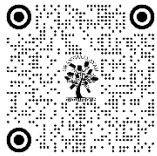


MEMES AND MEMERS: A QUALITATIVE DESCRIPTIVE STUDY ON THEIR CULTURE IN TAMIL NADU

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ABSTRACT

The internet's spread is now becoming more widespread and diverse. Information can be obtained quickly, and meme content, for example, is widely disseminated via social media accounts (Purwaningrum & Sudana, 2020). There are a plethora of memes floating around on social media networking sites. It is gaining more popularity not only in Tamil Nadu, India but all over the world, with the help of apps like WhatsApp. Because meme creation has become the most popular form of entertainment, there is a high demand for meme creators in Tamil Nadu. Memers (Meme Creators) have earned their place in the same way that Doctors, Engineers, and Teachers have. They are the Golden Key that binds the people together (Mruthula, 2017). This study describes the evolution and Pioneers of meme culture in Tamil Nadu, as well as the various types of meme creators in Tamil Nadu. This study is qualitative descriptive and exploratory in nature.

Keywords: Meme, Memers, Meme Creators, Tamil Nadu, Pioneer, Evolution

1. INTRODUCTION

Internet Memes are a kind of digital artifact that carries and spreads cultural items through social media with the help of the world's largest encyclopedia internet. In general, memes are produced to make fun of or to laugh about something or someone humorously or sarcastically. Simple Google search images on "Meme" will generate "n" number of images shared by netizens all over the world. Memes are getting shared widely on the internet nowadays. Tamil Nadu one of the states in India adopted this culture and spread memes widely on the Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest, etc. They create memes not only for entertainment but also for a social cause during the Chennai floods, Wardha cyclone, and during protest times of the Jallikattu Protest.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Richard Dawkins coined the term "Meme" in 1976 to describe small units of culture that spread from one person to another through copying or imitation (Shifman, 2014). Memes can be any type of content, such as images, text, video, gifs, and so on, that is shared virally across social media platforms in a humorous, sarcastic, or serious tone. Memes can be amusing, innocuous, destructive, or extremely serious all at the same time. Memes can also be used as invitations (Mina, 2019, p.6). The meme is also referred to as a joke vehicle. They can also influence election outcomes. They are extremely effective at disseminating primary data. Their celebrity is used to incite rather than inform. Memes use irony and comedy to spread embarrassing situations (Nihalani, 2020). Memes are best defined as cultural information that spreads from person to person but eventually becomes part of a larger social phenomenon. They spread on a micro-scale, but their impact is felt on a macro-scale. Memes influence the attitudes, forms of behaviour, and actions of social groups (Shifman, 2014). Shifman (2014) distinguishes between memes and viral content by stating that viral contents are a single unit of digital content whereas memes are a group of digital items that share content, form, and stance characteristics. Meme Culture is the stitching of single digital content with other digital content that has been reshared by adding additional content to it. Mina's (2019) explanation will shed more light on this. Consider a funny cat picture propped up on its front legs, she says. When stretched out, it will appear quite long. Long cat is a real meme. If someone does the same thing with their cat as someone else and they both share it. Then, if someone uses Photoshop to stitch them all together to form a team of three long cats, it becomes a meme culture (Mina, 2019). There are various types of memes and meme genres available on social media platforms. However, scholars have yet to define the category of meme creators in terms of content creation. This research will look at the evolution and pioneers of meme culture, as well as the different types of meme creators. Hence the objectives of the study were:

- 1) To explore the evolution of meme creators in Tamil Nadu.
- 2) To explore the Pioneers of meme creators in Tamil Nadu.
- 3) To find out the types of meme creators in Tamil Nadu.

3. RESEARCH METHODS

This is a qualitative descriptive study and the data was collected from primary and secondary sources. Documents, Journals, Online news articles, online news videos, observations, and interviews from 3 meme creators who have actively created memes and observed memes from the origin of meme culture in Tamil Nadu were used to collect necessary data for the study. This qualitative study describes the evolution and Pioneer of memes in Tamil Nadu. It also explores the Memers (Meme creators) seen widely in the Tamil Nadu meme industry. This study is exploratory in nature and initiated to add up to the literature for future researchers. This research is included as part of the thesis.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Evolution of Meme Culture in Tamil Nadu

Internet Memes are content units that are widely created by meme creators not only in a country but all over the world. Each meme will have a backstory as to why it was created. Memes have become an important part of modern social media, and they also give social networking life. Meme Creators are the rulers of Social Media – the hidden heroes who spread their spirit via memes. Particularly in Tamil Nadu, Tamil meme pages and Tamil meme creators demonstrate the aforementioned statement by dominating Tamil people's news feeds and the observed phenomenon on Instagram.¹ Memes began to leave their mark in Tamil Nadu in a big way after the Chennai Floods in 2015. The netizens enjoyed the funny trolls in Social Networks, particularly Facebook, before the Chennai flood, despite not understanding their purpose.

