One does not simply use the Internet: the effect of memes and humor on social connectedness and social fit

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Intro

Humor is a social skill that aids social connectedness, and different types of humor are utilized in various interpersonal and social environments (Salvera, Usan, & Jerie, 2018). Memes have become a popular form of humor and communication on the internet.

Hypothesis

People who know more memes, understand memes, find memes funny, and share memes with their friends will have a greater sense of social fit and higher social connectedness.

Methods

Participants were 388 undergraduate students at the University of Houston. All measures were completed online at the participants' convenience.

Measures

- Participants were shown popular memes from previous years and asked whether they understood the meme, found it funny, and their willingness to share the meme with friends.
- A modified Sense of Social and Academic Fit (Walton & Cohen, 2007) was used to determine if participants felt as though they fit in with their website of choice.
- We also used the Social Connectedness Scale (Lee, & Robbins, 1995) to measure general connectedness.

Data Analysis

The Social Connectedness Scale was reversed in order to represent loneliness due to its non-normal distribution. We then used negative binomial regression analysis.
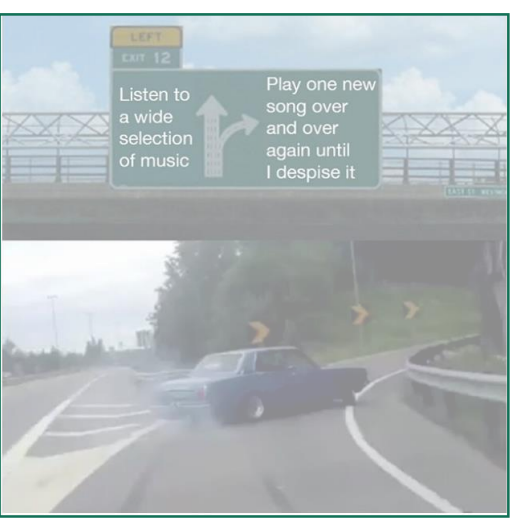
General **loneliness negatively predicted feeling belongingness** online, and finding memes funny **positively predicted belongingness online** while understanding memes **negatively predicted general loneliness**.

Take the Meme Quiz Here

Results

Finding memes funny, understanding memes, and general loneliness were found significant while knowing more memes, understanding memes, and willingness to share memes were non-significant, contrary to expectations.

Belongingness on Website	B	SE	p	95% CI	
Loneliness	-0.18	0.03	<.001	-0.23	-0.13
Understanding memes	0.11	0.36	0.76	-0.60	0.82
Finding memes funny	0.77	0.28	0.01	0.22	1.32
Seen the meme	-0.29	0.17	0.10	-0.63	0.05
Would send the meme	0.07	0.24	0.78	-0.41	0.54
Has sent the meme	0.41	0.31	0.18	-0.19	1.02

Loneliness in general	B	SE	p	95% CI	
Understanding memes	-0.84	0.41	0.04	-1.64	-0.04
Finding memes funny	-0.05	0.34	0.88	-0.71	0.61
Seen the meme	0.20	0.22	0.36	-0.23	0.63
Would send the meme	-0.51	0.30	0.09	-1.10	0.08
Has sent the meme	0.56	0.38	0.14	-0.18	1.30

Discussion

As the first study to focus on memes and online humor, this study can provide direction for future studies on humor and belongingness. This study can also provide a practical basis on how using humor can make people feel like they belong more, which can be utilized during organizational trainings. Additionally, these findings can be applied to belongingness interventions, which are associated with many positive outcomes including well-being, health, and academic functioning.