

## **Memeing the Masses: Internet Memes as Educational Tools and Expressions of Public Opinion on Social Media**

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*The proliferation of digital technology and social media has paved the way for teenagers and young adults to socialize on a new level. The online platform of social media became a place for civic engagement and public opinion expression, where being humorous and having visual content contributed greatly to the spread of the easiness of the online interaction (Kertcher and Turin, 2020). Accordingly, internet memes appeared as a part of the user-generated content that became not only viral, but also influential at both social and political levels. Internet Memes function as commenting tool on events in our society from a humorous perceptive, which may now always be politically correct. However, this results in a mirroring of the social reality on the internet specifically social network websites (Ortiz et al., 2020). Consequently, memes enable internet users, who are somehow socially sensitive or restrictive, to freely express themselves in manners that were not considered possible in a direct dialogue. Nevertheless, the effect of memes on audiences is not sufficiently scrutinized, especially among online media literate and semi-literate users, as most studies tackled memes impact from an entertaining perspective and ignored its educational and persuasive power especially in the political and social aspects. Therefore, a gap in the literature is clearly identified in role of memes as a digital humor tool that has cultural profound meanings. Egyptian users rely heavily on memes usage as a mean of expression, negotiation, voicing opinions, social and political participation as well we identity reflection. Therefore, examining how memes are used as well as perceived is crucial. Additionally, from an educational perspective, such measurement is essential is tackling issues regarding new media literacy, since memes are viewed as a communication method for expressing opinions and shaping perception among young users, then it is essential to study as well as assess how audiences understand and engage with this type of digital media. Therefore, the aim of the current research is to examine how memes acts as a tool for learning, public opinion formation as well as participation within social and political contexts. Moreover, the study aims measure the educational aspect behind memes usage by exploring how the exposure to political and social memes affects the learning and understanding of the social and the political online content.*

### **Social Media, Memes and Public Opinion**

In the recent digital age, the communication concept is commonly understood as an interactive aspect, where many scholars argued that social media platforms changed the online space from the idea of anonymous atmosphere into a complicated

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environment for networking, public opinion, civic engagement and identity formation (Latif et al., 2024; Li, 2024). While earlier studies acknowledged the need for empowering the online space to be a tool for democratizing the online opinion, recent studies embraced a more nuanced perspective, where they equally emphasized the empowerment of the audiences and the constraints resulted from the algorithms and the governing laws practiced in most of the online platforms. Therefore, social media acted as a diverse space enabling the different opinions, and at the same time, promoting selective exposure, opinion supremacy and distinction (Alit Suryawati et al., 2024).

Many studies that examined social media, showed that the public opinion generated on online platforms like Twitter and Facebook does not reach the degree of full unanimity, nevertheless, it encouraged more a leading orientation that resulted from the interaction dynamics fostered only through digital media (Li, 2024). This finding is congruent with most recent studies claiming that online audience incline to defy any change in their opinions on the one hand. On the other hand, they encourage predominant attitudes that resulted through recurrent online media exposure and peer pressure (Gass and Seiter, 2022). Additionally, most studies tackle the opinion formation from a high level, as they frequently ignore social and political dimensions of the online digital space, for instance, humour, ridicule, storytelling, etc.

Recent studies tackled the existing gap regarding the online cultural content, internet memes in this case, and its impact on public opinion formation. In other words, internet memes act as a hybrid form of online communication that mix entertainment, criticism, and emotions. As a result, audiences are empowered to engage indirectly with all social and political topics (Latif et al., 2024). Compared to the normal online texting, memes communication overcomes participation obstacles as well as facilitate diffusion and diversity, resulting a significantly persuasive tool among online audiences, especially young ones. Nevertheless, some researchers claim that the influential effect of memes still acknowledged as uneven as it depends on the degree of media literacy and degree of exposure of the online young audiences (Amer, 2024).

Accordingly, a view shift had occurred in the role and impact of social media, where it is not seen as a neutral space for opinions reflection, rather it is seen as an empowering space that formulates the public opinion through interactive content and interactive users. Meanwhile, the need for more further investigation is required in understating the relationship between public opinion, media literacy and memes especially in Egypt, as digital media and online interaction are substantial and influential.

### **Memes as an Empowering Tool in the Digital Age**

Internet memes are recognized as a type of user-generated content, where it empowered online audiences to proactively participate in any form of an online discussion. Usually user-generated content is defined as “User-generated content (UGC) is defined as any media content that is produced or created by the end user consumer and public rather than by paid professionals and is primarily shared online,” (Younis, 2026). Most recent studies focus on the fact the memes are created and

disseminated through normal online users rather than an organised institution, therefore, its role in expressing diverse opinions as well as social and political issues is respectfully trusted. As a result of its fast diffusion, memes play a vital role in the empowering users' engagement, affecting their identity formation, as well as reflecting their opinions and perceptions (Dyrel, 2021; Tassadit, 2025).

Some studies emphasised the potential impact of memes as a persuasive tool, where its nature in merging humour with symbolism in a visual content aid in its participatory nature. Subsequently, convoluted ideas can be easily communicated in a persuasive, yet emotional form lowers the defiance usually found online regarding social and political issues (Milner and Phillips, 2020; Shifman, 2022). In other words, memes allow the online youth to be consumers and producers at the same time, encouraging as well as poking their online media literacy skills.

