

Mememes at the round table of societal discourse

An investigation on the role of memes in transgender related discourse on Reddit and Instagram

Vriti Kalia

Bachelor Thesis

Supervised by Menno de Jong

Date: 01/07/2022

Abstract

Context: Trans people have been the target of scrutiny in mainstream and social media. While there have been positive developments in the formal acceptance of trans people. The broader informal, societal acceptance remains a barrier in gender equality. Memes have emerged as a way to present critiques of societal issues. While memes may seem to be frivolous and irrelevant, they may play a key role in shaping views and perpetuating stigma.

Objectives: Based on the analytical approach of Shifman (2013), this study aims to understand how memes serve the discursive goal of framing trans people as the 'other'. Specifically, the ways this is done using elements of humor, irony, emotions, visual metaphors and implicitness is considered.

Methods: Memes from the meme-rich platforms of Reddit and Instagram were collected. Purposive sampling was used to build a corpus reflecting a range of views on transgenderism. Hashtags and dedicated subreddits were used to find memes. A total of 150 memes were collected. The memes were analysed based on their form, content and stance, using Visual Semiotic analysis, inductive and deductive coding.

Results: Consistent with literature implicitness was used to express attitudes covertly. Metaphor emerged as a tool to mock and derogate trans people and issues. Interestingly, these elements also served the function of self validation and self victimisation of the creators.

Conclusions: These findings suggest how memes play a role in shaping discourses on transgenderism. Memes function as expression of targeted hate and validation of such views. Platform designers should consider how algorithms can be used to intentionally present diverse content to reduce echo chambers. Literacy of the potential underlying ideologies of memes needs to be increased. Understanding how memes surpass their common view as 'harmless' is crucial to prevent being deceived by them.

Note. The researcher can be contacted for the materials used in the study

Table of Contents

1	Introduction	4
2	Theoretical Framework.....	5
2.1	Memes and its dimensions	5
2.2	Discursive goal of framing the outgroup	5
2.3	Memetic elements characterising discourse	6
3	Methods.....	9
3.1	Data collection	9
3.2	Analytical Approach	10
3.3	Reliability.....	10
4	Results.....	12
4.1	Broad stances towards transgenderism	12
4.2	Themes of transgender discourses	12
4.2.1	Congruence and transness.....	13
4.2.2	Transness negatively characterised	14
4.2.3	Transness in cisnormative context.....	14
4.3	Elements	15
4.3.1	Implicitness	15
4.3.2	Metaphor	16
4.3.3	Humour	17
4.3.4	Emotive language.....	18
4.4	Co-occurrence.....	19
5	Discussion.....	21
5.1	Justifying views on transgenderism	21
5.2	Hate without the blame.....	21
5.3	Manufactured image of transness.....	22
5.4	Practical implications	22
5.5	Theoretical implications.....	23
5.6	Limitations and recommendations	23
5.7	Conclusion.....	24
	References	25
	Appendices.....	29
	Appendix A: R code	29
	Appendix B: Codebook.....	30
	Appendix C: Reliability Analysis	33

1 Introduction

Immense progress has been made in the legal recognition of transgender individuals. The last two decades have especially been important for the progress on acceptance of transgender individuals. Across the world many policies relating to trans people have been formulated including “gender recognition, anti-discrimination, marriage and family rights, access to primary and gender affirming medical care, combatting of gender-based violence and hate crimes” (Ayoub, as cited in Verloo & van der Vleuten, 2020). Legal acceptance has an impact on the acceptance of trans people in society. Amongst OECD countries, legal inclusion of trans and intersex people has been shown to have a positive affect on their acceptance (OECD, 2020). The legal recognition addresses the concrete and highly visible discrimination against trans people.

However, legal recognition alone is not enough to address the existing social stigma and marginalisation of trans people. There is still progress to be made in the social acceptance of trans people. One way that social acceptance and attitudes can be influenced is media. In general, most people are exposed to trans people through the media (Solomon & Kurtz-Costes, 2018). The lack of social acceptance is largely visible in the media representations and discussions about trans people. The media tends to subject trans identities to being pathologized and marginalised (Åkerlund, 2019; Barker-Plummer, 2013). Visibility on media influences the perpetuation or reduction of social stigma against trans people.

Similar to traditional media, social media may also play a role in changing views about trans people. Social media platforms have allowed perspectives beside the dominant ones on mainstream media, to become visible. It has led to more participatory possibilities for different minority groups (Primo et al., 2019). More specifically, social media has offered an avenue for trans or transgender youth to derive meaning and as self expression (Jenzen, 2017). Moreover, these participatory affordances promote more nuanced narratives of gender non-conformity (Primo et al., 2019). This is in contrast to the tropes of othering traditional media and mainstream have focused on when portraying trans people. At the same time, “intersecting oppressions are maintained and can even be exacerbated in the move to social media” (Fischer, 2016, p.755). The exacerbation of power structures can be observed in phenomenon like the digital divide. Gender related harassment and marginalisation, including that of trans individuals, is being normalised in digital spaces (Haslop et al., 2021). This reflects notions about trans people in society as that of an outsider. With the growing participatory affordances of social media, many positive and negative implications for trans people and issues.

An emerging way views are being expressed on social media is through memes. Memes have become part of the language of the internet. They are modes of expression of internet culture (McLoughlin & Southern, 2020). The way memes are used to influence perceptions about trans people might be relevant. Memes have been used to disseminate propaganda (DeCook, 2018). Given of lacking social acceptance and growing hateful narratives towards the trans community, the context of this study is relevant. Moreover, there is no research empirically addressing in memes in this context.

Thus, the following main research question will be addressed in this study: *How are memes used to shape attitudes towards trans people?*

2 Theoretical Framework

In this section, the main concepts related to memes, discourse and its characteristics will be explained. The use of memes will be set in the context of social issues and discourse. The characteristics of memes with discursive functions will be presented.

2.1 Memes and its dimensions

Shifman (2013) proposed a framework for understanding memes based on its 'memetic dimensions'. The dimensions include form, content and stance. Specifically, keying, a subdimension of stance the indicative of the stylistic aspects of the meme will be considered. In the framework, another subdimension of stance regarding the functions is included (Shifman, 2013). However, new functions not covered in the framework are proposed. Thus, an adaptation of the framework of memetic dimensions will be central in this study. The concepts of keying and form are combined since they represent aspects unrelated to the content. This will be labelled as 'elements'. Moreover, based on the model proposed by Hecker (2020) the functions act as a product of the memetic dimensions rather than a dimension itself. Certain elements of memes may have specific functions. However, these will be further addressed later in this section.

Memes can function as indicators of group identity. They can be used to build collective identities and have a gatekeeping role (DeCook, 2018; Nissenbaum & Shifman, 2015; Peters & Allan, 2021). Memes might become a way for groups to indicate their agreement on various aspects. Memes might also function as a way to criticise others (Zeng & Abidin, 2021). In this way, memes can be studied to understand how one group targets another. Memes can reflect conventions of a community (DeCook, 2018). Thus, memes may have underlying role of indicating agreeable viewpoints and scrutinising a target. For this study, such functions of memes may be targeted towards trans people.

Memes can function as a way to shape discourses on certain issues. Discourse is the structured use of content (Ghaffari, 2022) to reflect social realities. Colloquially, discourse also refers to the broader ongoing conversation or positions toward an issue and are characterised by the notion of subjective viewpoints (Malvini Redden & Way, 2019) on an issue. Memes are a unique form of discourse (Wagener, 2021). Individual memes might reflect micro level discourses. A collection of memes might represent a macro level discourse. Micro level discourses combined might reflect broader macro level discourses (Malvini Redden & Way, 2019). Thus, notions in individual memes can collectively reflect societal notions. It has been suggested to focus research on the consider the "new modes of discourse about salient contemporary issues such as gender representation and sexism" as a result of the affordances of social media (Ghaffari, 2022). Memes might be relevant to study as such a novel form of discourse.

2.2 Discursive goal of framing the outgroup

A central aspect to macro level discourses is social groups. The discursive role of memes has been linked to signifying group membership and collective identity (DeCook, 2018; Malvini Redden & Way, 2019). Discourses allow assigning categories in a way that determines who is included or excluded (Korkmazer et al., 2020). This indicates the potential of discourses to exclude other groups. It has been suggested to look at how memes function when social groups refer to other communities (Nissenbaum & Shifman, 2015). Thus, it is evident that an understanding of how memes function in creating discourses of those who are external to a group is important.

