

Internet Memes and Gender: A Pragmatic Analysis of How Saudi Male and Female EFL Undergraduate Students Use Internet Memes

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Abstract—The study examined the differences between 150 male and female EFL undergraduate students in their use of internet memes. The way in which male and female participants used internet memes was investigated. Moreover, the differences between the two genders in the pragmatic functions of the memes and the most common function by each gender were investigated. The data for the current study were gathered using a questionnaire completed by 75 male students and 75 female students. The findings suggest that both male and female participants showed a high use of memes in their private conversations with their family and friends. It also showed high use of memes for joking or humour. Male participants showed a high use of memes for entertainment or satire, whereas female participants used them to express their emotions, which was a less frequent function among males. In terms of the most common emotions expressed by males and females, male participants used memes to express happiness and joy more frequently than females, whereas female participants were more likely than males to use internet memes to express sadness, anger, love and hate. Therefore, this shows differences between males and females in the pragmatic functions of using internet memes. The majority of the male and female participants felt comfortable using memes from different cultures, although a few preferred not to because they were afraid of being misunderstood. The paper concludes with a recommendation to conduct studies on the pragmatic functions of memes by different age groups.

Index Terms—females, gender, internet memes, males, pragmatic functions

I. INTRODUCTION

Social network users have developed their own communication systems in order to communicate their feelings, thoughts and emotions by using emoticons, GIFs and internet memes. Internet memes are widely used by people of different ages on social networks. They are considered a modern cultural phenomenon through which certain information is spread via internet communication (Ariyoga & Rahyono, 2020). Internet memes combine image and text and are often used for purposes such as comedy and satirical drawings (Ostanina-Olszewka & Majdzińska-Koczorowicz, 2019). Given their widespread use across many digital platforms, internet memes have received increasing scholarly attention (Vasquez & Aslan, 2021).

Undergraduate student internet users may prefer to use internet memes to express their emotions, feelings or thoughts instead of using written language. Undergraduate students may also create new internet memes. As Smith (2021) states, studying memes in a geographical and academic population, rather than solely in a digital one, enhances understanding of how internet memes are used in many different contexts, including non-digital and interpersonal communication.

This study focuses on the use of internet memes by male and female EFL undergraduate students. Gender was selected as a focus because the literature on gender and language (cf. Bassiouney, 2009; Labov, 1982; Trudgill, 1983) shows that men and women tend to use language in distinct ways. A linguistic stereotype holds that women are more careful in their phrasing and articulation of language than men in order to appear more feminine and well-mannered (Bensaber, 2020). For example, a study conducted by Newman et al. (2008) explored language differences between males and females. This was done by analysing the language in 14,000 text samples. The findings showed that in the 8,353 text files examined, women primarily used language for gossip, talking about other people and what they had done. They also expressed emotions such as doubts, as well as their preferences and dislikes. In contrast, men, in the 5,970 text files analysed, used language to label objects and processes, along with a lot of talk about jobs, sports, money, usage of numbers and, most importantly, swear words and profanity. Regarding the similarities, both genders used language to talk about time, anger and sexuality. The distinction in how males and females use language could also apply to their use of internet memes.

The aim of the current study is to identify the pragmatic functions of internet memes used by male and female students, as well as finding out whether there are gender differences in the students' pragmatic preferences and functions in their use of internet memes. This is of key importance as it will provide an understanding of how internet memes are used and whether there are any gender differences in the use of the two groups. Most previous studies have examined digital content instead of conducting interviews or questionnaires, exploring social functions within a digital community or broader meme processes (Davis et al., 2016; Gal et al., 2016; Marcus et al., 2017; Milner, 2016; Nissenbaum & Shifman, 2017;

Smith, 2021). Moreover, since the students in the current study are studying English as a foreign language, the research paper will investigate whether this enables them to use internet memes from English-speaking cultures in the Arabic-speaking culture.

The purpose of the study will be fulfilled by answering the following research questions:

- 1) How do Saudi undergraduate students use memes?
- 2) What is the most common pragmatic meaning of the internet memes used by male students?
- 3) What is the most common pragmatic meaning of the internet memes used by female students?
- 4) Is there a difference between male and female students in the pragmatic functions of their use of memes?

The findings of the current study will contribute to the literature on the pragmatic functions of internet memes, especially by focusing on Saudi undergraduate students, whose use of internet memes, to my knowledge, has not been addressed before.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Internet Memes

The term *meme* was popularized by the evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins in his 1976 bestseller *The Selfish Gene* (Ariyoga & Rahyono, 2020). Dawkins coined the term to introduce his theory of mimetics to explain cultural (re)production, evolution and transmission, and “to argue that units of cultural transmission are analogous to the genes of biological evolution” (Xie, 2022, p. 7). According to Dawkins, a meme is “a unit of cultural transmission, or a unit of *imitation*” (Dawkins, 1976, p. 206, 2016, p. 249; italics in original). He suggests that “tunes, ideas, catchphrases, clothes fashions, ways of making pots or of building arches” (Dawkins, 1976, p. 206, 2016, p. 249) are examples of memes. Dawkins went on to refine his definition by stating that “[a] meme should be regarded as a unit of information residing in a brain” (Dawkins, 1982, p. 109, 1999, p. 165). For Dawkins (2006), a meme can be defined as an act of imitating ideas that spread from person to person; he also explains that the term meme has a Greek root (*mīmēma*), meaning something that can be imitated.

