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Social Functions of Memes

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Prohlašuji, že jsem bakalářskou práci zpracoval samostatně a použil pouze prameny uvedené v seznamu literatury. Souhlasím, aby tato práce byla uložena na Univerzitě Palackého v Olomouci v knihovně Pedagogické fakulty a zpřístupněna ke studijním účelům.

V Lipníku dne 22. 04. 2025 ……

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ANOTACE

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Název práce:	Společenské funkce memů
Název v angličtině:	Social Functions of Memes
Anotace práce:	Bakalářská práce se zabývá tematikou internetových memů, analýzou jejich dopadu na vytváření homogenních sociálních skupin a vlivem, který mají na lidskou psychiku. V práci je rozebraný nejen historický vývoj memů, od počátků písemných a grafických ztvárnění různorodých humorných či satirických témat z dob ještě před vznikem internetu, až po nejaktuálnější trendy a formáty memů, ale i vliv technologického rozvoje a psychologie konzumaci a změny formátů novodobých memů.
Klíčová slova:	Memy, sociální sítě, internet, mobilní telefon, psychologie, technologie, rickroll, kultura, sociální skupina, historie
Anotace v angličtině:	The Bachelor's thesis delves into the topic of internet memes, the analysis of its impact on creation of homogenous social groups and the influence it has over the human psyche. The thesis additionally aims at not only the historical evolution of memes, since the beginning of written and graphical renditions of humorous or satirical topics from before the internet era, all the way to the newest trends and formats of memes, but also aims at analysing the influence of modern technology advances and psychology in regards of consumption and changes in format of nowadays memes.
Klíčová slova v angličtině:	Memes, social media, internet, smartphone, psychology, technology, rickroll, culture, social group, history
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Introduction

In the 21st century, the internet is an important part of human society. Living without the internet is indeed unthinkable nowadays. The majority of mass media resides within the vast wasteland of the internet, and so does a significant part of people's social lives. There is virtually nothing the internet lacks and among this humongous amount of content available out there, one of the most popular forms of media are memes – a simple, often humorous or satirical images or short videos that often contain a short text that provides context of the meme.

But are they really this simple? Is every meme just a shallow, funny image that bears little to no importance to us? Or is it often more complex form of media sharing? How did memes really become relevant? What are the first ever recorded memes in human history? And last but not least, are there only positive, innocent impacts of memes on our society, or is there some risk involved, too? To seek answers to those questions, the thesis is dedicated to delve deep into the topic of internet memes, culture behind it, social groups that create, share and generally consume said memes and the overall impact memes have on society as a whole, even outside the said social groups.

Young adults can see memes almost everywhere they turn. Every time they open any social media, all they can see are memes – either in form of images, or in form of short videos. Even when they work with children, which will be an important part of every future teacher's life, they encounter memes that the children either show them or tell them about. This topic is important to see critically, however, as it may be harmful in quite a lot of ways, especially when consumed irresponsibly.

The aim of this thesis is to cast a light on this not-well-researched yet topic and to highlight the most important aspects of this trend, as well as to provide context for the full understanding of the topic for people that are not quite familiar with it. It is also supposed to uncover the depths these seemingly trivial humorous images and videos can reach.

Although the work was initially supposed to contain a theoretical and a practical part, after finishing the theoretical part, and after consulting the thesis' progress with the supervisor, a decision to NOT include the practical part was made. This was solely because the work would have been too complex and too long for a bachelor thesis and removing any provided information would most likely compromise the overall integrity of the theoretical part. The theoretical part is therefore divided into four major chapters and deals with the history of memes

and the origin of the word itself, the topic of virality of memes and what causes and allows it, the social impact memes can have, and a critical evaluation of an article written by the supervisor, doc. PhDr. Václav Řeřicha, CSc, which is dealing with the perception of contemporary digital environment.

I frankly believe this thesis could provide a valuable insight into the modern day culture that revolves heavily around memes. This could be useful knowledge for everyone who would desire to understand the topic and become closer to the younger generations.

THEORETICAL PART

1. The origin of memes

Memes, widely recognized and very popular form of content on social media nowadays, are an unthinkable part of human culture. The combination of auditory, visual and written aspect is an ultimate communication device. It is more popular than just a mere text and the information it includes is way easier to memorize. That is because of so called multimodal learning, which has been proven to significantly enhance the process of learning in humans, despite still having certain drawbacks (Bouchey, Castek and Thygeson, 2021).

Combining multiple sensory modes, such as gestures, visuals, haptics, auditory productions, text-based information, and multimedia, creates multiple access points for learning (Bezemer and Kress, 2016)

Memes, despite being really simple, usually bring at least some content of value, such as informative content or satire. Although memes in general are a form of edutainment, or educational entertainment, there are also memes that are purely for comedy purposes. The wide variety of forms in which memes can exist brings almost limitless possibilities, boundaries of which is only the creativity of mankind.

Richard Dawkins was the first researcher to ever use the term "meme". In his book *The Selfish Gene* from 1976, he claims that every living being, plants, animals and humans included, are simply "survival machines-robot vehicles" and our only real purpose is to blindly preserve our genes. Although Dawkins' book speaks of the human nature in general, it is the first ever recorded instance of a term "meme" used in literature. The term was coined from Greek "mimema", meaning "imitated", and the word "gene". The word therefore describes memes and the cultural transmission in general as the "imitative gene".

Dawkins believed that human culture is a subject to imitation and cultural transmission, analogous to the biological nature of genes. He also claimed that, similarly to our biological genes, we tend to preserve our culture in the same way. In his opinion, memes function as cultural replicators. They spread through imitation, often erratically, through communication and social interactions. Even for memes, he believed, the natural selection applies, which means that memes evolve through variation, selection and replication (Dawkins, 1976). This statement is easily observable in nowadays meme culture, as some memes tend to be more popular and survive for longer, either because they are very distinctive and catchy, have been popularized through some form of pop culture (like the *"Rickroll meme"* was in the show South Park), or

have deeper, often satirical meaning. This is further debated over in the later section of the thesis which delves deeper into the so called "virality" of memes.

Dawkins meme theory had been further expanded by Susan Blackmore in her book *The Meme Machine* (1999). She claimed that human brains evolved to imitate and spread memes in form of "meme machines". She further supported Dawkins' claims that memes, or rather cultural transmissions, are as crucial for humans as our own, biological evolution, and that the two separate branches indeed evolve in parallel to each other. She believed that alongside the real genes, memes shape the human behaviour and society, but she also warned that memes can be "selfish", abused to spread misinformation and manipulate masses (Blackmore, 1999). This will be further debated over in the section of possible dangers of memes.