Groups may be categorised as ingroups and outgroups. An ingroup refers to the group one identifies with, as opposed to the outgroup that is disidentified with (Kassin et al., 2016). An outgroup is subject to othering if they don't fit the norms of the ingroup (Ladegaard, 2021). A meta-analytical study reveals that when an ingroup perceives the outgroup to pose a certain type of threat, they exhibit negative attitudes toward them (Riek et al., 2006). The forms of threat explained in the study were 1) negative stereotypes: negative expectations from the outgroup; 2) realistic threat: individuals perceive a threat of harm; 3) symbolic threat: threats that challenge the groups norms and values and; 4) intergroup anxiety: discomfort from contact with the outgroup. The existing discourses of trans people can be linked to these threats. For example, themes of narratives related to trans individuals were 'bathroom bills' (Spencer, 2019) and 'detransitioning regret', the latter which is used to delegitimise transness and preventing access to trans affirming care (Slothouber, 2020). The bathroom narrative might be associated with realistic threat, where trans people are associated with causing harm to cisgender women. Discourse analysis of radical right groups indicate they delegitimise trans and gender issues using frames that divert attention or blatantly dismiss transness (Fiers & Muis, 2021). "Troll science is based on (distorted) scientific arguments moulded into populist discourse, creating an alternative narrative on the conceptions of gender equality" (Eslen-Ziya, 2020, p.1). Tactics of pseudo-science and distraction are used to convince people to potentially have biased views or choose to dismiss trans issues. Transgender identities fall outside the 'traditional' binary gender model (Makwana et al., 2018; West et al., 2021). Thus, cisgender groups might view a trans identity as a symbolic threat to traditional gender values. In contrast, transgender individuals used discourse to validate their identity which was aimed to "pre-empt societal discourses of erasure" (West et al., 2021, p.214). Thus, it seems that there may be competing discourses evoking legitimacy or delegitimacy. These examples indicate that discourses on transgenderism might be prevalent and used to (de)legitimise views. Moreover, it suggests that the 'othering' of trans people as an outgroup, might be prevalent in such discourses.

There is existing research on the use of othering in memes toward social groups. Memes use jokes to normalise their underlying gender related beliefs in a disguised way (Lomotey, 2020). Racist memes depict misunderstanding and misrepresentation of racism (Yoon, 2016). Anti-immigration hostility is rationalised in far right groups through the use of the rhetorical elements of logos, derogating the target and morality (Hakoköngäs et al., 2020). Thus, social issues are being dealt with covert ways, yet they signify underlying illiteracy of the social issues involved. The seriousness and impact of social issues and their discourses might be downplayed. In this study, the context of trans related memes will be considered. It is important to understand hateful views in order to create counter strategies (DeCook, 2018). Although, there is evidence of othering discourses through memes on several social groups. This has not been studied in the context of trans people. The potential of memes to delegitimise and negatively characterise ideas or individuals (Ross & Rivers, 2017) indicates the need to further investigate this phenomenon.

2.3 Memetic elements characterising discourse

As mentioned earlier, humor might play a role in memes. Memes tend to be labelled as user generated humor (Dyrel & Poppi, 2021). The arguments in memes might be overlooked due to the presence of humor. This is because humor reduces argument scrutiny (Nabi et al., 2007). However, there has been mixed evidence of the persuasive effects of humor. The low persuasive effect of humor has been attributed to the discounting effect (Young, 2008). This effect results in a message not being taken seriously and its persuasiveness is dismissed upon evaluation (Nabi et al., 2007). The unclear evidence indicates the need to study humor in memes. Similarly, irony can act as a semiotic tool that enables evaluation of a target (Zappavigna, 2022). Humor contributes to discourse through

its rhetorical or evaluative function (Piata, 2016). Furthermore, humor and metaphor can have an evaluative function.

Metaphor has a similar rhetorical or evaluative function in discourse (Piata, 2016), but it works slightly differently. Concept based metaphors evoke associations by pointing out similarities (Piata, 2016). Metaphors can function as a connector of concepts. More specifically, considering visual metaphors might be relevant when assessing content in memes. Visual elements play a significant role in social media discourse (Zappavigna, 2022). Thus, the visual aspect of memes might make it a relevant part of discourse. Visual metaphors use imagery to evoke associations (Jeong, 2008). Memes might use images to depict connections between concepts. Furthermore, the enthymematic property of visual metaphors make them persuasive (Huntington, 2016). The rhetorical potential of memes is created by inviting users to derive their apparent own conclusion i.e, using an enthymeme (Huntington, 2016). This is considered effective in persuading audiences (Kjeldsen, 2017). This is particularly because visual metaphors might not rely on text to present arguments (Jeong, 2008). Thus, visual metaphors might be effective in communicating an argument and have a rhetorical function. Building upon this idea of visual metaphors, they may also be used to create vagueness. Bolognesi and Vernillo (2019), suggest that visual metaphors use concrete imagery to depict abstract concepts. A simple example used in the study is that of a melting ice cream that looks like a globe melting. The abstract representation without accompanying explanation, allows for the audience to interpret its meaning. Thus, in this way, the audience might infer negative connotations of global warming. Through visual metaphors, audiences perceive coherence of arguments through the semantic associations evoked (Jeong, 2008). However, at the same time these associations might be used to create meaning through vague connotations. As a whole, metaphors might act as a simplistic yet argumentatively powerful depictions of ideas through visuals.

The notion of inference is not limited to metaphors and can act as a standalone element in content. Individuals tend to use literary devices when attempting to implicitly express criticism on a social issue (Gabriellova & Maksimenko, 2021). This indirect but argumentatively loaded way of communication is done by creating implicitness. The understanding of implicitness is based on the work of (Lombardi Vallauri et al., 2020) According to Lombardi Vallauri (2020), implicitness can be created through language in two ways. 1) individuals might try to mask or downplay meaning by implicatures and vagueness or; 2) present presuppositions, which can be regarded as an enthymeme, that leads to the “self convincing audience” (Kjeldsen, 2017, p. 321) effect. In the study, implicature is referred to as statements that omit message content and leave it inferable. Vagueness is used similarly, by not specifying aspects of a message. Presuppositions work by ‘implicit encoding of responsibility’. Arguments are formed based on the assumed pre-existing knowledge of the audience (Lombardi Vallauri et al., 2020). Thus, implicitness works by omitting key aspects of a message that the audience is left to infer or assumed to already be aware of.

Elements that are do not use an argumentative basis to convey meaning might also be used in memes. In fact, affective or emotionally oriented content on social media is more dominant than argument oriented content (KhosraviNik, 2018). Emotional appeals were the most used in misinformation posts (Chen et al., 2021). The prevalence of emotions in social media content indicates it might also be used to frame memes. Memes are criticised for being one sided, simplistic and emotionally charged, not useful in informing publics (L.C., 2021). Memes might foster environments that do not encourage a rational discourse but rather an emotionally oriented one. Nevertheless, Wagener (2021) points out that memes ability to act as “capsules of cognitive and emotional expression” is what makes them impactful. The “popularity of expressions”, emotionally

laden, precedes their argumentative coherence (KhosraviNik, 2018). Thus, publics might even be drawn to emotionally oriented content regardless of its argumentative value. Another factor that doesn't rely on argumentation when conveying a message is the bullshit frame. Bullshit frames explicitly suggest a dismissal of truth (Petrocelli, 2021). By undermining the regard for evidence, a bullshit frame can be persuasive (Petrocelli, 2021). Lastly, image based rhetoric can promote irrationality. This is done by invoking the audiences imagination, which might take precedence over other elements (Patel et al., 2021). Thus, image based language can be used to distract and dismiss rational aspects of a message.

Humor, metaphor, implicitness and irony might act as argumentative elements. These elements present the message content in a strategic and rhetorical way. Alternatively, emotion, image based rhetoric and bullshit frames do not rely on argumentative aspects. Thus, they might act as non-argumentative elements. These elements might have functions that serve the discursive goal of framing the outgroup.

This study aims to investigate the discursive role and elements of transgender related memes. The research questions include:

RQ1: How do trans related memes on Reddit and Instagram contribute to the discourse on transgenderism?

RQ2: To what extent are rhetorical (metaphor, implicitness, humour and irony) and non-argumentative (bullshit frame, image based rhetoric and emotion) elements used in trans related memes on Reddit and Instagram?

3 Methods

In order to understand the discursive role and identify characteristics of memes, image based posts from Reddit and Instagram were collected. Instagram and Reddit were chosen for two reasons. Firstly, the notable presence and propagation of memes on these platforms (DeCook, 2018; Literat & van den Berg, 2019). The platform of Reddit is an understudied area of research (Massanari, 2015). Thus, these platforms could be used to study a variety of memes. Secondly, the platforms allow a targeted meme search. The features allow searching for memes through hashtags and dedicated subreddits. Since the aim of this study is to understand a range of micro level perspectives, a corpus reflecting pro trans memes and anti- trans memes was aimed for. Reddit was used to mainly extract pro trans memes and Instagram was used to mainly extract anti trans memes. Ideally, both perspectives from both platforms would be used. However, this was beyond the scope of this study.

