




ORIGINAL

## Filipino Meme Culture in Reddit: A Social Exchange Theory Application in an Anonymous Online Community

### La cultura filipina de los memes en Reddit: Una aplicación de la teoría del intercambio social en una comunidad anónima en línea

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#### ABSTRACT

The study explores the dynamics of social exchanges within the r/Philippines subreddit, focusing on how meme culture influences user interactions and engagement. It highlights the significant role of social media in Filipino culture, noting the increasing time spent on platforms like Reddit, which serves as a unique space for community building and cultural expression. Social Exchange Theory (SET) is applied to understand participation behaviors in online communities, emphasizing perceived reciprocity and social capital as critical factors. SET provides a framework for analyzing social interactions, focusing on the perceived costs and benefits that influence user engagement in online communities. The research focuses on posts categorized under the MemePH flair in the r/Philippines subreddit, utilizing publicly accessible data without requiring ethical clearance. A content analysis was performed to analyze the posted memes, while a thematic analysis was conducted to examine social interactions in the comments section, with classifications established before data collection. The content analysis reveals that memes in the subreddit are primarily categorized as political, propaganda, current events, and dank memes, with humor being a significant driver of engagement. The thematic analysis indicates that perceived community support, exchange ideologies, social ties, and perceived benefits are crucial in motivating users to post and interact within the subreddit.

**Keywords:** Online Community; Social Exchange Theory; Thematic Analysis; Memes; Reddit.

#### RESUMEN

Este estudio explora la dinámica de los intercambios sociales en el subreddit r/Philippines, centrándose en cómo la cultura de los memes influye en las interacciones y el compromiso de los usuarios. Destaca el importante papel de las redes sociales en la cultura filipina, señalando el creciente tiempo dedicado a plataformas como Reddit, que sirve como un espacio único para la construcción de la comunidad y la expresión cultural. Se aplica la Teoría del Intercambio Social (SET) para comprender los comportamientos de participación en las comunidades en línea, haciendo hincapié en la reciprocidad percibida y el capital social como factores críticos. La SET proporciona un marco para analizar las interacciones sociales, centrándose en los costes y beneficios percibidos que influyen en la participación de los usuarios en las comunidades en línea. La investigación se centra en los mensajes categorizados bajo el estilo MemePH en el subreddit r/Philippines, utilizando datos de acceso público sin necesidad de autorización ética. Se realizó un análisis de contenido para analizar los memes publicados, mientras que se llevó a cabo un análisis temático para examinar las interacciones sociales en la sección de comentarios, con clasificaciones establecidas antes de la recogida de datos. El análisis de contenido revela que los memes del subreddit se clasifican principalmente en políticos, propagandísticos, de actualidad y chungos, y que el humor es un importante motor de participación. El

análisis temático indica que el apoyo percibido de la comunidad, las ideologías de intercambio, los vínculos sociales y los beneficios percibidos son cruciales para motivar a los usuarios a publicar e interactuar en el subreddit.

**Palabras clave:** Comunidad Online; Teoría Del Intercambio Social; Análisis Temático; Memes; Reddit.

## INTRODUCTION

Online communities (OC) are increasingly appealing to internet users, serving as platforms for knowledge exchange and cooperation, ranging from topic-focused websites to instant messaging groups.<sup>(1)</sup> OCs involve individuals collaborating via Internet technologies to achieve goals, demonstrating commitment, connection, reciprocity, and sustained interaction patterns.<sup>(2,3)</sup> Scholars describe these groups as digital environments where people willingly share knowledge via asynchronous, text-driven communication facilitated by computers.<sup>(4)</sup> As individuals broaden their social circles to establish connections and relationships, they encounter advantages and challenges. While accessing additional groups and resources offers clear benefits in organizational and social contexts, it also introduces competing demands on their attention and time.<sup>(5)</sup>

Communities, once tightly linked to physical proximity—neighbors sharing a street or a town square—have now transformed into a more prosperous, multifaceted understanding that transcends geographical boundaries. Communities were historically defined by shared physical spaces, enabling face-to-face relations and a sense of belonging.<sup>(6,7)</sup> The evolution of community, fueled by the internet and digital communication, now encompasses virtual gatherings and online networks.<sup>(8)</sup> This shift reflects a fundamental social need for connection that transcends physical boundaries, allowing for more inclusive and flexible communities formed through ongoing interactions and shared interests.<sup>(9)</sup> These communities, whether large or small, serve as vital spaces for social connection and information exchange.