1.1. Memes before the internet era

Memes are, however, not strictly bound to the era of internet. There are multiple recorded cases of meme-like occurrences throughout the history, with some of the most famous are *"Kilroy was here"* or an ancient Roman palindrome known as the Sator Square.

1.1.1. Kilroy was here

The human tendency to create humorous and often seemingly meaningless images is clearly observable in the *"Kilroy was here"* graffiti. This is probably one of the closest instances of meme-culture that we know of today that is also fairly similar in concept to the nowadays memes. This meme, usually in a form of a graffiti, became popular in WW2. Its origins are debatable, but it is believed to be an inspection marking of James J. Kilroy, as stated on the official website of United States Naval Shipbuilding Museum. According to this source, James J. Kilroy's job was inspecting rivets on ships that were being built for WW2. To mark the ship as inspected, Kilroy used chalk drawing of a bald man with a long nose, hanging onto a wall, over which he was merely peeking. Under the drawing, he wrote "Kilroy was here".

Due to the rush of ship production during the WW2, the logo had not been painted over on many of the ships that sailed to Europe. Soldiers who fought in Europe eventually adapted Kilroy's signature and started recreating it in the liberated areas of Europe. After the war, the meme remained vivid and it is still recognized today. Although there are many uncertainties regarding the origin of the meme, the form in which it was spread and the amount of popularity it had gotten during the WW2 and after only underlines human tendency to adapt and replicate pictures and text, even without any serious meaning.

1.1.2. The Sator Square

Palindromes are, in their nature, also a certain form of a meme. Probably the most famous palindrome, the Sator Square, is another instance of seemingly meaningless trend being taken over by people all around the Roman Empire and later even in many other places in Europe, the Middle East and Africa. The earliest known Sator Squares have been dated to the 1st century A.D., with some of the examples found in the ruins of Pompeii. This suggests that the first Sator Squares date older than 79 A.D. when the Pompeii was destroyed by an eruption of Mount Vesuvius (Swire, 2019).

The original reason of why these stones were carved is not clearly known, but throughout the history, people believed it had mystical, magical or protective properties. It has been documented in medical texts as a cure for certain ailments, such as rabies or fever. Practitioners also advised carving the Sator Square words into the crusts of bread before ingestion. Additionally, its usage also exceeded into charms, as many people believed it brought good fortune and protected against house fires (Discovery UK, author of the article not mentioned, 2024)

The Sator Squares have been discovered across Europe, the Middle East and North Africa, which indicated their widespread use and significant cultural meaning for many civilizations (Cortesi, Atlas Obscure, 2023).

The Sator Square itself is a simple, five word text, usually carved into a stone. It says "Sator, arepo, tenet, opera, rotas". This palindrome can not only be read backwards, but also vertically, starting from the upmost letter in the first column or the downmost letter of the fifth column – the resulting text is always the same. If read from the opposite side, the texts remains the same, but starts with "rotas" and ends with "sator". The real meaning of this palindrome is speculative. Some believe it is a word puzzle, others believe it is a mystical text that was believed to have magical properties, as mentioned above.

Nowadays, the mysteries behind this famous palindrome still remain mostly unsolved. In contemporary pop culture, such as in Christopher Nolan's movie called "Tenet", several aspects of this ancient phenomenon are recognizable in a form of characters' names, reflecting its mysterious nature. In literature, it often symbolises mystery, symmetry and interplay between language and meaning.

1.1.3. Other significant instances of widespread symbolisms

There are many other significant and popular trends that predate the era of internet, yet are widely spread throughout the world, or at least certain parts of it. Included in this thesis, there are some of the most intriguing, based on the author's perspective:

The Manicule

The Manicule is a small, hand-drawn symbol of a pointing hand, used to point out noteworthy parts of texts. The word "manicule" comes from the latin word *"manicula"*, meaning *"little hand"*. Even though its first recorded usage dates all the way back to the Domesday Book of 1086, it gained increased popularity in the 12th century and was widely used in manuscripts, written by scribes and scholars. It is found all around Europe in academic and religious writings. Its significance stems from the fact it is one of the first widely recognized symbols used for annotation, similar to modern emojis or reaction images. Despite still being used in newspaper titles occasionally, the popularity of manicules faded in the 20th century. The most popular contemporary remnant of a manicule is a computer cursor (Burgess, 2017).

In nowadays culture, except for its similarity with popular emojis, the manicule can still be found in some pop cultural works, such as videogames. A fine example of a videogame that utilises the medieval form of a manicule is the Kingdom Come: Deliverance franchise, specifically in the time wheel where the finger points at the current time, or markers in The Legend of Zelda.

The "Frogs in a well" parable

Ancient Chinese parable by a Chinese philosopher Zhuangzi, depicting a frog inside a well. For the frog, the well is its entire world, a bubble. In the fable, a turtle visits the frog and describes the vastness of the ocean to the frog. The frog struggles with comprehending the information, as it had only known the well before (Ni, 2022). It is used as a metaphor for ignorance across Chinese and Japanese cultures. The metaphor is still used nowadays in East Asian discourse.

The Green Man

The Green Man is a depiction of a man's face with leaves either covering it or surrounding it. It is considered to be a symbol of rebirth and nature, possibly stemming from an ancient vegetation deities and folklore. It is found usually in medieval churches and carvings on buildings, used as a common medieval European decoration aspect (Winnick, 2021). In the

same manner as the Sator Square, its exact origins and meaning are unknown, but due to its widespread use and distinct appearance, it is a parallel of how memes become popular nowadays.

1.2. Memes and the internet

Nowadays, the amount of memes is enormous, especially compared to the era before the internet. Most memes spread through social media and entertain millions of people daily. Contemporary meme culture is also way broader, with more people joining in and creating memes on various topics. The core idea of memes, however, remains the same – to entertain, educate or influence people.

According to Bradley E. Wiggins, memes often carry ideological expression. He claims that they are not merely humorous images but rather expressions imbued with ideological significance. He also believes that memes reflect and propagate cultural, political and social ideologies, often in a satirical way. In his book, Wiggins further describes memes as semiotic mechanisms and claims that they function as signs within the digital culture (Wiggins, 2020).

The author also emphasizes the intertextual nature of memes, noting that they often reference or remix already existing media, texts or other cultural aspects, for which they might even provide a new context. This allows memes to reach diverse audiences by connecting newly formed content with content that had already existed before. Furthermore, Wiggins also notes that memes carry a significant discursive power, with the potential to shape public opinions and influence perceptions. He further believes that through rapid dissemination and replication, memes can amplify specific viewpoints and contribute to the formation of collective identities (Wiggins 2020).

