Virality and Memes on Social Media Platforms

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Abstract

The phenomenon of 'Web 2.0' is one of the factors that helped in the existence of multi ways communication, which led to the internet as we know it nowadays and gave us the chance to witness the rapid development of social media platforms. The number of netizens who use social media platforms to express themselves and define their identities expanded enormously, leading to a flood of visual content circulated to become a better reflection of netizens' culture. This research addresses two of the most expressions related to social media platforms, Viral, and Memes. The two concepts are explored to discuss the relationship between them and how one may lead to the other. Social media has become an essential means in digital marketing and communication; thus, it is a necessity to study viral and memetic content consumed on these platforms to utilize it in favor of brands, organizations, and even governments advocating products, causes, and ideas.

The researcher explores virality and its characteristics to define factors that may link between the two concepts, besides factors that should be fulfilled if we want to assure both. Furthermore, it discusses the visual characteristics of memetic content such as simplicity and emotions included, and factors that affect its behavior in terms of time and scale.

The researcher follows the descriptive approach by collecting information besides analyzing samples of existing Egyptian and international content on social media platforms. The paper conducted that Simplicity, Humor, and Participation are the key factors to create a viral piece of content that may become memetic for a certain culture in the digital sphere.

Keywords:

Memes, Internet visual, Social media, Digital Marketing, Viral content.

ملخص البحث

ساهمت ظاهرة 'Web 2.0' في تشكيل وجه الانترنت كما نعرفه اليوم، بإتاحة فرص التواصل متعدد الأطراف والتي سمحت بظهور منصات التواصل الاجتماعي وان نشهد تطورها السريع في فترة زمنية قصيرة. تزايد عدد مستخدمي تلك المنصات بشكل هائل في الآونة الأخيرة مما توفره لهم من المساحة للتعبير عن أنفسهم وافكارهم، بل تحدد وتشكل هويتهم، فيتنج عن ذلك فيض من المحتوى البصري يتم تداوله وتناوله بين هؤلاء المستخدمين فيصبح انعكاسا لثقافتهم ولمجتمعاتهم.

يناقش البحث اثنان من أكثر المصطلحات المرتبطة ارتباطا وثيقا بمنصات التواصل الاجتماعي، المحتوى سريع الانتشار Virals او ما يطلق عليه (المحتوى الفيروسي) ووحدات نقل المعلومات الثقافية Memes. يتناول البحث المصطلحان للتعرف

عليهما ولمعرفة أوجه الترابط بينهما وهل يمكن لأحدهما أن يؤدي للآخر. وحيث أصبحت منصات التواصل الاجتماعي واقعا مؤثرا وفعالا في عمليات التسويق الرقمي على الانترنت، كان من الضروري دراسة أشكال المحتوى المتداول عليها وكيفية استغلاله بالشكل الأمثل لصالح الشركات والمؤسسات، بل وحتى الحكومات في سعيهم لتسويق منتجاتهم وقضاياهم وأفكارهم المختلفة.

تدرس الباحثة المحتوى واسع الانتشار Viral وخصائصه للوقوف على العوامل التي قد تربط بينه وبين المحتوى الناقل للمعلومات الثقافية Memes، بالإضافة الى تحديد الخصائص الواجب توافرها لضمان أن يسلك المحتوى المنشأ سلوك الأول ويحقق خصائص الثاني كلاهما معا. كذلك يتعرض البحث للخصائص البصرية لوحدات نقل المعلومات الثقافية Memes مثل البساطة الشكلية والمشاعر المتضمنة، ويسرد العوامل المؤثرة على سلوكه على تلك المنصات في البعد الزمني ومساحه الانتشار.