Researchers recently started to view memes as a "form of public discourse and visual rhetoric within networked publics," (Ross and Rivers, 2023; Highfield, 2020). Most scholars define memes as a tool for discussing public matters, enabling peer validation, and exemplifying some persuasive characteristics, in addition to their sentiment qualities; thus, allowing memes to act as trusted communicative tools for social and political matters (Dyrel, 2021; Shifman, 2022).

### **Social Media Activity and Memes: Emotional Power**

Memes played a vital role in the communication interactive process initiated in the digital space. In other words, memes are considered the cultural units that creates communication between online users, where they are perceived as a form of online expression. Furthermore, the degree of effectiveness of memes usage is quite debatable according to some studies, where some show positive association between memes and online users' expressions and others proved that it is conditioned on the type of humored memes shared. Having said that, as study conducted by Brody & Cullen (2023) examined the impact of memes usage on human relationships, where it found that sharing humor memes as an enjoyment function is positively correlated with the satisfaction level of any relationship, however, using it as an apologetic expression is negatively correlated with the level of satisfaction. Moreover, most of the research participants confirmed the notion of using memes as a social expression in their closest relationships and as a mean of social communication generally, nevertheless, the results showed that memes only served the humor function and not as a more thoughtful form of communication.

Another study conducted by Zhang & Gearhart (2022) examined the difference between memes used political entertainment and memes for political observation. The study found that the most frequent shared and viewed of political memes are mainly to satisfy their political entertainment need and not for political observation need. Nevertheless, the most frequent memes created satisfy the political observation need rather than the entertainment. In other words, individuals who share and view and does contribute to engagement use the memes for political entertainment, and individuals who create and contribute to engagement use the memes for observing the politics currently in action. Another study found congruent results, where it

examined the psychological reasons behind memes usage, and it provide that some individuals use the memes to moderate the stressful situation faced in the daily social life. In other words, memes are used as a tool for reinterpretation of social situation when individuals' area faced with cultural problems (Flecha, et al., 2021).

The abovementioned literature did show the effective impact of the memes regarding interaction and emotional expression, nevertheless their communicative influence is conditioned and limited. Also, most of the studies identified memes as humorous online content, however their use for complex political and social matters was not distinctive. Since most of the studies found that mems are used mainly for entertainment and not for political and social observation, therefore memes effectively contribute to the engagement more than it affects public opinion formation.

### **Memes and Public Opinion: Educational and Motivational Power**

Memes are now managing as well as forming the political dialogue on social media platforms, thus affecting the public opinion, political participation, as well as the dynamics of the political ideology. The fast spread of the memes over social media, like Twitter, Facebook, TikTok and Instagram, contributed to its need as a tool for political participation, where it is used as a method of political terminologies. A study conducted by Al Afnan (2025) found that the memes are not considered a neutral form of communication, but rather a significant instrument that affects the political and partisan discourse. The study found that different types of memes receive different degree of engagement withing political sub-groups, for instance, conservative groups share memes reflecting capitalism, free market, and patriotism. While more liberal lenient groups share memes reflecting social justice and environmental issues. Additionally, the study added the sentiment aspect, where it found that justice and environmental memes encourage positive sentiments, while critical political memes encourage negative ones. Nevertheless, such negative sentiments can carry some ethical misunderstandings as it manipulates “emotional responses rather than promoting for informed discussion”.

The memes and public opinions concepts are interrelated, yet some argument about their ethical concerns are existent, where another study conducted by Misra (2025) shared similar finding with the previous study mentioned above. The results showed that memes do have a significant impact on the shaping of public opinion represented on social media platforms, yet the impact varies according to the type of social media platform on the one hand. On the other hand, the type of the memes with its accompanied sentiment, either positive or negative. The study found that political memes allowed political actors to have higher levels of engagement with younger generations, also, some memes acted as a reinforcement tool for existing political beliefs, while others acted ignited the debates and discussions. The study concluded that memes is considered a powerful communication tool discussing politics, mobilization and persuasion. In other words, memes are proven to have the ability to simplify complex political terms, thus allowing diverse people to contribute to the public opinion resulting more inclusive and participatory political attitude.

Memes generally are perceived to be an “emotional contagion”, where it acts as an

intermediary in spreading diverse feelings and emotions, especially emotional behaviors in social media platforms. They not only encourage the feeling, but encourage the interaction as well, where it considered a strategic communication tool for steering the collective action, sentiment and by extension the public opinion acting as an “emotional mobilization” (Tabatabaei and Ivanova, 2021). A study conducted by Akram, et al. (2021) examining the impact of memes of individual anxiety levels during covid pandemic, showed some congruent regarding emotional in general and anxiety feeling in specific results, where it found that usually anxious individuals selective choose social media to acclimate to the social uncertainties they faced during the pandemic. Additionally, they share humorous memes as a copying mechanism to elevate their general mood and decrease their anxiety. In other word, individuals resort the online space to share as well as interact with memes to reduce some of their psychiatric symptoms, like anxiety and depression, as they form social and emotional online bonds that might act as a digital supportive group.

Additionally, another study conducted by Arkam & Drabble (2022) shared the similar findings, where it showed the social media pages dedicated to humor medical memes have a positive impact on the users, as it creates some social and emotional bonds resulting the simplification of difficult expressions, thus creating a socially supportive group. Also, memes have a positive impact on specific psychiatric issues, like depression and anxiety, where they are perceived as a humous mean of social connection that decrease such insecurities. In other words, individuals use memes to alleviate their mood by laughing out their problems and forming some social connection at the same time. Finally, it could be concluded that memes are used on two different yet parallel paths, where it is used as a mean of online expression that decreases anxiety due to its humorous nature from a psychiatric viewpoint on the one hand. On the other hand, it has an irrefutable role in the digital political life, where it constitutes a major part in public opinion due its ability to simplify complex political expressions. Subsequently, the current research paper will examine how memes could act as an educational tool for public opinion expression in a positive and enjoyable manner to overcome their anxious nature that is usually accompanied with the political participation and behavior, especially in the digital space.