Filipinos are highly active on social media worldwide, with numerous studies emphasizing their extensive involvement. The average of nine hours Filipinos spend on social media platforms increased from nine hours a day in 2019 to 11 hours in 2021.<sup>(10)</sup> Across diverse demographics, including students, social media engagement remains consistently high. Filipino youth, especially in college, exhibit significant digital media consumption, primarily on platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube.<sup>(11)</sup>

Reddit, an online discussion and community platform, currently ranks eighth among the world's most visited websites. It boasts over 138,000 active communities and over 400 million monthly users in 2019.<sup>(12)</sup> Subreddits are dedicated online communities where users or members discuss distinctive topics, manage content, and connect based on shared interests.<sup>(13)</sup> They significantly impact user engagement, with some subreddits drawing more users and interactions than others.<sup>(14)</sup> Anonymity on Reddit significantly influences user interactions and content visibility. Research indicates that under specific conditions, Reddit's anonymous environment can facilitate communication, and it correlates with engagement levels influenced by personality traits, news consumption, and news engagement.<sup>(15,16)</sup>

Drawing from the Social Exchange Theory, this study investigates social interactions with the flair “MemePH” within r/Philippines, a prominent subreddit among Filipino Reddit users. As cultural units, memes swiftly propagate among individuals through imitation and digital sharing. They commonly manifest as images, videos, text, or a blend of these elements.<sup>(17,18)</sup> Internet memes, multifaceted and dynamic, blend textual and visual components to express ideas, emotions, or commentary across diverse topics. Often integrated with wit or satire, these digital creations have become a prominent feature of mass culture and digital expression, increasing across social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter.<sup>(19,20)</sup> Memes, by their very nature, intertwine intertextuality and multimodality. They seamlessly blend images and text, giving rise to fresh interpretations and enabling effective communication.<sup>(21)</sup> With their creative adaptability, Internet memes persist in relevance by recontextualization and modification.<sup>(22)</sup> Moreover, these memes influence political discourse significantly, shaping public opinion and fostering political engagement.<sup>(23)</sup>

Specifically, the research aims to address the following research questions:

1. What are the most common themes associated with the memes posted in the subreddit?
2. What motivates individuals to post such memes in the subreddit and at what cost?

The study explores the behaviors of Filipino Reddit users, focusing on the pros and cons they consider when posting or creating Internet meme topics. This research is significant as it investigates the usage patterns on Reddit, a platform that, while globally popular, sees less traction among Filipinos than other online communities such as Facebook. By analyzing these behaviors, the study aims to shed light on how Filipino online community users navigate and leverage Reddit for their discussions and interactions. Specifically, this study aims to uncover the following concepts on the use of Reddit by Filipino users: cultural adaptation,

platform-specific dynamics, power dynamics, emotional exchange, and content creation and consumption. As of May 2024, Reddit is the sixth most visited site in the Philippines, with over 84 million monthly visits. The subreddit *r/Philippines*, on the other hand, is the most popular among Filipinos, with a total of 1,9 million members.

