

The Influence of Meme Content Exposure on Increasing Social Sensitivity and Critical Thinking Among College Students in Semarang City

Thuba Fahmi Ubaidillah¹, Made Dwi Adnjani²

Faculty of Communication Science^{1,2}, Sultan Agung Islamic University^{1,2}

32802200004@std.unissula.ac.id¹, made@unissula.ac.id²

Abstract

The development of social media has established memes as a dominant form of digital communication consumed by students. This study aims to analyze the influence of meme content exposure on the social sensitivity and critical thinking abilities of students in Semarang City. Using a positivistic paradigm, this research tests causal relationships based on Uses and Gratifications and Media Exposure theories. The research method utilizes a quantitative approach with a survey of 400 student respondents in Semarang selected through purposive sampling. Primary data were collected via questionnaires and analyzed using simple linear regression with IBM SPSS version 27 software. The results show that meme exposure has a positive and significant effect on students' social sensitivity (Sig. 0.000 < 0.05) with a regression coefficient of 0.720 and a coefficient of determination (R^2) of 0.493. Furthermore, meme exposure also has a positive and significant effect on students' critical thinking (Sig. 0.000 < 0.05) with a regression coefficient of 0.531 and an R^2 value of 0.281. These findings prove that memes are not merely entertainment media but are digital instruments capable of increasing social awareness and critical mindsets. The researcher recommends that higher education institutions optimize digital literacy so that students can utilize creative content more reflectively and wisely.

Keywords: Meme Exposure, Social Sensitivity, Critical Thinking, Uses and Gratifications, Media Exposure.

Abstrak

Perkembangan media sosial telah menjadikan meme sebagai salah satu bentuk komunikasi digital yang dominan dikonsumsi oleh mahasiswa. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis pengaruh terpapar konten meme terhadap kepekaan sosial dan kemampuan berpikir kritis (*critical thinking*) mahasiswa di Kota Semarang. Dengan menggunakan paradigma positivistik, penelitian ini menguji hubungan sebab-akibat berdasarkan landasan teori *Uses and Gratifications* serta *Media Exposure*. Metode penelitian yang digunakan adalah pendekatan kuantitatif dengan metode survei terhadap 400 responden mahasiswa di Kota Semarang yang dipilih melalui teknik *purposive sampling*. Data primer dikumpulkan melalui penyebaran kuesioner dan dianalisis menggunakan uji regresi linear sederhana dengan bantuan perangkat lunak IBM SPSS versi 27. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa terpapar meme berpengaruh positif dan signifikan terhadap kepekaan sosial mahasiswa (Sig. 0,000 < 0,05) dengan koefisien regresi sebesar 0,720 dan nilai koefisien determinasi (R^2) sebesar 0,493. Selain itu, terpapar meme juga berpengaruh positif dan signifikan terhadap *critical thinking* mahasiswa (Sig. 0,000 < 0,05) dengan koefisien regresi 0,531 dan nilai R^2 sebesar 0,281. Temuan ini membuktikan bahwa meme bukan sekadar media hiburan, melainkan instrumen digital yang mampu meningkatkan kesadaran sosial dan pola pikir kritis. Peneliti merekomendasikan perguruan tinggi untuk mengoptimalkan literasi digital agar mahasiswa dapat memanfaatkan konten kreatif secara lebih reflektif dan bijak.

Kata Kunci: Terpapar Meme, Kepekaan Sosial, Critical Thinking, Uses and Gratifications, Media Exposure.

INTRODUCTION

The development of digital technology has transformed how humans communicate, obtain information, and participate in social life. In today's digital era, the flow of information moves very rapidly through various social media platforms such as Instagram, X (Twitter), and TikTok. According to (Ibrahim, 2024), social media plays a vital role in everyday community life regardless of background. According to (Kemp, 2024), social media usage data from The Digital 2024 Indonesia shows that more than 143 million Indonesians are active social media users.