## Theoretical Framework

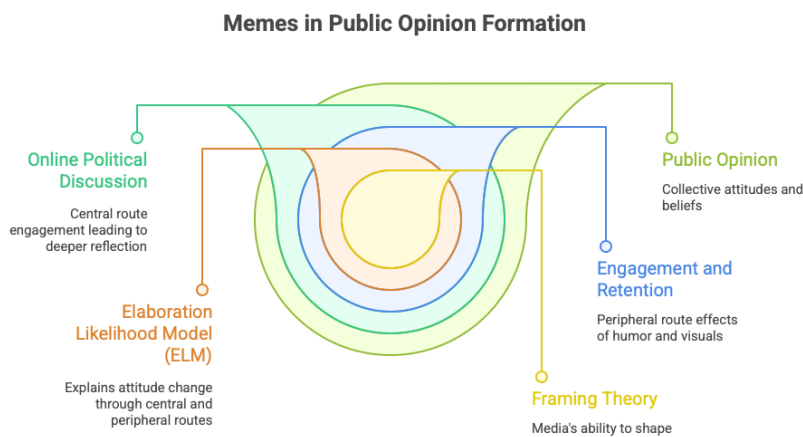
### Framing Theory and Elaboration Likelihood Model

Generally *framing theory* refers to the ability of media to create frames for several reasons, for instance, gaining public affection, normalizing viewpoints and persuasion (Guenther et al., 2020). In the current research paper memes utilize framing theory to rapidly simplify implications and sense-makings in a digital media platform. Since farming in general is referred to as the mean to select as well as interpret situations, then memes are a *sub-category frame* as they simplify complex political terms into audio or visual humor narratives that evoke social support and understanding. In other words, it could be claimed that memes changed the decoding process of political messages, using humor, allowing it to be easily digestible by

diverse audience, thus increasing the contribution to the public opinion.

ELM on the other hand, complements the notion of framing theory in the current research, where it provides a thorough explanation on how memes affect attitudes through both central and peripheral routes of persuasion (Widyaningsih et al., 2025). The use of humor as well as emotional appeals in memes usually affect the both the attention and the acceptance of the audience (peripheral route). The visuals found in memes encourages sharing, engagement as well retention attitudes. Meanwhile, accordingly, when audience are deeply involved, they will reflect profounder and deeper attitude (central route) that leads to online political discussion, thus contributing to the public opinion. Together framing theory and ELM constitutes a deep explanation as well as comprehension on how memes act as an educational tool in public opinion, as it shows how meanings as well as emotions are framed through humorous memes, developing high levels of engagements as well as motivation that would eventually either enlighten or redesign collective support and understanding.

Figure 1. Theoretical Framework



In this paper, we analyze how memes serve as a vehicle to express an individual or collective voice, and how individuals use these memes as a main source of communication.

The researchers wanted to examine if: first, social media activity and meme engagement, the viewing of memes will result in perceiving memes as a new method of communication.

- Second, usage of memes as an emotional coping mechanisms.

Third, the relationship between memes, public opinion and social anxiety. if the viewing of memes will result in perceiving memes as a new source of information and knowledge

Thus, the following research hypothesis were developed to measure the above variables:

- **H1:** There is a positive relationship between the level of social media activity and the likelihood of viewing or sharing memes
- **H2:** Users who find memes emotionally relieving are more likely to perceive them as useful for understanding or responding to public opinion during crises.
- **H3:** Exposure to memes that address public opinion issues contributes to users' learning and understanding of social and political topics.
- **H4:** Individuals who agree that memes help them “cope with public opinion anxiety” are more likely to believe memes influence or reflect public opinion.
- **H5:** Engagement with memes (viewing/sharing frequency) affects lower self-reported anxiety toward current public issues information online.

### **Methodology**

Using a quantitative descriptive research design, the researchers conducted an online survey to explore how internet memes influenced participants' engagement, emotional regulation, and public opinion on current issues. The survey intended to measure participants' social media engagement, meme utilization, and psychological response to internet memes as part of their online communication behaviors.

A quantitative descriptive research design is used and an online survey is the chosen method. The current research employed a descriptive study to document the use of internet memes and measure the effect that they had on participants' social media interactions, emotional regulation, and opinions about social issues. A descriptive study was appropriate due to the goal of the study to measure attitudes/ behaviors rather than manipulate them. An online survey was distributed among the sample to help understand and analyze the use of memes in expressing an individual's opinion and how they use it as its main source of communication on online social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and X (N=166).

### **Sampling**

The study employed a purposive sample, where the sample must meet the researcher's aim in being active online participants on social media platform and being teenagers and young adult, since they are the main users of these online social media platforms. All participants were active users of popular social media networks, i.e. X, Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, Snapchat. Non-probability sampling was adopted as it helps researchers to collect respondents that were knowledgeable about the phenomenon that was being researched, in this case, the consumption and sharing of memes on current issues that affect the public opinion.

Participants were targeted as per their relevance to the research topic. The criteria established for inclusion in the study were using social media frequently, being in the teenage and young adult age groups, as teenagers and young adults are considered the main consumers and producers of internet memes.