### Review of related literature

Social Exchange Theory (SET) provides a fundamental framework for understanding individuals' interactions and community participation. According to SET, people commit to social interactions when they perceive that the benefits outweigh the costs. In OCs, the perceived support from fellow members significantly impacts participation behavior, ultimately enhancing the perceived benefits for users.<sup>(1)</sup> SET is relevant to online communities, shaping participation behavior through factors such as perceived reciprocity, benefits, social capital, and exchange ideology.<sup>(24,25)</sup> SET continues to be a valuable framework for comprehending the intricate dynamics of social interactions. It provides valuable insights into the factors that precede, the mechanisms involved and the ultimate results of both interpersonal and organizational relationships.<sup>(26)</sup>

In a study by Dixuan & Baolong, SET is relevant to online health care communities (OHC), impacting physicians' economic outcomes through interactive mechanisms such as service quality and mutual support groups, as demonstrated in research studies.<sup>(27)</sup> This study established an internet-based effort exchange model for doctors using social exchange theory. In a study by Min et al., applying SET to online health communities reveals how information sharing among doctors and fellow patients impacts diabetic patients' behavior, self-management, and health outcomes in diabetes management.<sup>(28)</sup> In another study, applying SET to OHCs reveals how social support impacts relationship commitment, subsequently influencing members' intention for continuous knowledge sharing.<sup>(29)</sup> The study combined social exchange and commitment-trust theories to create a theoretical framework. Lastly, in the study of Zhao and Du, SET is employed to examine the factors affecting the provision of social support in OHCs.<sup>(30)</sup> The study applied social exchange theory to introduce a benefit-cost model for investigating the incentive and inhibiting factors of social support within OHCs.

The multifaceted phenomenon of meme culture within online communities significantly shapes digital communication and cultural expression. Memes, functioning as units of cultural transmission, play an integral role in how cybercommunities think, circulate information, and infuse content with meaning in daily interactions.<sup>(31)</sup> Meme culture within youth online communities empowers expression and serves as a resistance against marginalization. It significantly influences cultural and political discourse through shared ideas and practices, thereby shaping the landscape of contemporary online cultural politics.<sup>(32)</sup> A study found that Internet memes construct a movement's collective self while serving as informal venues for confrontation and learning.<sup>(33)</sup>

In the Philippine context, research studies have explored the fundamental principles underlying Internet meme culture among Filipino users. Research conducted among Filipino journalists explored the factors influencing the use of political memes as a journalistic tool. Variables such as public opinion, news values, participatory culture, and disinformation indirectly shape the production of political memes mediated by intention. Interestingly, credibility was found to have little significance in the decision-making process regarding using political memes.<sup>(34)</sup> In a separate study examining the role of memes in analyzing Philippine propaganda, memes emerge as creators and simplifiers of intricate political narratives through linguistic and visual structuring. Additionally, memes exhibit propaganda traits and serve as practical tools for propagating messages.<sup>(35)</sup> Lastly, examining memes related to the inadequate pandemic response during COVID-19 in the Philippines revealed a dynamic interaction between the government and the citizenry.<sup>(36)</sup>

This study addresses the research gaps related to applying Social Exchange Theory to Filipino participation in online communities. Firstly, we explore cultural adaptation, examining how SET principles adjust to the distinctive cultural setting of Filipino online communities, considering local norms, values, and communication patterns. Secondly, we investigate Reddit's platform-specific dynamics, exploring how SET manifests differently across various online platforms within the Filipino context. Factors such as anonymity, community rules, and user behavior are pivotal in shaping social exchanges. Lastly, we explore content creation and consumption and explain how SET principles come to life in the content creation of memes and influence consumption behaviors (upvotes, comments) within Filipino Reddit communities.

### Theoretical framework

Social Exchange Theory (SET) is a framework that examines interactions between individuals or parties. It combines sociological and psychological aspects and revolves around cost-benefit analysis.<sup>(37)</sup> In SET, individuals evaluate the risks and benefits of their actions within social transactions. Beyond economic exchanges, the theory considers psychological transactions, reciprocity principles, and the impact of various factors. Ultimately, SET helps us understand how individuals engage in social interactions based on perceived costs and benefits.<sup>(38)</sup> George C. Homans defined social exchange as the interaction involving the exchange of tangible

or intangible activity, which may be more or less rewarding or costly, between at least two individuals.<sup>(39)</sup> Homans focused on individual behavior within social interactions. While there are different modes of exchange, Homans primarily studied dyadic exchange.