One of the most popular forms of communication among the younger generation is the meme. Memes have become a digital cultural phenomenon that is not only entertainment-oriented but also a means of conveying social, political, and educational messages. According to (Dawkins, 2017), a meme is a unit of cultural information that is infectious and evolves through a process of imitation between individuals, much like how genes spread biologically. This phenomenon shows that memes have become an effective, concise, and emotional new form of communication. Memes are capable of conveying messages in a simple yet powerful way, making them easier to understand and accept compared to long news articles or academic texts. Data from (Anderson et al., 2023) reveals that more than 50% of young users in the 22–24 age range in America use social media as their primary news source. With these indicators, meme content has great potential to become a significant tool for education and information dissemination. The combination of visuals and text found in memes makes them a multimodal medium capable of increasing understanding, memory retention, and user participation in social discussions.

This trend is increasingly visible through the rise of informative meme-style content or light, entertaining news presented by popular digital accounts such as Folkative. This type of content combines visual elements, brief text, and a light delivery style similar to informative memes, making it easy to attract attention and spread quickly among young people. Many students now trust information from light visual formats like this more than official news or long journalistic articles, as they are considered more relevant, fast, and easy to understand. This phenomenon indicates a shift in information consumption patterns from mainstream media to visual and humor-based social media. From a communication perspective, this signifies that memes function as a new form of mass communication that can shape social perceptions and opinions.

However, the positive potential of memes is also accompanied by risks. UNESCO notes that the reading interest rate of the Indonesian people is very low, reaching only 0.001%. This means that out of every 1,000 Indonesians, only one person has a routine reading habit (Indrasari, 2024). Memes that were originally intended for entertainment often experience a distortion of meaning, oversimplification of facts, or even misinformation in spreading news. This condition has the potential to influence ways of thinking and form public opinion incorrectly. This phenomenon poses an important challenge in the context of digital communication, especially for students as an educated group of society active in media culture.

According to (Syirfan et al., 2023), it is shown that memes can be used as an educational medium in the socialization of anti-corruption values to the younger generation. Meanwhile, a study from (Prihantoro et al., 2024) regarding the Influence of Political Meme Exposure, Information Quality, and Digital Literacy on First-Time Voter Attitudes proves that exposure to memes and digital literacy has a real influence on the formation of students' social and political attitudes. Findings by (Ibrahim, 2024) also explain that social media algorithms

determine the types of memes that frequently appear on a user's timeline, which then influences how they understand certain social issues. In addition, research from (Fachri Aziza, 2019) found a positive relationship between information literacy and Critical Thinking disposition of students on social media, emphasizing the importance of critical thinking skills in assessing digital content. In the context of higher education, (Wijanarka, 2023) shows that critical thinking training for Generation Z students is highly necessary to face the rapid flow of information and viral content that is not necessarily factual.

Memes do not only play a role as an entertainment communication tool, but also as a medium for social reflection capable of awakening students' social sensitivity and critical thinking (Critical Thinking) skills. Through memes containing social, political, or humanitarian issues, students can learn to recognize social realities, evaluate messages, and develop empathetic attitudes toward their surrounding environment. On the other hand, the process of interpreting meaning in memes demands critical thinking skills ranging from analyzing messages and identifying biases to evaluating the truth of the information contained therein.

Semarang City, as one of the centers of higher education in Indonesia, particularly in Central Java, has a population of students who are active in using social media and engaged in digital culture. Based on data from (Andreas & Dewi, 2022), it is shown that there are two indicators with the lowest scores regarding the digital literacy conditions of students in Semarang: the ability to trace the identity and track record of information authors (3.29) and the ability to recognize how to verify the identity of individuals interacting in the virtual world (3.52). The low scores in these two aspects contribute to the low average score for information competence and data literacy, which stands at 3.86.

Thus, although memes and similar content are proven to attract attention and increase student engagement with social issues, there is still a gap in local research that quantitatively measures how the dynamics of meme usage actually affect students' social sensitivity and critical thinking abilities. Semarang City, as one of the centers of higher education in Indonesia, becomes an interesting context to study, given the large number of students active in digital and creative culture on social media.

Therefore, this study aims to empirically analyze the influence of meme usage dynamics on the social sensitivity and critical thinking of students in Semarang City, as well as to provide an overview of how digital culture can play a role in shaping the social awareness and critical mindset of the younger generation in the information era.