3.1 Data collection

Purposive sampling was used to gather memes that reflected different views towards transgenderism. Two active subreddits containing memes related to trans people or issues were found. This included the r/traaaaans subreddit, the most popular and active subreddit containing memes related to being transgender. The r/terfscantmeme, subreddit contained anti-trans memes. This was the only subreddit where anti-trans memes could be found. Additionally, the r/memes subreddit with posts containing the word trans was chosen. This reflected more popular memes common to the general Reddit community. The memes were extracted using an R code (Appendix A) to mine the image files and saved locally. The extraction was done within the public API rules of Reddit.

Publicly available memes from Instagram were collected based on hashtags. Since the researcher was not familiar with the keywords of the non-supportive hashtags, a snowballing method was used. Under the general hashtag of transgender memes, several memes were selected that displayed negative or ironic attitudes towards trans people. Similar to the snowballing method of Decook (2018) the frequently recurring hashtags within these posts were identified. These memes included hashtags related to the themes of edgy jokes, gender theory, trans exclusionary radical feminism, JK Rowling and questioning transness. The hashtags selected were highly popular with a large number of posts. In this way, some of the widely spread discourses could be accounted for. The list of hashtags and their variations that recurred in several posts containing those hashtags can be found in Table 1. Memes from these hashtags were extracted for analysis. Screenshots of the memes without any identifiers were saved locally.

Table 1

Overview of hashtag categories

Hashtags	Variations	Theme	Memes
Onlytwogenders	only2genders, twogenders, 2genders	Edgy jokes and gender theory	37
terfsafe, istandwithjkrowling	lswjkr, teamterf	Trans Exclusionary Radical Feminism/Feminist (TERF) and JK Rowling	60
transcult, transvestigation, transpocalypse, transwomenarenotwomen	transmenarenotmen	Direct transphobia/conspiracy leaning	19

The first 702 posts within each hashtag were viewed. A definition of a meme relevant for data collection is that of image macros or images juxtaposed with text (White-Farnham, 2019). Thus, posts containing Images with text superimposed were collected. A total of 214 posts were retrieved. Posts with original comics and those unrelated to trans people or trans issues were excluded. This resulted in a corpus containing 150 memes from Instagram and Reddit. The distribution of the collected memes can be seen in Table 1.

3.2 Analytical Approach

Based on suggestions in literature (Pelletier-Gagnon & Pérez Trujillo Diniz, 2018; Shifman, 2013) analyses of the form, content and stance of the memes were conducted. The analysis of the meme corpus was divided into three steps. Firstly, Visual Semiotic Analysis was performed. This was derived from the suggestion of Yoon (2016) to apply the layering of meaning analysis to every meme. In this type of analysis, the forms and their meanings are derived. In the first layer the denotative signifiers and denotation or the literal description of the memes was extracted. In the second layer of analysis the connotation and contextual aspects were combined to indicate the meaning of the meme. Additionally, during this process, any unfamiliar references or slang were looked up on knowyourmeme or urban dictionary.

Secondly, open coding was performed. The aim was to identify the content. The thematic codes were deductively derived from the corpus. In the first round each meme was given a category, memes with common themes were identified. In the second round of coding these categories were assessed against the memes and new categories emerged.

Lastly, the inductive codes for the persuasive forms were applied. These included the memetic elements derived from existing literature. The codebook with the thematic and inductive codes can be found in Appendix B. The coding and co-occurrence calculations were done using the software Atlas ti.

3.3 Reliability

Interrater reliability was calculated using SPSS. An independent coder coded 15 per cent of the meme corpus. The Cohen's kappa was 0.6 or above overall, with some exceptions. This included

implicit content, incomprehension, hypocritical, image based, bullshit frame and parts icm. Some of the codes had a low agreement and others negligible Cohen's Kappa value. The values and significance of each code can be seen in Appendix C. The negligible codes were excluded.

4 Results

In this section, the findings from the analyses will be discussed. Firstly, findings about the overall data will be addressed. Secondly, the thematic patterns in the content of the message in the memes will be presented. Thirdly, the use of elements in expressing views will be discussed. The findings will be explained using examples of memes. Lastly, relationships between contents, elements and other findings will be discussed.

4.1 Broad stances towards transgenderism

The dataset can be generally categorised based on whether a meme was pro or anti trans. These types of memes were selectively obtained from different social media platforms. Thus, this was not an observation but a classification of memes. There were some memes in which the position was not clear, these were labelled as ambivalent. The occurrences of these categorisations are summarised in Table 2. In anti-trans memes, notions of excluding and ridiculing trans people were most noticeable. Pro trans memes were anecdotal and addressed norms within trans communities.

Table 2

Various stances towards transness

Position towards trans people	Frequency
Anti	108
Pro	33
Ambivalent/Ambiguous	9

Some memes were ambiguous or ambivalent. Ambivalent is defined as the “simultaneous presence of contradictory reactions to a stimulus” (Scharp, 2021, p.545). This means the view towards transgenderism was explained in contradictory premises. An example of such presentation of an explanation through contradiction can be seen in Figure 1. The character in the meme expresses confusion and contradictory thoughts about being trans in relation to misogyny.

Ambiguity in memes indicated that the position behind the message was unclear to deduce. This was also included with confusion expressed or unclarity of whether a statement was unironically presented. An example is depicted in Figure 2. In this meme, it is not clear whether the tone is mocking or ironic. The stances categorised as ambivalent and ambiguous were found on both Reddit and Instagram.

4.2 Themes of transgender discourses

12 themes emerged from the thematic analysis. These themes can be broadly distinguished by three categories: a) congruence: what comprises a trans person in terms of how congruent to cis people they are; b) Negative characterisation: what traits are exhibited by trans people, specifically negative characterisations and; c) Cisnormative context: what impact trans people have on society, their position in a cis normative society. The broad themes and their respective sub themes are summarised in Table 3.

Table 3.*Occurrences of thematic codes and their descriptions*

Main Code and subcodes	Description	Frequency
Incongruence		
Experiences/norms	describes experience or norms of the community or individual of a community	32
Appearance/biological features	commenting or addressing transpeople's appearance or traits	10
Gender concept	confusing or comparing the concepts of gender to biological sex or sexuality (identifying as a man = being biologically male or being gay; or saying one is better than the other)	7
Incomprehension	good faith or genuine incomprehension or confusion	4
Negative characterisation		
Mocking/caricatures	to treat with contempt or ridicule (mocking him as a mamas boy) or mimicing (mocking the oldman's gait)	59
Negative portrayal	transpeople are depicted as overly demanding or overreactive or overdramatic	22
posers	transpeople are opportunistic posers: men dressing as women to benefit themselves or vice versa or transallies/society who reward transness, might also imply that being trans is a choice	18
Cisnormative context		
Denial/excluders	denial or exclusion of transness	34
Trivialising	to make transpeople/issues seem less important or significant than it really is	29
Ignoring/dismissing	with an underlying negative or neutral or ambivalent attitude, may be intentional or unintentional	24
Predatory/threat	views the object of scrutiny as a threat or predator that could cause harm of sorts	17
hypocritical	pointing out hypocrisy (not practicing what you preach or doing the opposite)	10

4.2.1 Congruence and transness

In the broad theme of congruence, there are five themes. Each theme relates to aspects of transness that are perceived as incongruent to cisnormative notions. In the theme appearance, the visual depiction of a trans person is presented as unnatural or out of place. This presented in contrast to the norms of gendered aesthetics. Physical features that are 'feminine' are imposed onto 'masculine' features. This creates a visual that appears incongruent with the gendered norms. An example of such contrasting features is depicted in Figure 3. Thus, a trans person is shown as unnatural because of the mismatch of their biological sex and expected physical appearance. Thus, visual imagery is used to represent an incongruent appearance by overemphasising contrasting features.

Under the theme gender concept, 'flaws' or inconsistencies in the concept of gender identity are presented. For example, a mismatch between the concept of gender and biological sex is presented. Often, these stemmed from misconceptions about trans people. As seen in Figure 4, the concept of gender was presented as a rejection of biological sex. Based on this incorrect assumption

identifying as a woman is considered the same as identifying as a biological woman. This indicates the underlying lacking of understanding of transgenderism. In this theme transness is 'debunked' and from a cis perspective shown as incongruent with misunderstandings of transgenderism.

Another theme that used incongruencies was experiences/norms. In this theme the situations encountered by trans people as a result of being trans are addressed. Pro trans memes depicted incongruencies caused by dysphoria or personal experiences with incongruencies as a result of being trans. This incongruency is illustrated in Figure 5 where the conflicting emotions caused by being trans.