The internet allows for faster and broader spreading of memes in various forms. The overall precedence is that the modern memes are mostly digital. There are occasional interpretations of digital memes made outside of the digital world, but from the author's knowledge, that is very rare. The format of memes vary, mostly depending on the platform it is shared on. Initially, memes were simply amusing images, often complemented with written text, shared on some internet websites, like *4chan*, specifically which was created in October 1st, 2003, according to data available at Google.

With the evolution of social media, the shape and form of memes also changed. Below is a deeper analysis of meme platforms that were popular in the late 20th and early 21st century

and some of its memes, with the main focus being rather the platforms themselves. This is because of the amount of memes the internet culture have created ever since its foundation. Also, the memes mentioned are the most famous or influential ones, based mostly on author's perspective, who grew up with most of these memes and is still surrounded by meme culture currently, as there is no reliable way to measure the significance of memes in general. Hence this section contains some information that are based on author's own experience.

1.2.1. Usenet

Possibly the oldest recorded instances of memes being shared among communities using computers on the Usenet website. This website was founded in 1979, which is four years prior to the creation of the internet in 1983. Usenet was a decentralized network built on UUCP (Unix-to-Unix Copy Protocol), which allowed users at different universities and research institutions to exchange messages. This was not the internet in the exact sense of term, but rather became part of the internet eventually. It had been one of the first early on-line communication systems ever introduced (Britannica, 2025).

In the early 1980s, Usenet was a key platform for sharing jokes, ASCII art and early memes, even before browsers with advanced GUI (graphical user interface) existed. It was initially intended to serve as a forum for students of various university communities, which also served as a platform for the birth of computer shared memes, further supporting Dawkins' and Blackmore's ideas that humans tend to replicate their culture through imitation.

The memes shared on the early Usenet were limited by the technical capabilities of computers that were used in the 1980s and 1990s. The very first instanced of memes were therefore ASCII arts or text-based memes. The text-based memes that were popular often consisted of spamming a random word, such as the word *"Meow"*, issuing so called *"Meow Wars"* in discussions, usually with the intention of disrupting it (Kiberd, 2016). Other form of text-based memes was so called *"copypastas"*, which were usually passages from more complex texts, like *"Green Eggs and Ham"* from Dr. Seuss from 1960. These two examples usually do not provide any deeper meaning and are rather for entertainment or mischievous purposes only. A fine example of a somewhat satirical meme shared on Usenet was so called *"Godwin's Law"*, which stated that every argument online eventually leads to a Hitler comparison, with the chance increasing the longer the argument lasts (Godwin, 1995 & Godwin, 1994). This meme, although not really considered a meme nowadays, to a certain point predicted how online arguments would work even in the 21st century.

Eventually, Usenet's users worked their way around the limitations regarding picture sharing. During the 1980s, a new method of converting binary files into text-based code that could be shared on the Usenet sites, downloaded and decoded back into images, were introduced. This method was called UUencode, which is short for Unix-to-Unix encoding. Years later, in the 1990s, and improved Base64 Encoding was introduced, which worked similarly to UUencode and was also widely used in emails.

Due to Usenet's common lack of moderation in its discussion channels, it was also heavily used as a pornography and pirated software sharing platform. This led to a controversy among the public and many governments took measures against the indecent materials shared on the platform. The problem with pirated content lasted long after the discussion forums moved from Usenet to other platforms, despite the adoption of P2P (Peer-to-Peer) software (Britannica, 2025). After Usenet fell out of the public's favour, many other platforms were introduced in its place.

1.2.2. 4chan

4chan is possibly the most significant and influential website created for sharing memes, at least when it comes to its influence on shaping the modern form of meme culture. This anonymous website have introduced some of the most iconic and long-lasting memes of the 21st century. It had was first established on the 1st of October, 2003, using translated source code from 2chan, which was a Japanese imageboard, also known as *Futaba Channel*.

4chan's importance stems from the formats it introduced, which later influenced multiple other platforms, especially one of the nowadays most popular ones being *reddit*. 4chan introduced to the internet community a lot of, in some way immortal memes, such as the *"Wojak"*, *"Trollface"*, *"Rickroll"* or *"Pepe the Frog"*.

Wojak is a meme containing a very simple, shakily drawn caricature of a human, originally a bald male, with a wistful, melancholic expression. It became a trend on 4chan around the years 2010 and 2011, with its archived first appearance dating all the way back to 16th of December, 2009, on the meme sharing website *Sad and Useless*, according to the internet archive website called Wayback Machine. Although 4chan was not the first archived instance of its usage, it certainly was the most important one in Wojak's popularisation. Its original appearance is often associated with a phrase *"the feeling when"*, or in short simply *"tfw"*, which is still used in the 2020s as an internet slang phrase. Since its creation and popularisation, the

Wojak meme had been shaped to fit a lot of real life scenarios, often empathising neutral emotions covering the real, depressive feelings – although there are instances where the Wojak's portray other emotions, too. The perfect example is the portrayal of a mature, independent and respectable individual, especially in the form of so called *"tradwifes"*, uncovered depression expression, as in the *"doomer"* variant of Wojak, or rage and frustration, often mocking people for being enraged and frustrated from being stupid or outsmarted by someone else. This phenomenon hints the evolution of this meme, aligning with Dawkins' theory.

These Wojak images, despite the original being almost twenty years old, are still fairly popular in the 2020s in all their shapes, including the original. The Wojak is visually probably the closest mentioned descendant to the Kilroy was here meme, mentioned in the previous subchapter of the thesis – Memes before the internet era.

Trollface is another meme popularised by 4chan, although it was initially supposed to be a satire towards internet troll actually using 4chan. This famous image was created in late September, 2008, in Microsoft Paint and published on DevianArt, as a part of a comic mocking trolls. Similarly to Wojak, 4chan played a key part in its popularisation on the internet, making it one of the most popular memes of the early 2010s (Klepek, 2015). The Trollface is often complemented with a short text saying "Problem?" or "Are you mad bro?", both of which are supposed to depict the malicious nature of trolling.

Unlike Wojak, the Trollface did face some struggle during the second half of 2010s. It became less relevant, most likely due to it being overused, and was almost forgotten, until it came back in a new, slightly different form, in the early 2020s, according to r/youngpeopleyoutube discussion. Tracking its precise usage, however, is nearly impossible, as the internet covers plenty of memes in ever-evolving cycles daily. The new Trollface was not associated with internet trolls or simple, innocent fun as much, but rather became a symbol for something darker, often disturbing.