Active participation in online communities is significantly influenced by the perceived community support from members and the brand, including acknowledging contributions, fostering interactions, providing quality information, satisfying members' socioemotional needs, enhancing their trust in the brand, and driving their active engagement in the community.<sup>(40)</sup> Social support has been shown to bolster creativity, stimulating more active content creation as individuals feel confident and supported and engage more in their creative endeavors.<sup>(41)</sup> In online health communities, the beneficial influence of social support on members' self-belief and personal well-being significantly shapes their willingness to disseminate knowledge.<sup>(42)</sup> The quality of information found in response posts significantly contributes to the perceived value of the community, thus motivating members to post more as they view the community as both supportive and beneficial.<sup>(43)</sup>

Exchange ideology (EI), a belief about the reciprocity of social exchanges, plays a complex role in shaping posting behavior, especially in knowledge-sharing (KS) and organizational dynamics, and can negatively moderate the relationship between perceived extrinsic rewards, reciprocity, and knowledge-sharing behavior in virtual teams, indicating that these factors may less drive individuals with strong EI to share knowledge.<sup>(44)</sup> Influencing posting behavior, EI potentially shapes an individual's perception of their interactions within the organization, thereby affecting their engagement levels, which are determined by their self-belief and alignment with the organization's values.<sup>(45)</sup>

Perceived social ties within a community have a significant influence on posting behavior, affecting the frequency and type of contributions, with research showing that social ties, regardless of their strength, are vital in promoting community involvement and content creation, and stronger ties within the same community often result in more regular and substantial interactions due to increased trust and reciprocity.<sup>(46)</sup> On the other hand, weak ties that connect individuals from diverse communities play a crucial role in expanding the scope and variety of content, thereby enriching the overall worth of the community.<sup>(47)</sup> Furthermore, the existence of social ties and the perception of privacy in establishing trust in social media platforms are crucial factors. This trust subsequently promotes more active participation in posting behavior.<sup>(48)</sup> In summary, the perceived ties within a community, regardless of their strength, significantly impact posting behavior. These factors boost trust, reciprocity, and a feeling of community, which subsequently fuels active involvement and content creation.

Posting in online communities provides a wide range of perceived benefits across informational, emotional, social, and psychological aspects, with one of the main advantages being the opportunity to share and acquire valuable information, advice, and resources on common interests or specific topics like health conditions or ethical consumption practices.<sup>(1)</sup> Emotional support is another key benefit. Members find comfort and a sense of togetherness when they share their experiences and emotions with others encountering similar challenges, thus lessening feelings of loneliness.<sup>(49)</sup> However, recognizing the potential hazards linked to online community participation is crucial. These can include heightened stress resulting from the successes or failures of others and the risk of becoming addicted to the forum, which could result in detachment from real-world relationships.<sup>(50)</sup> Scopus and ScienceDirect. The criteria are: (1) The perceived advantages of online community participation are diverse and include informational, emotional, social, and psychological benefits. These benefits enhance the well-being of users and cultivate a supportive and active community atmosphere.

## **METHOD**

### **Online Community**

In this study, the researchers selected r/Philippines, a subreddit that enjoys significant popularity among Filipino users. This subreddit features a variety of posts, each identified by "flairs" - a method used to categorize content into groups such as PoliticsPH, NewsPh, CulturePh, TravelPh, and more. This research specifically focused on the posts categorized under the MemePh flair. Since the selected online community is public, ethical clearance is not required. The posts and comments are publicly accessible and thus considered public information.

### **Classifying Memes**

The authors used content analysis on the top posts within the last six months to classify the memes posted within the subreddit. For a post to be considered, it must receive a minimum of 50 upvotes or have at least 20 comments. Prior to collecting these posts, a pre-conceived set of classifications was already established. The first author identified the set of memes based on the classifications, while the second author confirmed or rejected the classification. If there is no agreement, the authors convene to unify the classification. These classifications are shown in table 1 - Classifications of Memes.