It is noteworthy that Shifman (2014) and Milner (2016) introduced a genre of memes called internet memes. Shifman (2014), in her book titled *Memes in Digital Culture*, defines internet memes as “(a) a group of digital items sharing the common characteristics of content, form and/or stance; (b) that were created with awareness of each other; (c) were circulated, imitated and / or transformed via the Internet by many users” (p. 41). To her, internet memes are a group of digital items that share common characteristics of form, content and attitudes, created intentionally in relation to one other. These memes are then circulated, imitated and even changed by many users over the internet. Shifman (2014) highlights that digitalization plays an important role in spreading culture, which supports Davison’s (2012) perspective that internet memes represent cultural artefacts that gain influence through online transmission. Nevertheless, memes are not necessarily jokes as they do not need to be funny or interesting (Markowski, 2022). They blend various modes, such as images, text and audio-visual material, in order to produce a shared cultural experience.

In his book *The World Made Meme*, Milner (2016) provides a definition of internet memes that is in agreement with Shifman (2014), but he expands the concept to include pictures, hashtags, puns, songs, YouTube videos, stock photos, catchphrases and even recordings of physical performances. According to Börzsei (2013), meme images can originate from sources such as films, video games, political imagery or photos of celebrities; they may appear as standalone image or be accompanied by text.

Xie (2022) illustrates that anything can become a meme as long as other people can imitate, copy and transmit it, noting that memes may be in different forms and genres, such as “text messages, slogans, speeches, lectures, instructions, advertising/advertisements, films, videos, pictograms, images, pictures, cartoons, comics, image macros, public texts (road/ traffic signs, brand logos, notices, etc.), music, songs, recipes, etc” (p. 9). Such items can be viewed as ‘meme outputs’.

A simple definition of internet memes is that they are created and transmitted online through social media and messaging applications (Xie, 2022). However, internet memes refer not only to those created online but also to those created offline and transmitted online.

The success of a meme depends on how often the meme is reproduced or imitated (Blackmore, 1999). Sometimes certain memes become popular because they are funny or associated with a certain incident like COVID-19. As Wiggins (2022, p. 10) notes: “the internet meme is a remixed, iterated message that is rapidly diffused by members of participatory digital culture for the purpose of satire, parody, critique, or other discursive activity”.

B. The Conceptual Blends of Memes

Fillmore (1976) introduced the term *frames* to describe how mental spaces are structured (Ostanina-Olszewska & Majdzińska-Koczorowicz, 2019). Frames are structured clusters of knowledge that can be metonymically activated by one of their components. Fillmore (1976) notes that “particular words or speech formulas, or particular grammatical choices, are associated in memory with particular frames, in such a way that exposure to the linguistic form in an appropriate context activates in the perceiver’s mind the particular frame” (p. 25). This leads to frame metonymy, where accessing any part or element of a frame can help to understand either the whole frame or part of it (Ostanina-Olszewska & Majdzińska-Koczorowicz, 2019).

Internet memes are an example of conceptual blends. This is because they act as creative artefacts by combining modalities and are often allusive and intertextual, spatial, complex and multilevel structures (Ostanina-Olszewska & Majdzińska-Koczorowicz, 2019). Creating new content becomes possible through conceptual blending or conceptual integration, which Fauconnier and Turner (2002) recognize as the basic instrument of human creativity. For this process to take place, at least two input spaces should be included, each containing elements from different scenarios. Several steps are involved in creating a conceptual blend. Abstract connections, or frames, are created through the selective mapping of corresponding elements from different scenarios. These frames are created within a blended space, resulting in new frames that differ from those in the original spaces, known as emergent structures (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002, p. 61). Conceptual understanding thus develops through dynamic interaction between mental spaces, resulting in a blend being produced that has an emergent, unique structure and logic.

Conceptual blending is a very rapid, dynamic, unconscious and routine process (Cichmińska, 2004), and it has been demonstrated to function similarly across the highest levels of scientific, artistic and literary thought (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002). It has crucial importance in language, science, art and religion, and other expressions of human creativity. Conceptual blending is fundamental to everyday reasoning, as well as in all artistic and scientific pursuits. Within a blend, the new structure, meaning and qualities can over time become part of a particular cultural context, evolving into established language structures that may later contribute to the creation of new meanings. Composition, completion and elaboration processes underpin the emergence of conceptual blending, and each of these elements enable new content (emergent structure) to emerge that is not accessible in the individual input spaces. Fauconnier (1997) describes these three processes as follows:

Completion: Knowledge of background frames, cognitive and cultural models, allows the composite structure projected into the blend from the inputs to be viewed as part of a larger self-contained structure in the blend. The pattern in the blend triggered by the inherited structures is ‘completed’ into the larger, emergent structure.

Elaboration: The structure in the blend can then be elaborated. This is called ‘running the blend.’ It consists of cognitive work performed within the blend, according to its own emergent logic. (pp. 150–151)

Conceptual integration is considered the basic mechanism of human creativity through which language users create a blend containing a new semantic quality. This blend can then have new frames, features and associations which could be the consequence of one’s culture, language or nationality (Ostanina-Olszewska & Majdzińska-Koczorowicz, 2019).