Meme as Digital Communication

An internet meme is a unit of cultural information in the form of text, images, or videos that spreads, replicates, and transforms rapidly from one user to another through a process of imitation in cyberspace (Dawkins, 2017). In the landscape of digital communication, memes have mutated from mere visual entertainment or light humor (escapism) into a new form of cultural language used to express public opinion (Milner, 2016). As a multimodal medium that combines visual elements and concise text, memes possess a unique ability to package complex social narratives, political criticism, and humanitarian issues into persuasive and easily digestible satirical messages for the public, especially the younger generation (Wiggins, 2019).

Media Exposure Theory

Media Exposure Theory focuses on measuring the intensity of involvement or interaction between the audience and the messages conveyed by the media (Hadi et al., 2019). The conceptualization of media

exposure does not merely look at the physical presence of the media, but is operationalized through three main measurement aspects, namely:

1. **Frequency:** How often students access or view meme content within a certain timeframe on social media platforms (such as Instagram, TikTok, or X).
2. **Duration:** How much time students spend in a single interaction session consuming meme content.
3. **Attention:** The level of awareness, cognitive focus, and depth of message absorption by students when deciphering the meaning behind the text and visuals of the meme.

Based on the core assumptions of this theory, repeated exposure to informational stimuli (high exposure) accompanied by high attention will gradually affect the cognitive and affective aspects of the audience, which in this study manifests as the formation of social sensitivity and sharp critical thinking (Hadi et al., 2019).

Uses and Gratifications (U&G) Theory

The Uses and Gratifications (U&G) Theory explains media consumption behavior by positioning the audience as active, selective, and goal-directed agents in choosing media to fulfill their psychological and social needs (Katz et al., n.d.). In this study, meme consumption among college students is triggered by the search for satisfaction (gratifications sought) driven by two dominant motives:

1. **Cognitive Motives:** Students actively utilize memes as an alternative source of digital information. The characteristics of memes that employ visual metaphors and satire are sought after to help them understand social realities and current issues in a faster, more casual, and flexible manner compared to consuming rigid conventional news (Sundar & Limperos, 2013).
2. **Social Integration Motives:** Memes function as digital social capital. Students consume and share memes to interact, build emotional closeness with their peer group, and maintain self-relevance to stay connected within their community communication networks (Whiting & Williams, 2013).

Critical Thinking in Digital Media

Critical thinking in the digital ecosystem is defined as a higher-order thinking skill that involves activities such as message deconstruction, argument analysis, source credibility evaluation, context interpretation, and critical reflection on information scattered across social media (Potter, 2021). Amid the rapid flow of digital information that is prone to oversimplification of facts and misinformation, critical thinking skills act as a protective filter. This ability encourages students to be skeptical and not immediately trust the visual surface of a piece of content; instead, it prompts them to actively seek text validation, analyze biases, and distinguish between mere humor-based opinions and objective facts.

Conceptual Relationship Between Variables

Theoretically and methodologically, the relationship between the independent and dependent variables in this study is built through the integration of an analytical framework from the powerful media effects paradigm mediated by audience activity. The operational flow of thought can be illustrated as follows:

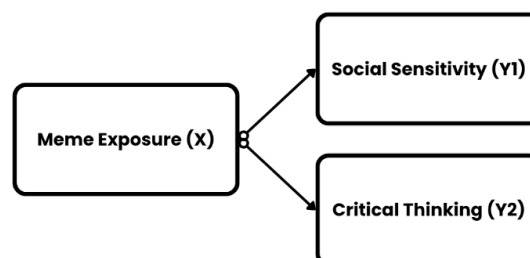


Figure 1 Conceptual Relationship Between Variables

1. **The Relationship between Meme Exposure (X) and Social Sensitivity (Y1):** The intensity of media exposure (X) measured by the high frequency, duration, and attention students give to memes containing social issues acts as a powerful affective stimulus. When students repeatedly witness representations of social inequality, humanitarian issues, or injustice through satirical meme portraits, the stimulus activates their empathy, concern, and emotional responsiveness (Y1) toward the real environment around them (Hadi et al., 2019).
2. **The Relationship between Meme Exposure (X) and Critical Thinking (Y2):** This relationship is explained in depth through the process of fulfilling cognitive motives within U&G Theory. Because memes often hide their true meaning behind layers of irony, humor, and visual ambiguity, students cannot understand memes passively. To grasp the implied meaning, students' mental processes are forced to perform cognitive calculations, analyze textual contradictions, and decode satirical messages (Cannizzaro, 2016). This activity of distinguishing between pure humor and data-based critique simultaneously trains, stimulates, and hones the sharpness of students' critical thinking skills (Y2) in processing digital media (Sundar & Limperos, 2013).

