

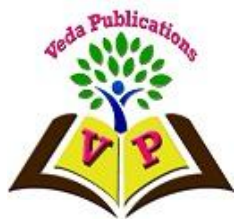
PSC TROLLS: SPREADING GENERAL KNOWLEDGE THROUGH MEMES

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doi: <https://doi.org/10.33329/IJREP.2019.24>

ABSTRACT



Memes or Trolls are now used as both tools of satire and medium of fun. However, though most of such memes shared by different 'meme pages' relate its content only to political events, happenings and comments made by political leaders (also other random fun), some memes and meme pages stand different. 'PSC Trolls', a meme page created by a group of young aspirants of public service jobs in the state of Kerala represents one such different meme page. The page, now active on social media site 'Instagram' with sixty-two followers, uses trolls or memes to 'educate' its followers. Rather than sharing trolls that deal with humour or satire, the page shares trolls that informs the readers with general knowledge. Usage of trolls has helped people remember things easily as general knowledge is mainly associated with facts, figures, and numbers. The paper titled 'PSC Trolls: Gaining General Knowledge through Trolls or Memes' will discuss the importance and relevance of such 'educational trolls' in the present era and how it is an important genre in the field of e-learning. It will also look at the impact of such trolls and how it has influenced the people who follow them.

Keywords: Memes, Trolls, General Knowledge, Education, Meme Page, PSC (Public Service Commission)

'Meme' seems to be a word in everyone's lips nowadays, whether it is a teenager browsing through the internet or a middle-aged office worker seeking a job from 9-5. They are funny, short and relatable images with captions that, regardless of age, gender or occupation, never fail to amuse the readers. Social media websites such as Twitter, Facebook and Instagram are playing an increasingly bigger part in the lives of today's population, with the internet reaching far and wide in terms of connectivity and communication. Psychologist

Susan Blackmore, in her essay *'The Power of Memes'* defines meme (pronounced "meem") as "an idea, behaviour, style or usage that spreads from person to person within a culture." So, whenever you shake hands, sing "Happy Birthday" or cast your vote in an election, you are giving life to memes. Memes, she argues, have been (and are) a powerful force shaping our cultural—and biological—evolution. A few scientists want to abandon Darwin theory and she thereby asks a question that if it does not clarify why we humans have come to apportion so much of our resources to so many abilities that are superfluous to the central biological task of further propagating our genes, where else can we look? For her, the answer lies in memes. Memes are stories, songs, habits, skills, inventions, and ways of doing things that we copy from person to person by imitation. Human nature can be explained by evolutionary theory, but only when we consider evolving memes as well as genes. It is tempting to consider memes as simply 'ideas', but more properly memes are a form of information. (Genes, too, are information: instructions, written in DNA, for building proteins.) Thus, the meme for, say, the first eight notes of the Twilight Zone theme can be recorded not only in the neurons of a person (who will recognize the notes when she hears them) but also in magnetic patterns on a videocassette or in ink markings on a page of sheet music.

The notion that memes exist and evolve has been around for almost 25 years, but only recently has it gained attention as a powerful force in human evolution. Richard Dawkins of the University of Oxford coined the word in 1976, in his best-selling book *The Selfish Gene*. There he described the basic

principle of Darwinian evolution in terms of three general processes—when information is copied again and again, with variations and with the selection of some variants over others, you must get evolution. That is, over many iterations of this cycle, the population of surviving copies will gradually acquire new properties that tend to make them better suited to succeed in the ongoing competition to produce progeny. Although the cycle is mindless, it generates design out of chaos. Dawkins called the information that gets copied the "replicator" and pointed out that the most familiar replicator is the gene. But he wanted to emphasize that evolution can be based on any replicator, and so, as an example, he invented the idea of the meme. The copying of memes from one person to another is imperfect, just as the copying of genes from parent to child is sometimes inaccurate. We may embellish a story, forget a word of the song, adapt an old technology or concoct a new theory out of old ideas. Of all these variations, some go on to be copied many times, whereas others die out. Memes are thus true replicators, possessing all three properties—replication, variation, selection—needed to spawn a new Darwinian evolutionary process (Blackmore, 2000).

As said above, if memes help both teenagers and people working from 9 – 5 get some moments of entertainment, can they help these 'teenagers' get a job which will make them work 9-5? *PSC Trolls*, a troll page created by a group of men in Kerala tries to show they can. The page uploads memes in Malayalam created by the admins of the page and also accepts ideas for creating memes from the page's followers. The speciality of page *PSC Trolls* from other memes pages is that *PSC Trolls* uploads memes for the purpose of providing general knowledge within random fun. The page is aimed at youngsters trying to get a job for which they have to undergo qualification tests. As most of the job vacancies available these days in both public and private sector requires the aspirants to qualify such tests, the admins claim that *PSC Trolls* help them achieve their dream through memes. The page is given the title as '*PSC Trolls*' because PSC stands for Public Service Commission (of Kerala) and it is the exams conducted by Kerala PSC that requires

candidates to have a good knowledge about current affairs. Moreover, most youngsters in Kerala prefer a government job than a job in a private sector, wherein PSC Exams come for their rescue. Though it can be said that the admins of the page PSC Trolls made use of a good opportunity to make something creative, different and trending, it is interesting to look at how these memes are able to 'educate' people in a 'funny' manner with something which is considered as a medium of entertainment. Whether the page achieved its target or whether the page is popular among millions of Instagram users becomes a matter of discussion.