4.2.2 Transness negatively characterised

Trans people or allies or issues are characterised negatively in three themes. In the theme negative portrayal, associations between traits with negative connotations and trans people are illustrated. This includes traits of being overreactive and demanding. Trans people are often shown crying, with angry expressions or both. This reaction is often combined with a relatively polar opposite (happy cis person) or a simple 'fact'. Expressions are dramatized and trans people are presented as unreasonable and intimidating when confronted, oblivious and lacking in self awareness. A meme illustrating this theme is shown in Figure 5. The contrasting statement or reaction makes the reaction of the trans person is made to seem like it is exaggerated. Thus, Trans people are classified by their negative over reaction to situations.

In the theme mocking/caricature trans people and issues are made fun of. In the theme posers, trans people are presented as opportunistic posers, who choose to be trans to gain benefits from it. Trans people in society such as athletes, celebrities and workers are used to depict this. An example of such a characterisation can be seen in Figure 7. Trans people are shown to take advantage of a system that supports trans people. Thus, trans people potentially take away opportunities from their cis counterparts. This is negatively characterised as being unfair.

4.2.3 Transness in cisnormative context

Several consequences or reactions towards transness from a cisgendered perspective are presented. This includes depicting trans people as a threat, excluding, trivialising and dismissing them and their issues. This categorisation includes four themes. Under the theme predatory/threat, transwomen are viewed as a threat to the safety of ciswomen. They are depicted as predatory and prying into cis spaces (Figure 8).

In the second theme, trans people and issues are trivialised. For example, issues such as using correct pronouns, are portrayed as silly or inconvenient (Figure 9). Under the theme ignoring/dismissing, the notion that their significance is invalid under cis norms, they are dismissed. Trans issues are not addressed at all, they are ignored deliberately. A sense of disengagement with trans people and issues are shown (Figure 10).

Lastly, transness as a concept is denied or trans people are explicitly excluded by anti trans people. In contrast to dismissing/ignoring, trans people are actively excluded or their inclusion is portrayed negatively (Figure 11).

The presented classifications of perspectives on transness indicate the cisgender centric notions of anti trans memes. Two groups are placed against each other, trans people, their allies and trans exclusionists. Since trans exclusionists tend to claim to speak for the cisgender community, the

terms trans exclusionists and cis people are used interchangeably. However, this does not imply that all cis people are trans exclusionists.

4.3 Elements

In the next section, the various elements of memes will be presented.

4.3.1 Implicitness

Table 4

Distribution of implicitness

Type	Frequency
Implicit	96
Explicit	54

Table 5

Occurrences of implicitness cues

Implicitness sub element	Frequency
Implicatures	81
Presuppositions	15

Both anti and pro trans memes used implicitness. Two types of implicitness, implicatures and presuppositions, were used to present information covertly. The occurrences of these in the memes are summarised in Table 5.

4.3.1.1 Implicatures

Implicatures were present in two aspects of a meme. Firstly, references to a trans person, ally or issue was implicit. The meme included coded words, allusions, icons and mockery to make indirect references to transness. Examples include using the pride or trans flag, gender, mimicking pronoun preferences, misgendering, caricatures of transwomen and hormones. Figure 11 depicts an anti trans meme that uses implicature to reference a trans person. The meme uses the term ‘girl brain’, which alludes to a transwoman. Secondly, the message itself was presented in an implicit way. Transness was portrayed as inferior through comparisons and placed in contexts with negative connotations. For example, trans people were frequently compared to cis people. This comparison included portraying cis people as better than trans people or how trans people seize benefits from their cis counterparts. One such comparison is presented in Figure 12. A transgender government official and athlete are presented with the text ‘Woman of the year is a man’ and ‘best woman’s swimmer is a man’ respectively. It can be implied that these ‘men’ have taken away recognitions that should be awarded to ciswomen. Thus, transwomen stolen opportunities from ciswomen, which have negative connotations.

Negative contexts included framing a trans person with negative characterisations. An example of a negative context is shown in Figure 13. A wallflower at a party wonders about whether they appear as a trans person to the others. The others reactions are of disgust due to the presumed flatulence and associated smell caused by the wallflower. The status as a wallflower, socially

excluded and the negative connotations of smell are associated with a trans person. These negative traits frame the trans person specifically, although it could be applied to a cisgender person as well. Thus, the creator made a deliberate decision to place a trans person in the context with negative connotations.

4.3.1.2 Presuppositions

Presuppositions included explicit arguments presented with facts assumed to be true. Thus, the implicitness was present in the assumptions made. Assumptions included that transwomen are men, biological sex determines which bathroom is used, gender is binary, there is one right kind of feminism. An example of a presupposition is presented in Figure 14. An image of an anime character inviting the viewer is combined with the text ‘identifying as male won’t defend you from misogyny, radical feminism will’. The creator presumes the fact that ‘identifying as male’ or being a transman, is a choice made to protect oneself from misogyny. By not stating this explicitly, the creator’s responsibility in make this suggestion is masked. Instead, the inference is made by the reader and thus their own thoughts. As suggested in literature (Vallauri & Masia, 2014), these allusions to assumptions make the presented argument more concrete since the reader recognises it themselves.

In contrast, anti trans memes that were explicit, directly included transphobia or transphobic behaviours. Transness was ‘debunked’ more openly in an argumentative and confrontative way. Pro trans memes that used explicit language were descriptive using experiential facts and anecdotes.

4.3.2 Metaphor

Table 6

Distribution of metaphor

Type	Frequency
Metaphor	82
Non-metaphor/Literal	68

Table 7

Occurrences of metonymic relationships

Metonymic relationship	Frequency
Form for concept	62
Salient property for category	19
Object for function	1

Metaphors are used to refer to trans exclusionist individuals and experiences, transgender actions or behaviours and represent trans peoples’ appearance. Form for concept and salient property for category metaphors were used (Table 7).

4.3.2.1 Form for concept

Different memetic forms were used to depict trans exclusionists and transness. These forms were used to create positive associations, including superiority, pride and pity, with trans exclusionists. Negative associations, such as over reactivity, absurdity and predatory, were connected to transness. Sometimes, these positive and negative associations were presented in the

same meme. This type of form for content metaphor can be observed in Figure 15. In this popular iteration of the batman meme, batman can be seen slapping robin for making an offensive statement. Batman represents an anti trans person and Robin represents a pro trans person. Batman is a superhero who is better than Robin, his relatively inferior protégé, and in this meme assumed to be right. This metaphorical relationship is used to present the anti trans perspective as the ‘right’ one and the pro trans one as an unacceptable statement to make.

4.3.2.2 *Salient property for category*

In the other metaphor, transwomen were presented through mocking caricatures. This caricature depicted the salient property, the incongruent appearance, to the category of transwomen. Transwomen were caricaturised as a man dressed as a woman. Typical biologically male features were overemphasised and contrasted with stereotypically feminine gendered symbols. An example of such a caricature is shown in Figure 16 below. Symbols like facial hair was contrasted with the colour pink, makeup and a dress. This was frequently used as a metaphor to scrutinise trans people in memes. Interestingly, this was almost exclusively done for transwomen, no transmen were depicted in this caricaturised form. Overall only 3 references to Elliot page, an actor who recently came out as a trans man, were made. Only 1 other reference to people who come out as transmen was made.

4.3.3 Humour

Table 8

Distribution of humour across the corpus

Type	Frequency
Humorous	76
Non-humorous	74

Table 9

Occurrences of humour types

Humour type	Frequency
Depreciative	38
Absurd	27
Funny context	9

Humour was used to downplay aspects of a message. The offensiveness and the absurdness of message was undercut through humour. Humour was used as depreciative towards trans people, presentation of absurd remarks and, entertaining through juxtaposition onto funny contexts. The overview of the occurrences of the types of humour is presented in Table 9. Depreciative humour was used to scrutinise trans people and their behaviours. For example, as depicted in Figure 17, pronoun preferences were mocked. This was depreciative towards trans and non binary individuals. This kind of humour makes a joke aiming to make fun of an individual or group. The way it was mocked might be interpreted as humorous due to the exaggeration. Depreciative humour was heightened by combining the message with a funny reference. An example of this juxtaposition can be seen in Figure 18. The text is depreciative towards transwomen. The meme references a popular

song lyric by the 'Spice Girls'. When the depreciative statement is combined with the song, it is unexpected and thus humorous.

In order to evoke incongruency between reality and the unexpected, absurd statements were presented. For example, in Figure 19, a meme depicting a character, referring to 'Queer Tumblr' indicates toward a butterfly, referring to emotions. This is combined with the text 'is this a gender'. The absurdity of defining gender based on the whims of emotions is humorous. The statement is presented as an exaggeration of a hypothetical situation. Although the statement is absurd, it trivialises genders other than the binary. Thus, through this type of humour, it is possible to momentarily accept the absurdity as reality.