يستخدم البحث المنهج الوصفي في جمع المعلومات والبيانات بجانب تحليل نماذج لمحتوى بصري منتشر على منصات التواصل الاجتماعي في مصر والخارج. لخص البحث ان عدد من العوامل والخصائص يجب توفيرها في المحتوى لتحقيق انتشار واسع وسريع بين الأفراد مستخدمي منصات التواصل الاجتماعي في ثقافة ما وتساهم في تحويله لوحدة نقل لتلك المعلومات الثقافية، من أبرزها القدرة على التشاركية، والبساطة في تناول المحتوى، وأخيرا احتوائه على قدر من الدعابة.

الكلمات المفتاحية :
الميمات ، المرئيات عبر الإنترنت ، وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي ، التسويق الرقمي ، المحتوى الفيروسي

Introduction

The rapid evolution of technology is changing our lives and how we communicate every day. However, one of the main turning points was the phenomenon of 'Web 2.0' that helped in the existence of the social media platforms. The communications in the early days of the internet were one-way as the internet was a source to retrieve information only. By 'Web 2.0' the multi ways communication helped in the existence of the internet as we know it nowadays. Social media platforms, as a result of the phenomenon, give individuals the ability to have multiple conversations at the same time, besides the ease of sharing variety of content in visuals, audio, textual messages, and videos. Social media influence is not limited to changing how people communicate with each other, but also affected the existence and marketing for brands and organizations and become able to reach their audience anywhere. Even governments are now able to speak to their people at any time and interact with them wherever they are [15].

Social media platforms are defined as web-based services that allow people to create a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, this system gives them the ability to create connections with other users and to view and browse their list of connections and those made by others within the system [4].

The number of netizens who use social media platforms expanded enormously. Facebook, as one of the biggest networks, has expanded from one billion monthly active users in the last quarter of 2012 to roughly 2.85 billion users. Moreover, there are 3.45 billion people are using at least one of the company's platforms each month, as the company acquired other platforms such as WhatsApp and Instagram [22].

Accordingly, the existence of user-generated content on such platforms has become essential and associated with terms such as 'Viral' and 'Meme'. The two concepts are being used

interchangeably, however; there are fine differences as one could lead to another. Therefore, this paper is exploring the conception, characteristics, and behavior of viral content and memes on social media platforms.

Research Problem
Due to the importance of social media platforms for digital marketing nowadays, it is a necessity to study viral and memetic content consumed on these platforms by netizens to utilize it in favor of brands, organizations, and even governments advocating products, causes, and ideas.

Research Terminologies
Virality
A diffusion process in which a certain message (such as a catchphrase, video, or image) spreads from one person to another via digital and social media platforms. The process is characterized by great speed (the number of people exposed to the "viral" message increases dramatically in a short time), and with broad reach (achieved by bridging multiple networks). ([19], 177).

Viral content
A viral piece of content is a single cultural unit (formulated in words, image or video) that is spread by multiple agents and is viewed by many millions. A "viral" may or may not have derivatives. ([19], 56-58).

Meme
A term introduced by the biologist Richard Dawkins in his 1976 book "The Selfish Gene". Dawkins defined memes as small cultural units of transmission, analogous to genes, which are spread from one person to the other by copying or imitation ([19], 177).
Memes may best be understood as pieces of cultural information that pass along from one person to the other, but gradually scale into a shared social phenomenon ([19], 18).

Internet memes
A group of digital content units sharing common characteristics of content, form, and/or stance. These units are created with awareness of each other, They are circulated, imitated, and/or transformed via the Internet by many users. Internet memes are multiparticipant creative expressions through which cultural and political identities are communicated and negotiated. ([19], 177).

Aims and Objective
The paper aims to explore the following:
1- The link between memetic content and virality on social media platforms.
2- The characteristics and behavior of digital content in order to ensure that it becomes a meme and a viral one.

Research Hypothesis
H1: There is a fine link between viral content and memetic ones on the internet.
H2: The virality of a piece of content helps in making it memetic.

H3: Memetic content have several characteristics.

H4: Certain attributes should be fulfilled while working on viral content to become memetic.

Research Importance

The paper is important for those who work in the digital marketing sector, either marketers, designers, or content creators, as it defines the properties of some viral and memetic content on social media and their expected behavior in the digital sphere.

