Dawson, a well-known Australian model, and TV personality, is among the most well notable victims of trolling death (Webb, 2014).

a) Role of internet memes in trolling

Internet meme helps form opinion formation and has been an essential part of social life. Memes play various roles on internet, particularly in fast and easy information dissemination. On many occasions, memes have become the primary source of information for natives as they turn and are attracted to the memes made on news stories. (Lissi Lainesk, 2016). The research study, "Rogue Cops among Rogues: Trolls and Trolling on Social Networking Sites," examined why people engage in trolling and memes online. The study discovered that online anonymity and temporary identity suspension are common in computer-mediated communication, allowing people to "unleash" inappropriate urges in face-to-face interactions (Escartin, 2015).

Trolls and memes have emerged as the most recent craze to sweep social media networking sites and are the most destructive and harmful for children and adults. Individuals have used Facebook, online forums, blogging, and newspaper comments as platforms and stages to attack others with insults, provocations, and threatening phrases (Abdul Rasheed PK et al., 2020). Trolling causes great distress for the recipients of the following messages. Trolling supporters see this as harmless fun, but it causes a deviation from fun for most people. Trolling is an inducement, including sending abusive comments across all social media platforms. It has another meaning used for bullying; no matter how we dress it up, it encourages people to make comments to others that elicit further comments (Jiffy, 2015).

b) Trolling through memes in Kashmir

In Kashmir, a classic example of local trolling is the well-known actress Zaira Wasim, who was trolled after her acting pictures in the film 'Dangal' went viral on Facebook and other social media platforms in 2016. Suresh Methew (2017) In his article "Here is How 'Dangal' Girl Zaira Wasim Was Trolled Online," writes for the *Quint* about how she was trolled in Kashmir after her picture was posted on Facebook showing her meeting with the former Chief Minister of the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir, Mehbooba Mufti, went viral on social media platforms, particularly on Facebook and Instagram. A class 12th topper, Aroosa Parvaiz, was recently trolled on internet for not wearing a *hijab* in Kashmir. In his news article "Trolling of Topper: How Class 12 Results Ended on a Sour Note in Kashmir", Zaid Bin Shabir writes for the Kashmir Observer how, despite topping the class 12th examination in the Kashmir division, Aroosa was trolled for not wearing a hijab (Shabir, 2022).

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III. Research Design

a) Scope of the study

This research paper studied the use of memes for trolling in Kashmir. Moreover, this research study examined the internet memes publicized through social media platforms in Kashmir. The research study also explored the impact of digital natives in Kashmir and their influence on trolling people.

b) Hypothesis

H0: Internet memes are primarily used for trolling and considered 'ethically wrong' by people in Kashmir.

H1: Internet memes have brought a paradigm shift in trolling, and they have influenced the social media engagement of digital natives in Kashmir.

IV. Research Methodology

The research study employed both qualitative and quantitative methods. When conducting a survey, a structured questionnaire was utilized as a tool. A survey of media consumers was used to determine the impact of these social media satires on people and their impact on social media engagement. Thirty digital natives were among the media consumers who were used to study the impact of trolling in Kashmir. The students were drawn from four Kashmir University departments through random sampling: Political Science, Mass Communication, History, Sociology, Islamic studies, Physiology, Urdu, Linguistics, Hindi, and Social Work. The sample was chosen using a primary random sampling method.

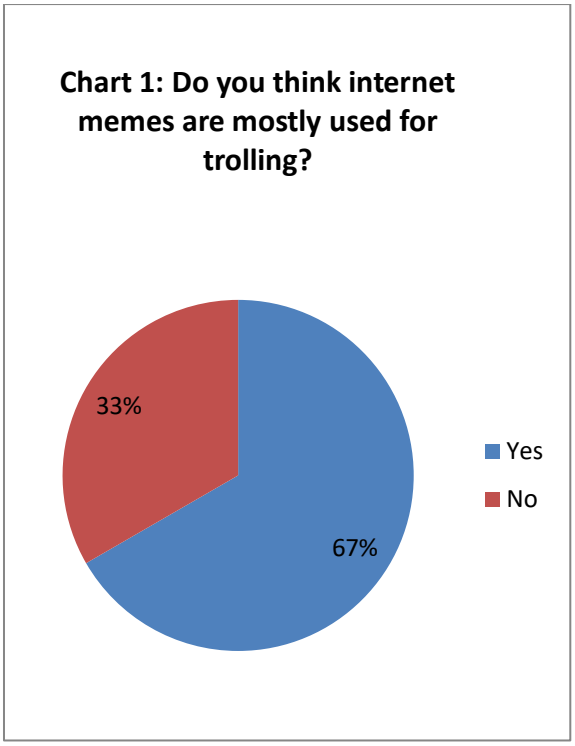
V. Variables

Social media engagement, trolling involvement, and the paradigm shift in the discourse were dependent variables in the study, while internet memes were independent variables. Internet memes impact these dependent variables, as well as media consumers.