Internet memes are known for mixing different modalities such as text, pictures and/or audiovisual material in a creative way. They represent a text–picture interdependence based on specific rules that co-create discourse. In this sense, without the picture, the text would be incomplete and not understood, even though the textual part is presented in condensed form, often without adherence to grammatical rules. After being combined with an image, the text often acquires an entirely different meaning and may refer to a commonly known and popular semantic framework (Ostanina-Olszewska & Majdzińska-Koczorowicz, 2019), and semantic roles are often attributed to particular characters. Internet memes become multimodal through the interactions and interdependence between linguistic and visual forms (Dancygier & Vandelanotte, 2016).

Recipients of memes use frame metonymy, in which identifiable frame elements allow comprehension of the complete frame or the particular context. This approach also facilitates understanding the behaviour of the participants involved. Moreover, in analysing memes, they cannot be isolated from their cultural associations or connotations. An individual’s perspective is constantly affected by the information found in the memes, which usually has a satirical or ironic nature (Ostanina-Olszewska & Majdzińska-Koczorowicz, 2019). How an individual interprets a meme is shaped by the beliefs, opinions, stereotypes and clichés shared by a particular group of people, as an individual user of a network never constructs a meme on their own. Memes prompt recipients to alter the original meaning, resulting in them becoming co-authors of the meme. The content of each meme corresponds to different situations, reflecting the unique experiences of each person and the fact that humour is directly associated with creativity.

Ostanina-Olszewska and Majdzińska-Koczorowicz (2019) note that memes always carry some background meaning and should not be analysed as isolated artefacts. This means that memes do not only reference previous versions of a situation or meme and play a role in the creation of new memes but also create new concepts relevant to the contexts, situations and images to which they refer.

C. *Pragmatics and Internet Memes*

Pragmatics is the study of utterances and the intentional meaning of speech in a given time and place, including the implicit meaning behind language. Daily use of the internet has led to a widening of the scope of pragmatics to include internet pragmatics, which Xie (2022) considers to be a valuable area of enquiry. According to Xie (2022), internet pragmatics is an important branch of the pragmatics field that studies online language, encompassing social media and the online world. It is a very promising and diverse area of knowledge which is full of vitality, involving exploring various aspects of human cognition, interaction and social dynamics relating to the internet. Yus (2019) states that internet pragmatics provides a powerful explanatory tool which enables understanding of the many layers of intended meanings communicated through internet memes.

The popularity of internet memes results from the nature of their visual and textual content (Malik & Tehseen, 2022). Internet memes are used as figurative devices to say one thing with a different implied meaning. Moreover, Grundlingh (2018) argues that memes are considered as speech acts; therefore, they are easily communicated and comprehended.

Most of the time internet memes imply various meanings depending on the time and context in which they are used. Grice (1975) introduced the theory of implicature, which refers to the conclusions that the hearer draws from an utterance, even if it is not explicitly conveyed in the speaker's words.

According to Xie et al. (2021), internet pragmatics studies both what the internet is and how people use it. It recognizes the internet as an increasingly complex and diverse aspect of daily life. As a functional perspective, internet pragmatics seeks to explain how individuals use various linguistic and semiotic resources online to express themselves and understand others. Given that the human life-world is inherently diverse, encompassing individuals with linguistic, cultural, educational, religious, ethical and cognitive differences, members of a certain subculture may also exhibit heterogeneous characteristics.

D. Previous Studies

Given the widespread nature of internet memes, they have received a considerable amount of scholarly attention in their many digital forms (Vasquez & Aslan, 2021). Most studies have analysed digital items rather than using interviews or questionnaires to collect data from internet memes' users, focusing on the social functions of memes within the specific digital community studied or on larger meme processes (Davis et al., 2016; Gal, 2015; Marcus et al., 2017; Milner, 2016; Nissenbaum & Shifman, 2017).

In a study conducted on undergraduate university students, Smith (2021) examined the use of internet memes by college students at Central Washington University, as well as attempting to examine how memes were defined within this sample. Questionnaires and interviews were used to collect the data; 14 questionnaires were completed and returned, while 18 interviews were conducted with six participants. Analysis of the data showed that the college students considered memes to play a significant role in their conversations with family and friends, and they also used them to construct their public identities. However, the students did not engage in meme making to the same extent as other types of meme use, and when they did so it was often not recognized by them as meme making. Additionally, their definitions of memes were similar to those set out in the current literature. Smith (2021) found that the participants first started interacting with memes at the age of 11–14 years old.

Bensaber (2020) examined the differences between males and females in their understanding and appreciation of the humour found in memes and written jokes, aiming to investigate the hypothesis that males understand and appreciate humour in memes and jokes to a greater extent than females. For hypothesis testing, a questionnaire and a test were administered to a total of 58 participants in a cluster sample, consisting of 29 male participants and 29 female participants. The participants were in their third year studying English at Frères Mentouri Constantine University. In the questionnaire, the students provided information about their exposure to English media and their preferred social media platforms. The main research tool was a test, providing the participants with six memes and eight written jokes representing different types of humour. They were first expected to react to these items; following this, if they had understood the content, they had to provide an explanation of the humour and their reactions. The results revealed a gap in males' and females' understanding of humour in memes and written jokes. The males seemed to understand humour more than the females did, with a difference of over 10% between the two genders. However, regarding humour appreciation, males and females were almost equally appreciative of humour.

The current study aims to investigate the use of internet memes by Saudi male and female EFL undergraduate students and to find out the common pragmatic functions of internet memes for each gender group.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Participants

The data were collected from 150 participants, consisting of 75 female and 75 male Saudi EFL undergraduate students from the Department of English Language and Literature at the College of Languages and Humanities, Qassim University. The data were gathered randomly from students aged 18 years old and over. Undergraduate students were selected because internet memes are widely used by this age group and they can also participate in creating them.