This meme was and as of March 2025 still is also heavily used as a gif, which allowed for reversing the shift from a neutral face to the smiling face, resulting in a face that "loses" the smile and starts looking disturbed. This is often accompanied by a vintage-sounding, eerie melody or similar, disturbing or creepy music. Another popular use for Trollface in the 2020s is in short, edited compilations of people being savage, but in this case it is associated with a heavy, bass-boosted music. This also supports Dawkins' theory of memes being able to evolve.

Rickroll is probably one of the most loved and one of the most hated memes at the same time. It is simple, used for entertainment purposes only, and bears little to no value except for the comedy. Arguably, it is also one of the most popularised memes of the 21st century in general. The meme itself is rather bizarre, consisting of people simply trying to bait their friends or others on the internet to open a link that redirects the user to a certain passage of the Rick Astley's song *Never Gonna Give You Up* from 1987. According to website Dictionary.com, the first ever recorded Rickroll happened in 2007 on 4chan, where the person who posted it claimed it to be a link to the awaited *Grand Theft Auto IV* videogame. Instead, the victims of this troll were redirected to the music video, which prompted enraged reactions and backlash. YouTube, the mainstream platform for sharing videos, rickrolled everyone on the platform on April Fool's Day in 2008 by replacing every single video link on YouTube with a link to the Rick Astley's song (Arrington, 2008).

The Rickroll was so popular that it was even mentioned in a critically acclaimed comedy series *South Park*. Rick Astley himself was rickrolled on several occasions (King, 2017, interview with Astley available on YouTube). He also participated in the meme by performing the song at the Macy's Thanksgiving Parade in 2008 and in the 2020s, when the popularity grew again, he did a short video where he "embraced" that people see him as the Rickroll meme guy. Additionally, in 2011, the official White House Twitter account sent the Rickroll link users who complained over a correspondence briefing. The popularity of this silly meme grew so much that new re-uploads of the Rickroll had to be created, as people started memorizing the official video link. The meme itself lived for a long time, with its popularity slowly increasing and decreasing, similarly to the Trollface meme. However, as far as the author is aware, Rickroll never entirely disappeared, until recent time, when the popularity decreased highly, probably for its overuse (Dictionary.com).

Rickroll, probably due to its rage bait click-and-switch nature, have not undergone the evolution in the same way Wojak and Trollface have. Rickroll still more or less remained the same for its entire existence. The only thing that have changed is people finding more creative ways to bait other into actually getting rickrolled – this ranges from creating alternative links, to live performing the songs, encoding the lyrics into written or spoken text, all the way to simply creating images that resemble pixelated Rick Astley and his outfit from the infamous video, complemented by a text saying "People say you can't hear an image". The last instance could be theoretically considered an evolution of this meme, however not as significant as those Wojak and Trollface went through.

Finally, the last meme that became famous mostly through 4chan is **Pepe the Frog**. This meme, even though it is mentioned in the thesis as the last of the 4chan famous old memes, is the first of the four that was created – preceding Wojak, Trollface and Rickroll. It was created in 2005 as a part of a comic called *Boy's Club*. It is an anthropomorphic frog, originally embodying a carefree and relaxed lifestyle. The first meme-like use containing this particular frog was Pepe urinating with his pants down while saying *"Feels good man"* and had begun around 2008. Although strange, this is also the officially used name of this specific expression of Pepe. The meme itself is only consisting of Pepe's face and the phrase (Khan, 2021).

It is important to note that the Feels good man meme is Pepe the Frog meme, but not every Pepe the Frog meme refers to the Feels good man meme. This is because Pepe eventually evolved through different online communities into memes such as the *"Feels bad man"* variant, which is the same meme, only Pepe's expression is sad instead of relaxed, or the *"Pepe Angry"*, also poetically known as the *"Reeeee!"* meme, which portrays Pepe shouting in an outburst of rage. Pepe the Frog is simply the "meme character" used in those variants.

Pepe the Frog's significance, beside it being one of the most popular memes on 4chan in 2015, is its versatility. This meme has gotten adapted arguably in every possible meaning and in various forms is probably the most community-preferred emoticon used on the platform Twitch.tv since 2016, according to data available at StreamElements Chat Stats, with the *"RETRORELAXO"* variant having over 56 billion uses across four different emote platforms worldwide.

Despite communities loving Pepe the Frog as a way of expressing emotions in communication, it had reportedly been associated with alt-right extremist groups as well. In 2015, its popularity among these infamous groups had risen and in 2016, the Anti-Defamation League (or ADL for short) added Pepe to its database of hate symbols, although still acknowledging that not all the uses were hateful. This sad reality also affected the author of the image, Matt Furie, who expressed his dismay at Pepe being used as a hate symbol. He even went as far as suing organizations for doing so (BBC News, 2016 & Swinyard, 2019). Despite the Trollface, Wojak and many other memes facing similar issues, their association with extremist groups was arguably never as popular.

Pepe's political engagement has lasted over the years and is still being sometimes politicised nowadays. For example, in 2019, Pepe was associated with a political movement that lobbied for Hong Kong's independence. The most recent relevant use of Pepe was during

Trump's campaigns for presidency in 2016 and 2024, sharing images of himself interpreted as Pepe the Frog with blonde toupee in 2015 and recreating similar meme-based campaign in 2024 with the use of AI. Elon Musk, who has been supporting Donald Trump heavily during his campaign in 2024, also used Pepe the Frog to depict himself on his social platform X (Samuel, 2024 & Crane, 2024). Another meme mentioned in this chapter, the Wojak, is also fairly often associated with politics. However, unlike Pepe, Wojak's association with politics is rather negative, mocking opposite groups' opinions.

The early memes shared on 4chan are, to a certain point, similar to the memes of the era before the internet. There is symbolism, cultural evolution, social group formation and sometimes even deeper meaning or shift in the use of the examples mentioned, which further complements Dawkins' theory of memes. It is also interesting to observe the pattern of internet memes appearing, disappearing and eventually reappearing, indicating a pattern of popularity growth and decline over time.

2. Virality of memes and its causes

When a meme becomes very popular, it is referred to as *"viral"*. Viral memes are essentially memes so mainstream that they spread very similarly as a biological virus does among people, with the only major difference is that they spread through the internet, and almost everyone who uses the internet comes into contact with such memes eventually. It describes the, often uncontrollable, tendency of meme spreading via exponential sharing. This analogy is an on-point description of meme nature, with the internet serving as an environment for the viral spreading and its users being the potential "hosts" for the viral content.

