

Mental Health as a Cultural Trend Among Gen Z Culture

DEBOLINA KAR¹, MONALISA G², PRITPAL KAUR³, PRIYANKA R⁴, SHALINI A⁵, DR.
BHARGHAVI D. HEMMIGE⁶

^{1,2,3,4,5,6}*Department of Journalism and Mass Communication CMS Lalbagh Road*

Abstract- Conversations regarding mental health have become a popular trend among the Gen Z culture, this trend can be distinctly observed in the memes posted on Instagram, a social media platform. This research paper studies a sample of 49 memes from Instagram and its comment sections are analysed qualitatively to understand how topics related to mental health are created, framed and engaged with. Thematic coding is used to analyse the following sections - concept translation, trivialisation versus normalisation, framing and tone, collective identity and relatability, accuracy, misinformation and emotional expression. The findings conclude that complex mental health concepts are used in these memes in a very simplified tone in everyday language which makes it hard to distinguish these serious conditions from regular, normal stress. Humour is used as a dominant framing tone which increases the scale of relatability and emotional expression among the audience. At the same time, these memes lead to normalisation of the mental health conditions but in some cases they trivialise the extent of its seriousness. The analysis of the comment sections shows a pattern of engagement where the audience show a sense of collective identity and validation. This study uses the following three theories, Social Constructionism, Uses and Gratifications and Framing theory, to explain how these memes on mental health act as an awareness tool and help in transforming and understanding the meaning of mental health. Meme culture plays a dual role where it enables destigmatisation but also reduces the accuracy of clinical conditions in modern digital discourse.

Keywords: *Mental Health, GenZ culture, Instagram memes, Digital Discourse, Relatability*

Operational Definitions

1. Mental Health: Mental health refers to the dimensions of emotional and psychological effects depicted in the selected memes of this study which includes terms like anxiety, burnout, stress and depression which is shown through the visuals and texts in the memes and the comment sections.
2. Instagram Memes: Instagram memes is the set of 49 memes selected for this study which uses

sarcasm, relatability and humour as a medium to talk about mental health.

3. GenZ culture: GenZ culture does not refer to individuals belonging to the Generation Z rather, it refers to all the individuals that identify with similar ways of interactions, expressions and understandings like the individuals that belong to Generation Z.
4. Digital Discourse: Digital Discourse refers to the conversations and expressions that are formed from the mental health memes on digital platforms like social media.
5. Relatability: Relatability refers to how the audience feel encouraged to identify with the content of the meme because of the language used or how familiar the concept feels to their own personal lives which promotes expressions like “literally me” and “same”.

I. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Mental health has become a highly debated topic in digital environments in which information is transmitted rapidly, circulated widely and replicated in great volumes. Social media platforms, in recent years, have emerged to take the lead of where the concept of mental health is comprehended, experienced, expressed and interpreted in. This discernible change can be clearly noticed within the generation of youth who consider digital and online environments to be the space where interaction takes place and, importantly, a space where the identity formation, self-expression and shared personal feelings, emotions and perceptions transpire. Such increase in attention on mental health has contributed to raising the awareness of the young generation of this particular topic, at the same time bringing challenges with regard to appropriate display and interpretation of mental health information.

In relation to the numerous groups present in the rapid digital world, Gen Z stands to be the biggest generation in both population and activity, and hence a primary group of interest in this study. They are immersed within the online cultures and a higher proportion of them have a tendency to consume and interact with information about mental health online via social media. According to some earlier studies, Gen Z exhibits a higher willingness to talk about mental health compared to the previous generations, therefore this displays the general understanding and the high priority of this generation toward psychological well-being.

Nevertheless, this willingness does not correlate with taking an action of seeking professional help. A perpetual gap between the action and the reaction can therefore be concluded. Prior research points to internal stigma, social cognition and institutional barriers still affect young individuals' conceptions and approaches toward mental health care in spite of an increasing normalization effort toward the issue.

Social media has had profound influences on the context of these activities. Social media has contributed greatly towards increasing awareness, developing social connections, and providing readily accessible mental health information. Researches in academic field prove social media can decrease stigma, facilitate emotions expression, and foster the topic of psychological wellbeing to be one of general interest (Keles et al., 2019;Twenge, 2017),.

whereas they also serve to worsen anxiety, depression and emotional distress through ways like social comparison, fear of missing out (FOMO) and exposition to ideals (Keles et al., 2019;Twenge, 2017).Dichotomous effect hence calls for an observation toward presence of mental health discussions in online communities and more importantly, their communication patterns.