B. Data Collection

A digital questionnaire was used for data collection. The questionnaire was designed based on Smith (2021), and more questions were added to encompass the research questions of the current study. The questionnaire consisted of 12 questions, focusing on the participants' behaviour in using internet memes and the pragmatic functions of the memes. Three specialists in the field judged the questionnaire. A pilot study was also conducted to ensure the reliability and validity of the questionnaire. This involved asking five undergraduate students from the Department of English Language and Literature at Qassim University to complete the questionnaire. Following this, the questionnaire was distributed to the main participants of the study.

A quantitative analysis was conducted using Excel to identify the similarities and differences between the two groups in their use of internet memes and the most common pragmatic functions used by each group.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, the findings from the questionnaire data will be discussed to answer the research questions.

The first question in the questionnaire asked about the frequency of using internet memes in any digital space. As can be seen in Figure 1, both male and female participants reported using internet memes, though with varying frequency. The purpose of this question was to find out how frequently the participants encountered memes in their lives and to ensure that they understood that internet memes can be used to convey their intended messages without using traditional text messages.

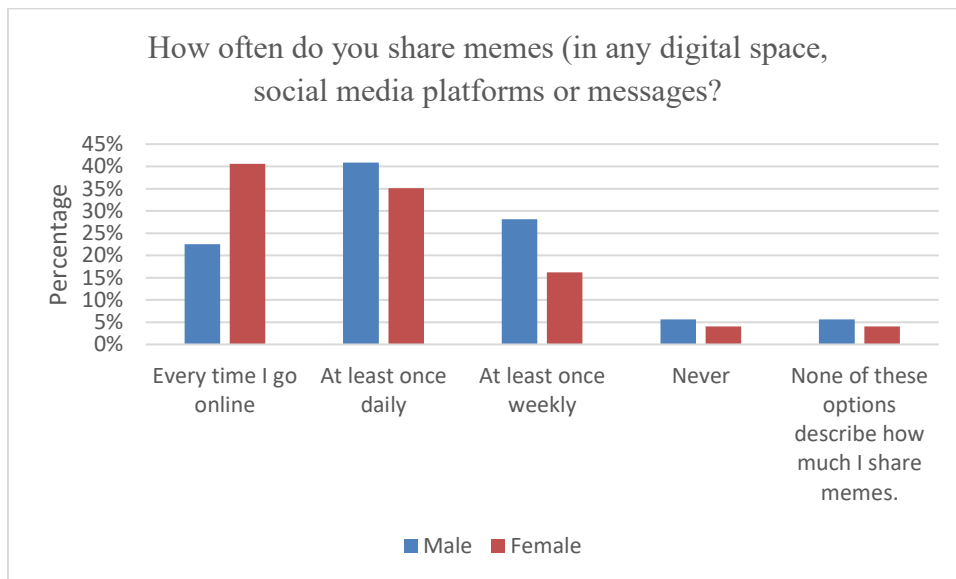


Figure 1. Male and Female Participants' Frequency of Sharing Memes (in Any Digital Space, Social Media Platforms or Messages)

The findings suggest that both males and females use internet memes in different digital spaces. 41% of the male participants reported using internet memes at least once daily, whereas 41% of the female participants reported that they use internet memes every time they go online. These findings suggest that the female participants have a stronger preference for using internet memes compared to the male participants. Only a few participants from both genders reported never using memes (4% of males and 3% of females).

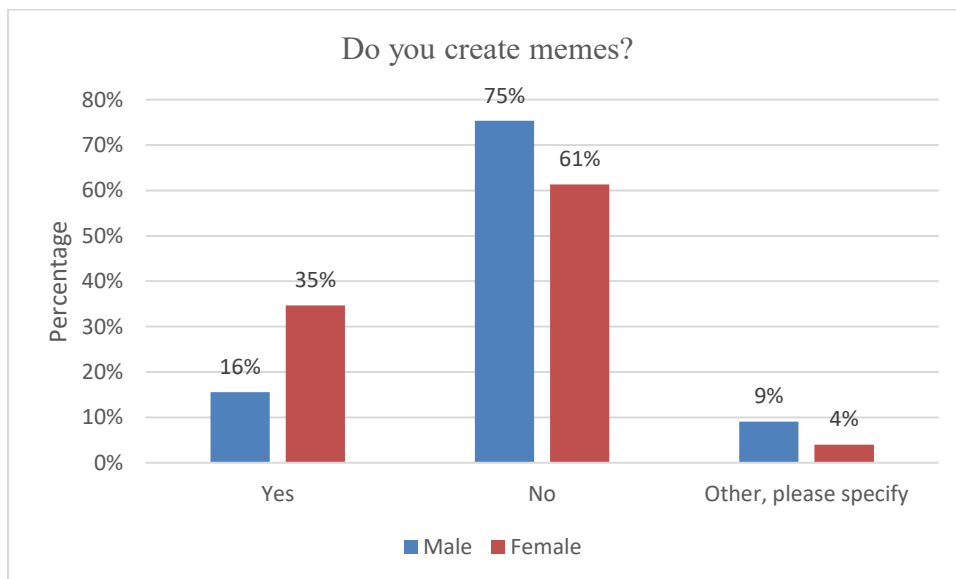


Figure 2. Creating Internet Memes

According to Boiko et al. (2024), internet users often participate in meme creation, with memes being easily changed by other internet users to convey their intended message. Thus, memes go through a process of transformation and lose their authorship. By examining the participants' attempts to create memes, Figure 2 shows that both genders rarely create memes. Nevertheless, the results show that the female participants tend to create memes more often than the male participants, with 35% of females doing so. This aligns with Smith's (2021) findings, as the participants in her study did not engage in creating memes to the same extent as they used them.