Classifications	Description
Political	A political meme is a digital medium that intertwines visual and textual components to deliver political messages, typically with a touch of humor or satire. It spreads extensively across social media platforms. <sup>(51)</sup>
Propaganda	A propaganda meme is a digital content that fuses imagery and text to sway public sentiment or conduct in favor of a particular objective. It often utilizes psychological and rhetorical strategies to manipulate its viewers. <sup>(52)</sup>
Current Events	A current event meme is crafted in reaction to or influenced by unfolding events or societal issues. <sup>(17)</sup>
Dank	A dank meme is an internet meme that stands out for its distinctiveness, wit, or humor. <sup>(53)</sup>

**Thematic Analysis**

Both authors conducted a thematic analysis examining social interactions in the comments section. The themes were derived from similar studies, and a codebook containing the codes for each theme was utilized. The themes used in this study are presented in table 2 - Themes and Descriptions.

Themes	Descriptions
Perceived Community Support	Perceptions of support from the online community
Exchange Ideology	Beliefs about reciprocity and exchange in online interactions
Perceived Social Ties	Perceptions of social connections within the online community
Perceived Benefits	Perceptions of the benefits gained from participating in the online community

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The subsequent sections present the findings of the content analysis conducted by the two authors on memes collected from the subreddit. This is followed by a thematic analysis that applies social exchange theory to comprehend the dynamics of interactions among online community members.

**Memes Classification**

Through content analysis of the memes collected from the anonymous online community, we discovered that 43,44 % were classified as political, 18,33 % as propaganda, 48,33 % as current events, and the highest category, 65 %, as dank memes, as shown in figure 1 - Memes under Single Classification. The high rating of dank memes is categorized by the intention of uploaders to be funny. Internet memes serve as a lively platform for humor and self-expression, enabling users to creatively share their perspectives on various subjects through a comedic lens.<sup>(54)</sup> Political internet memes, particularly on platforms like Reddit, recontextualize pop-cultural references into new political contexts, creating and shaping online political discourse.<sup>(23)</sup> Denysiyuk highlights that memes related to current events capture contemporary issues, making them relatable and shareable through humor and satire.<sup>(19)</sup> Internet memes represent a modern form of propaganda applicable in the Philippines and globally. These digital artifacts serve as potent tools for persuasion, allowing precise targeting of specific groups to reinforce social bonds and influence broader audiences.<sup>(55)</sup> Although dank memes were posted the most, uploads categorized as “political” have the most comments and interactions.