Among all various platforms and forums in the vast digital environment, Instagram has taken the lead in forming a crucial platform, mainly due to its visual characteristics and interactive functions. Prioritising images, texts and speedy interactions, this platform serves as an indispensable site to proliferate culture contents including discussions on mental health. A

prominent format in such discourse consists of memes. Humoristic, brief and succinct messages delivered via meme make it an efficient way of delivering complex ideas. With the viral nature of meme communication, large audiences could be reached at a remarkable speed, hence this channel of interaction leads to creation of new cultural meanings and its proliferation among communities.

Recently, the communication surrounding mental health online has been revealed to be influenced more by such informal and cultural communication. (Woodward et al., 2025) showed how terms such as depression, anxiety and trauma are freely used in non-clinical contexts by online users. It has greatly contributed to the practice of self-diagnosis of certain conditions where individuals assess and form perceptions of their own mental health issues based on the information provided by social media platforms rather than professional opinion. This indicates the change in understanding of the concepts, shifting away from clinical framework toward a more cultural, adaptable meaning.

In addition, user involvement with Social Media aids to verify and support meanings by increasing visibility for specific discourses through things like likes, shares, and comments so that they encourage users to share their own experiences or contribute to common experiences or expression of emotions. Although these interactions create feelings of community and belonging, they simultaneously serve toward a normalization and oversimplification of psychological issues and related concepts. Interaction between content sharing and audience response is therefore a crucial variable in determining how mental health is being constructed online.

To facilitate a more in depth analysis on such processes, this study utilizes the principles of Social Constructionism, Uses and Gratifications Theory and Framing Theory to frame the conceptualization, development, and interactions associated with the cultural representation of mental health in Instagram memes. The study aims to gain a clearer perspective on how the discussion on mental health evolves, not just as a discourse on the Internet, but as a larger part of how it is being shaped within the modern digital landscape for Gen Z internet users.

1.2 Research Objectives

1. To analyze the transformation of clinical mental health terminologies into everyday culture through Instagram memes among Gen Z Culture.
2. To investigate the dynamic relationship between normalisation and trivialisation of mental health in memes,
3. To understand how the construction of collectively relatable meme-driven mental health content shapes the sense of identity and emotional expression among Gen Z Culture.

1.3 Significance

The purpose of this study is to explore how Instagram can help provide a better understanding and increase awareness about mental health issues affecting the Generation Z demographic. The research indicates that though the memes that promote discussion about mental health have made it easier for individuals to connect with mental health issues as well as understand them more, the risks associated with their usage, such as oversimplification and trivialisation of serious issues related to mental health are significant. Through careful examination of both the type and amount of content along with what the interactions are around that content, the research examines how forms of communication (online vs in person) influence perception, language, and discourse development around mental health.

The findings of this study will be useful to both media researchers seeking to understand how to communicate using digital mediums and health care providers gaining awareness of how informal content on the internet can shape mental health discourse and perceptions held by younger generations.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The relationship between digital media and mental health has been widely researched, especially with Generation Z, who are more involved in the digital space. Recent studies show how Generation Z is more open towards having conversations about mental health than the previous generations. Though, even with such conversations, it does not guarantee that more people will seek out help (Manjushree.M.H & Dr. T. Jothimani, 2025) . This research paper

focuses on the gap between awareness and action, indicating how internal stigma still continues to exist even with the rise in conversation about mental health.

The study of online environments focuses on how mental health phenomena are shaped by social media. Phenomena like FOMO (fear of missing out, social comparison, and cyberbullying results in anxiety, depression, and emotional stress among users (Keles et al., 2019; Twenge, 2017). Excessive usage of social media platforms like Instagram directly correlates with high levels of anxiety and depression, especially amongst youngsters who are more prone to developing validation-seeking behaviours (Opoku et al., 2025). Such findings show how content consumption habits impact one's mental well-being. Additionally social media works as a double role in both raising awareness about mental health and providing peer support to users. According to the results of a systematic review of the link between youth mental health and social media usage, social media sites like Instagram and TikTok can help minimize stigma, offer emotional support, and encourage seeking help (Mohamad & Mubin, 2023). Nonetheless, the positive function of social media as regards to mental health is somewhat undermined by new issues like self-diagnoses when adolescents use information from social media as a basis for assessing their mental health (Armstrong et al., 2025)

Another set of research shows how cultural trends and communicative practices influence mental health discourse on social media platforms. These studies show how psychiatric terminology has become extensively popular to use in non clinical and casual contexts, integrated in everyday digital lingo (Woodward et al., 2025). This correlates with the established fact that members belonging to Generation Z tend to discuss their mental well-being through social media conversations without translating it into actions.