The final sample was made up of 166 participants (N = 166) who used at least one of the following social media platforms: Facebook, Instagram, X (Twitter), WhatsApp, and Snapchat.

Age range: Teenagers and young adults (age 16 to 30)  
Gender: Male and female participants  
Education level: Secondary education and university level  
Sampling technique: Purposive (non-probability) sampling.

### **Data Collection Procedure**

Data were gathered using online survey that was distributed through popular social media platforms including Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp. People shared the survey link over a period of 2 weeks and respondents participated voluntarily and anonymously. respondents were informed about the purpose of the survey and that their responses would be kept confidential and used for academic research only.

This structured questionnaire consisted solely of closed-ended questions only, that are:

- Social media activity and meme exposure (e.g., viewing, sharing, or creating memes)
- Emotional perceptions (e.g., coping with anxiety, forming social bonds, and interpreting public opinion through memes)
- Demographic information (gender, age, education)

Attitudinal items were rated on a 3-point Likert scale:

1 = Disagree  
2 = Neutral  
3 = Agree

The scale selected intended to reduce the number of response alternatives and encourage completion.

### **Instrument Development and Validation**

The questionnaire was self-developed based on relevant literature on digital communication, meme culture, and public opinion formation. No standardized scale was adopted. The instrument was reviewed for clarity and relevance prior to distribution. A pilot test (n=20) was conducted as well as reliability analysis to ensure validity and reliability.

### Delimitations of the Study

Geographic delimitation: It only includes respondents based in Egypt.

Age delimitation: Only teenagers and young adults were included. Older age groups were excluded.

Platform delimitation: focuses on the four most common social media platforms: Facebook, Instagram, X (formerly Twitter), WhatsApp and Snapchat.

Time delimitation: Because this data was collected over two weeks, it only provides a snapshot of their perceptions.

Methodological delimitation: Using self-reported survey data, this study conducts a quantitative descriptive analysis of correlates for peripheral nerve injuries without qualitative exploration.

### Results

For the survey purpose a filtering question was added in the beginning asking whether or not respondents were active social media users. A total of **166 respondents** completed the survey, all of whom confirmed being active social media users

*Table 1.* Demographic Profile of Respondents (N = 166)

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
<b>Gender</b>	Female	133	80.1
	Male	33	19.9
<b>Age Group</b>	16–20 years	31	18.7
	21–25 years	90	54.2
	26–30 years	25	15.1
	31 years or older	18	10.8
<b>Education Level</b>	Undergraduate student	101	60.8
	Bachelor's degree	38	22.9
	Master's degree	23	13.9
	PhD / Other postgraduate	4	2.4

### Social Media Usage and Meme Exposure

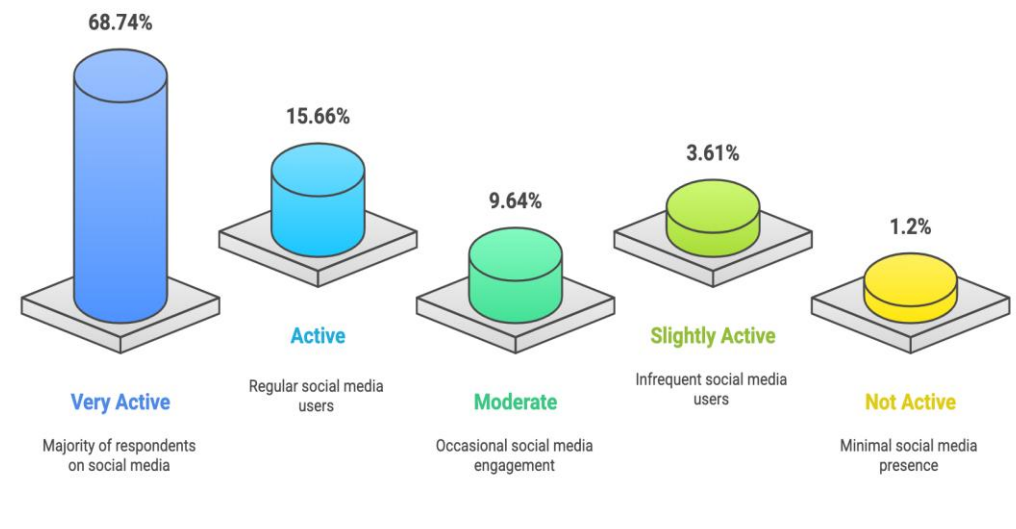
The most common used social media platform was found to be Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp with 77% of the respondents answering that they use it the most.

Table 2. Level of Social Media Activity

Activity Level	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Very active	114	68.7
Active	26	15.7
Moderate	16	9.6
Slightly active	6	3.6
Not active	2	1.2

Regarding overall activity level, the majority identified themselves as **very active users (68.7%)**. When the respondents were asked how active you are on social media? The majority with 68.74% answered very active (n=114), while 15.66% answered active (n=26), 9.64% answered with Moderate (n=16), 3.61% answered with slightly active (n=6) and only 1.2% answered with not active (n=2). Results are shown in more details in figure 1.