Viral internet content is not exclusively memes, but also videos, photos etc. The word is also used as a verb in terms of *"going viral"*, meaning that someone or something is gaining a notable amount of popularity, often in short time period. Similarly to biological viruses, the viral content on the internet affects users by capturing their attention. The users then serve the role of "hosts", spreading the viral content via re-posting and re-sharing. Additionally, the viral internet content also has a tendency to transform, similarly to how real viruses mutate, to further increase its reach and secure its survival– a fine example of which is the transformation of Pepe the Frog into Donald Trump caricature, mentioned in the previous chapter. This way, the viral meme was able to reach new audiences and "infect" them as well.

2.1. The role of technological advances in meme culture

Naturally, the internet is a powerful tool in spreading memes and without it, the viral, often worldwide spread of memes most likely would not be possible. In the recent years, the vast majority of memes revolves around the social media. The social media themselves evolve quickly to further satisfy the needs of its users. Since there is a competition among companies owning the individual social media, each company needs to provide better, more complex services.

The first technological advance that paved the path for memes was the creation of computers, of which the first was invented by Charles Babbage in 1822 and finally built in 1991 by British Science museum, only to test whether or not Babbage's model would work – and it did work. Many preceding inventions in the fields of computer science happened prior to the creation of the computers as we know nowadays. This included the foundation of computer science in 1936 by Alan Turing, the invention of the first programmable computer Z1 in 1938, Z2 in 1939 and Z3 (the first fully automatic, digital computer) in 1941 by Konrad Zuse. Soon followed the introduction of ENIAC, built in 1945, which was the first electronic general-purpose digital computer, big enough to fill an entire room, or Micral N, which was the first prototype of a personal computer, built in 1973 – and the list goes on. All these inventions, and many others, contributed to the creation of modern computers and all corresponding accessories, including networking protocols, such as previously mentioned UUCP in 1976 or the internet itself in 1983 (Barfield, 2020).

Possibly the most remarkable advance after the creation of computers were community forums run on UUCP networks, of which the author has chosen Usenet as an example. These forums essentially functioned as a primitive, limited sites that preceded internet. However, there were flaws such as slower processing and longer response timers. Essentially, the UUCP networks temporarily connect two closest points within the said network, typically via dial-up telephone lines. This allowed for data exchange in between those points, typically computers, which acted both as clients and servers, depending on their specific role during said exchange. The connection between UUCP network computers was not permanent and therefore did not allow for real-time data transmissions over high-speed connections. Usenet eventually became a part of the modern internet (IBM, 2021).

There are some adjusted UUCP successors, such as the Base64 encoding, which was also used in email attachment systems. Internet itself, or ARPANET's TCP/IP network, which is a

revolutionary protocol system that allows stable and permanent connection between devices in real time, caused a breaking point in computer sciences. It allows the creation complex networks by assigning IP addresses to the devices it connects together. It also breaks down data into small data packets on sender's side and reassembles them in the desired destination, which allows faster and more fluent data transmission. The TCP protocol then ensures no ordered data are lost during the transmission, allows the reassembly of said data and manages possible retransmissions. Lastly, TCP/IP networks allow for the application layer to exist as well, allowing creation of permanent websites that contain GUIs, or graphical user interfaces (Yasar, 2024). This, alongside the hardware improvements of computers and memory disks, allowed image and video sharing, instead of only allowing to share written text, which was the case with Usenet in its early days.

The last and obvious major advance in technology is the evolution of social media, which nowadays allow for various content sharing. Whether it be classic, longer videos on YouTube, photos on basically any modern social media, or the most recent format, short videos optimised for smartphones, which were first introduced by a Chinese company TikTok in 2016, and later adopted by others, mainly Instagram via Reels, YouTube via Shorts. These social media advances played, together with the creation of modern internet, arguably the most important part in allowing memes to become a viral, worldwide phenomenon.

2.2. Memes and human psychology

Another major aspect that affects the way memes evolve and spread is embedded in human psychology. J. M. Balkin introduces the concept of *"cultural software"* to describe templates that humans inherit from their culture. He claims that through such templates, humans can interpret the world around them. He compares the cultural software to the real computer software, describing its influence over structuring thoughts, reasoning and perception through this analogy. In his opinion, cultural software defines how people understand and engage with their surroundings (Balkin, 1998). This applies effectively, yet not exclusively to nowadays memes, as they are arguably the fastest spreading cultural footprint humans contemporarily create. Additionally, it highlights how memes, as standalone units of cultural influence, evolve, replicate and spread, earning their place within our cognitive processes (Silbey, 1999).

Memes are also, according to Balkin, a powerful ideological tools. This is further proven by the fact that memes have assimilated with broad advertisement and political campaign, outreaching their initial environment. In the 2020s, the amount of meme-like advertisement and

campaigns outside of the internet has also grown. Unfortunately, in certain instances, the political and ideological influence of memes and their key aspects, which are described below in regards of J. Berger's theory, can also have a negative impact, specifically the possibility spreading hateful content via popular memes taken out of context. Arguably the most famous instance of this phenomenon is the alt-right movements adopting the innocent Pepe the Frog meme, as mentioned in the chapter *Memes and the Internet*. This has led to many misconceptions of this meme, sparking negative associations.

Furthermore, J. Berger's book called *Contagious: Why Things Catch On* delves deeper into the psychological processes that affect the spread of mainstream content. This very much affects memes, although again not exclusively. Berger's theory claims that the key factors allowing the "contagious" spread of information within human culture are triggers, emotions, public visibility, practical value, storytelling and social currency, which simply the value of how it can improve one's status within said society. Berger believes that these six key aspects are crucial for content to be "catchy", which is a precedence for anything to go viral (Berger, 2013).

Additionally, Berger's theory, especially the description of social currency, suggests that based these six key aspects, humans tend to participate in spreading viral content – whether it be memes or something else, often based on popularity of the trend, the exclusiveness of the information or to gain approval from peers via witty, humorous or clever interpretations of information (e.g. a broad variety of Wojak memes or political memes). This also partially suggest that the human nature to feel included and accepted into social groups affects our perception and affection for memes. Humans naturally want to feel included, enlightened and up-to-date with the current situation, especially in the fields of interest that are close to them. Memes allow for often effortless public projection of these values, usually through social media, which then again leads to the possibility of certain, catchy memes to go viral.