Research Methodologies

The researcher follows the descriptive approach by collecting information and analyzing samples of existing Egyptian content on social media platforms.

Research limits

The research is limited to Egyptian content at the time of the research on different social media platforms.

1. The conception of "Viral content" and "Memes"

The terms 'Viral' and 'Meme' are being used interchangeably nowadays, however, there is a fine difference between them. There are so many definitions for virality, some refer it to standing out among other content, and other refer it to the wide and fast spread of a piece of content [3]. The viral content, whether it was a video or a picture or textual message, is created when user-led distribution makes it widely popular. Obviously, containing elements of popular culture will lead to high acceptance from younger generations and make it go viral, in addition to other features such as the oddness, uniqueness, and amateurism of the content that influences virality as well [24].

While virality is more like a behavior, memes are treated as media objects in most of the internet and cultural studies. They have specific characteristics and practices and considered as spreadable media. Moreover, they give users to have their own interpretations from the same media artifact as they strike different chords in each person [16].

The fine difference between viral content and memetic ones is the number of derivatives from the same visual, textual or audiovisual content as mentioned by Shifman [19]: "A viral piece of content is a single cultural unit (formulated in words, image or video) that is spread by multiple agents and is viewed by many millions. A "viral" may or may not have derivatives." ([19], 56-58).

It means that there is rare pure viral content, once a photo, or a video, reaches a certain degree of popularity on the web, you can expect that someone, somewhere, will alter it. Once the viral content was altered, it can be considered as memetic.

On the other hand, internet memes are considered one of many visual forms that was invoked and spread daily by numerous netizens. The term "Meme" was first coined by the Biologist, and pioneer of meme studies, Richard Dawkins in 1976. In his seminal book "The Selfish Gene", he first mentioned memes as a cultural analogue to a gene. He used this term to determine the small cultural changes and transformations that act like genes in terms of evolution [7] [20].

From the technological perspective, Internet meme is defined as "a piece of culture, typically a joke, which gains influence through online transmission" [6]. However, Shifman [20] suggested a more detailed definition specified some of internet meme's characteristics dealing with them as groups of content units instead of considering them as a whole cultural unit. He defined them as "A group of digital items that share common characteristics of content, form, and/or stance; created with awareness for each other; and are circulated, imitated, and transformed via the internet by multiple users". Accordingly, memes are being divided into two main categories as the following:

Founder-based meme: An Internet meme that is sparked by a specific (often viral) text, video, or photo. For example, (fig 1) that shows a screenshot from the viral video "The ordinary Ahmed", an animation video made and shared on "Tahaleb animation studio" YouTube channel. The video was watched more than 450000 times on YouTube, and more than 350000 times on their Facebook page by the time of writing (2020).

Figure 1, a screenshot from the video "The ordinary Ahmed", which the character says "You're idiot? Are you an idiot?!". The scene was altered in many other versions [26].

Egalitarian meme: Is the different versions of the founder-meme which are viewed by fewer people and comprising many versions that seem to have evolved simultaneously without a clear founding text. Egalitarian memes are often based on a certain formula or genre ([19], 56-58). For instance (fig 2), in which shows an altered internet meme based on the viral video "The ordinary Ahmed". It uses a hand drawing form for the previous screenshot (fig 1), considering the character as Um Kolthum, the famous Egyptian singer, sings one of her songs, and the lyrics was changed to say "Do you still wait for my affection? You're idiot? Are you an idiot?".

Figure 2, an altered internet meme based on the screenshot of the video "The ordinary Ahmed" [8]

2. Characteristics of Viral content

The piece of content has a higher ability to go viral if it has several features, in case it met the best timing and context that may help the content to be circulated among users online. The virality can be achieved if some properties are considered while developing online messages and visuals. According to ([19], 66-73), these characteristics are:

2.1. Positivity and humor

People, and netizens in specific, are more likely to share positive stories than negative ones. Several studies conducted that virality is linked to the positive emotions that users experience, like happiness, excitement, rewarding and uniqueness [3].