Hypotheses

Based on the background of the problem, literature review, and theoretical framework presented previously, the hypotheses in this study are formulated as follows:

- H1** : There is a positive and significant influence of meme content exposure (X) on increasing the social sensitivity (Y1) of students in Semarang City.
- H2** : There is a positive and significant influence of meme content exposure (X) on the critical thinking ability (Y2) of students in Semarang City.
- H3** : There is no significant influence of meme content exposure (X) on increasing the social sensitivity (Y1) of students in Semarang City.
- H4** : There is no significant influence of meme content exposure (X) on the critical thinking ability (Y2) of students in Semarang City.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses a quantitative approach with an explanative research type. According to (Sugiyono, 2016), quantitative methods are used to examine specific populations or samples with the aim of testing established hypotheses. The explanative approach was chosen to explain the causal relationship or influence between the independent variable, namely meme content exposure (X), on two dependent variables, namely social sensitivity (Y1) and critical thinking (Y2).

The population in this study consists of all active students in Semarang City, totaling 269,043 individuals (Syakilah et al., 2025). Given the large population size, sampling was conducted using the Slovin formula at a 5% significance level, resulting in a total sample of 400 respondents. The sampling technique applied is purposive sampling, which is a technique for determining samples based on specific considerations (Sugiyono, 2020). The criteria for respondents in this study include: (1) active students at higher education institutions in Semarang City, (2) aged 18–25 years, and (3) actively accessing meme content on social media with a minimum duration of two hours per day.

Primary data were collected through the distribution of online questionnaires using Google Forms. The research instrument was prepared using a Likert scale with a range of 1 to 5 (Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree). The variable of meme content exposure is measured through indicators of frequency, duration, and attention based on Media Exposure theory (Hadi

et al., 2019). The social sensitivity variable is measured through dimensions of empathy and responsiveness to social issues, while the critical thinking variable is measured through indicators of interpretation, argument analysis, and self-reflection (Potter, 2021).

Before data analysis was conducted, the research instrument was declared valid and reliable through instrument testing. Furthermore, hypothesis testing was performed using simple linear regression analysis to measure the magnitude of the influence of variable X on Y1 and Y2 partially. The entire statistical data processing process was carried out with the assistance of IBM SPSS version 27 software.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This research involved 400 student respondents in Semarang City, collected over the period from February 13 to March 5, 2026, with a total duration of 3 weeks. Based on gender, the respondents were dominated by females, totaling 212 students (53%). The majority of respondents were in the 21–23 age range (48.5%) and were from the class of 2022 (29.5%). Regarding digital activity, the TikTok (31.5%) and Instagram (31.3%) platforms were the most frequently used social media for accessing memes, with an average daily usage duration of 3–5 hours (48.3%).

Validity Test

The validity test was conducted to ensure that each statement item in the questionnaire is capable of accurately measuring the research variables. This test utilizes the Pearson Product Moment correlation technique by comparing the rcalculated value against the rtable value. With a total of 400 respondents (n) 400 and a significance level of 0.01, the established rtable value is 0.128

Tabel 1. 1 Validity Test

Variables	No	r Count	r Table	Information
Meme Exposure (X)	X1.1	0,697	0,128	Valid
	X1.2	0,826	0,128	Valid
	X1.3	0,746	0,128	Valid
	X1.4	0,849	0,128	Valid
	X1.5	0,773	0,128	Valid
	X1.6	0,824	0,128	Valid
	X1.7	0,844	0,128	Valid
	X1.8	0,716	0,128	Valid
	X1.9	0,825	0,128	Valid
Social Sensitivity (Y1)	Y1.1	0,680	0,128	Valid
	Y1.2	0,777	0,128	Valid
	Y1.3	0,773	0,128	Valid
	Y1.4	0,812	0,128	Valid
	Y1.5	0,844	0,128	Valid
	Y1.6	0,776	0,128	Valid
	Y1.7	0,814	0,128	Valid
	Y1.8	0,855	0,128	Valid
	Y1.9	0,834	0,128	Valid
	Y1.10	0,801	0,128	Valid