Figure 2. Level of Social Media Active users



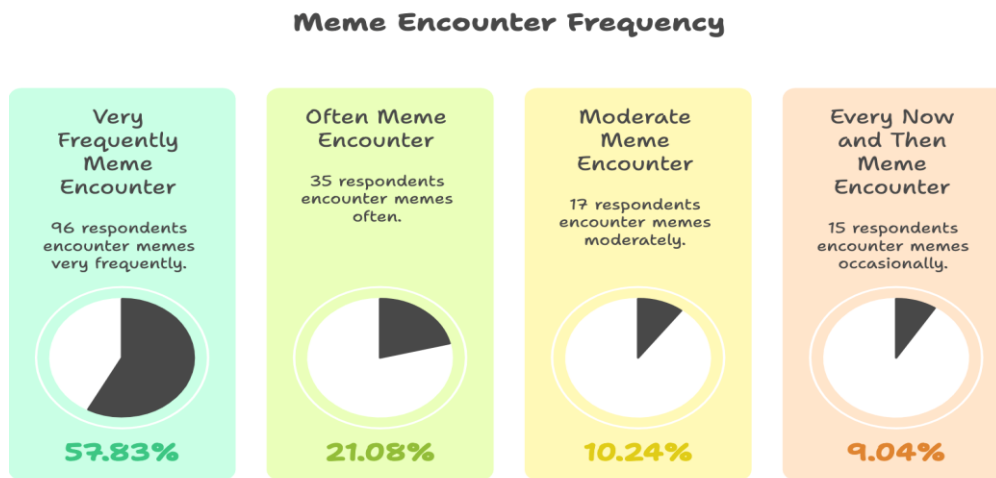
### Meme Awareness, Consumption, and Sharing Behavior

Nearly all respondents reported familiarity with memes (**n = 163**). Meme exposure and enjoyment were exceptionally high. the most common response was yes, I know what a meme is (n=163). The majority of the respondents answered that they view memes regularly with 94.58% (n=158) and only 4.82% answered no (n=8). When asked whether or not the respondents enjoy reading memes, the majority answered yes they enjoy with 96% (n=160) and only 4% did not enjoy reading memes (n=6). These results demonstrate that while meme creation is less common, meme circulation and recommendation are widespread, supporting memes' role as participatory communication tools.

### Frequency of Meme Exposure

In analyzing the frequency of participants encountering memes throughout their day, the results indicate a significant level of exposure and engagement with meme content. The majority of respondents 57.83% (n=96) reported that they come across memes very frequently, suggesting that memes have become a part of daily online interactions. 21.08% stated that they encounter memes often (n=35), further emphasizing the consistent visibility of memes across social media platforms. A smaller proportion 10.24% described their exposure as moderate (n=17), while (9.04%) noted that they come across memes only every now and then (n=15). Results are shown in Figure2.

Figure 3. Frequency of Memes encountered by users



Moving on, respondents were asked whether they repost or shared memes before the majority answered Yes with 82.53% (n=137) and only 17.47% answered that they don't share memes (n=29). On the contrast, when asked if they ever created their own memes, the majority answered no with 66.27% (n=110) and only 33.73% answered yes (n=56). Respondents were then asked if they would recommend or send a meme to their friends, the majority said that yes, they would with 92.77% (n=154), while they minority said they don't with 7.23% (n=12).

Concerning memes covering social issues respondents were unaware, the majority answered Yes with 90.36% showing a strong response to the role of memes as a source of education to current public opinion issues (n=150). This shows that memes moved to become an influential tool for social awareness and public discourse. Only 9.46% answered no to the question (n=16).

### Memos as Tools for Opinion Expression and Public Discourse

When asked the respondents about the usage of memes as a method of self-expression in online communication and texting, the majority 76.51% answered that they do use memes to express their thoughts, feelings, and opinions in digital

interaction. A small part of the respondents 22.89% answered that they do not use memes as a form of self-expression (n=38).

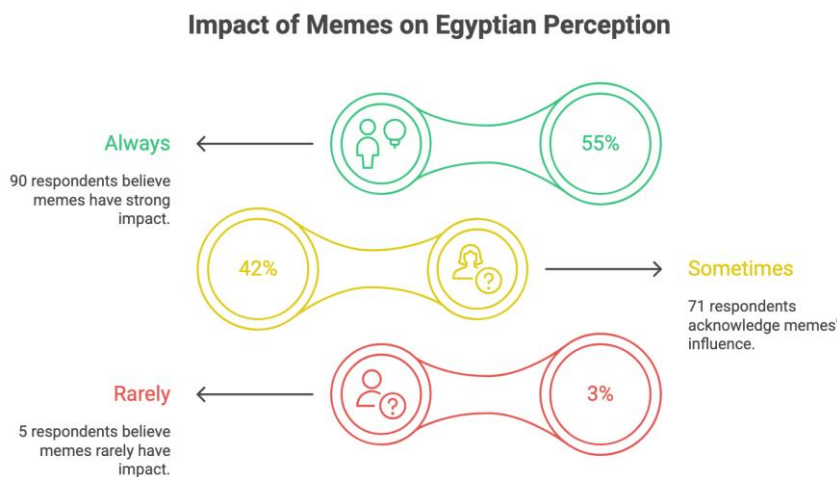
Regarding if respondents use memes to contribute to public conversations regarding current public opinion issues, the results showed a tendency toward using memes as a form of participation and social commentary. 57.36% answered “yes” that they actively engaged in public discourse through meme sharing or creation (n=96). These findings indicate that memes are widely used for expression and awareness, though skepticism toward credibility remains. On the other hand 41.57% stated “No,” implying that a significant minority still view memes primarily as entertainment (n=69).

When asked if the respondents believe that a meme related to current public opinion issues, the majority with 59% answered No, this shows a level of skepticism among social media users regarding the credibility of meme-based information (n=98). In the meantime, 41% admitted to believing a meme at some point (n=68).

