Internet Memes: A Mirror of Culture and Society

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Abstract : As the internet became a ruling force of society, computer-mediated communication has enriched its methods to convey meaning by combining linguistic means to visual means of expressivity. One of the elements of cyberspace is what we call a meme, a succinct, visually engaging tool used to communicate ideas or emotions, usually in a funny or ironic manner. Coined by Richard Dawkings in the late 1970s to refer to cultural genes, this term now denominates a special type of vernacular language used to share content on the internet. This research aims to analyse the basic mechanism that stands at the basis of meme creation as a blend of innovation and imitation and will approach some of the most widely used image macros remixed to generate new content while also pointing out success strategies. Moreover, this paper discusses whether memes can transcend the light-hearted and playful mood they mirror and become biting and sharp cultural comments. The study also uses the concept of multimodality and stresses how the text interacts with image, discussing three types of relations between the two: symmetry, amplification, and contradiction. We will furthermore show that memes are cultural artifacts and virtual tropes highly dependent on context and societal issues by using a corpus of memes created related to the COVID-19 pandemic.
Keywords : context, computer-mediated communication, memes, multimodality
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