Lastly, Berger emphasises the importance of emotional resonance within the target social groups while spreading content, if the intention of the content is to reach a viral status. This resonance can be either negative or positive, sparking all kinds of emotions – from anger, sadness, happiness, or straight up laughter. The emotional value memes carry amplify their reach within the native social groups and even allows them to potentially overlap into other social groups, spreading even further.

3. The impact of memes on our society

As mentioned previously, memes represent a significant factor of human culture and society. The influence is gaining in strength the more our society revolves around the internet. It is also influenced by time, as the generations, including the generation the author is a part of, who grew up during the internet era grow older and their impact on society and decisions over it grows accordingly. In this chapter, the author will briefly recapitulate positive, negative and neutral impact memes can have over human perception of the world around them, as well as give examples for each of the subchapters. The summary is based both on the information extracted from sources, as well as personal experiences and reflections of the author.

3.1. Positive impact

First off, the positive influence of memes arguably exceeds its negative impacts. To put this claim into perspective, memes have become a major part of news source for the younger part of millennials (born towards the most recent threshold, which is approx. 1996), and especially generation Z (approx. 1997 to 2010) and generation Alpha (approx. 2010 to 2024), and somewhat inevitably will impact the upcoming generation beta, which will be born approx. after the year 2025 and therefore will reach adulthood in the upcoming two decades (Cottrell, 2024). Note that the generational category thresholds can vary depending on the source.

To further understand the positive impact of the internet and social media, which play a significant role in the daily lives of countless people of younger generations, it is important to understand that in order to adopt the healthy internet habits, one must first be digitally competent and must realise the dangers that internet also contains. Digital literacy is a crucial skill while navigating the vastness of the internet and it can represent a decisive factor between its positive impact and a negative impact.

According to a definition of digital literacy, provided by the Indiana State University, it refers to the ability to effectively and responsibly use digital technologies to work with information – from locating, evaluating, or creating, all the way to its sharing. This affects memes as well, as they are an important informative form of media of the 21st century.

This information suggests the greatest positive impact of memes is social, political and environmental awareness. Memes in form of both pictures and short videos are suited to contain crucial information, political satire and spread awareness of contemporary problematics to a broad audiences. It also promotes critical thinking and unlike some mainstream media, most

memes are made by independent creators and mostly are not censored or biased – given, of course, if the person is digitally literate or not and can eventually recognize false information. This condition partially pushes the informative role of memes into the so called "grey zone".

However, the informative value of memes is not the only benefit people can use. Amongst the other, the most significant one is probably the social currency value, as mentioned in the chapter *Memes and human psychology*. In 1943, Abraham Maslow proposed an idea of *Maslow's hierarchy of needs*, also known as *Maslow's pyramid of human needs*. This conceptualised scheme simplifies the understanding and hierarchy of different human needs into five steps, which need to be satisfied in order to achieve happiness and peace. Since the 21st century is a digital era, memes can be used as a tool in some steps of this pyramid, specifically the third and fourth step – belongingness & love and esteem needs. The third step is straightforward. One can belong to groups on the internet and get their acceptance through memes. There are even memes that serve the purpose of so called "icebreakers" during the initial stages of communication with one's love interest. Soon after fulfilling the third step, humans have a need to fulfil the fourth one – esteem needs. In this scenario, memes can also be helpful, although arguably less than in the third step. If a person understands the online world and gains recognition among peers, or even followers and fans, it can partially satisfy their need for respect and feeling of accomplishment. In some extreme cases, people can even build careers on their meme knowledge, which then further satisfies their needs in the fourth step of Maslow's pyramid (McLeod, 2025).

The last major positive impact that will be mentioned in the thesis is the humorous part of memes. Naturally, every human has a need to feel joy, to laugh and to relax. In the 21st century, people spend a lot of their free time on the internet. Memes are ubiquitous, therefore most people come in contact with them daily. Except for their informational value, memes are often simply jokes or surrealistic and bizarre pieces of art. Since the feeling of joy reinforces overall good mood, it can help people escape from reality and improve their overall well-being. Scientifically speaking, having a good laugh over memes releases endorphins and reduces stress hormones, improves motivation and even possibly improves memory and overall health, according to an article written by J. Patterson, MD, for University Health blog in 2024.

3.2. Negative impact

Unlike the positive impacts, the negative impacts mentioned in the thesis are rather connected to the form in which memes are being spread and to the unhealthy habits that people can adopt while consuming them. Social media work based on algorithmically tuned content. The content is basically customised for each individual consumer and it can easily overwhelm them. This represents a possible danger that must be addressed. It is noteworthy that this section applies not only to memes, but often to the form in which they are shared, the social media content in general.

The major negative aspect of memes obviously boils down to the possible harm it can do to people who are not digitally literate. It is the exact opposite from what the positive impact was, further proving the presence of this "grey zone". For a person who is not digitally literate, the amount of informative memes flooding their recommended home page content might be harmful, especially since it may be harder for them to tell a difference between a real information and a hoax. Although there are plenty of content creators that spread awareness and unbiased content, some people may actually abuse the absence of censorship social media have. This is a great danger, especially towards older people, who are often targeted by populists, so called "troll farms" and people who spread misinformation in general. The seemingly irrational tendency to follow such content is often based on Berger's claims, which say that content that resonates deeply with strong emotions within the audience influences them more and tends to reach more audience, since people who consume such content are more prone to sharing it. This applies to the potentially dangerous content too, since a lot of especially political disinformation content uses strong emotions, such as fear of an unknown or nostalgia, to resonate with its audience (Munson, 2021).

This creates a sinister breeding ground for extremist political agenda, spreading of hate speech, xenophobia and other potentially harmful behaviours, which is often abused by populists and troll farms. Without digital literacy and understanding of the complexity which politics and other societal problematics resemble, humans are facing the danger of being consumed by such content, which potentially directly affects their perception of societal values and shapes their ideas.

Another problematic aspect of meme consumptions are the algorithms that power social media. Except for locking users within a specific type of content which may potentially be harmful, the algorithms in general are potentially harmful too, as they are designed to entertain

the user for as long as possible. This increases the risk of addiction, overstimulation, so called "doom-scrolling" and lack of motivation, and can possibly even affect the attention span.

Most of the problems mentioned in the previous article boil down to the initial or advanced stages of addiction. However, the lack of motivation does not necessarily be caused by addiction. The real culprit is the overstimulation of dopamine centres caused by excessive consumption of memes, of which media that use scrolling mechanisms are arguably the most dangerous. This can possibly result in dopamine dysregulation, which does not always equal addiction. Addiction is defined by compulsive behaviour despite the possible negative impacts that gets out of control. Dopamine dysregulation is, however, simply an inability to stimulate the neurotransmitters associated with pleasure and motivation. In simple words, the brain adapts to a constant and high dopamine stimulation, which increases the risk of addiction and disrupts the motivational drive in healthy humans (Sheridan, ca. 2024).