Moreover, there is evidence that social media plays a part in forming emotional communication and identity in young individuals. The disclosure of mental health on social media is largely influenced by relatability and validation needs as opposed to any kind of therapy need, meaning that they act more as a

social currency (Wang et al., 2025). In addition, watching short videos is seen to offer emotional relief yet discourage seeking professional assistance.

Even though mental health is becoming increasingly mainstream, a number of research studies highlight the problems encountered by Gen Z that are real and based on structural and technological pressures. Emotional burden, online comparison and digital burnout, such aspects play a crucial role in influencing mental health (George, 2024). Therefore, such findings help prove that despite mental health appearing as a cultural trend, it has more substantial connections than just being a superficial engagement.

There is a clear pattern from the current literature regarding the complicated role of social media in influencing the mental health discourse of Generation Z. On one hand, social media makes people aware, eliminates stigma, and builds communities. On the contrary, social media has a dark side, since it leads to misinformation and facilitates self-diagnoses. However, a critical limitation of the current literature is the lack of focus on the role of meme culture in constructing discourses around mental health.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Methodology

This research takes up a qualitative content analysis approach to study the representation of mental health and its interpretation through the Instagram meme culture. For this paper, a purposive sample of 50 Instagram posts (memes) were taken that are related to mental health.

These were selected on the criteria of reflecting recurring themes, formats, and engagement patterns popularly linked with Gen Z online culture. The posts were chosen based on their explicit reference to mental health concepts like depression, burnout, anxiety, and its relevance to contemporary meme discourse, hence the sampling was criterion-based and non-random.

Each post was thoroughly studied by analyzing the visual content and the interactions in the comment section. This allowed a multi-layered analysis of

audience engagement and content production. The posts were numbered (Post 1-50), thematically coded and referenced throughout the analysis.

This research followed a thematic coding system that was created alongside the research objectives. For which six key analytical categories were used: (1) concept translation (clinical to cultural language), (2) tone and framing, (3) normalization vs trivialization, (4) relatability and collective identity, (5) emotional expression, and (6) accuracy and misinformation. Each of the posts and its comments were coded alongside these categories to find out related patterns, differences and major key narratives.

The analysis process used an iterative coding strategy, where initial observations were transformed into more general themes. Even though the research process relied on qualitative measures for the most part, quantitative considerations were included wherever possible (for instance, frequencies in specific trends in posts). Representative examples were provided to help substantiate the results of the analysis process.

Mainly, this research does not make the assumption that all users who are engaging with the content belong to a specific demographic group. Rather, the engagement pattern seen with these memes are seen as a reflection of a larger Gen Z culture discourse, and not individual behaviour and attitudes.

This approach allows for a detailed understanding about the construction, framing and circulating of mental health on social media platforms like Instagram via meme culture, allowing integration of both audience engagement and content analysis to give value to the research objectives.

3.2 Theoretical Framework

Social Constructionism

This research uses the concept of Social Constructionism to explore the idea of mental health in the context of online culture. According to Berger and Luckmann (1966), reality is not immutable but socially constructed through meanings that develop through interaction and are subsequently normalized. Taking this concept further, Hacking (1999) explains that meanings are not constant and depend on culture

and history. Within the context of this paper, the notion is especially pertinent since Instagram memes, as a form of culture, become spaces where ideas about mental health, which originated within medical settings, are rendered in vernacular forms and recontextualized. In this case, the theory becomes pertinent since the research aims to explore how culture discourse within Gen Z produces meanings of mental health.

Framing Theory

This research further draws interpretation from another theoretical framework known as the Framing Theory, which assists in understanding how meaning is formed through presentation. According to Goffman (1974), frames can be defined as structures that facilitate experiences and the interpretation of what one observes, implying that presentation of information may affect its interpretation. Entman (1993) in turn, posits that framing consists of selection and accentuation of some elements of reality to foster specific interpretations and judgements. As for the application of this framework to the research questions posed in this study, one may consider Instagram memes as frames that create particular presentations of mental well-being, for instance, by using humor, sarcasm, or identification.