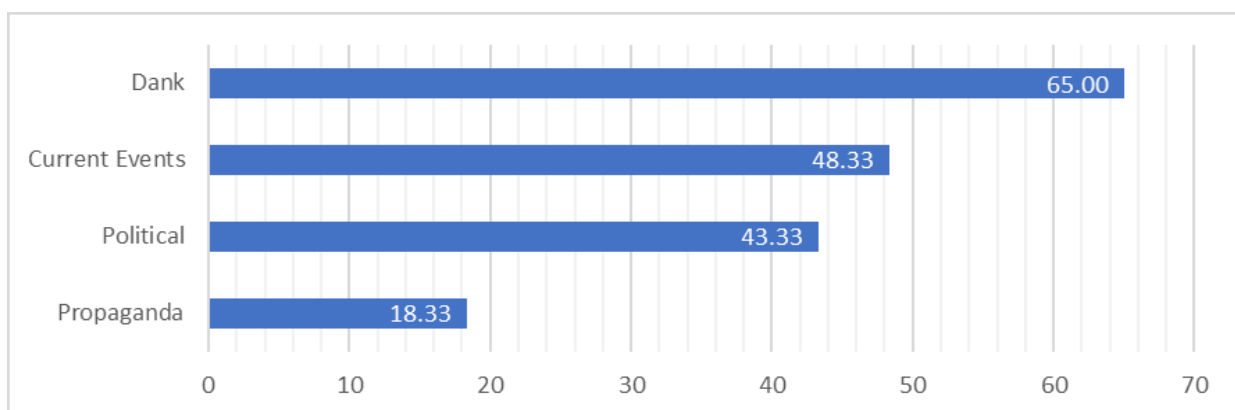


Figure 1. Memes under Single Classification



Among the memes categorized into two classifications, 11,67 % were political and propaganda, 21,67 % were political and current events, and 16,67 % were political and dank. Propaganda and current event memes accounted for 6,67 %, while propaganda and dank memes comprised 3,33 %. Additionally, the most significant percentage among memes classified under two categories was current event and dank memes, at 30 % as shown in figure 2 - Memes under Multiple Classifications. Lastly, 15 % of the memes were categorized into three classifications, while none were classified into all four. These results show that memes posted in the online community may have been posted by the uploader for a sole purpose but may be interpreted or categorized as another. Internet memes primarily serve as a platform for humor and entertainment. However, their implied meanings or implicatures can be challenging to interpret. Influenced by factors like limited captions, image characteristics, and context, memes allow users to creatively convey universal emotions and social messages.<sup>(56)</sup>

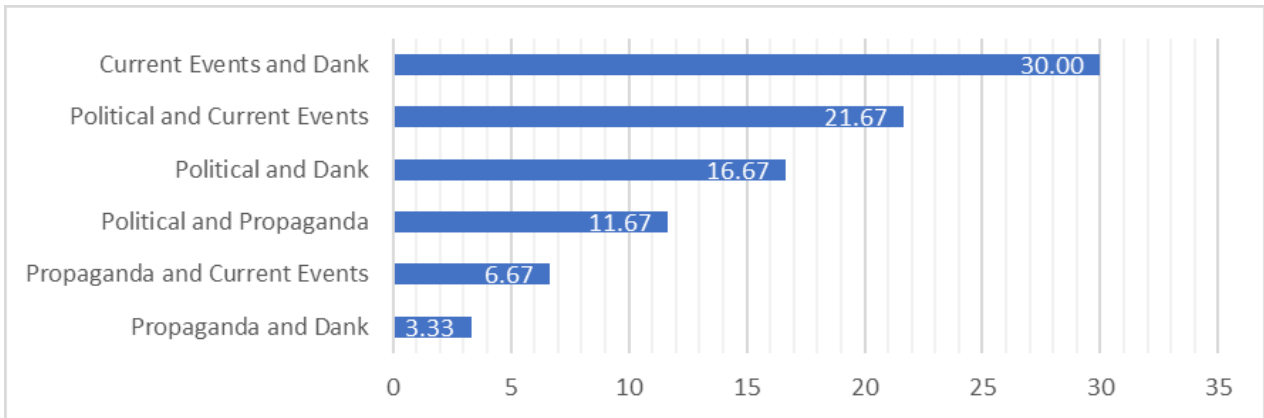


Figure 2. Memes under Multiple Classifications

An analysis of memes across two categories found that 50 % fell under the “dank meme” classification. This observation implies that the memes shared within the subreddit were intentionally humorous, either in their own right or as part of another category. De Leon and Ballesteros-Lintao further support this finding, asserting that internet memes in the Philippines serve as a means to convey political messages and influence public opinion through humor and narrative manipulation.<sup>(35)</sup> Calimbo, on the other hand, emphasizes that humor within internet memes can function as a means for expressing dissent and increasing awareness of political matters in the Philippines.<sup>(57)</sup>

**Results from Thematic Analysis**

Table 3 - Thematic Analysis presents the themes, corresponding codes, and examples extracted from the selected set of memes. To ensure accessibility for all readers, the examples have been translated and paraphrased into English.