People also tend to share things viewed as surprising, important, or useful to them. These preferences are explained as deriving from users' motivations of sharing content online.

In addition to that, the social and self-presentational benefits associated with positive content in general make humorous content may be particularly more able to go viral. In one of the studies investigated 360 viral advertisements, containing humor was the most important appeal that drive virality [3]. Humorous content tends to be surprising which makes it more sharable, as surprise often invokes emotional arousal that is one of the keys for virality [19].

2.2. Provoking "High-Arousal" Emotions

The content that arouses people emotionally leads them to share it. The physiological arousal is important for virality because it activates the nervous system, whether it triggers them positively or negatively. Positive high-arousal is involved in stories that generate a feeling of upliftment in the face of something greater than oneself. For instance, videos of Natural wonders, major scientific achievements, and ordinary people overcoming adversities.

In spite of that, some less cheerful stories have become viral as well. The negative high-arousal feelings of anger and anxiety that can be triggered by some content on social media platforms activate people to share the content. In contrast, stories that made people sad, but not angry or anxious, people do not share them as much since sadness is a deactivating emotion [19] [3].

2.3. Packaging

An important aspect of viral diffusion is the packaging of messages. Clear and simple stories spread better than complex ones. Simple videos or jokes could prove as more sharable since people understand them quickly and assume that others will decode them easily as well [19].

2.4. Prestige

This quality relates to users' knowledge about the content's source. The more famous and well-known the author is, the more likely people are to spread the content. This relates to one of cognitive reaction to the messages which is the message credibility [17]. A similar tendency to rely on celebrities, in a different configuration, is obvious in the wide spread of viral content.

2.5. Positioning

Positioning is considered crucial for virality. In general, it means the location of a certain article in digital space and time. It is not surprising that the most viral content was featured for a long time in prominent locations. Less virals was presented for shorter periods in less central locations.

However, positioning has a broader meaning in the context of viral distribution, which relates to the location of a message within certain social networks and to its association with some famous people and celebrities. The good positioning for the content will lead it to the right users. These users will act as seeds and make the content spread wider, especially if these individuals have higher numbers of connections with others. Targeting highly connected people with the initial message has proved to be much more effective than sending it to other regular users.

3. Characteristics of memetic content

A piece of content turn into memetic when it generates user-created derivatives in the form of remakes, parodies, or imitations. Shifman ([19], 74-89) made a qualitative and quantitative analysis for number of viral videos and he came up with the following main features related to viral videos and photos that came into memetics. While not all memetic videos incorporate the

whole set of the following six attributes, the most successful among them tend to integrate at least three or four.

3.1.   Ordinary People

It was found that popular user-generated videos tend to lure more derivatives than equivalent corporate or professional visual content [19]. Thus, if a user-created video achieves a certain level of popularity, it is more likely to generate a substantial number of derivatives than traditional content with the same number or even more viewings. Moreover, it was found that traditionally generated videos are more common in YouTube's "most viewed" lists, and they tend to react more to user-generated videos.

This phenomenon is explained due to the kind of production, it is simple, and thus easier to imitate because ordinary people may set an achievable goal for others as well. Moreover, YouTube and TikTok, the video platforms, were made basically for peer communication, which means that it is more likely for people to receive a replay on their comments on ordinary people's videos. On the other hand, people trust that something is good and valuable because

Figure 3 screenshot from one of Rima Rahwanji's videos [18]

other people said so. That lead to the fact that 15% are more likely to consume content that created and shared by other people on social media platforms, not brands or organizations [14]. For instance, Rima Rahwanji, one of video makers who made videos on TikTok that went viral on different social media platforms as she gained more than 95000 followers in less than a month [2]. She created number of videos doing Lip-Sync mocking famous Egyptian plays' narrations, like Samir Ghanem in "Almotazwgon" play. She started making these videos due to the lockdown held in Egypt because of the pandemic of covid-19 virus. Although her videos were on TikTok at first, but they went viral on Facebook as well and she started to be known with "The girl who imitates Samir Ghanem". So, we can say that the content itself become memetic encourages people to alter it in many ways as it could go viral as well (Fig. 3).