Critical Thinking (Y2)	Y1.11	0,754	0,128	Valid
	Y1.12	0,737	0,128	Valid
	Y2.1	0,700	0,128	Valid
	Y2.2	0,716	0,128	Valid
	Y2.3	0,725	0,128	Valid
	Y2.4	0,746	0,128	Valid
	Y2.5	0,735	0,128	Valid
	Y2.6	0,731	0,128	Valid
	Y2.7	0,822	0,128	Valid
	Y2.8	0,781	0,128	Valid
	Y2.9	0,793	0,128	Valid
	Y2.10	0,795	0,128	Valid
	Y2.11	0,729	0,128	Valid
	Y2.12	0,740	0,128	Valid

Source: Data processed based on the results of the research questionnaire, April 2026

Based on the data processing results, all statement items for the variables Meme Exposure (X), Social Sensitivity (Y1), and Critical Thinking (Y2) are declared valid. This is evidenced by the rcalculated value for each statement being greater than 0.128. For example, in variable X, the highest correlation value is found in item X1.4 at 0.849, while in variable Y1, item Y1.8 reaches 0.855, and in variable Y2, item Y2.7 is 0.822. Thus, the entire instrument is feasible for use in the next stage of analysis.

Reliability Test

The reliability test was conducted using the Cronbach's Alpha method to measure the consistency of the instrument. A variable is declared reliable if the Cronbach's Alpha value is greater than 0.60.

Tabel 1. 2 Reliability Test

NO	Variables	Cronbach Alpha Value	Information
1	Meme Exposure (X)	0,925	Reliable
2	Social Sensitivity(Y1)	0,944	Reliable
3	Critical Thinking (Y2)	0,930	Reliable

Source: Data processed based on the results of the research questionnaire, April 2026

The test results show that the Meme Exposure variable has a value of 0.925, Social Sensitivity is 0.944, and Critical Thinking is 0.930. These values are well above the minimum threshold, indicating that this research instrument has a very good level of consistency.

Hypothesis Testing and Simple Regression Analysis

This research utilizes simple linear regression analysis to test the influence between variables partially.

The Influence of Meme Exposure (X) on Social Sensitivity (Y1)

Tabel 1. 3 The Influence of Meme Exposure (X) on Social Sensitivity (Y1)

Coefficients^a

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	18.316	1.247		
	Terpaan Meme	.720	.037	.702	19.671
					<.001

a. Dependent Variable: Kepekaan Sosial

Based on the t-test results, a t-calculated value of 19.671 was obtained with a significance value of 0.000. Since the significance value is < 0.05 , H1 is accepted, which means that meme exposure has a significant effect on students' social sensitivity. The resulting regression equation is $Y1 = 18.316 + 0.720X$. The coefficient of determination (R^2) value of 0.493 indicates that meme exposure contributes 49.3% to the variation in social sensitivity.

The Influence of Meme Exposure (X) on Critical Thinking (Y2)

Tabel 1. 4 The Influence of Meme Exposure (X) on Critical Thinking (Y2)

Coefficients ^a						
		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
Model		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	30.263	1.449		20.880	<.001
	Terpaan Meme	.531	.043	.530	12.479	<.001

a. Dependent Variable: Critical Thinking

The t-test results show a t-calculated value of 12.479 with a significance of 0.000. This means that H2 is accepted, indicating a significant influence of meme exposure on students' critical thinking skills. The regression equation is $Y2 = 30.263 + 0.531X$. An R^2 value of 0.281 indicates that variable X is able to explain 28.1% of the variation in variable Y2.

DISCUSSION

Analysis of Meme Content Exposure on Social Sensitivity

Based on the results of the first hypothesis testing, it was found that meme content exposure has a positive and significant influence on the social sensitivity of students in Semarang City. The coefficient of determination (R^2) value of 0.493 indicates that nearly half (49.3%) of the variation in students' social sensitivity is influenced by how intensely they are exposed to memes on social media. This is in line with the Media Exposure theory proposed by (Hadi et al., 2019), which suggests that high frequency and duration of media consumption will shape the audience's perceptions and attitudes toward the surrounding reality.