### Perceived Impact of Memes on Public Opinion

Concerning the issue if respondents believe that memes have a strong impact on how Egyptian perceive current issues, the majority 55% answered “Always” (n=90). While 42% answered with “Sometimes” showing that they acknowledged the influence of the memes (n=71). And a small percentage 3% answered with “Rarely” (n=5). Results are shown more in Figure 3.

Figure 4. Impact of Memes on Egyptian users’ Perception



### Attitudinal Dimensions Toward Memes (3-Point Likert Scale)

Regarding the variable of communication and the usage of memes, results showed how respondents perceive memes as a tool for persuasion, interaction, and

education related to current public opinion issues. When asked where they thought memes are persuasive, 50% of the respondents remained neutral, while 35.54% of the respondents agreed and 12.65% disagreed. Likewise, when evaluating whether memes were convincing 47% remained neutral, 34% agreed and 17% disagreed. Respondents were asked whether they believe memes help them communicate better with others regarding current public opinion issues, 36% agreed, 37% remained neutral and 26% disagreed. Likewise, when asked whether memes help them find common ground with others, (42.17%) were *Neutral*, 58 (34.94%) agreed, and 36 (21.69%) disagreed. When examining the entertainment dimension, a majority of participants (55.42%) agreed that memes are considered online entertainment, (28.92%) remained neutral, and (14.46%) disagreed, reinforcing that memes are primarily viewed as enjoyable digital content even when they address serious topics. Finally, when analyzing whether memes are a good source of communication regarding public opinion issues, (36.14%) remained *Neutral*, 57 (34.34%) agreed, and 45 (27.11%) disagreed.

Regarding the variable of freedom and the usage of memes, results showed how respondents perceive memes as a source of awareness, knowledge and affirmation in relation to current public opinion issues. When asked whether memes make them more aware of current public opinion issues, responses were evenly distributed: 35.54% chose *Neutral*, 32.53% disagreed, and 31.93% agreed. Likewise, concerning if memes make the respondents feel more knowledgeable, the majority disagreed with 37.35%, followed by 33.13% remaining neutral and 28.92% agreed. In a related question regarding awareness of current public opinion issues, 37.95% remained neutral, while 33.73% disagreed and 28.31% agreed. Finally, when asked whether memes strengthen their views regarding current public opinion issues, 42.77% were *Neutral*, 33.73% disagreed, and 22.89% agreed.

Results related to the variable of the viewing of memes and personal opinions, it showed an emotional and social dimensions of meme engagement among participants, revealing how memes serve not only as tools for opinion expression. When asked whether memes help them express their opinions regarding current public opinion issues, 36.75% remained neutral, 35.54% agreed and 27.71% disagreed. In regards to the emotional relief, the majority with 47% agreed that memes reduce the anxiety they feel regarding current public opinion issues, 36.14% remained neutral and 16.27% disagreed. Likewise, respondents were asked if memes help them better cope with current public opinion issues, 39.16% remained neutral, 31.33% agreed and 28.92% disagreed. Finally, respondents were asked if memes allow them to form bonds with others who share similar views, 45.18% agreed, 36.75% were neutral and 18.07% disagreed. Mean scores above the neutral midpoint (2.0) indicate a moderate-to-positive perception of memes, particularly as entertainment, emotional relief tools, and social bonding mechanisms.

Table 3. Mean Scores for Meme-Related Attitudinal Dimensions

Dimension	Mean	SD
Persuasion & convincing power	2.23	0.61
Communication effectiveness	2.18	0.65
Entertainment value	2.41	0.58
Awareness & knowledge	2.01	0.67
Emotional relief & coping	2.31	0.63
Social bonding	2.27	0.60

### Discussion

The first hypothesis argues that there is a positive relationship between the level of social media activity and the likelihood of viewing or sharing memes. Which means that it was expected that the more active users are on social media, the more they would engage with memes, whether by viewing them, sharing them, and/or reposting them. Basically, individuals who use social media for more than four hours per day should be more involved with meme culture than in active individuals. A chi-square test was employed to analyze the relationship between social media users' activity level and meme engagement. The results showed to be not statistically significant ( $p=.554$ ), this shows that the level of social media users' activity does not have an impact on meme engagement. Results did not support H1.

Table 4. A Chi-square test conducted to Test the Statistical difference between Social Media users' Activity Level and Meme Engagement

#### Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	3.021 <sup>a</sup>	4	.554
Likelihood Ratio	3.359	4	.500
Linear-by-Linear Association	.015	1	.903
N of Valid Cases	166		

a. 5 cells (50.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .52.

The second hypothesis claimed that users who find memes emotionally relieving are more likely to perceive them as useful for understanding or responding to public opinion during crises. Meaning that when individuals feel that memes help them reduce stress, fear or anxiety, they start to view the memes as being valuable tools for learning and making sense of what is happening in society. This is especially seen during times of crisis such as the Covid-19 pandemic or wars. A chi-square test was employed to analyze the relationship between emotional relief from memes and their perceived usefulness during crises. Results were found to be statistically significant

( $p < .001$ ) showing that individuals who find memes emotionally relieving are more likely to perceive them as informative, educational and useful too. Results indicate that the more memes make users feel emotionally better, the more users will believe that memes will help them with understanding what is happening in society.

*Table 5.* A Chi-square Test conducted to Test the Statistical difference between Emotional Relief from Memes and their perceived usefulness during Crises

#### Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	189.983 <sup>a</sup>	64	.000
Likelihood Ratio	175.575	64	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	69.260	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	164		

a. 75 cells (92.6%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .44.