3.2.   Flawed Masculinity

It was found that Men were the leading characters in twenty-four out of the thirty videos in Shifman's study [19], while only three videos featured women as protagonists. The men's representation in contemporary mass media genres, particularly the sitcom, responded to society and what so-called crisis of masculinity in society. This "crisis of masculinity" leads to presenting far-from-perfect men, who fail to

Figure 4 a screen shot from one of Afifi's video on YouTube [11].

fulfill basic functions in their personal and professional lives [19]. Two of the most famous Egyptian content creators are Khalid Mukhtar and Hisham Afifi. Their content is mostly

whimsical and sarcastic, exposing and discussing the daily struggles of Egyptian people funnily and ironically (Fig 4). Hisham Afifi's videos became viral to a certain level that encouraged some people to engage with his content that reflects the challenges that many Egyptians face in their daily situations and discusses many topics that concern this generation funnily and sarcastically.

3.3. Humor

Humor is a major component of viral memes. It doesn't mean only the content that is made for humor in purpose, but also include those videos and images that doesn't intend to be humorous at first place as well. This category includes, for instance, films of animals and kids; protagonists who may or may not be acting out and huge mistakes that people were unfortunate enough to be videoed or captured making.

The prominence of humor in memetic content relies on three attributes; **Playfulness,** as humor is enjoyed for its own sake and has a multilayer perception of social situations. Therefore, playfulness may attract user creativity by calling viewers to take part in a game. **Incongruity,** which is derived from an unexpected cognitive encounter between two conflicting elements and generates comedy, as in puns for instance (Fig 3). This what is called the incongruity theory of humor. And finally **Superiority** that comes with content made by people who enjoy not only watching videos of others, but also take pleasure in scornfully imitating them, thus publicly demonstrating their own superiority. This feature relates to the empowerment motivation that led people to share content on social media platforms [19].

In Figure (5), we can notice the incongruity in the pun used in the meme, by word playing for both English word "Safe" that is mentioned a lot since the outbreak of Covid-19, and the Arabic word "سيف" which are pronounced the same as the English word with a different meaning, followed by one of the well-known scenes in Ismail Yasin's movie "Almilionair" in which is the Arabic word is said.

Figure 5 shows how Egyptian uses incongruity to relate between two incongruent elements showed in the pun [21].

3.4. Simplicity

The Simplicity of the content is also a key feature of the visual construction of the content. It can be achieved in videos by featuring one or two performers or focus on only one or two in case of filming more participants. Considering the simple design of the frames and settings in which the videos take place as well.

People are enabled to emulate simple visuals in their own vernacular settings, with limited resources, and with low levels of digital literacy, which helps in the process of the creation of user-generated versions of the meme [19].

Figure (6) is an example of how simple content becomes memetic. A video called "Farhet El Corona" made by Khaled Mukhtar, the admin of "Tamat El Targama" Facebook page, responding to the televised briefing to announce the easing of some restrictions put in place in light of the Covid-19 pandemic evolvements. The video was viewed more than one million times in less than a week from its release on the Facebook page.

Figure 6 screenshot from video "Farhet El Corona" shared on "Tamat el Targama" Facebook page [10].

Visually, the video is simple using lip-synch of a 90s song for Amr Diab "Rageen". Khaled made this video as a response to the virus itself upon easing some restrictions made by the government earlier, showing that it could be an opportunity for the virus if people didn't maintain the social distancing and staying at home as much as possible.

3.5. Repetitiveness

Simplicity and repetitiveness are found not only in user-generated content but also in many professional video clips. Repetitiveness may help active users and encourag them to involve and remake memes.