Irony was present in 38 memes. Irony was used to mock trans issues and trans people. Statements seemingly pro trans were presented. However, these statements were presented rhetorically. Since these statements are unexpected their incongruence creates the irony. An example of a meme that uses irony is presented in Figure 20.

4.3.4 Emotive language

Table 10

Distribution of Emotion

Type	Frequency
Emotive	57
Non-emotive	93

Table 11

Emotion Sub Elements

Emotion	Frequency
Negative Anti	23
Positive Anti	22
Negative Pro	9
Positive Pro	3

In contrast to humour, emotive language was used to sensationalise or overlay the message in a meme. In pro trans memes, positive and negative emotions were present. Specifically, the relief, anxiety, joy and sorrow of trans experiences with transitioning, dysphoria and transphobia were presented. An example of a negative emotion is depicted in Figure 21. Emotions presented were personal to the experience of an individual.

In anti trans memes, trans people were framed using negative emotions of fear (Figure 22), anxiety, shame and disapproval. Depictions of positive emotions were used for anti trans perspectives. This included the emotions of pride (Figure 23) and confidence. Emotions in these memes were more general and applicable to groups rather than individuals.

4.4 Co-occurrence

The overlap of the code categories will be presented.

Table 12

Element and stance co-occurrence

	anti (n=108)	pro (n=33)	ambi (n=9)
implicit content (n=81)	67 (62%)	10 (30%)	2 (22%)
implicit responsibility (n=15)	14 (13%)	0	1 (11%)
sign icm (n=62)	43 (40%)	16 (48%)	1 (11%)
whole icm (n=21)	21 (19%)	0	0
Humor (n=76)	62 (57%)	7 (21%)	5 (56%)
Emotive language (n=57)	42 (39%)	10 (30%)	3 (33%)
Irony (n=38)	19 (18%)	14 (42%)	2 (22%)

From Table 12, a lack of humor in pro memes is noticeable relative to other stances. In Table 13, an overlap of themes and elements can be seen. A pattern of frequent use (more than 50 percent) of implicitness and humor was observed across most themes. The exceptions to this include experiences/norms. Instead, experiences/norms mostly used irony and metaphor. In addition, the themes posers and predatory/threat had low presence of humor. Emotive language was considerably more prevalent in the theme negative portrayal compared to other themes. Irony was most prominent in the theme experiences/norms.

Table 13

Theme and element co-occurrence

	Irony (n=38)	Emotive language (n=72)	Humor (n=76)	whole (n=21)	icm (n=62)	implicit responsi	implicit content (n=64)
mocking/caricatures (n=59)	16 (27%)	25 (42%)	44 (75%)	16 (27%)	22 (37%)	5 (8%)	41 (69%)
deniers/excluders (n=34)	4 (12%)	15 (44%)	22 (65%)	4 (12%)	17 (50%)	3 (9%)	21 (62%)
Experiences/norms (n=32)	13 (41%)	12 (38%)	8 (25%)	0	13 (41%)	1 (3%)	9 (28%)
trivialising (n=29)	6 (21%)	11 (38%)	22 (76%)	9 (31%)	12 (41%)	6 (21%)	21 (72%)
Ignoring/dismissing (n=24)	2 (8%)	10 (42%)	18 (75%)	4 (17%)	10 (42%)	1 (4%)	18 (75%)
Negative portrayal (n=22)	4 (18%)	17 (77%)	14 (64%)	8 (36%)	5 (23%)	3 (14%)	13 (59%)
posers (n=18)	4 (22%)	6 (33%)	6 (33%)	3 (17%)	8 (44%)	2 (11%)	13 (72%)
predatory/threat (n=17)	4 (24%)	8 (47%)	5 (29%)	4 (24%)	8 (47%)	2 (12%)	12 (71%)
appearance/biological features (n=10)	1 (10%)	4 (40%)	4 (40%)	5 (50%)	2 (20%)	0	6 (60%)
Gender concept (n=7)	4 (57%)	4 (57%)	5 (71%)	0	3 (43%)	3 (43%)	2 (29%)

5 Discussion

In this section, the main findings will be interpreted and the reasoning behind them will be explained. The societal implications, limitations and conclusions of the study will be discussed.

5.1 Justifying views on transgenderism

Mememes were used to strategically position transness in derogatory ways. By framing transness as an attack to cisnormativity, the claims made were validated. The prevalence of such content indicates the function of such mememes in criticising the outgroup. Moreover, mememes used metaphors and implicitness to create meaning. Metaphors served as a mechanism for mememes to use visual expression to draw the differences between cis and trans. Implicitness was used to covertly refer to trans people and present transphobic statements in indirect ways. Furthermore, metaphor and implicitness functioned as a means for non-trans groups to validate their positions and self victimisation.

The presence of views of trans people as a threat were notable in the mememes. Particularly, symbolic threat and use of resources were observed. The reasoning behind why such mememes were created or shared might be explained by the concept of threat. The existence of gender non conformity or transness violates the norms of the binary gender model, thus they were viewed as a symbolic threat (Riek et al., 2006) which likely lead to the negative attitudes in the mememes. Thus, beyond framings of ingroup and outgroup differences, the underlying notions of threat were visible in the mememes.

Overall, the discursive themes on transgenderism were consistent with the expected framings of trans people in social media. Transness was depicted as incongruent, trans people were shown as outsiders in a cis society and were negatively characterised. This is in line with the framing of trans people as the outgroup or other (Fiers & Muis, 2021), using delegitimisation to justify hateful views (Hakoköngäs et al., 2020; Ross & Rivers, 2017). Gender identity was trivialised and mocked which is similar to trolling gender science (Eslen-Ziya, 2020). The transphobic views in the mememes seemed to stem from a sense of morality to protect the notion of a ciswoman or uphold binary norms. There were findings that were not expected. Narratives of trans people as a threat was lower than expected. Common tropes of the bathroom use and de-transitioning discourse (Slothouber, 2020; Spencer, 2019) was not covered. Instead, new themes emerged. These themes can be attributed to the inclusion of a heavily visual medium of mememes. This likely lead to more commentary based on appearances or visual elements. This might explain the high prevalence of the categories of mocking and metaphor.

5.2 Hate without the blame

The strategic use of rhetorical characteristics contributed to the framing of trans people as the outgroup. Rhetorically strong statements were presented using implicatures. As compared to mememes with explicit statements, implicit statements were considerably used more. Negative views were not expressed explicitly but rather implicitly, covertly. This also points to some kind of need of the authors of the mememes to stay politically correct and within the bounds of what is considered socially acceptable even when expressing hateful views. There was some kind of reluctance or creation of distance. The characteristics used in the mememes implies a creation of distance between the message of the meme and the creator. This suggests a potential function of the mememes in avoidance of responsibility. This could have been done to avoid presenting views in a confrontative way. As an individual directing hate towards a certain group, doing so in an anonymous way prevents having to deal with the consequences of resistance. Additionally, the creator might have been trying to avoid interaction with trans communities.

The significant use of implicitness in memes is inline with the literature (DeCook, 2018; Hakoköngäs et al., 2020; Lomotey, 2020; Yoon, 2016) on social issue memes. Transphobic views were expressed in covert ways. Simple statements with a implied transphobia were presented without directly labelling it as hateful. These memes reflected the irrationally based transphobic views of the anti trans communities. Their beliefs were presented as “truths” the public was oblivious to. The dangers of trans people stemmed from non existent or isolated cases of harm which were sensationalised. more implicature than presuppositions, generally were not focused on presenting too many arguments since memes are meant to be simplistic and made under restrictions. However, memes did express views explicitly as well. Interestingly these memes were roughly divided between either blatantly transphobic or pro trans memes. The pro trans memes expressed in explicit ways were anecdotal or informative. Moreover, the memes were selected from a highly moderated Reddit community with likeminded individuals; explaining the lack of implicitness.

5.3 Manufactured image of transness

Metaphors were commonly used to express views. Metaphors simplified the message of the meme into memorable visuals. The simplistic presentation allowed the creator to make cognitively heavy arguments more accessible to general audiences. The function of metaphor appeared to be creating strong associations with negative connotations in an abstract way. Thus, metaphor contributed in creating negative visually based associations with trans people. This served the purpose of critiquing trans people and issues. Such an evaluative role of metaphor is consistent with literature (Piata, 2016). One notably form of metaphor was caricaturising. A prominent image that was memorable was created through incongruent features. Thus, a manufactured depiction of a trans person as a man dressed as a woman was presented. Moreover, this trans person was used as a representative of all trans people. Besides this, avoidance of direct references to trans people or issues was done. Placeholder symbols were used as if in aversion to using politically correct words. Thus, imagery associated with trans people was constructed. By avoiding a verbal reference, abstraction was created. This was likely done to perpetuate and spread stereotypes more easily and in deceptive and unnoticeable ways.