In more detail, descriptive data shows that the empathy indicator is the dominant factor being stimulated. As many as 67.5% of respondents stated that they feel emotionally touched when seeing memes that raise humanitarian issues or social injustice. Memes, through a combination of visuals and satirical text, are able to simplify complex social issues into "biting" and easily digestible messages. This phenomenon proves that memes are not just digital comedy, but rather an instrument of "social reflection" capable of awakening the concern of students in Semarang City regarding issues occurring in their surrounding environment.

Based on the empirical findings, meme content exposure has a positive and significant influence on the social sensitivity of college students in Semarang City. This relationship is robustly supported by the t-test results, which yielded a t-calculated value of 19.671 with a significance level of 0.000 (< 0.05). Furthermore, the coefficient of determination (R^2) value

of 0.493 indicates that meme exposure contributes 49.3% to the variance in students' social sensitivity. This means nearly half of the changes in students' social awareness and empathy are driven by how intensely they interact with memes on social media.

Descriptive data from the questionnaire heavily reinforces this finding, particularly within the empathy indicator. A striking 67.5% of respondents explicitly agreed that they feel emotionally touched when viewing memes that highlight humanitarian crises or social injustices. When analyzed through Media Exposure Theory, the high frequency and duration of students' interaction with memes where 48.3% of them spend 3 to 5 hours daily on TikTok and Instagram act as a continuous affective stimulus. Satirical text combined with sharp visuals effectively compresses complex socio-political issues into a "biting," highly relatable format. Consequently, frequent exposure backed by strong user attention successfully translates digital humor into a powerful instrument for social reflection, awakening students' responsiveness toward the real-world issues happening around them.

Analysis of Meme Content Exposure on Critical Thinking

The research results for the second hypothesis also show a positive and significant influence on critical thinking skills with a contribution of 28.1%. Although the contribution figure is lower than that of social sensitivity, this finding remains crucial. This indicates that the cognitive processes of students when consuming memes involve a fairly high level of mental activity.

Within the dimension of argument analysis, as many as 74.5% of students claimed they try to distinguish between opinion and fact in the memes they see. This shows that the audience does not blindly accept the existing messages but instead carries out an evaluation process. (Potter, 2021) explains that critical thinking in media literacy involves the ability to deconstruct message compositions. Memes, which often contain irony, metaphors, and subtle satire, force students to engage in deep thinking to grasp the implied meaning of the meme creator. The low digital literacy scores of Semarang students regarding the aspect of verifying the author's identity (Andreas & Dewi, 2022) seem to be starting to be compensated by the habits of students who are becoming skeptical and critical when viewing satirical content on social media.

The statistical analysis for the second hypothesis also confirms a positive and significant influence of meme exposure on students' critical thinking skills. The regression analysis produced a $t_{\text{calculated}}$ value of 12.479 ($p = 0.000 < 0.05$) with an R^2 value of 0.281. Although the variance explained (28.1%) is lower than that of social sensitivity, this finding remains highly critical as it proves that consuming memes is far from a passive mental activity.

The descriptive data highlights that within the argument analysis dimension, 74.5% of the surveyed students claimed that they actively try to distinguish between mere opinion and objective facts when looking at a meme. This quantitative finding perfectly aligns with Uses and Gratifications Theory, specifically regarding Cognitive Motives. Because memes inherently operate on layers of irony, metaphors, double meanings, and subtle sarcasm, they do not present information on a silver platter. To successfully "get the joke" or grasp the implied meaning, students are forced to engage in higher-order cognitive processing. They must deconstruct the message composition, identify structural biases, and evaluate the underlying truth of the text. Therefore, the active pursuit of information via memes serves as an intellectual catalyst, progressively sharpening students' skepticism and analytical minds in the digital ecosystem.