Memers, on the other hand, began to circulate around the walls of social media earlier in 2014. It spread to North India in 2013-2014 and became popular in Tamil Nadu only after the craze in North India died down, according to Gautham Govindaraman, founder of Chennai Memes, in an interview with the New Indian Express. (Madhavan, 2017).

¹ Refer Top 20 Tamil Meme Pages on Instagram (2020). <https://feedosite.com/top-20-tamil-meme-pages-on-instagram-2020/>.

Previously, in 2013, during the early stages of Internet memes, Tamil Nadu's great comedian Vadivelu's facial expressions alone were shared via Whatsapp. Then it evolved into incorporating movie scenes and real-world elements. Meme creators began by creating memes in image format, and then progressed to creating memes in video format. Video memes are very popular among social media and Whatsapp users, and the trend is shifted towards dark memes after that.²

Pioneer of memes in Tamil Nadu

Chennai, the capital of Tamil Nadu, India's southernmost state, is home to a slew of meme creators. They distributed their memes via Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Whatsapp. In Tamil Nadu, the culture of expressing one's feelings, emotions, and events around oneself become the content of memes. Goutham Govindaraman, a social media analyst, brought this culture to Chennai, the capital of Tamil Nadu (Joseph, 2015). The popularity of his Facebook page "Mogappair Confessions" and his love for Chennai prompted him to launch Chennai Memes at the age of 21. This Chennai Memes page that was started by the young minds of the Tamil Nadu state is very popular among the youths in many places. It provides a forum for everyone to discuss content that requires or deserves attention. They gather information from across the country and disseminate it to a group of socially conscious citizens. This website has official accounts on various social media platforms, including Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Instagram. They organized and participated in a number of social issue-related events, such as Lake Cleaning, Jallikattu Protest, Unnaviradham for Farmers, Save Neduvasal, and others. As the name implies, their meme templates depict the beauty of the state and, more specifically, Chennai.

This Chennai Memes is basically a Social Media Agency that had won numerous awards for its work. The Founder of Chennai Memes, who began creating memes in January 2014, first began following meme pages in 2011, 2012, and observed the meme and its culture abroad. When many people in north India began to post memes in 2013, he pioneered the meme-posting culture on Facebook. Thus, the memes originated in Tamil Nadu. We could also see that more news article about memes is published on a popular online news website with the interview of the Chennai memes Founder or their organisation representatives. For example, the interview of the young teams of Chennai Memes appeared as an article in the Tamil Hindu online news website under the title in Tamil "இனி எல்லாமே 'மீம்ஸ்' தான்!³ loosely translated as "Hereafter everything is meme" (Fig. 1) might be the first open up article about memes in Tamil Nadu as per the review (கௌரி, 2015). Memes began to dominate online media the very next day. The other article in The Hindu English news, "The men behind the memes" (Fig. 2), revealed the team members and their idea for creating memes. Gautham's interview contains a wealth of information about memes, culture, and trends.

One of the Chennai memes team members who spoke with Aval Vikatan in April 2016 stated that they create memes not only to make people laugh but also to make them think. He also stated that, despite the fact that their main project is to post memes related to cinema and social phenomenal matters, they took on social issues such as river cleaning, blood donation, and awareness campaigns in order to keep their page running successfully (Kavitha, 2018).