Since memes are mostly encountered on social media, Figure 3 illustrates the most common social platform in which the participants see internet memes. Both genders agreed that memes are more commonly found on TikTok. More male than female participants reported encountering internet memes on Instagram (24%), whereas more female than male participants reported that memes are more common on X (24%). This partially agrees with the findings of Smith (2021), whose participants also reported encountering internet memes on X and Instagram. The results disagree with Bensaber (2021), who found that memes were most commonly found on Facebook and Instagram.

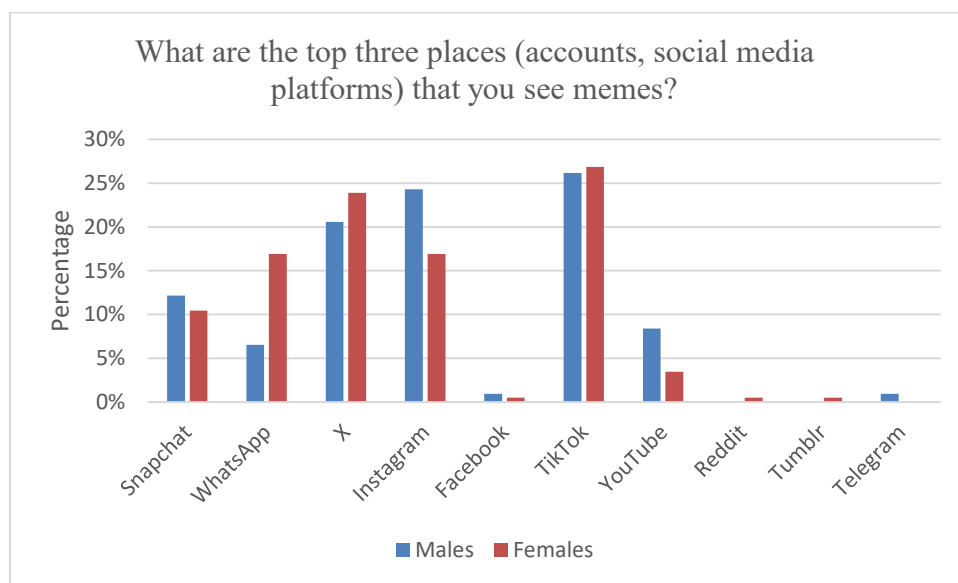


Figure 3. Where Study Participants Found Memes

The participants were also asked about with whom they prefer to use memes. The male participants reported that they prefer to use internet memes with their friends, with 96% selecting this option. Similarly, the female participants also showed a strong preference for using memes with friends, accounting for 76% of the total, and they also showed a preference for using them with their families, as can be seen in Table 1. The strong preference for using internet memes with their friends by both male and female participants could be due to being of the same age or generation, with shared life experiences and lifestyles. This contrasts with older people or people who they are not familiar with. Both genders showed a very low preference for using internet memes with their colleagues, when chatting with unknown people and in formal conversations. This could be because the students are aware of the formality of these contexts and fear being misunderstood by people they are not familiar with, such as in interactions with unknown people or colleagues.

TABLE 1
WITH WHOM DO YOU USE MEMES MORE WHEN CHATTING?

Gender	Family	Friends	Colleagues	Chatting with unknown people	In formal conversations
Male	3%	96%	1%	0%	0%
Female	20%	76%	1%	1%	1%

The participants showed an interest in looking for more information about the internet memes they encounter (61% of females and 53% of males), as shown in Figure 4. This agrees with the findings of Smith (2021), who found that most of her participants verified the information they found in memes: seven of the participants answered “Yes” to looking for more information about memes or verifying meme content and four answered “No”. In the current study 47% of the male participants answered “No”, compared to 39% of the female participants. This indicates that the male participants are less interested in looking for more information about memes or verifying information about them, while the female participants seemed to be more curious about memes.