Integration of Uses and Gratifications Theory in Meme Culture

Theoretically, the overall results of this study reinforce the assumptions of the Uses and Gratifications theory. Students in Semarang City do not position themselves as passive audiences. They actively choose meme content (TikTok 31.5% and Instagram 31.3%) to fulfill cognitive motives (seeking information) and social integration motives (to stay relevant with current issues).

The utilization of memes as an alternative information medium serves as a solution amidst the low reading interest of the Indonesian people (0.001%). The ability of memes to trigger emotional engagement while simultaneously providing intellectual challenges makes them a highly effective communication medium. This finding confirms that the higher the attention and frequency of students interacting with high-quality meme content, the more refined their analytical sharpness and social concern become in facing information dynamics in the digital era.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the data analysis and discussion presented, this study concludes that there is a positive and significant influence between meme content exposure and the social sensitivity of students in Semarang City. This is evidenced by a significance value of 0.000 and a variable contribution of 49.3%, indicating that the more intensely students are exposed to memes containing social issues, the more their levels of empathy and responsiveness toward social welfare phenomena in their surrounding environment will increase. Memes are no longer merely entertainment content; instead, they have transformed into effective social reflection instruments in awakening the emotional concern of the younger generation.

In addition to the affective aspect, this research also proves that meme content exposure has a positive and significant effect on students' critical thinking skills, with a contribution of 28.1%. These findings indicate that the process of interpreting satirical messages, metaphors, and irony contained in memes acts as a cognitive stimulus that trains students to analyze arguments more deeply and objectively. Theoretically, the results of this study reinforce the relevance of Media Exposure and Uses and Gratifications theories, where students actively utilize memes as alternative information media to fulfill cognitive and social integration needs amidst the low interest in reading conventional texts.

REFERENCES

- Anderson, M., Faverio, M., & Gottfried, J. (2023). *Teens, Social Media and Technology 2023* YouTube, TikTok, Snapchat and Instagram remain the most widely used online platforms among U.S. teens. Pew Research Center.
<https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2023/12/11/teens-social-media-and-technology-2023/>
- Andreas, R. S., & Dewi, E. A. S. K. (2022). *Laporan Penelitian Indeks Literasi Digital Remaja Kota Semarang*. 1–23. [https://repository.unika.ac.id/32728/1/Laporan Penelitian Indeks Literasi Digital Remaja Kota Semarang.pdf](https://repository.unika.ac.id/32728/1/Laporan%20Penelitian%20Indeks%20Literasi%20Digital%20Remaja%20Kota%20Semarang.pdf)
- Cannizzaro, S. (2016). Internet memes as internet signs: A semiotic view of digital culture. *Sign Systems Studies*, 44, 562–586. <https://api.semanticscholar.org/CorpusID:53374867>
- Dawkins, R. (2017). *The Selfish Gene: 40th Anniversary edition* (Oxford Landmark Science