Overall, the functions of the memes to criticise the outgroup seemed to be inline with the expectation (ok). Such critiques were mainly made through metaphors and implicitness. There may be a secondary function of the memes. Especially the element of metaphor had a function of self validation and self victimisation of the creators. This was observed in the struggles of the ingroup and righteousness of their claims that were highlighted in the memes. Thus, the memes functioned in targeting critique toward the outgroup and validating views made by the ingroup.

5.4 Practical implications

The memes reflect how trans people are viewed within the context of transphobic communities on Instagram and the general community on Reddit. More broadly, the discourses on transgenderism reflect the extreme and transphobic attitudes towards trans people. The prevalence of such discourses could influence others attitudes towards trans people and reinforce stereotypes and marginalisation of trans communities. The views are antagonistic in nature and reflect the hate towards trans people.

The discourses indicate a polarisation of views. This might indicate the need to create discursive spaces that encourage a healthy exchange of views. Designers could address the presence of echo chambers and present more diverse views to audiences. Content curation could play a role that provides new content based on personalised preferences. There is some evidence that digital

interventions that increase social contact through brief exposure can influence transphobic attitudes (Amsalem et al., 2022). Attitude polarisation should be resisted with such counter strategies. Even though discourses reflect realities, they might also have the power to change existing narratives in society. Metaphors can play an important role in informing the public on trans narratives and changing views. At the same time, increasing literacy about the potential of memes is important. Viewers should be informed about the potential biased and deceptive presentation of information, if not mis or dis information.

The findings of this study indicate that covertness plays a large part in the way memes express views. However, this might imply that the moderation filters on Instagram overlook hate present in such memes. This indicates toward better solutions to the moderation of unnoticeable hate. Counter strategies can be formulated (DeCook, 2018) based on the elements presented in the study. On the other hand, an independent body to moderate platforms might need to intervene. Memes are being used to advertise, in political campaigns and propaganda. Memeing has turned into an industry (Lee & Hoh, 2021). Suppressing covert content might not be in the best interest of corporations as they can earn profits from it.

5.5 Theoretical implications

The methodology used in the study was largely derived from the work of Shifman (2013). The analytical approach was useful in understanding and deconstructing social issue memes. Thus, this study builds on the existing literature toward a concrete theory for analysing memes. Considering the study of memes as sites of discourse can be used to understand how complex viewpoints on issues are represented in simplistic ways. As a collective memes can represent a significant part of the discourse and reflect patterns. This changing way of communicating and interacting is worth investigating.

The study contributes to the existing body of research, confirming the use of memes to frame outgroups as the other. This study is the first to assess memes in the context of transgenderism. The memes were reflective of trends in public discussions surrounding trans people. Moreover, different positions of the transgenderism were found.

5.6 Limitations and recommendations

Using a purposive sampling approach and the snowballing method led to limitations of the study. Ideally, the supportive and non-supportive memes on both platforms would have been looked at. However, this was not prioritised and outside the limits of this study. Additionally, there was a lack of balance in pro and anti views. Nevertheless, the goal of the study to explore a range of views on transgenderism was met.

There were limitations of data collection on platforms. The choice of platforms including that of Reddit and Instagram, had restrictions. The memes from Reddit were collected using the API guidelines. These guidelines restrict the amount and memes that can be collected. The memes collected from Instagram were subject to the algorithm filtering. The effects of this filtering are unknown since Instagram does not disclose this information.

The Cohen's Kappa of the implicit content code was lower than the 0.6 threshold. Identifying the presence of implicit content relies on the researcher's knowledge of the context of the meme and discussions surrounding transgenderism. Thus, this value might be attributed to the unfamiliarity of the independent coder of the research context. Based on this assumption the code was included in the analysis. However, it may well be that this code is not reliable. This is something researchers should consider when relying on an independent coder.

Although there is some indication of overlap in the co-occurrence of codes, these findings must be approached with caution. The differences in frequencies of codes makes the categories difficult to compare. Percentages were used to account for the comparability of codes. However, the connections made would have to be tested before they can be asserted.

Using an inductive approach for the elements led to forced categories. Adjusting the codebook during the coding process should have been done. In this way, overlap between categories and new elements could have been included. Since, the codes were not mutually exclusive the generalisability of findings is limited. The complexity of views expressed in a single meme was underestimated. However, the findings support the use of the analytical framework as an application of the framework.

Future research could be based on quantitative assessments of memes. Employing a random sampling approach can be used to assess whether the results of this study are representative of the actual body of memes. It also might be interesting to look at memetic elements and how they are similarly used across different issues. Lastly, memes in real time as responses to societal developments can be explored. This can lead to more insight into the functions of memes. The memes in the dataset were reflective of progressions in the trans discourse. However, a more targeted approach might be more insightful.

5.7 Conclusion

In this study, the role of memes and its dimensions on shaping the discourse on transgenderism was investigated. Memes might be dismissed as silly commentaries. However, the findings from this study suggest they play a central role in shaping discourse. The memes analysed had evaluative, derogatory, self victimisation and self validating functions. Memes played a role in legitimising the ingroup and delegitimising the outgroup. The use of memetic elements of implicitness and metaphor was dominant. Implicitness led to obscuring the views being expressed and expressing them covertly as opposed to blatantly transphobic views. Metaphor was used to present negative connections to trans people. Societal implications for attitude polarisation and stigmatisation of trans people are relevant. The functions of memes still needs exploration. Understanding how memes surpass their common view as 'harmless' is crucial for emerging forms of societal discourse.

References

- Åkerlund, M. (2019). Representations of Trans People in Swedish Newspapers. *Journalism Studies*, 20(9), 1319–1338. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2018.1513816>
- Amsalem, D., Halloran, J., Penque, B., Celentano, J., & Martin, A. (2022). Effect of a Brief Social Contact Video on Transphobia and Depression-Related Stigma Among Adolescents: A Randomized Clinical Trial. *JAMA Network Open*, 5(2), e220376–e220376. <https://doi.org/10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2022.0376>
- Barker-Plummer, B. (2013). Fixing Gwen. *Feminist Media Studies*, 13(4), 710–724. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2012.679289>
- Bolognesi, M., & Vernillo, P. (2019). How abstract concepts emerge from metaphorical images: The metonymic way. *Language and Communication*, 69, 26–41. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.langcom.2019.05.003>
- Chen, S., Xiao, L., & Mao, J. (2021). Persuasion strategies of misinformation-containing posts in the social media. *Information Processing and Management*, 58(5), 102665. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ipm.2021.102665>
- DeCook, J. R. (2018). Memes and symbolic violence: #proudboys and the use of memes for propaganda and the construction of collective identity. *Learning, Media and Technology*, 43(4), 485–504. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17439884.2018.1544149>
- Dynel, M., & Poppi, F. I. M. (2021). Fidelis ad mortem: multimodal discourses and ideologies in Black Lives Matter and Blue Lives Matter (non)humorous memes. *Information Communication and Society*, 0(0), 1–27. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2021.1993958>
- Eslen-Ziya, H. (2020). Right-wing populism in new Turkey: Leading to all new grounds for troll science in gender theory. *HTS Theologiese Studies / Theological Studies*, 76(3), 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v76i3.6005>
- Fiers, R., & Muis, J. (2021). Dividing between ‘us’ and ‘them’: The framing of gender and sexuality by online followers of the dutch populist radical right. *European Journal of Politics and Gender*, 4(3), 381–402. <https://doi.org/10.1332/263169020X16039796162173>
- Fischer, M. (2016). #Free_CeCe: the material convergence of social media activism. *Feminist Media Studies*, 16(5), 755–771. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2016.1140668>
- Gabrielova, E. V., & Maksimenko, O. I. (2021). Implicit vs explicit evaluation: How english-speaking twitter users discuss migration problems. *Russian Journal of Linguistics*, 25(1), 105–124. <https://doi.org/10.22363/2687-0088-2021-25-1-105-124>
- Ghaffari, S. (2022). Discourses of celebrities on Instagram: digital femininity, self-representation and hate speech. *Critical Discourse Studies*, 19(2), 161–178. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17405904.2020.1839923>
- Hakoköngäs, E., Halmesvaara, O., & Sakki, I. (2020). Persuasion Through Bitter Humor: Multimodal Discourse Analysis of Rhetoric in Internet Memes of Two Far-Right Groups in Finland. *Social Media and Society*, 6(2). <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305120921575>
- Haslop, C., O'Rourke, F., & Southern, R. (2021). #NoSnowflakes: The toleration of harassment and an emergent gender-related digital divide, in a UK student online culture. *Convergence*, 27(5), 1418–1438. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354856521989270>