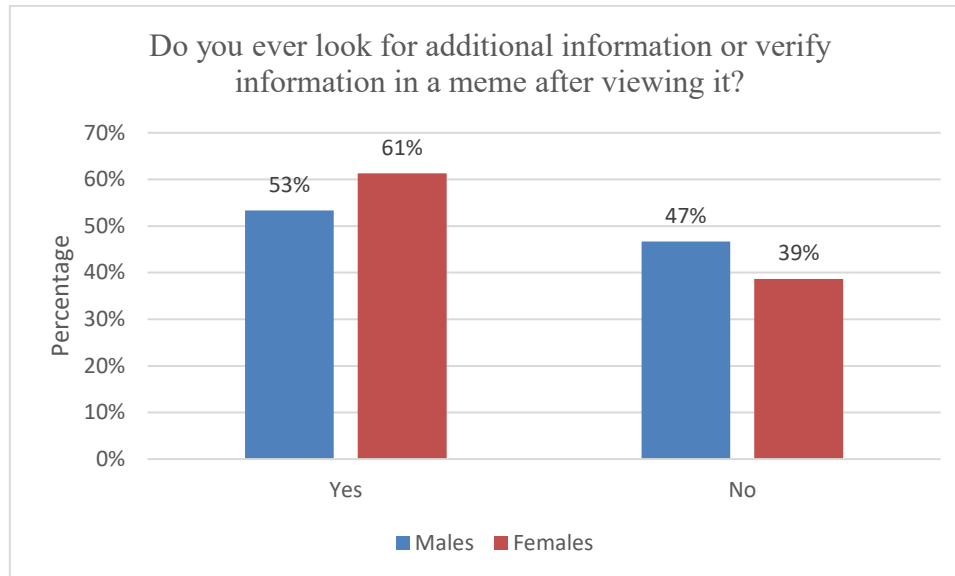


Figure 4. Male and Female Participants' Verification of Information in Memes

In terms of the purpose of using memes, both the male and female participants reported using internet memes for joking (25% of males and 23% of females). Expressing emotions was the second most frequent purpose for female participants (19%), while using memes for entertainment was the second most frequent purpose for males (16%). Using memes for entertainment was the third most frequent purpose for the females (13%). For the male participants, using memes to express satire was the third most frequent purpose (15%). The male participants showed more use of internet memes to talk about sports in comparison to the females, who were less interested in this purpose. Both genders showed less interest in using memes for talking about politics, national identity and culture, which could be due to the seriousness of such kinds of topic. Regarding the purposes of irony/metaphor, exclamation and exaggeration, although they showed a low percentage of use the female participants seemed to use them more frequently than the male participants. These findings are presented in Figure 5.

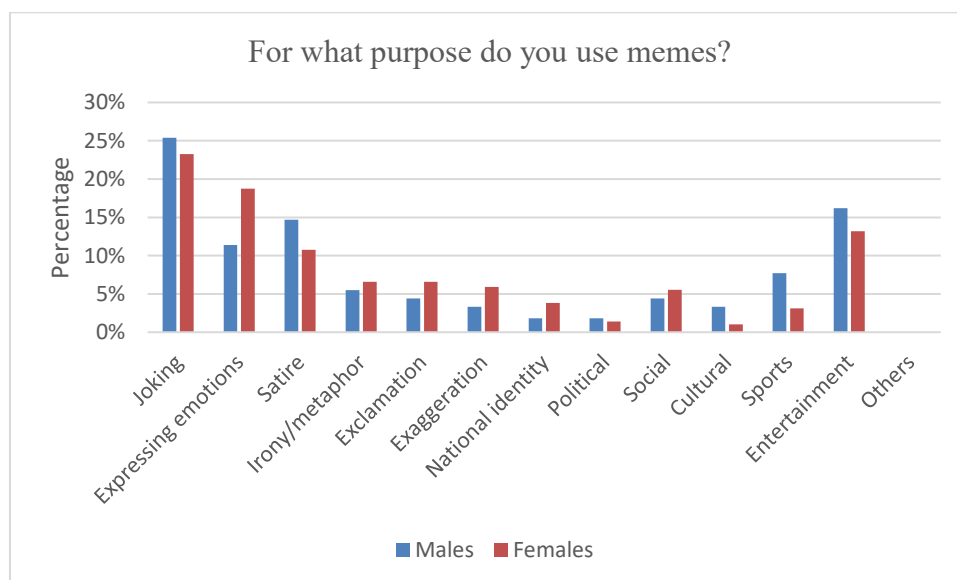


Figure 5. Pragmatic Functions of Using Internet Memes for Male and Female Participants

The results showed that the majority of the male and female participants reported first encountering memes at the age of 11–14 years old (65% of males and 61% of females, a negligible difference). This finding is consistent with the results of Smith (2021). The remainder of the participants (both male and female) reported encountering memes at the age of 14 to 18. A few participants reported another age range, such as between 18 and 20 years old, as reported by one of the males and one of the females. One of the females mentioned that she started encountering internet memes at the age of 5 to 6 years old. The findings are illustrated in Figure 6.

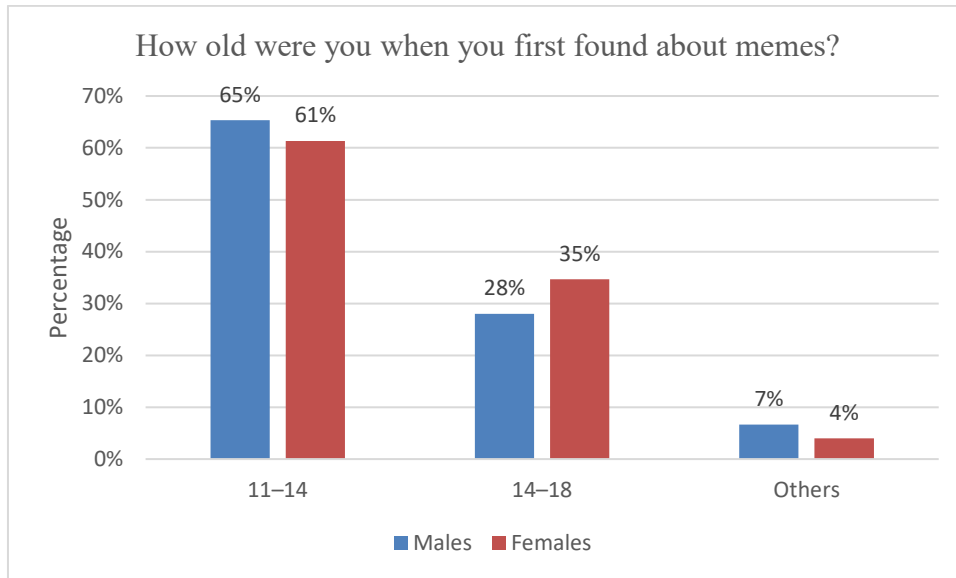


Figure 6. Age at Which Male and Female Participants First Encountered Internet Memes

