Analyzing The Influence of Memes on News Perception Among Young Adults in Sri Lanka

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Abstract

Memes have increasingly been a form of information dissemination in the contemporary context of digital media. However, its influence on news perception specifically among young adults remains understudied. This research explores how public understanding has been reshaped by memes, along with its capacity to circulate both misinformation and credible information. The "Agenda-Setting Theory" developed by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw in 1972, alongside the "Social Amplification of Risk Framework" has been studied when considering the theoretical approach. This research has tried to understand the extent to which memes have influenced how young adults conceive news. The question whether the perceptions of credibility and trust have been affected by news presentation through memes is examined while analyzing the dissemination of misinformation through memes. A mixed-methods research design has been utilized, incorporating a comprehensive and pragmatic content analysis of social media pages that share memes and a survey along with an experimental survey that is comparative, conducted among participants spanning university students and young working professionals between the ages of 21 and 30 in Sri Lanka. A sample of one hundred participants, selected through convenience sampling methods for this survey would be presented with a fabricated meme containing misinformation and then, would be presented with the same news broadcast through a legitimate news outlet. Considering the exploratory nature of this research, a formal method of pretesting will not be undertaken. The results would be measured followed by a structured questionnaire, assessing the perceived credibility and trust. Results ideally showcase the vulnerabilities through meme-based narratives, revealing its considerable power to persuade audiences, even in this era of advanced digital literacy, when analyzed thematically. While it explores an area that has been underlooked in media studies, this research contributes to highlight how memes, visually, influence the narratives among young adults with their perception of news. Implications for initiatives targeting media literacy and policy interventions addressing misinformation is recommended, while also suggesting legitimate news outlets to utilize meme-based mediums strategically to strengthen its engagement with young adults as an additional mode of news communication, improving credibility while adapting to novel trends in the digital era.

Keywords: *Memes, Young Adults, News Perception, Digital Media*