- Hecker, R. (2020). *Are you serious it is just a joke? : The influence of Internet memes on the perception and interpretation of online communication in social media*. <http://essay.utwente.nl/81615/>
- Huntington, H. E. (2016). Pepper Spray Cop and the American Dream: Using Synecdoche and Metaphor to Unlock Internet Memes' Visual Political Rhetoric. *Communication Studies*, 67(1), 77–93. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10510974.2015.1087414>
- Jenzen, O. (2017). Trans youth and social media: moving between counterpublics and the wider web. *Gender, Place & Culture*, 24(11), 1626–1641. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369X.2017.1396204>
- Jeong, S. (2008). Visual Metaphor in Advertising: Is the Persuasive Effect Attributable to Visual Argumentation or Metaphorical Rhetoric? *Journal of Marketing Communications*, 14(1), 59–73. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14697010701717488>
- KhosraviNik, M. (2018). Social Media Techno-Discursive Design, Affective Communication and Contemporary Politics. *Fudan Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences*, 11(4), 427–442. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40647-018-0226-y>
- Kjeldsen, J. E. (2017). What the Metaphor Could Not Tell Us About the Prime Minister's Bicycle Helmet. *Nordicom Review*, 21(2), 305–327. <https://doi.org/doi:10.1515/nor-2017-0387>
- Korkmazer, B., De Ridder, S., & Van Bauwel, S. (2020). Reporting on young people, sexuality, and social media: a discourse theoretical analysis. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 23(3), 323–339. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2019.1603365>
- L.C., W. (2021). Trump, memes and the Alt-right: Emotive and affective criticism and praise. *Russian Journal of Linguistics*, 25(3), 789–809. <https://doi.org/DOI:10.22363/2687-0088-2021-25-3-789-809>
- Ladegaard, H. J. (2021). Language, Discrimination and Employability: Employers' Othering and Racist Representations of Domestic Migrant Workers on Social Media. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 41(1), 97–118. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0261927X2111046644>
- Lee, S. Y., & Hoh, J. W. T. (2021). A critical examination of ageism in memes and the role of meme factories. *New Media & Society*, 14614448211047844. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448211047845>
- Legal LGBTI inclusivity is positively associated with acceptance of transgender and intersex people. (2020). In *Over the Rainbow? The Road to LGBTI Inclusion*. OECD. <https://doi.org/10.1787/3fcf856f-en>
- Literat, I., & van den Berg, S. (2019). Buy memes low, sell memes high: vernacular criticism and collective negotiations of value on Reddit's MemeEconomy. *Information, Communication & Society*, 22(2), 232–249. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2017.1366540>
- Lombardi Vallauri, E., Baranzini, L., Cimmino, D., Cominetti, F., Coppola, C., & Mannaioli, G. (2020). Implicit argumentation and persuasion - A measuring model. *Journal of Argumentation in Context*, 9. <https://doi.org/10.1075/jaic.00009.lom>
- Lomotey, B. A. (2020). Exploring Gender Ideologies in Social Media Jokes During the Coronavirus Pandemic. *Gender Studies*, 19(1), 65–89. <https://doi.org/doi:10.2478/genst-2021-0005>
- Makwana, A. P., Dhont, K., De keersmaecker, J., Akhlaghi-Ghaffarokh, P., Masure, M., & Roets, A. (2018). The Motivated Cognitive Basis of Transphobia: The Roles of Right-Wing Ideologies and Gender Role Beliefs. *Sex Roles*, 79(3), 206–217. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-017-0860-x>
- Malvini Redden, S., & Way, A. K. (2019). How social media discourses organize communication

- online: a multi-level discursive analysis of tensions and contradictions in teens' online experiences. *Communication Quarterly*, 67(5), 477–505.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/01463373.2019.1668440>
- Massanari, A. (2015). #Gamergate and The Fapping: How Reddit's algorithm, governance, and culture support toxic technocultures. *New Media & Society*, 19(3), 329–346.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444815608807>
- McLoughlin, L., & Southern, R. (2020). By any memes necessary? Small political acts, incidental exposure and memes during the 2017 UK general election. *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 23(1), 60–84. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1369148120930594>
- Nabi, R. L., Moyer-Gusé, E., & Byrne, S. (2007). All joking aside: A serious investigation into the persuasive effect of funny social issue messages. *Communication Monographs*, 74(1), 29–54.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/03637750701196896>
- Nissenbaum, A., & Shifman, L. (2015). Internet memes as contested cultural capital: The case of 4chan's /b/ board. *New Media & Society*, 19(4), 483–501.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444815609313>
- Patel, P. C., Wolfe, M. T., & Manikas, A. S. (2021). Logic is (Somewhat) Overrated: Image-Based Versus Concept-Based Rhetoric in Crowdfunding Narratives. *Entrepreneurship: Theory and Practice*, 45(3), 600–625. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1042258720976370>
- Pelletier-Gagnon, J., & Pérez Trujillo Diniz, A. (2018). Colonizing Pepe: Internet Memes as Cyberplaces. *Space and Culture*, 24(1), 4–18. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1206331218776188>
- Peters, C., & Allan, S. (2021). Weaponizing Memes: The Journalistic Mediation of Visual Politicization. *Digital Journalism*, 10(2), 217–229. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2021.1903958>
- Petrocelli, J. V. (2021). Bullshitting and persuasion: The persuasiveness of a disregard for the truth. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 60(4), 1464–1483. <https://doi.org/10.1111/bjso.12453>
- Piata, A. (2016). When metaphor becomes a joke: Metaphor journeys from political ads to internet memes. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 106, 39–56.
<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2016.10.003>
- Primo, D., Zamperini, A., & Testoni, I. (2019). Online reverse discourses? Claiming a space for trans voices. *Feminism & Psychology*, 29(4), 514–533. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0959353518819583>
- Riek, B. M., Mania, E. W., & Gaertner, S. L. (2006). Intergroup Threat and Outgroup Attitudes: A Meta-Analytic Review. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 10(4), 336–353.
https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327957pspr1004_4
- Ross, A. S., & Rivers, D. J. (2017). Digital cultures of political participation: Internet memes and the discursive delegitimization of the 2016 U.S Presidential candidates. *Discourse, Context and Media*, 16, 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dcm.2017.01.001>
- Scharp, K. M. (2021). Thematic Co-occurrence Analysis: Advancing a Theory and Qualitative Method to Illuminate Ambivalent Experiences. *Journal of Communication*, 71(4), 545–571.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/joc/jqab015>
- Shifman, L. (2013). Memes in a Digital World: Reconciling with a Conceptual Troublemaker. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 18(3), 362–377. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcc4.12013>
- Slothouber, V. (2020). (De)trans visibility: moral panic in mainstream media reports on de/retransition. *European Journal of English Studies*, 24(1), 89–99.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13825577.2020.1730052>

- Solomon, H. E., & Kurtz-Costes, B. (2018). Media's Influence on Perceptions of Trans Women. *Sexuality Research and Social Policy*, 15(1), 34–47. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13178-017-0280-2>
- Spencer, L. G. (2019). Bathroom Bills, Memes, and a Biopolitics of Trans Disposability. *Western Journal of Communication*, 83(5), 542–559. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10570314.2019.1615635>
- Vallauri, E. L., & Masia, V. (2014). Implicitness impact: Measuring texts. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 61, 161–184. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2013.09.010>
- Verloo, M., & van der Vleuten, A. (2020). Trans* Politics: Current Challenges and Contestations Regarding Bodies, Recognition, and Trans* Organising. *Politics and Governance; Vol 8, No 3 (2020): Trans* Politics: Current Challenges and Contestations* DO - 10.17645/Pag.V8i3.3651 . <https://www.cogitatiopress.com/politicsandgovernance/article/view/3651/3651>
- West, A., Wada, K., & Strong, T. (2021). Authenticating and Legitimizing Transgender and Gender Non-conforming Identities Online: A Discourse Analysis. *Journal of LGBTQ Issues in Counseling*, 15(2), 195–223. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15538605.2021.1914275>
- White-Farnham, J. (2019). Resisting “Let’s Eat Grandma”: The Rhetorical Potential of Grammar Memes. *Computers and Composition*, 52, 210–221. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compcom.2019.02.001>
- Yoon, I. (2016). Why is it not Just a Joke? Analysis of Internet Memes Associated with Racism and Hidden Ideology of Colorblindness. *Journal of Cultural Research in Art Education*, 33, 92–122. <http://www.jcrae.org/journal/index.php/jcrae/article/view/60>
- Young, D. G. (2008). The privileged role of the late-night joke: Exploring humor’s role in disrupting argument scrutiny. *Media Psychology*, 11(1), 119–142. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15213260701837073>
- Zappavigna, M. (2022). Social media quotation practices and ambient affiliation: Weaponising ironic quotation for humorous ridicule in political discourse. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 191, 98–112. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2021.12.003>
- Zeng, J., & Abidin, C. (2021). ‘#OkBoomer, time to meet the Zoomers’: studying the memefication of intergenerational politics on TikTok. *Information, Communication & Society*, 24(16), 2459–2481. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2021.1961007>