Since it was expected that one of the main purposes of using memes would be to express and transmit emotions (cf. Boiko et al., 2024), it was interesting to examine the most widely expressed emotions and whether any gender differences could be seen. Figure 7 presents the findings. The most commonly expressed emotion through using memes was happiness, which was widely expressed by both genders (28% of males and 21% of females). In second place was joy, which was more widely expressed by male than female participants. On the other hand, female participants showed a higher use of memes expressing sadness than the males, at 14%, and it was their second most frequently expressed emotion. Male participants also showed higher use of memes expressing surprise and fear than the females. The female participants seemed to use more memes expressing feelings of anger, disappointment, love, hate and worry than the males. There were slight differences in expressing boredom between the two genders, whereas the same percentage of participants used memes to express disapproval.

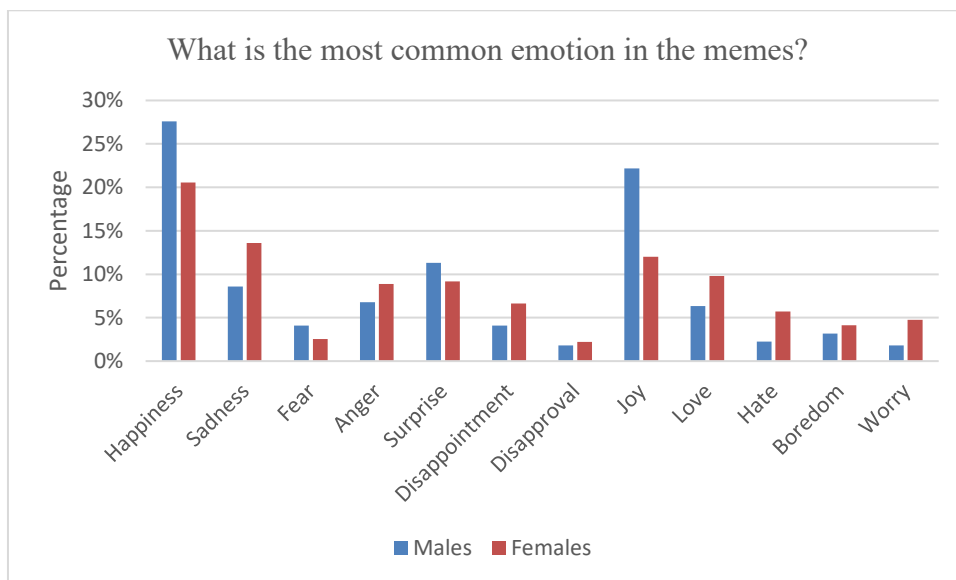


Figure 7. The Most Common Emotions Expressed by Males and Female Participants in Their Use of Memes

When the participants were asked whether they face difficulty comprehending internet memes, both genders reported that they do not. This could be attributed to their early exposure to memes and long history of using them. The male participants reported a better level of understanding of memes (93%) than the female participants (84%).