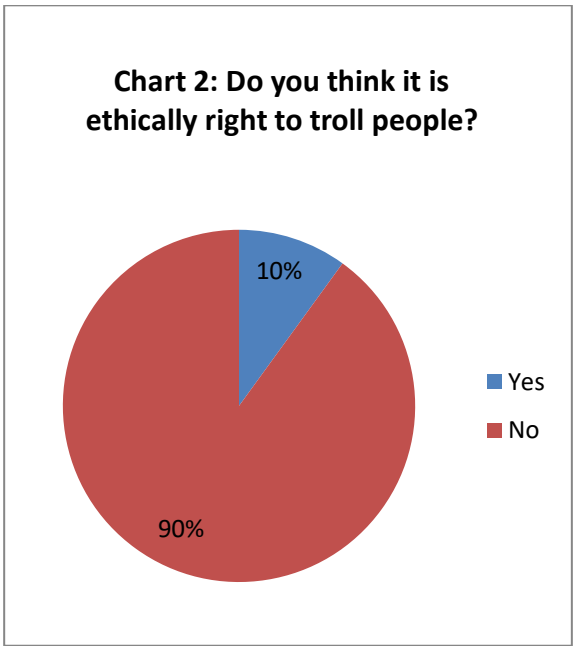
VI. Data Collection and Analysis

Close-ended questions were analyzed through SPSS. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the open-ended questions submitted by students of the ten (10) departments of University of Kashmir.

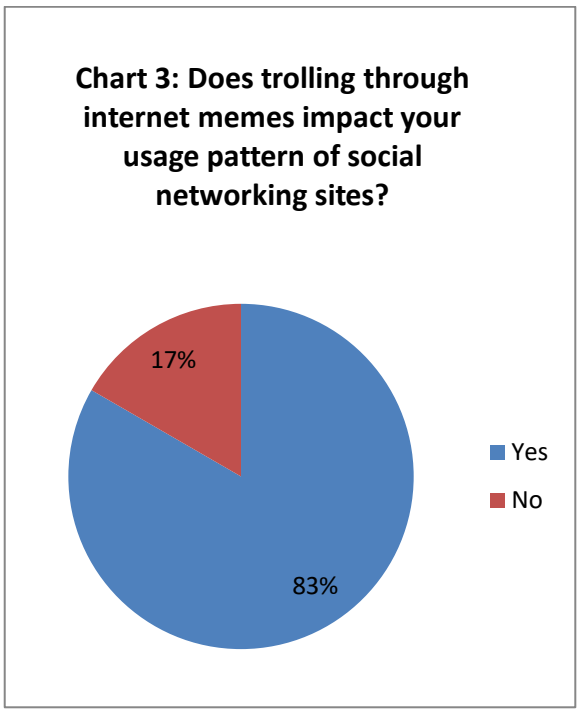
VII. Findings and Interpretations



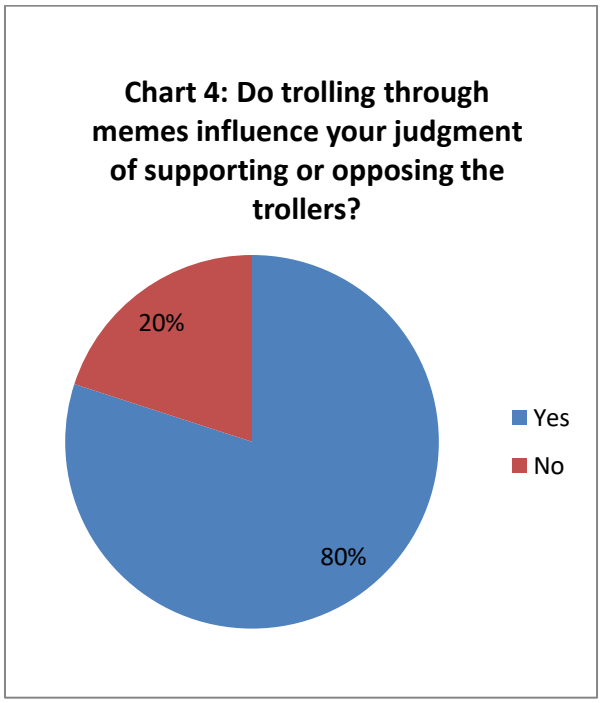
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About 67% of the students surveyed during this research study expressed their opinion that internet memes are used for trolling. Furthermore, they believed that trolling through internet memes severely impacts people's social and physiological condition. They said memes affect people's social, cultural, and emotional aspects. They reiterated that trolling is done to get fame or get facial recognition among people. Internet memes used for trolling are principally wrong. Ethically, 90% of students noted that trolling is wrong. Only 10% of students consider trolling ethically correct. Moreover, students said that trolling can lead to serious mental complications like stress, depression, anxiety, lack of confidence, and even objectionable actions taken by people who are trolled.