Repeated exposure to a certain piece of information generates a kind of credibility because it creates a familiarity that influences people's preferences [1]. This is known as The Mere Exposure Effect, which states that the more individuals are exposed to something, the more they like and appeal to it [13]. Social media is a key element in creating the participatory culture, where individuals not only consume media but also produce it. As a result, the content we see on social media multiple times forms our participatory culture, and we become more willing to believe in it, as well as engage with, imitate, and meme it.

3.6.   Whimsical Content

It is asserted that the only content type somewhat salient in memetic content related to popular culture. The referencing of pop culture may be connected to the content success. This type of content demonstrates a tendency toward the whimsical as it shares a certain mode of presentation by depicting people playing or performing, often acting in a silly or irrational manner ([19], 74-89). The (Fig. 7) is an example for this type of internet meme, in which the visual meme is totally whimsical and poorly executed, tries to relate between an Egyptian beverage used to be well known in the past childhood (Best Juice) and how it was hard to dip the straw in it to drink. Combining between the image of the product and the image of one of the well-known Egyptian actors (Talaat Zakaria), to evoke his tone of voice while reading the text associated with the composition.

Figure 7 an Internet meme shows how whimsical content look like using a poorly Photoshoped images together, to relate between a certain product (Best Juice) and the experience while using it. [5]

3.7.   Image Juxtaposition

Memetic photos share a fundamental feature called Image juxtaposition, which is a striking incongruity between two or more elements in the frame. These juxtapositions call for memetic responses such as reappropriation to other contexts, which seems almost natural since the people featured in memetic photos appear to be out of context in the first place.

People tend to do one of two things, either to deepen the ridicule associated with the incongruity by presenting even stronger juxtapositions suggested by the original photo, or repositioning the character in a more appropriate context to reduce the initial incongruity. These memetic responses vary between being sarcastic and being playful ([19], 90-92) (Fig. 8).

Figure 8 an internet meme merges "The Joker" and one of traditional dance in an Egyptian wedding in upper Egypt [23]

3.8.   Frozen Motion

Another group of memetic photos pictures people in the midst of a physical activity such as running or dancing. These photos feature both celebrities and ordinary people, who are captured during an intense movement that is "frozen in time" through photography.

Figure 9 A meme relates to the Lockdown because of coronavirus and Ramadan's Egyptian traditions [25].

The extensive memetic reactions that such photos generate are explained in two main reasons, capturing people in a somewhat ridiculous posture and because these photos capture a moment of great instability, people cannot remain in midair for more than a split of a second.

For instance, the (Fig. 9) is a meme relating how people react to the lockdown that the Egyptian government applied because of the pandemic of covid-19 while Muslims are preparing for the holly month of Ramadan, and how they will miss some of the Egyptian traditions and gatherings because of its timing. Visually, it uses one of the scenes of the 90s Egyptian movie "Alpasha Telmeez" that shows how people must act quickly to get back home before the curfew started.

In conclusion, to create a memetic and viral piece of content in the digital sphere, the content must include the three main features that leads to its success, Simplicity, Humor and Participation (Chart 1). These three attributes conduct virality of the content that defiantly will encourage individuals to alter it in their own way to become memetic. Bearing in mind the fast-changing trends on social media, content creators should be as creative, productive and have the sense of promptitude to take advantages of these trends. The simplicity of the visual, using ordinary people in videos and pictures besides relying on humor or positive emotions in general will lead to higher possibility of altering the content and becoming memetic.
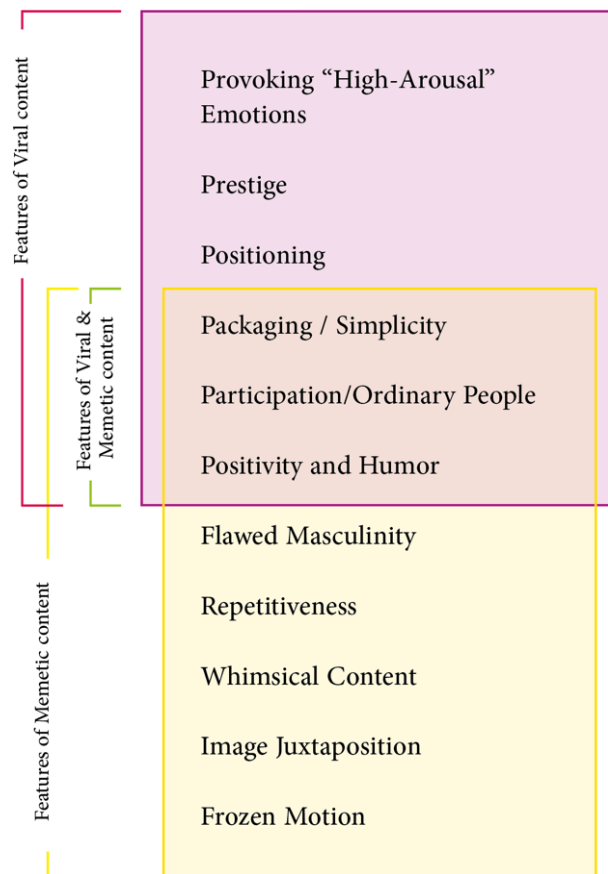