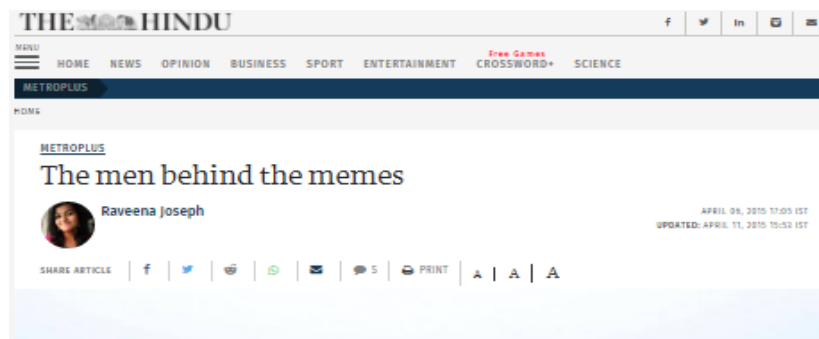


Fig. 1 First Article published by The Hindu English April 05, 2015

² Refer Vanakkam Tamil Nadu: Chennai Memes Founder Gautham Govindaraman Shares His Journey - YouTube, 2021. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1uRDhhtDI0w>.

³Referring this website <https://www.hindutamil.in/news/supplements/ilamai-puthumai/50672-.html> can give the full interview details about its origin.



Fig. 2 Article published by Tamil Hindu about Memes July 10,2015

Memers of Social Media

The term "memers" refers to the people who create memes. Today, there are a plethora of meme creators saturating the social media walls. This is due to the cultural shift that is occurring all over the world, particularly as a result of the COVID-19 days. People behind closed doors and constant exposure to social media Platforms with internet service provided by mobile service providers prompted many people to create memes and post them on platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and others using their Android phones. In an interview, a meme creator stated that Jio's entry was the primary reason for this. Their free internet service propelled India into the digital age.

There are many meme apps and websites that can help you create memes in a matter of seconds. The only requirement is that the meme creator knows what he or she is going to meme. They must be aware of global events and understand what content and images are best suited to convey their ideas or concepts. They must be visualized before they can be put into production. Following the Jallikattu protest by Tamil Nadu youth, the memes spread widely, inspiring people to register their voices wherever they are voiceless. "Memes were also used as a tool during the Jallikattu Protest time to get people to join and support the protest," says a meme creator who began creating memes during the early days of meme culture in Tamil Nadu. This protest is an example of how memes were created for social causes.

Another type of meme creator is one who creates memes solely for the purpose of entertainment. Their hobby is to create humorous memes with a message on them. Small things like leaving clothes on racks and walking up and down mall hallways became memes. These meme creators' hobbies include making memes and posting them with film templates, either in image or video format.

Aside from that, memes have been used for marketing purposes. To reach out to their target audience and gain traction, both large and small brands require marketing today. Memes make us laugh, and we usually see them on social media pages, but times have changed, and businesses are now hiring meme creators. Individual artists' work is constantly monitored on social media by people who hire resources for job titles like these, and they are then approached directly. Because this job does not require a professional course or diploma, aspiring memers can only provide a resume obtained through social media.⁴

A meme creator who creates memes for business must also check the stocks 24 hours a day, seven days a week to stay up to date on stocks about politics or any other general news in that case. "Memes that are created for business, entertainment, news, or social causes must be created in relation to the current happenings of the society in order to reach out to the viewers," says a meme creator from Chennai who makes video memes and runs a YouTube Channels.

Memes are a type of artifact that can be shared as an image, video, or audio and are quickly becoming a part of the netizens' world. This recent study described the evolution and pioneers of meme creators in Tamil Nadu, as many young people began to talk and enjoy themselves by creating memes. In Tamil Nadu, there are various types of meme creators. Individuals who post messages to voice out or express their opinions or feelings fall into the first category of meme creators. Individuals who make memes for marketing a brand or campaign for a social cause fall into the second category. In terms of creativity, these two types of meme creators are distinct. According to one meme maker, "memers who make

⁴ Refer the website: The demand of meme makers in the industry, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/life-style/spotlight/the-demand-of-meme-makers-in-the-industry/articleshow/74907892.cms>.

memes about life happenings cannot fit themselves in making it for marketing or campaign purposes." This is because marketing or campaign memes are client-based, causing creators to think from their perspective, and individuals create about observed societal happenings based on their own experiences. This study conducted a very basic analysis of meme culture and memers. It is recommended that a separate study needs to be conducted solely to analyze and compare the meme contents of both the marketing and social perception of memes, as well as to determine the reach of its viewers in this contemporary world that are filling AI memes also in the social media walls.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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