Appendices

Appendix A: R code

R Code for data collection from Reddit

```
###Retrieve packages###
```

```
library(Rcrawler)
```

```
library(Rcrawler)
```

```
###Authentication###
```

```
##Check if authentication was successful##
```

```
GET(url="https://www.reddit.com/r/traaaaaaannnnnnnnns/")
```

```
res = GET("https://www.reddit.com/r/traaaaaaannnnnnnnns/")
```

```
##Retrieve post links from meme page###
```

```
Rcrawler(Website = "https://www.reddit.com/r/TheTERFsCantMeme/", no_cores = 5, no_conn = 5,  
dataUrlfilter = "/comments/" )
```

```
###convert links to dataframe###
```

```
write.csv(INDEX, "C:\\Users\\vriti\\Documents\\R\\data.csv")
```

```
write.csv(INDEX, "C:\\Users\\vriti\\Documents\\R\\dataterfs.csv")
```

```
###Retrieve image url (of meme) from post link###
```

```
bnb <-
```

```
read_html("https://www.reddit.com/r/memes/comments/u8t2wl/get_that_man_some_rum/")
```

```
imageurl <- bnb %>% html_nodes(". _3m20hIKOhTTeMgPnfMbVNN > img:nth-child(1)") %>%  
html_attr("src")
```

```
head(imageurl)
```

```
imageurl
```

```
###download image file###
```

```
imageurl <- "https://i.redd.it/h0onwoxg00v81.jpg"
```

download.file(imageurl,"turtle1.jpg",mode = "wb")

Appendix B: Codebook

Table 14

Codebook

Non argumentative memetic elements	
bs frame	disregard for evidence (petro), ignoring, not caring about evidence or facts when making a point, for example: stating i dont care about the statistics on poverty, i still think its a choice ()
image based language	does it contain any of the words from RID primary list
emotional language	To invoke audiences’ positive, pleasant emotions and give good feelings , including happiness, joy, amusement, cheerfulness, zest, contentment, pride, respect, love, fondness, attraction, admiration, desire, hope, optimism, relief, trust. To invoke audiences’ negative, unpleasant emotions and cause discomfort , including sadness, compassion, pity, anger, fear, anxiety, guilt, shame, disgust, disappointment, regret. Appeals to surprise, curiosity, or ridicule
Argumentative memetic elements	
Humour	Incongruity between what is expected and what is presented is an inherent element of humors, statements or content intended to be funny/humorous (jokes, not being serious, wordplay, etc)
irony	expressed through two polar assessments of the same object in a single utterance or what is expected differs radically from what is actually the case
implicitness	
implicit encoding of content	implicature : contents which are not explicitly expressed but inferable. <i>for example</i> : person1: we finally have a new government and person2: you know, the average age of minsiters is 78 (implies the government is old/old fashioned)
	vagueness : understating mostly, but not exclusively, through approximating devices/bushes: more or less, kind of, referring to the fuzziness of the referential and propositional content of the utterance, <i>for example</i> : paradise hotel: experience the best--leaves the details implicit, allows readers to infer unspecified state, and makes it possible to convey what could not be asserted and convince about it
implicit encoding of responsibility	encode content explicitly but leave the assumption of responsibility for the content on the part of the speakers. Pressupositions : conceal the act of proposing some content as true, as if the speaker has noc ommitment to transferring tha tcontent. not that the speaker wants the adresse to believe something, but speaker believes that the addressee already knows and agrees with that something, presuppositions allow offensive contents to the addresse to go unchallenged, for example: stop watching, start

	living, encodes argument not as introduced by the author but rather as already available
Metaphor	
Coding Scheme ICM Type	Metonymical relationships
Sign ICM s	FORM FOR CONCEPT: example dollar can represent concept of american currency, a form can be associated with multiple concepts, but not vice versa
Whole ICM and its part	PART FOR THE WHOLE; WHOLE FOR THE PART:PART OF A THING FOR THE WHOLE THING. This type of metonymy is also called synecdoche, england can refer to whole of uk
	SALIENT PROPERTY FOR CATEGORY: The first semantic relation is based on the mechanisms by which a prototypical property can be used to pinpoint to an entire category. How do i find mr right?; CATEGORY FOR SALIENT PROPERTY: Conversely, in the second metonymy an entire category is used to refer to one property or more. boys will be boys
	MEMBER FOR CATEGORY : kind-of-relation, aspirin is a type of pain relieving tablet
Parts of an ICM	SUB-EVENT FOR EVENT: in which each event is composed by individual actions and time sequences, which may individually stand for the whole event mary speaks spanish encompasses, listening, reading, writing
	AGENT FOR ACTION: to author a new book; ACTION FOR RESULT: 2. the noun production used to designate the output of a process, rather than the action of producing it); ; OBJECT FOR ACTION/FUNCTION: (e.g., in "to dust the room", the noun dust is used as a verb to encode the action performed to remove dust10);; INSTRUMENT FOR AGENT: (e.g., "he is a good pen", where the reference to the instrument used to perform the action enables the reference to the agent involved in the action
	CONTAINER FOR CONTENT: which is built on the connection between a physical and conceptual space and the things or entities contained therein. A typical example is summarized in the expression "The bottle is sour" (Radden and Kövecses, 1999, 41), where the container stands for the milk contained within.
Thematic codes	
appearance/biological features	commenting or addressing transpeople's appearance or traits
gender concept	confusing or comparing the concepts of gender to biological sex or sexuality (identifying as a man = being biologically male or being gay; or saying one is better than the other)
ignoring or dismissing	with an underlying negative or neutral or ambivalent attitude, may be intentional or unintentional
denial/excluders	denial or exclusion of transness
hypocritical	pointing out hypocrisy (not practicing what you preach or doing the opposite)
mocking/caricatures	to treat with contempt or ridicule (mocking him as a mama's boy) or mimicking (mocking the oldman's gait)

predatory/threat	views the object of scrutiny as a threat or predator that could cause harm of sorts
posers	transpeople are opportunistic posers: men dressing as women to benefit themselves or vice versa or transallies/society who reward transness, might also imply that being trans is a choice
negative portrayal	transpeople are depicted as overly demanding or overreactive or overdramatic
trivialising	to make transpeople/issues seem less important or significant than it really is
experiences/norms	describes experience or norms of the community or individual of a community
incomprehension	good faith or genuine incomprehension or confusion
Regressive Imagery Dictionary Categories and Sample Words	
CATEGORY	SAMPLE WORDS
PRIMARY PROCESS	
Drive	
Oral	Breast, drink, lip
Anal	Sweat, rot, dirty
Sex	Lover, kiss, naked
Sensation	
General Sensation	Fair, charm, beauty
Touch	Touch, thick, stroke
Taste	Sweet, taste, bitter
Odor	Breath, perfume, scent
Sound	Hear, voice, sound
Vision	See, light, look
Cold	Cold, winter, snow
Hard	Rock, stone, hard
Soft	Soft, gentle, tender
Defensive Symbolization	
Passivity	Die, lie, bed
Voyage	Wander, desert, beyond
Random Movement	Wave, roll, spread
Diffusion	Shade, shadow, cloud
Chaos	Wild, crowd, ruin
Regressive Cognition	
Unknown	Secret, strange, unknown
Timelessness	Eternal, forever, immortal
Consciousness Alteration	Dream, sleep, wake
Brink-passage	Road, wall, door
Narcissism	Eye, heart, hand
Concreteness	At, where, over
Icarian Imagery	
Ascend	Rise, fly, throw

Height	Up, sky, high
Descend	Fall, drop, sink
Depth	Down, deep, beneath
Fire	Sun, fire, flame
Water	Sea, water, stream

Appendix C: Reliability Analysis

Table 15

Reliability Analysis with Cohen's Kappa and significance levels

Code name	Cohen's Kappa	Significance
implicit content	0.444	0.038
irony	1	0.001
humor	0.727	0.003
emotive	0.815	0.001
image based	0	-
bs frame	0	-
Mocking/caricatures	0.667	0.006
Denial/excluders	0.634	0.008
Experiences/norms	0.815	0.001
Trivialising	0.659	0.011
Ignoring/dismissing	1	0.001
Negative portrayal	0.815	0.001
posers	0.634	0.008

Predatory/threat	1	0.001
hypocritical	0	1
Appearance/biological features	0.667	0.006
Gender concept	0.842	0.001
Incomprehension	0.328	0.086
implicit res	0.609	0.01
sign	0.609	0.01
whole	0.595	0.012
parts	0	-