Chart (1) shows the best formula form making a viral memetic piece of content on social media.

4. Meme's behavior and virality

Memes differ from iconic images and from viral texts that do not experience much alteration. They are never fixed symbols, stories or icons, but interactive aesthetic artefacts that provide a snapshot of the immediate tendencies of culture and public discourses ([7], 6). Memes are more likely to connect ideas than people. The act of sharing memes does not link people in the first place, as memes are mostly anonymous ([7], 198).

Internet Memes rely on many attributes. Unlike genes that are reproduced and replicated depending on some physical procedures, the memes relay on mental processes and observation. Moreover, the memes varied depending on their interpretation and explanation [6].

Memes are sharp and abstract at the same time as well. Sharp as they point to the specific event, person or saying, and require the contextual knowledge of the audience to understand the message. Abstract as they often appeal to much larger narratives, stereotypes and ways of thinking. It is this interplay of two levels that makes memes fascinating to decode, fun to consume and revealing to research ([7], 196-197).

The new technologies and media made it available for individuals to create their own content and participate in formulation of the pop visual culture. The use of ugly font on unpolished images can create a successful viral meme in the contemporary participatory culture. The logic of this culture relies on the involvement of people and incompleteness which are the triggers for further dialogue making a meme viral and successful. Therefor, the content that looks unfinished, unpolished, amateur-looking, and weird video or photos is the perfect formula that grabs people attention to fill in the gaps, address the puzzles, or mock its creator.

There are three main features of a meme that can be distinguished: fidelity, fecundity and longevity. Fidelity refers to the inner trustworthiness that makes a meme appealing; fecundity (or replicability) renders easy and quick imitation; and longevity is the ability to survive among other memes for a long time, thus ensuring the meme's continued existence ([7], 6).

In addition to that, internet memes consider two main factors in their behavior, time and space. In the matter of time, the internet meme could be circulated in a very short time using social media platforms and internet as long as the server hosting it remains online.

On the other hand, space of transmission it has overcome. The range of spreading provided by the internet is enormous by connecting computers to each other, inwhich could provide a very wide range of transmission in a high speed of connectivity comparing to other traditional methods. That means, once the content is uploaded, its spreading is uncontrolled.

To explore meme's behavior in relation to virality, the following two examples will be discussed. One of these examples is a local one (from Egypt) and the other is an international one (from USA).

Example No. (1) "Etisalat Misr commercial – Ramadan 2020"

"Etisalat Misr" is one of the mobile operator companies in Egypt that started its business in 2007. During the lockdown of the Covid-19, the TV commercial copy was aired through different TV channels and on YouTube. The commercial staring Ahmed Helmy, a famous Egyptian actor, is exposing the changes that happened with Egyptians' daily routines while

Figure 10 A screenshot for Etisalat Misr Ramadan's TV commercial [9].

managing their time during the lockdown of the Covid-19.