Table 3. Thematic Analysis			
Themes	Codes	Exemplar	Meme Posted
Perceived Community Support	Agreement on Posts	“Jokes on you. I really am ugly.”	A signage stating that J-walking causes ugliness.
		“All of these faces are easily punchable.”	A photo of personalities which easily annoy the public with their antics.
	Gratification	“It is also rooted in the socio-cultural regulation system of hiya (shame) which indicates the mindset of Filipinos that being corrected is the same as being humiliated.”	A post which shows how Filipinos invalidate correction of others.
“Debt of gratitude activated.”		A reply to a post wherein uniformed personnel still shows loyalty despite political issues because the president double his salary.	
Exchange Ideology	Social Interactions	“But the QR code will remain unchanged, right? Banks usually verify with the PhilSys database.”	A photo indicating that the national ID can easily be manipulated.
		“Really? That is the priority instead the education crisis?”	A meme on displaying the ten commandments in schools.

	Nostalgia	“Time flies so fast. I remember the days when those were my ultimate crushes.” “Screw you and cursed image! Justice for Pikotaro.”	A photo of the first batch of contestants in a talent search competition. “A meme of a famous comedian that shows resemblance to a Japanese online sensation.”
Perceived Social Ties	Familiarity and Relatedness	““Before, notebooks were mostly covered with Teleserye (TV drama) themes. I didn’t realize that those still exist, like now, where they mostly feature journalists.”	A post of notebooks where the covers are printed with photos of journalists.
		“I can still relate to that. I am still afraid of white vans in the streets.” “This also happens abroad!”	A post of a white van which allegedly kidnaps children. A meme saying that Filipinos always bring a karaoke machine in every social gathering like swimming and picnics.
Perceived Benefits	Upvotes, Karma, and Community Reputation	“Your posts are on point!”	A comment stating that that he upvoted the original poster.
	Hedonic	“Hahaha. Politics edition. The contestants can be the former and new secretary where the boss chooses the latter.” “That’s a different type of injection. If you know what I mean.”	A meme replacing the contestants in a reality TV show with politicians. A political and current event memes showing a controversial former cabinet member choosing between POGO or Pogi (handsome).

### Thematic Analysis

Four themes were derived from the thematic analysis of the collected posts and comments within the subreddit. Each theme was identified based on related literature, while codes for each theme were based on the careful analysis of the comments from each post.

#### *Perceived Community Support*

The codes for this theme include agreement on posts and gratification. Members of the subreddit who post memes do so to get gratification and a sense of agreement among the other members. A careful analysis of the comments also reveals a sense of humor when it comes to the interaction between the original poster and the comments by the community members. This coincides with other studies, which indicate that value creation and user engagement contribute to continuous participation within the online community.<sup>(58)</sup> Recent research suggests that fostering a sense of community support involving recognition of contributions and freedom of expression is instrumental in motivating passive observers to engage actively in an online community. Therefore, creating posts within an online community can effectively cultivate this supportive environment, ultimately impacting the level of commitment from both active participants and silent observers.<sup>(59)</sup> Online communities can boost user participation and benefit members by cultivating a supportive environment that encourages engagement and interaction.

#### *Exchange Ideology*

The concept of exchange ideology refers to a theoretical framework governing the perceptions and interactions of individuals within reciprocal relationships across various contexts, including organizational settings. This belief system significantly influences how participants comprehend and engage in mutual exchanges, thereby affecting the dynamics of interpersonal and organizational relationships. The theme encompasses social interaction and nostalgia. Online community members engage with each other by commenting on posts that capture their interest, showing active participation to foster social interaction. Additionally, members engage with posts due to nostalgia, possibly because some memes are designed to evoke nostalgic memories for the subreddit members. The study by Jahan and Kim reveals that exchange ideology, a belief system about reciprocal interactions and perceived member support, shapes online community participation and its benefits by moderating the relationship between member support and participation behavior.<sup>(61)</sup> Another study implies that online communities can act as platforms where individuals with diverse ideologies can engage, potentially facilitating the sharing and discussing of ideas within these virtual environments.<sup>(60)</sup>