- 4th Revised edition). Gramedia.
- Fachri Aziza, D. (2019). Hubungan antara Critical Thinking Disposition dengan Information Literacy di Media Sosial pada Mahasiswa. *Cognicia*, 7(2), 270–280.
<http://ejournal.umm.ac.id/index.php/cognicia>
- Hadi, I. P., Wahjudianata, M., & Indrayani, I. I. (2019). Komunikasi Massa. In *ペインクリニック学会治療指針 2* (1st ed.). CV. PENERBIT QIARA MEDIA.
https://repository.petra.ac.id/19098/1/Publikasi1_96022_7071.pdf
- Ibrahim, R. (2024). Dari Meme Ke Makna : Jembatan Menuju Literasi Melalui Algoritma Media Sosial. *Jurnal Kajian Keislaman Multi-Perspektif*, 5(1), 80–97.
<https://doi.org/10.22515/literasi.v5i1.11018>
- Indrasari, Y. (2024). *UNESCO Sebut Minat Baca Orang Indonesia Masih Rendah*. RRI.
<https://rri.co.id/daerah/649261/unesco-sebut-minat-baca-orang-indonesia-masih-rendah>
- Katz, E., Blumler, J. G., & Gurevitch, M. (n.d.). USES AND GRATIFICATIONS. *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, 37(4), 509–523.
https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/2747854.pdf?refreqid=fastly-default%3Afbba045b38cf6f4392f7440d78101a8f&ab_segments=&initiator=&acceptTC=1
- Kemp, S. (2024). *Penggunaan internet di Indonesia pada tahun 2024*. Global Digital Reports. <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2024-indonesia>
- Milner, R. M. (2016). *The World Made Meme: Public Conversations and Participatory Media*. The MIT Press. <https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/9780262034999.001.0001>
- Potter, W. J. (2021). Media Literacy. In *SAGE Publications, Inc* (10th ed.). SAGE Publications Ltd. https://uk.sagepub.com/sites/default/files/upm-assets/117120_book_item_117120.pdf
- Prihantoro, E., Widyaningsih, W., & Ramadhani, R. W. (2024). PENGARUH TERPAAN MEME POLITIK, KUALITAS INFORMASI, DAN LITERASI DIGITAL TERHADAP SIKAP PEMILIH PEMULA DI JABODETABEK. *Jurnal Ilmu Komunikasi*, 13(2), 351–371. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.14710/interaksi.13.2.351-371>
- Sugiyono. (2020). *Metodologi Penelitian Kuantitatif, Kualitatif dan R & D* (Edisi Ke-). Alfabeta bandung. https://digi-lib.stekom.ac.id/assets/dokumen/ebook/feb_35efe6a47227d6031a75569c2f3f39d44fe2db43_1652079047.pdf
- Sugiyono, P. L. (2016). Metode Penelitian Komunikasi. In *Simbiosis Rekatama Media* (Vol. 1).
- Sundar, S., & Limperos, A. M. (2013). Uses and Grats 2 . 0 : New Gratifications for New Media. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 7(4), 504–525.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/08838151.2013.845827>
- Syakilah, A., Maharani, K., Ferdiana, N., & Saifullah, A. (2025). *Statistik Telekomunikasi Indonesia 2024* (F. Herbowo (ed.); Volume 13.). Badan Pusat Statistik Republik Indonesia. <https://web-api.bps.go.id/download.php?f=JMp13Qh+CYbBCd+mNrb+BUh0S3RJQ21KVThZU0cr eXpWNkhQeXhma292ck4xajBTVk1tZ1hORDk1eU1aSzhtQWJNUHIKMjdPOCt3Tk RGMnJXWmNDMkpPaUg4NUVnL1pZWVJzclEwOHZ3cGNwQU1lWWVyVXFyZC tIUW93VTZmbEJuY1ZXOUe5MTN0YTNMV0dQcjNHeIVXYlINQkU3Sm94UFQ1U XhqR2JLSDFuOVQrVmJhd2JDUTRYWFFBaGdTTUZNU2txM3JkUTJHRktvMC9jW>

- VV4OEK2MnJxSGNLMDh6UmVrU2phbVUxWmNlbXZ4ODVPY0Q3UDR5ck9PcW
kzakZNRHFQOEkrUWt1RjZ3STlQWDhvRHpLRGY0all2VVFzY281WkdldFVnPT0=
- Syirfan, M. A., Pitaloka, A. D., Amalia, R., Davita, J. S., Fu'adah, S., Saputri, M. O. Y., Artyana, H. M., Adni, L., & Rochmawati, R. (2023). Konten Meme Sebagai Media Terkini Sebagai Upaya Edukasi dan Sosialisasi Anti Korupsi pada Generasi Muda Indonesia. *Jurnal Teknologi Pendidikan*, 1(2), 11. <https://doi.org/10.47134/jtp.v1i2.121>
- Whiting, A., & Williams, D. (2013). Why people use social media: a uses and gratifications approach. *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal*, 16(4), 362–369. <https://doi.org/10.1108/QMR-06-2013-0041>
- Wiggins, B. E. (2019). *The Discursive Power of Memes in Digital Culture Ideology, Semiotics, and Intertextuality* (1st Editio). Routledge 1 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX 14 4RN 711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017. USA. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429492303>
- Wijanarka, T. (2023). Pelatihan Berpikir Kritis Ala Generasi Z Mahasiswa Fiskom UKSW di Era Disrupsi Digital. *Magistrorum Et Scholarium Jurnal Pengabdian Masyarakat*, 03(April), 428–440. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.24246/jms.v3i32023p428-440>