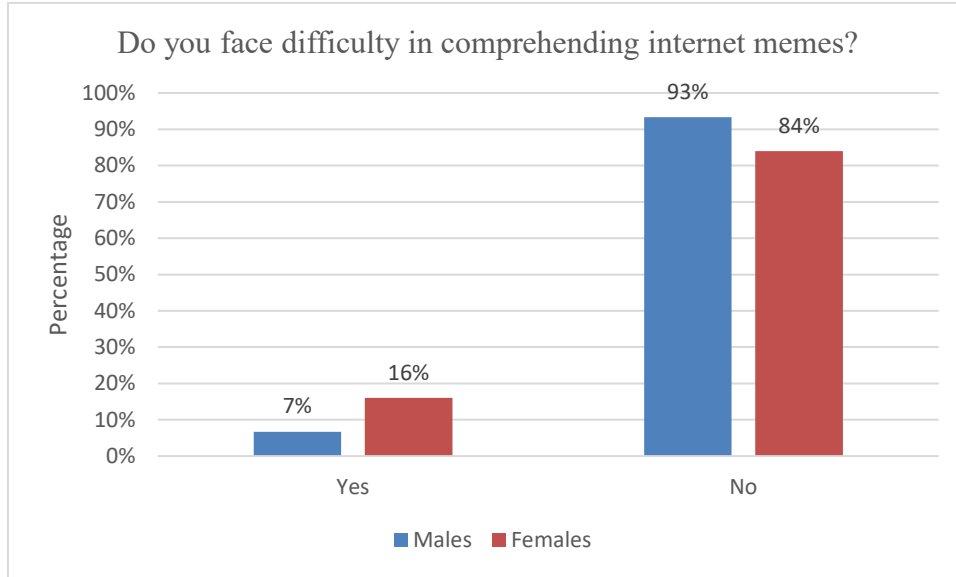


Figure 8. Level of Difficulty in Comprehending Internet Memes

Figure 9 presents the results on whether the male and female participants feel comfortable using memes from different cultures. The findings show that the majority of the male and female participants (73% of females and 72% of males) reported feeling comfortable using internet memes from different cultures; the differences between them were negligible. This finding could be attributed to the fast spread of internet memes causing what Dawkins (1976) described as cultural information spread. On the other hand, 28% of the males and 27% of the females reported feeling uncomfortable using memes from different cultures. The most common reason mentioned by both the male and female participants was a fear of being misunderstood. For instance, a female participant explained that she prefers not to use memes from a different culture because “using memes from other cultures can be challenging, especially when the listener isn’t familiar with that culture. The references might come across as confusing or inappropriate. Additionally, some memes may not resonate with your own society and could be rejected by the audience”. Another female participant said a meme from another culture might not be understood by the receiver. A further female participant mentioned that she is afraid when using memes from a different culture because she does not know much about their culture or the things that are forbidden to them. Regarding the male participants who prefer not to use memes from different cultures, their main reason was a fear of being misunderstood or of using memes that might have an offensive meaning. This can be explained using politeness strategies since the participants do not want to offend the receiver of their memes and do not want to use memes from other cultures that might be misunderstood or carry an offensive meaning. Such an explanation can be understood by referring to Brown and Levinson’s (1987) model, which is centred on the concept of face, specifically positive face, where the speaker wants other people to like them.

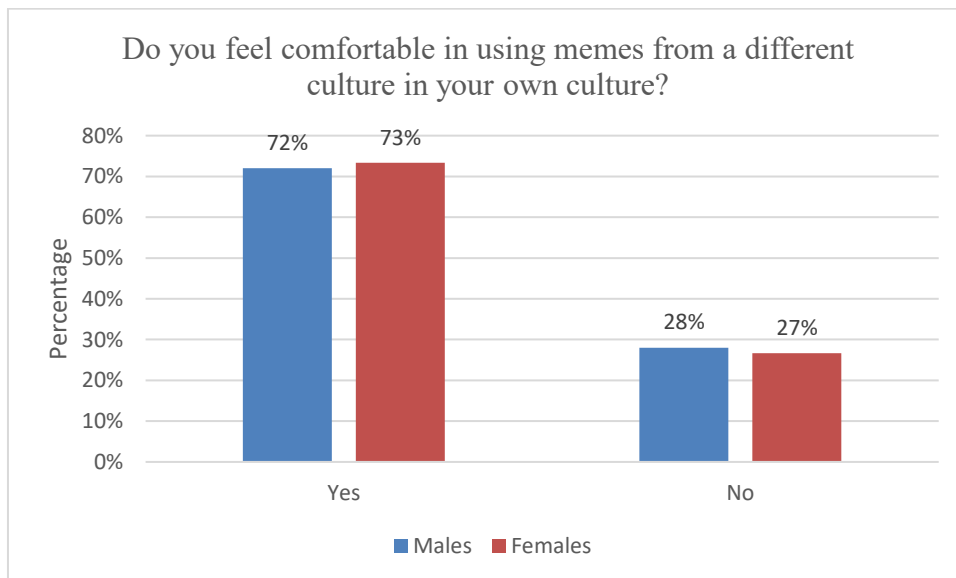


Figure 9. Male and Female Participants’ Use of Memes From Different Cultures

To sum up this section, most of the Saudi male and female undergraduate students showed considerable use of internet memes, mainly on a daily basis, with variation in the frequency of their use. They reported encountering internet memes at an early age (i.e. between 11 and 14 years old). Regarding the pragmatic functions of using memes, both genders showed a strong preference for using memes for joking or humour. Males frequently used memes for entertainment or satire, whereas females used them to express their emotions, a purpose less often used by the males. When examining the most common emotions expressed, it was found that the male participants used memes to express happiness and joy more often than the females, whereas the female participants tended to use internet memes to express the emotions of sadness, anger, love and hate more frequently than the males. Therefore, this highlights differences between males and females in the pragmatic functions of using internet memes.

V. CONCLUSION

The present study aimed to investigate the behaviour of Saudi male and female EFL students in their use of internet memes and to identify the common pragmatic functions intended by each gender group. It also aimed to identify the similarities and differences in the pragmatic functions intended by each group. The data were gathered using an electronic questionnaire, which was completed by 150 participants (75 males and 75 females). The findings suggest that both genders show considerable use of internet memes in their daily communication, with variations in the frequency of usage. However, they were less engaged in creating memes. Both male and female participants revealed that they prefer to use internet memes with their friends and family.

In terms of the pragmatic functions of memes, joking was the most common purpose, especially among male participants. The female participants used internet memes to express emotions more often than the males, while the male participants used memes for the purpose of entertainment, sports and satire more often than the females. Happiness was the most common emotion expressed by using memes, especially among males, who also displayed a preference for expressing joy. The female participants tended to more often use memes expressing love, sadness, hate, anger and worry. Most of the participants felt comfortable using internet memes from different cultures, whereas few of them preferred not to because they were afraid of being misunderstood or that the memes might have an offensive meaning in their culture.

The current study also has a number of limitations that can be addressed in future research. The analysis was confined to comparing internet meme use by male and female EFL undergraduate students. Further research should be conducted to compare groups of people of different ages, including older participants, to identify similarities and differences between them in the pragmatic functions of using internet memes. Moreover, since internet memes are considered a type of written language, they should be studied in relation to politeness strategies. A study could also be carried out to investigate the recipients of internet memes, assessing whether they understand the meaning of internet memes or whether this type of communication could lead to misunderstandings.

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