The third hypothesis argues that exposure to memes that address public opinion issues contributes to users' learning and understanding of social and political topics. Mainly H3 suggests that individuals see memes about current public opinion events, they don't just laugh, they actually educate themselves and learn something from it. Memes that include social issues, simplify political ideas or use humor in certain situations, may lead to the increase of individuals' awareness and understanding of public discussions. A Pearson correlation test was done to examine the relationship between memes exposure and the learning outcome about public opinion issues. Results showed a statistically significant positive correlation ( $r(158), p = .036$ ). This suggests that users are more frequently exposed to memes are slightly more likely to report learning or gaining information of current public opinion topics. Results support H3 that meme exposure contributes to informal learning and social awareness among users.

*Table 6.* A Pearson Correlation Test conducted to Test the Statistical difference between Memes Exposure and the learning Outcome about Public Opinion Issues

#### Correlations

		memelearn	How2doyouencountermemesduringyourday
memelearn	Pearson Correlation	1	.167*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.036
	N	160	158
How2doyouencountermemesduringyourday	Pearson Correlation	.167*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.036	
	N	158	164

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The fourth hypothesis argues that individuals who agree that memes help them cope with public opinion anxiety are more likely to believe memes influence or reflect public opinion. This means that individuals who use memes as an emotional coping

mechanism with stress and tension also tend to see memes as powerful communicative tools. Moreover, if memes help people feel better about current public opinion issues that are more likely to think that these memes matter more, or that they shape public attitudes. A Pearson correlation was done to measure the relationship between individuals' perceptions of memes as a coping mechanism for public opinion anxiety and their belief in memes' influence of the public's attitudes. Results showed statistically significant and a strong positive correlation ( $r(164), p < .001$ ) meaning that individuals find memes emotionally comforting are more likely believe that memes influence or may reflect the public opinion. Results supports H4 where emotional engagement with memes influence individual's perception of their social and communicative impact.

Table 7. A Pearson Correlation Test conducted to Test the Statistical Difference between Individuals' Perceptions of Memes as a coping Mechanism for Public Opinion Anxiety and their Belief in Memes' Influence of the Public's Attitudes

**Correlations**

		memeviews	memefreedom
memeviews	Pearson Correlation	1	.652**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	165	164
memefreedom	Pearson Correlation	.652**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	164	165

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

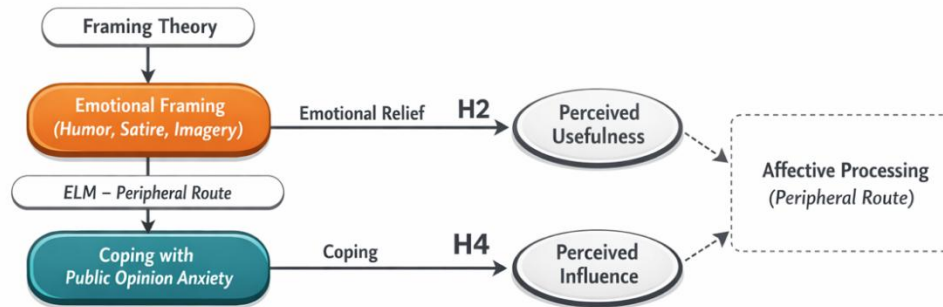
The fifth hypothesis states that eengagement with memes (viewing/sharing frequency) affect lower self-reported anxiety toward current public issues information online. Meaning that users who have higher level of engagements with memes, by viewing them, liking them, or sharing them are more likely to experience less anxiety or stress when getting information about current public opinion issues. Moreover, the more individuals relate to memes, the calmer and less anxious individuals feel about serious or social topics. A Pearson correlation test was done to examine the relationship between meme engagement levels and individuals' anxiety level toward current public opinion issues. Results showed a weak and a non-statistically significant correlation ( $r(164), p = .38.$ ) showing that higher level of engagement with memes does not necessarily mean lower anxiety levels. Therefore, results did not support H5. The result implies that while memes may provide entertainment, they do not substantially influence emotional responses such as anxiety toward social or political issues.

Table 8. A Pearson Correlation Test conducted to Test the Statistical Difference to Examine the Relationship between Meme Engagement Levels and Individuals' Anxiety Level toward current Public Opinion Issues

		ViewsandMe meslAniexty	memeengag ment
ViewsandMemeslAniexty	Pearson Correlation	1	-.069
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.379
	N	165	164
memeengagment	Pearson Correlation	-.069	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.379	
	N	164	165

The results related to H2 and H4 were explained based on Framing Theory and the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM). According to the former, memes can be understood as forms of framing that condense and encapsulate public opinion issues in highly emotional and easily understandable formats. The support for H2 indicates that users who consider emotionally relieving memes more helpful in a crisis situation are more receptive to memes that humorously represent or emotionally frame the interpretations of social situations. The support for H4 indicates that the extent to which memes help users cope with anxiety regarding public opinion is predictive of their perception of memes as persuasive, as well as their perception of memes as representative of public opinion, both supporting the persuasive power of emotionally framed memes. In terms of the ELM model, the studies suggest that users process meme discourse using mainly the peripheral route, drawing on characteristics such as emotional release, humor, and relatability, and not on the processing of factual correctness. This may explain why emotional involvement correlates with perceived usefulness/influence but not with factual correctness. Furthermore, Framing Theory and the ELM explain why, as H2 and H4 hypothesized, memes are affectively framed. Memes are affectively and peripherally used to convey how someone should think about or perceive public opinion, not how citizens understand public opinion. Figure 5 shows a model that demonstrate the importance of emotional framing, such as humor, satire, and imagery in Internet memes, utilizing Framing Theory and the Elaboration Likelihood Model (peripheral route) to provide emotional relief and coping from public opinion.