3.3. The explanation of the "grey zone"

To put the problematics of the dual nature in which memes on social media occur, the author of the thesis proposes a category called the "grey zone". To determine whether or not the aspect is harmful, one must first look into the context. As stated above, the positives and negatives can overlap and it is only the context that matters. The following article is rather the author's observation.

Since the informative value of memes was mentioned in both positive and negative impact, it naturally means it belongs to the grey zone. This imaginary zone could be analogically compared to the Schrödinger's cat phenomenon. To a certain extent, we cannot predict the outcome unless we first delve deeper into a broader context of each and every consumer – or metaphorically "open the box". Therefore, unless we specifically observe the outcome meme consumption has caused in a specific individual, the grey zone remains positive and negative at the same time. There are behavioural patterns that certain social groups share, which also means the outcome of meme consumption can be affected by social circles in which the consumer revolves. As an example, an alt-right extremist groups tend to rather follow radical content and spread hate speech. If a person who is not familiar with social media is first exposed to such group, they are more likely to believe misinformation that benefit said group.

Furthermore, any research conducted on this topic will likely be affected by how the research will be advertised to the public. If the respondents that will willingly participate in the experiment share some social groups through which they were notified about the experiment

(e.g. group chats or thematic websites), the probability of shared opinions and social circles grows. The ideal experiment should therefore be performed with randomly selected respondents in separate areas and should contain a high number of respondents.

4. Reflection of perception of social media and memes

The supervisor of the thesis, doc. PhDr. Václav Řeřicha, CSc. has written an article, published in 2023 called *"New Perception as Message of Contemporary Digital Environment"*, in which he comments about the role of social media as a whole within today's society. After consulting the thesis with the supervisor, he has suggested the implementation of reflexion on his article regarding memes based on the thesis' author's opinion.

In the article, the author is extensively focusing on popular means of contemporary media, such as videogames or social media, mentioning their significance as a form of informative sources. Also, the author comments on the topic of memes, or more specifically on the human nature in general to adapt to the technological advances the same way they are able to adapt to biological advances, only quite faster. His claims, to a certain extent, correlate with claims made in the thesis, especially the ability of online content (such as memes) to evolve, and the significance of emotional resonance within consumers of contemporary media, may it be videogames, movies or memes. For the purpose of the thesis, the reflection is mostly focused on contemporary memes and social media that allow for their sharing.

Řeřicha mentions in his article that the new, contemporary media forms, especially social media, are effectively replacing older means of information spreading, such as books, newspaper or TV news channels. This, he believes, is due to the human tendency of speeding up the very process of information gathering. This is apparent in many instances, especially when observing the recent shift of major informative sources (political campaigns, interviews, short documentaries, etc.) towards the format which fits the norms for the social media while keeping the content integrity intact.

Social media provide a perfect ground for spreading information. However, the informative value often depends on the individual creators. The freedom of expression and the option for anyone to post content increase the likelihood that the integrity of shared information may be compromised – whether unintentionally or deliberately. This flaw is, on the other hand, balanced out by the fact that we are able to process information faster and due to complex algorithms only focus on the exact field of information that we have an interest in, which are

both arguably either major positive or grey zone aspects of social media when compared to their predecessors. It is safe to say that in adaptiveness, both time and cost efficiency, availability, flexibility, reach and popularity, social media have surpassed the older means of communication and information sharing.

Additionally, Řeřicha mentions in the article that videogames are a great medium for both information spreading (e.g. videogames with historical context are great for learning history) and entertainment. He compared *The Last of Us* videogame and TV series based on it, commenting on the latter's lack of a crucial compound – a strong emotions stemming from the fear of the unscripted events that are present in videogames, even as strong as fear of player's character death. Although memes do not possess the ability to provide an unscripted events, since the format of short videos and images does not support it, they still often resonate with the consumers via strong emotions. Furthermore, quite a lot of memes actually originate from videogames, or at least communities around them.

A fine example of an unusual contemporary meme that was both connected to the very videogame mentioned in Řeřicha's article and resonated deeply with consumers' emotions is Naughty Dog studio's post on the platform *X*, shared on 26th of June, 2020, where one of the most community-beloved characters is toasting in a cycled, short video to celebrate selling more than four million copies of their game, *The Last of Us Part II* (or in short, *TLOU2*). For context, this post was highly controversial within the community around The Last of Us franchise, as the character portrayed in the meme was unexpectedly and brutally killed during the initial sequence of the TLOU2 game, despite being the protagonist of the previous part. This has caused a massive community backlash, as the fans were emotionally devastated after watching their beloved character die, and seeing the game's developers sarcastically portraying the very character celebrating the milestone even strengthened these emotions.

This specific meme, despite not carrying a significant informative or educational value, proves that an image, gif or a short video that was previously used by a community in a positive way could be theoretically shifted towards negative emotional value if used in a different context and vice versa. The nature of memes' meaning shifting accordingly to the context and evolving to satisfy the current needs of consumers has been briefly mentioned in chapter *1.2. Memes and the Internet*. Therefore, the informative value of memes also depends on context. As an example, if the same short video that Naughty Dog studio used to provoke their audience was used in a different context, it could theoretically possess an informative value – such as a

satirical political meme or a meme about important historical events. This is because the short video, if taken out of context, radiates rather positive, approving feelings, which can be used to depict these emotions in various scenarios.

Řeřicha in his article also comments on the danger of human adaptation to the virtual world, which could eventually cause dissociation with the real world. Although this might be partially true, especially when the consumption of the virtual world's assets is uncontrolled and excessive, the author of this thesis rather perceives the virtual world and the real world as two mutually intertwined parallels that can not only coexist, but complement each other effectively. A fine example supporting this claim is the fact that virtual world offers tools to maximize efficiency of learning, as was also acknowledged by Řeřicha, and if approached correctly, these tools can become more powerful than the traditional learning tools we know.