#### *Perceived Social Ties*

The perception of social connections within online communities significantly impacts the participation

behavior of its members. Based on the thematic analysis, this is described by familiarity and relatedness. This indicates that community members would often interact with other members if they felt a sense of familiarity and relatedness with the meme. This familiarity is because Filipinos often share everyday experiences, which are presented in a funny or comedic way through a meme. A study by Li and Chen suggests that the perception of social ties in online communities is vital for comprehending how virtual communities are formed and sustained, given their significant influence on developing social capital and fostering a sense of belonging within these digital realms.<sup>(61)</sup>

### *Perceived Benefits*

Individuals reap various perceived benefits from their involvement in online communities, generally classified into informational, emotional, social, and psychological benefits. A key advantage is informational support, as it allows users to access targeted information and discussions that meet their needs, thereby enriching their comprehension of diverse subjects. For Reddit, the most notable advantages include increased karma and an improved reputation within the community. Within a subreddit community, a member who has amassed a high karma count is regarded as a valuable contributor. This system is fundamental to the social dynamics of Reddit, as it encourages high-quality content and active engagement. Aside from this, the hedonic factor of posting is also seen as significant as a majority of memes posted within the subreddit to elicit hedonic responses from the community members. The array of hedonic benefits in online communities, which include pleasure, social connections, and mental health advantages, are varied. Participation in these communities can amplify these benefits by satisfying essential psychological needs such as competence, autonomy, and relatedness, fostering overall mental wellness and positive feelings.<sup>(62)</sup>

### *The Cost of Posting a Meme*

The Social Exchange Theory offers a structure for interpreting social conduct using economic concepts, implying that people handle social interactions with the same logic as they would in economic dealings. Within the scope of this study, the cost of posting a meme is the time and effort it takes to think and create one. Although there are sites dedicated to streamlining a meme, most posts are created using essential image editing software, as memes do not require high-quality image rendering. Aside from this, original posters and those who view and comment often engage with each other to get better engagement karma. Given this essential cost, members of the subreddit gain more karma and community reputation than the cost of creating and posting within the online community. This is in conjunction with the mentioned benefits based on the thematic analysis from the previous section.

## **CONCLUSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS**

Online communities extend the capabilities of a traditional community by allowing its members to interact and exchange social ideologies through the Internet, thus extending its reach beyond geographical and time-bound restrictions. Filipinos, known as one of the most active online communities, such as social networking sites, leverage these avenues to share and engage with each other based on common interests and principles. This study exposes a different form of online social engagement among Filipino online community members through the lens of one of the most popular subreddits in the country, r/Philippines.

The content analysis revealed that the most common themes posted within the subreddit are political, propaganda, current events, and dank memes. This analysis also exposed that most posted memes were not categorized into a single theme but expressed other intentions, as shown in the previous section. This means that Filipinos express their ideologies through memes while not restricting themselves to the direct meaning of such posts. Additionally, posting memes is more hedonic as most of the analyzed contents either fall under the dank category or share this category with others. Meanwhile, the thematic analysis revealed that perceived community support, exchange ideologies, perceived social ties, and perceived benefits are the most common reasons why members of the subreddit post memes and comments on them. Aside from the most common benefit of gathering karma and increased community reputation, these benefits outweigh the primary cost of posting a meme, which is the time and effort to create and post it. Anonymity within the online community also plays a vital role in social engagement. This additional layer provides privacy, allowing members to post and comment without fearing being judged by others. The level of anonymity, be it total, partial, or absent, can sway trust and perceived risk in a community, affecting participation and team performance while influencing the quality and volume of information shared.<sup>(63)</sup>

Although this study sheds some light on the social exchanges in an anonymous online community, it has limitations. Firstly, the authors analyzed the posts and comments based only on the merit of how they were written in relation to the memes posted. Further investigation through anonymized interviews with active members of the subreddit may be utilized to understand better why social exchanges happen within the online community. Secondly, the results may be different if the posts were collected in a different period, as memes



posted within the subreddit often coincide with the current and popular issues within the Philippines at the time of posting.

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