Figure 5. Theoretical Model Linking Internet Meme Framing, Emotional Processing, and Public Opinion Perceptions



### Educational and Practical Implications

The findings of this study also highlight the importance of internet memes as popular communicative artifacts and suggest their meaningful role in shaping learning, emotional responses, and public sentiments on social media. Several implications for educators, media practitioners, and policymakers are also discussed.

#### Educational Implications: Memes as Learning and Engagement Tools

Findings show memes are highly exposable, shareable, and considered to have educational content and provide support for informal learning. Teens and young adults could use memes as informal learning tools as they can capture complex social and political realities without requiring meaningful effort and in formats that are often considered appropriate and relatable. In educational settings memes can be used to complement lectures, as discussion or debate material, or to get students thinking critically about current affairs. For example, memes can be used to: Introduce or summarize social, political or cultural issues, encourage students to create or assess memes related to the course to reinforce concepts, and bridge formal education with students' everyday digital experiences.

However, educators must help students to discern, within that data, the difference between satire, fallacy, misinformation, and fact. These findings show the potential, but also the challenges of learning from memes. While many participants reported having previously learned about social issues from memes, many also expressed reluctance to trust them as a credible learning source. It also highlights the need for media literacy education related to visual and participatory digital culture.

### **Media Literacy Implications**

Teach students about how memes frame issues, spread emotions, and influence public opinion. Experience and develop critical skills for understanding the source, context, and intent. Algorithmic amplification and virality influence what content appears on users' screens and what they learn. Teaching about memes should be a part of teaching media literacy to help learners become critical and responsible consumers of digital media.

### **Practical Implications for Content Creators and Media Practitioners**

In light of these findings, content creators, journalists, and digital communicators can use memes to engage, persuade, and appeal to younger audiences. Memes can be used to: Improve the visibility of social awareness campaigns, encourage discussion and debate of social issues, and use humor and relatability to address subtle or sensitive topics. As such, creators must remain ethically responsible for not oversimplifying, distorting, or misinforming audiences in their use of the meme.

### **Policy and Public Communication Implications**

From a public policy perspective, the adoption of memes as an instrument for understanding public sentiment highlights that memes are a relevant form of public communication, which can be utilized by policy makers and public institutions to reach and engage the younger population. Policy-makers can better understand the sentiment and engagement in memes and leverage the use of memes as a form of communication.

## **Conclusion, Limitation and Recommendation**

### **Conclusion**

The current study examined the relationship between social media memes as an educational tool for public opinion, where survey was implemented to quantitatively measure the online participants' online engagement, meme usage, as well as their psychological response. The questionnaire was distributed among the desired sample on Facebook and Instagram, using purposive sampling technique, to scrutinize the role of memes as a part of their online communication tools and expressions. The study examined several hypotheses, and the results goes as follows: first the relationship between the level of social media users' activity does not have an impact on meme engagement behavior. Second, individuals who find memes emotionally relieving are more likely to perceive them as informative, educational and useful, thus H2 was supported. Third, meme exposure contributes to informal learning and social awareness among users. Fourth, emotional engagement with memes influences individual's perception of their social and communicative impact. Last, the results imply that while

memes may provide entertainment, they do not substantially influence emotional responses such as anxiety toward social or political issues.

Additionally, the current study defined memes as a framing device, where it simplifies complicated political and social implication through funny visual content making the messages more appealing to the online youth. Also, it combined framing theory with ELM (Elaboration Likelihood Model) to explain how memes can impact attitudes through both central and peripheral routes, where humor and emotions are explained through the peripheral routes and the profound discussion and conversations of public opinion can be instituted through the central route.

### **Limitation**

The current study offered an insightful perspective regarding memes as acting as an impactful educational tool, nevertheless, it did face several limitations. First, reliance on purposive sampling hinders the idea of generalizability of the study findings as well as the number of the respondents contributed. Second, the data was affected by the self-reported measures that might affect the participants objectivity and contributing to the research bias and subjective analyses, especially since it examined an emotional variable. Third, using cross-sectional survey design limits the idea of claiming some causality between meme engagement and emotional responses.

### **Recommendations**

For the future research, the following is recommended to be explored, first, the educational and emotional perspectives of online memes in different cultural, social contexts, as well as demographics. Second, a comparative study between different social media platforms could be done instead of examining them together, for instance, TikTok versus Instagram could be more insightful since the nature of the platform differs as well as the format and engagement levels. Third, applying mixed methods, qualitative method, in this case would be beneficial in establishing some insights and deep analysis about the users' memes usage regarding civic issues. Lastly, adding the variable of algorithmic exposure would be very insightful and richer as memes not only used as means of entertainment, but they are also now perceived as more meaningful tools of casual learning and public discussions.

Additionally, it is recommended to measure the media education and media literacy impact on the youth understanding of memes and its usage. Also, a comparative study based on age could be beneficial and more insightful to examine the different levels of engagement as well as recognizing the efficient stages for media literacy education introduction. Another comparative study could be explored regarding the role of the educational systems in introducing as well as expediting the impact of memes in diverse matters and how education in general influence transmedia literacy, especially in Egypt compared to other countries.

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