Memes are already quite strongly associated with education. There are accounts throughout the social media that are solely dedicated to educational memes (e.g. *vedeckýhumor* or *historicke_meme* accounts on Instagram, both of which are Czech or Slovakian variations of countless similar, foreign educational accounts). If used correctly, memes can effectively provide crucial information for learners and/or help them to better understand complex problematics via simplification and humorous metaphors – educational videos on YouTube are a great example that has been very popular lately (Hashem, 2024). This further supports claims made in the previous article, as memes are nowadays almost exclusively bound to the social media and virtual world. It is important to keep in mind that "virtual world" in this context applies for the virtual world in general, not exclusively to virtual or advanced reality, both of which have a potential to even amplify the possible benefits of virtual learning tools when implemented correctly but can bring more challenges along the way.

Lastly, it is noteworthy that despite Řeřicha arguing the world outside of the social media is uninviting and incomprehensible for today's teenagers as a consequence of using the social media daily, it is still to a certain extent possibly caused by the generational gap between today's teenagers and older generations. In other words, what the older generations may perceive as dissociation from reality is rather association with another, younger generation. As mentioned before, social media allow for creation of complex communities based around certain topics, interests or common features – whether it is memes, science, music or movies, almost anything can have a community based around it. This also means that teenagers, who may seem dissociated from the real world, are not exactly dissociated from real people, but rather

connected to a community that revolves around a decentralised, cosmopolitan concept – a community close to them (Hashem, 2024).

In other words, online social circles and communities are often cosmopolitan and people involved in them can find social understanding and close relations with other members of the same community, based on shared ideas, hobbies and beliefs. This does not exactly mean they are dissociated from the real world, but rather connected to real people from afar the same way their ancestors were connected to the people around them. Older generations might not have been able to shape their social circles as precisely and effectively because they used to lack the option to connect to more people via the internet and social media.

There are both benefits and flaws of the said cosmopolitan nature of online communities. The greatest benefit would probably be the option to choose people to befriend based on how much they understand each other. This is also especially useful while finding partners, as people can get to know much more strangers from greater distances than they would have ever got to know without social media and simply pick the greatest match. There is also the phenomenon of social belonging and evaluation that can be mediated through the virtual world and social media (hence the Berger's social currency theory). Similarly to local social circles, online social circles can form dialects or even complex new words in order to communicate – a fine example of which is the so called *skibidi toilet brainrot* slang, which originated from a certain YouTube community and has become a viral phenomenon around the world, overlapping from the virtual world to the real world. This allows the communities to firmly unite and distinguish themselves from their ancestors, promoting healthy social growth of younger generations.

The flaws, however, are also important to note. The reasoning behind Řeřicha's claims of teenagers dissociating from reality is partially justified. Spending too much time in closely-knit social circles without critically perceiving its contents can lead to a creation of social bubbles, in which other members do not challenge one's opinions and beliefs. This can cause troubles when facing disagreement in the real world. The harsh reality can often discourage the naïve and inexperienced people who were only used to support and agreement within their social bubble, causing them to further incline to surrounding themselves with the said bubble to avoid facing reality. This coping mechanism also applies as a way to cope with stress overload, often from school or work, which young people tend to escape through (Dhaliwal, 2021). Furthermore, there is a risk of viral misinformation spreading and extremism within the said groups – this, however, applies for all generations that do participate in online activities.

These flaws do not indicate that teenagers perceive the real world as obsolete and irrelevant. Arguably, it is quite the opposite – a lot of teenagers are concerned about things that are happening in the real world, which can be further amplified by the fact they often reside within very monotonous social bubbles and are therefore unable to cope with harsh reality. They also often opt for social media as a sort of an escape mechanism, especially if they are not satisfied with situations around them. Again, this arguably does not mean they are not aware or do not care at all.

Simply put, unless social media or the virtual world is consumed excessively, the users think critically and the overall safety principles are followed, the benefits overweight the flaws. The multimodality in which content in the virtual world appears allows for better understanding and absorption of information. The cosmopolitan nature of the virtual world then allows to ignore boundaries of the real world, with the possibility to form complex social circles which, unless they are blindly following the same creed, is arguably another benefit that would not be possible within the real world only. As already mentioned, the real world and the virtual world are two parallel, intertwined world that can benefit each other in order to improve both the real world and the virtual world environments.

Conclusion

In conclusion, memes are arguably not mere humour devices that have no complexity nor depth. They can serve much more complex purposes and influence people's opinions and beliefs across various topics. Contemporary memes are inseparably tied to not only social media and virtual world, but overlap into the real world as well. They find their place in political campaigns, advertisement and education. They also allow forming of social groups and are an integral part of human communication and satire.

Historically, memes are not strictly bound to the internet, as mentioned in the first chapter of the thesis. The original, oldest memes to date are pictures, carvings or written snippets of seemingly meaningless text, all of which served as a cultural tokens of our ancestors. Their historical usage ranges from charms and magical symbols to jokes and means of communication. Since the introduction of the internet, the memes have rapidly evolved and became a one of the mainstream communicative devices for online communication.

Ever since the internet was introduced, the memes have become an integral part of it. Although some memes have declined in popularity over the years, they often come back in various forms and their overall meaning mostly depends on the context they are used in. With the introduction of modern social media, memes were able to infiltrate most established social groups and even allowed for an establishment of new social groups based around memes. Multiple social platforms were adapted to memes and became the birthplace of many popular, contemporary memes. Even nowadays, a majority of social media content are memes in both reoccurring and freshly created, new forms.

Memes are, according to R. Dawkins, able to evolve, similarly to biological genes. This means memes need to evolve in order to survive – or rather stay relevant. The word itself depicts this nature, since it is a combination of two already existing words, Greek word "mimema" (meaning "imitated") and "gene" (which stands for biological genes).

Additionally, memes can spread in a manner similar to viruses – therefore a new term "virality of memes" was introduced. This is caused by both technological advances, without which viral spreading would be arguably impossible, and psychological impact memes have on humans. Both of these complex aspects contributed greatly to memes becoming as popular as they are nowadays.

Memes can have a significant impact on everyday lives of humans, especially since they are omnipresent. As mentioned, they are often not just mere humorous images and their influence can be seen in serious aspects that influence our everyday lives heavily, such as politics. The nature of impact memes have varies based on context. Some memes can be beneficial, spread awareness and educate, whereas others can be misused to manipulate people and cause harm. This dual nature depends heavily on the context, message, target audience and implementation. It is therefore very important to critically evaluate information acquired through memes.

Lastly, memes are heavily connected to a broader topic of virtual world, in which they act as a crucial communication device. There are general dangers which may occur in the online virtual world, some of which include possible forming of monotonous social bubbles and groups spreading misinformation both unintentionally and deliberately. The benefits of the virtual world are, same as for memes, content-dependant. If implemented correctly, they can heavily overweight the flaws and allow for an improvements in both real and virtual world.

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