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About 83% of students agreed that their social media usage is affected by trolling through memes. Moreover, they revealed that if any student or person is trolled on social media platforms or any other platforms on the internet, it decreases the usage of their activeness on any social media platform. Only 17 percent of the students disagreed with this question and stated that trolling does not affect their social media usage.

Among the students who were part of this research study, nearly 80 percent agreed that supporting or opposing trolls affects their judging capability. Their decision-making capability is affected by trollers. Only 20% disagreed that their judging of trollers who troll a person affects them. They stated that their decisions are not influenced by the trolling of people through memes.

Internet memes are the main reason people judge others and their influence help in supporting or opposing the trollers. Trolling a person leads to a change in usage of social media platforms; when people are trolled based on color, sex, religion, etc., they feel insecure and irritated and may even go away from social media because they get hurt though trolling. Most of the time, people who are sportspersons, celebrities, etc., are disturbed and even quit all social media platforms.

a) Usage of internet memes through social networking media to troll people

The students who were part of this research revealed that People usually use internet memes to oppose or criticize others. Trolling through memes, mainly digital natives, has increased many folds in Kashmir. These memes are generally passed from one person to another through internet, mainly through social networking sites, to spread to a large audience. Internet memes are generally user-generated or further recreated through internet users. 67% of students claimed that memes were for trolling. They opined that it is so because trolling through internet memes is inexpensive, free to create, and becomes viral within seconds on the internet.

b) Internet memes and paradigm shift in trolling

Students claimed that internet memes were not present in the past, and trolling was done with word of mouth. Face-to-face trolling at the local level was abundant. However, as soon as internet memes appeared in 1993, digital trolling became prominent (Rajkhowa, 2021). The trolling of people moved from the offline world to the online. Internet memes paved the way for trolling people in new ways. Students stated that trolling had increased many times with the advent of the internet, particularly in Kashmir. It is easy to troll anyone with simple text and images posted online. Internet memes are given importance as their content is given much priority now. Besides, there has been a shift in the trolling media. The most popular memes are those found on the internet, which have resulted in a paradigm change in meme usage.

c) The Impact of Internet memes on Trolling

Trolling through memes is much used, particularly in Kashmir among youth. The research study revealed that most people use trolling as fun. To criticize or create a joke about one person, whether that person is aware or not, the troll is created regularly in Kashmir.

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This proves the null hypothesis that internet memes are primarily used for trolling but are ethically considered wrong by the people of Kashmir.

d) Limitations of the research paper

The limitation of this research paper was that only the sample of university students was taken. A large sample could have increased the general ability of the results by including students from more departments of the university and also at college level students. Because of the time and financial constraints, the study also has further limitations. The limitations of the study further since the sample size was only 300, the study included only those respondents who were studying in post graduation and thus excluded less educated students.

VIII. Conclusion

Internet memes have paved the way for how people will connect with one another. They have created a path for communication among younger generations. They help them to know new stories and events popular in their locality at the national and international level respectively. Memes help students to understand the sensitivity of different issues which are dominant in their societies. Internet memes have become a form of interactivity among the common masses. The Internet has enhanced voluntary participation in various activities through two-way communication. For instance, Keller and Kim (2009) argue that YouTube is a new space for activism and dialogical learning communities where individuals become deeply involved in democratic knowledge production and mutual pedagogy.

Internet memes are surely the source of information for the young generation, but research study explored that trolls through the internet are usually used to misrepresent the memes. Trolling through internet memes is considered wrong and disgraceful by students, and they consider trolling as the main reason for anxiety, depression, hopelessness, and sadness among the young generation. Educators and teachers can help students overcome the bad effects of trolls and teach students to tackle this menace through different trolling memes in classrooms. Moreover, teachers can help students to grab the meaning of internet memes by critically analyzing them. In this way, students will understand the bad effects of trolls and remain aware of any possible harm caused to them by trollers.

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