As per date February 6 2019, the meme page PSC Trolls has around 62,900 followers, with more than 300 memes posted on it. All the memes are in Malayalam language, with the movies scenes used for making the memes also taken from Malayalam movies. Each meme posted has got an average of around 5000-6000 likes along with 10-20 comments. The page posts memes regularly, with a frequency of one new meme every two days. It also uploads a meme once posted as the page's story, in order to keep its followers aware that the page has posted something new. Though 90% of the memes posted in the page are meant for educational purposes, one can also find memes that are sarcastic in nature targeting exam patterns of the Kerala Public Service Commission. Looking at the way in which such memes are presented, the memes takes clippings of famous Malayalam movies and then adds custom dialogues in a way that the characters in that particular scene are talking about a particular fact, i.e., a general knowledge. For example, one of the meme posted has chosen a scene from the Malayalam movie '*Bangalore Days*' in which one of the character describes Bangalore to the other character as a place where one can chill, have fun and enjoy their life to the maximum. The meme replaced these dialogues with one character asking the other: "*Which is the place that is called as 'Garden of India'?*" The other character replies that it is Bangalore. The meme then has a conclusion written below, which reads *Garden of India: Bangalore*. Hence the meme successfully conveyed the readers that it is Bangalore which is known as the

Garden City of India. As visual images is considered to be more helpful in remembering things, such memes may help people remember facts like the ones discussed above associating it to a particular movie scene. Another meme takes a particular scene from another famous Malayalam movie '*In Harihar Nagar*' in which two main characters are discussing about one of their lover. The meme replaced those dialogues and presented the scene as if both the characters are saying something about a lake named '*Azad Lake*', situated in Syria. The first character asks the second whether he knew where lake '*Azad*' was situated. The second character immediately replies that it is in India, as the name contains the Sanskrit/Hindi word '*Azad*' in it. The second character then says that it's not India where the lake is situated but is in Syria. Replacing dialogues that are loved by the people with conversations that convey helpful facts hence makes such memes stand out from other memes showing how visual media can effectively be used in order to gain knowledge.

As Mary Alice White said in her essay titled *Implications of the Technologies for Human Learning*, imagery has another, perhaps more important, role as a mental tool for thinking. Thinking in images is now becoming possible with new graphic soft wares, raising the question whether linear word logic is the only, or best way, to solve problems (White, 2012). When an Instagram user who follow PSC Trolls suddenly comes across a 'general knowledge' troll in his or her news feed, making them laugh and gain knowledge at the same time. If the troll or meme they encounter is made based on a scene taken from one of their favourite movie, chances are high that it may stay in their mind for a long time. Those people who cannot rely on books to gasp a lot of things by heart can resolve to such methods which may help them connect 'things' with things they love. Such associations may help them more than staring at a five hundred page notebook on general knowledge and current affairs. People usually tend to look onto social media for entertainment and fun and even in the midst of such entertainments, trolls or memes like the ones on PSC Trolls may help them be in a constant process of learning something.

CONCLUSION

Concepts like 'Meme Learning' also hosts a number of problems or consequences along with its advantages. The major disadvantage of relying on memes for learning is that one is not sure about the source of such memes. Published books that deal with current affairs maybe written by a well-known author and may have been cross verified before publication which may or may not be the case with memes published on an Instagram page. One is not sure about the credibility of a meme which is getting published as nowadays it is possible for everyone to create memes. Books and articles available in both printed and digital form hence on the other hand turns out to be more effective when it comes to reliability and credibility. In addition, a meme can contain only one 'fact' or point of general knowledge whereas a single page of a book can contain multiple information at the same time. This makes learning through memes a long and tough process as there are already thousands of current affairs happening around in a fraction of a second. It becomes practically impossible to make memes covering all such topics even if a 'meme maker' or 'troller' looks only at the most important facts to cover. While the page PSC Trolls only publishes trolls in Malayalam language, its popularity could have been increased if it may have relied on English language as contents in English maybe accessible to more people since English is the most popular language in the country. Anyhow the questions remains whether people who seriously want to study for such competitive exams may sit down and read memes on their mobile when they have a lot to study from numerous texts and articles. However, young candidates who still have enough time to write and prepare for such exams on the other hand can rely on such materials though not completely (because of issues like credibility, reliability etc.). With advanced technology and more people coming into fields like meme making, it seems possible to use methods such as meme making which can be called 'creative', in order to facilitate education overcoming challenges like the ones mentioned above.

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