This commercial went viral with more than 57 million views on YouTube till the time of writing, and encouraged people to use some of its main sentences and altered them visually to have their own visual copy, leading to the creation of several memetic content.

Figure (11) is an example that shows how the previous viral commercial become memetic among netizens. A non-official Facebook page (Disney in Arabic) discusses topics related to the Arabic Editions of Disney's productions published this meme combining scenes from one of Disney's productions "Hercules" and the narration of the "Etisalat Misr" commercial.

As mentioned previously, the widespread viral piece of content triggers people to alter and make their own copy. The Meme's three main features; fidelity, fecundity, and longevity, are obtained. The virality of the content helped to overcome the contextual knowledge to understand the message in the produced memes.

Figure 11, an example using Etisalat's TV commercial and altered it visually [12].

Example No. (2) "Sen. Bernie Sanders Picture at Inauguration Day"

Bernie Sanders, the United States Senator from Vermont, were captured wearing oversized mittens and a practical brown coat, sitting socially distanced on a folding chair with crossed legs and arms at the inauguration day of the American president Joe Biden.

The photo was taken by a Washington-based photojournalist, Brendan Smialowski, and he never

Figure 12, the photograph of Sen. Bernie Sanders taken by Brendan Smialowski that went viral [27].

thought it could go viral as it may not be that good. Once the photo is online, many funny captions are paired with it and people became more creative and photoshopped Bernie's picture in a different context, artworks, and movie scenes.

The photo become a meme when people started to alter it. Figure (13) shows one of these memes. Bernie was manipulated in artwork for a coffee shop with the caption "I am once again asking for some coffee. #berniesmittens".

Another meme in Figure (14) shows Bernie's image photoshopped in a master scene of the famous movie "Forrest Gump". Bernie's image traveled in space and time as it was manipulated in many contexts that made it more humorous which helped it to go more viral.

The senator's campaign store took advantage of what happen and released a sweatshirt featuring the meme with 100% of proceeds going toward Meals on Wheels Vermont [27].

Figure 13 one of the memes that merged Bernie's image with an artwork [27].

Figure 14 Bernie's image is photoshopped in a master scene of "Forrest Gump" movie [28]

5. Results and Discussion

The results of the paper can be conducted into the following points:

5.1.   A viral piece of content doesn't ensure it should be memetic although memes are created when the content reaches a certain virality.

5.2.   Virality of a piece of content may lead it to be altered by the audience and become memetic.

5.3.   Virality describes the range of spread and number of peoples involved in contributions, while Memes consider ideas not people as they are mostly anonymous.

5.4.   Viral content provokes "High-Arousal" Emotions, either positively, like humor, or negatively like anger and anxiety.

5.5.   Clear and simple content created by ordinary people spread better than complex ones and have a higher influence on others to become memetic.

5.6.   The prominence of humor in memetic content relies on three attributes: Playfulness, Incongruity, and Superiority.

5.7.   Netizens on social media are experiencing "The Mere Exposure Effect" every day that generates a kind of familiarity to the content and shapes their common pop culture.

5.8.   Simplicity, Humor, and Participation are the key factors to create a memetic and viral piece of content in the digital sphere.

6. Recommendations

The researcher recommends following the rapidly changing viral trends and memetic content, to utilize them in the marketing context especially in digital marketing. These trends are not just a popular form of content, but they contain much more that could shape the pop culture of the targeted society. Designers, marketers, and social scholars may study internet content to monitor the changes in individuals' behavior, ideas, and interests.

7. Conclusion

This paper is an attempt to discuss the relation between virality of the content on social media and memes by Exploring the conception of both "viral" and "memetic" content, and how they differ from each other. In addition to that, the paper addresses the main characteristics of viral content and how it could turn into a memetic if people changed, added, or altered it. The paper explores the visual characteristics of memetic content with examples from the Egyptian content, and factors that affect and influence the behavior of these memetic and viral pieces.

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