User and Gratifications Theory

This research uses Users and Gratifications Theory to analyse engagement with mental health related memes. According to Katz, Blumler, Gurevitch (1973), audiences are active participants, using media to meet psychological and social needs, like the need for expression, escape and reinforcement of personal identity. Moving beyond the traditional uses and gratifications theory into modern digital media usage, Sundar and Limperos (2013) expand the concept by noting additional gratifications, such as social interaction and self-expression, linked to interactive media usage. While the demographic information provided by users may not be explicitly used in this research, engagement practices and types of comments made will be considered through the lens of Users and Gratifications Theory to explain the cultural significance of the practice.

3.3 Research Gap

Previous studies have examined the relationship of mental health and social media from various angles and aspects, including knowledge, psychology and intervention seeking. It reflects on the openness amongst Generation Z, along with the enduring discrepancies between talk and action, as well as issues like self-diagnosis and the informal use of medical terms on social media platforms. Nonetheless, these studies are more inclined towards studying the usage of mental health terms online and their impacts rather than investigating the discourses surrounding mental health terms.

Particularly, the fact that there has not been much attention given to how different formats of digital media, like memes, work as a cultural tool, capable of creating and spreading messages concerning mental health issues. The absence of attention towards the ways in which humor and reliability both legitimize and devalue mental health issues, making no distinction between clinical and non-clinical problems, constitutes the base of this research.

IV. ANALYSIS

4.1 Content Analysis

Concept translation

A major pattern identified in analysing the data set is the systematic translation of clinical and mental health terminologies into simple, informal language that is culturally embedded.

Drawing on Social Constructionism, this can be understood as a process through which new meanings are produced and propagated through repeated social interactions. Analysing patterns across 49 posts, it is found that clinical terms, such as the likes of “anxiety”, “depression”, “ADHD” and “PTSD” are frequently used in the comments. However, the usage is not clinically or diagnostically employed. They have been trivialized and normalized to become everyday descriptions of moods and feelings, often used interchangeably with common stress, depression, exhaustion or discomfort from the day.

Framing Theory can be used to further shape this process of translation or shift. Memes use humor to present mental health concepts which focus on

engagement through relativity rather than clinical precision in the terminologies. Taking post 1 as an example, “serotonin” and “dopamine” are neurochemical terminologies which are humourised through personification.

This clearly abandons the clinical usage and shifts to a playful and simple term which generates laughter and relatability. This construct in which the language moves from clinical usage to accessible, understandable and shareable language culture is identified as the concept translation. Instagram users engage with such posts identifying themselves as part of “ADHD gang” or “Depression+ ADHD gang”. This is moving the language beyond medical labels to identities that are shared by a particular group across the globe, which in turn frames mental health terminologies as facilitators of global social belonging, validation and recognition.

A notable reoccurrence in this shift, is the employment of metaphor and exaggeration to connect with other users better. Post 7 speaks of “I’m all nervous, no system” attitude and Post 13 uses “mind goblins” as a reference, shaping clinical discussions to culturally understandable and imaginative descriptions. From the lens of Social Constructionism, this is identified as the formation of shared vocabulary that reframes how the generation understands and discusses mental health. These metaphors however, push the clinical accuracy and proper medical awareness away while reinforcing new socially and culturally conducted meanings.

The lines between clinical conditions and everyday normal, ordinary experiences with emotions and moods are blurred due to this translation. “What do you do for a living? Suffer” (Post 8) and “I stress, that’s what I do” stand as examples to how clinical terms are used in everyday emotions that are passing and normal. Clinical applications of such terms are broadened due to this over usage to non-clinical applications.

Uses and Gratification theory gives insight of the role of audience engagement in propagating and reinforcing this translation. Users are active in finding, adopting, using and sharing the simplified language of mental health terms to satisfy needs such

as relatability, collective identity, validation and community belonging. Labelling oneself with diagnostic terms introduced to one through the platform and comments such as “same” or “that is literally me” prove that they are using this translation to express their own identities and seek for connections that mirror the feelings. This is not a passive usage, they actively participate and engage in the dissemination of such culture that normalises mental health terminologies.

Not every post and comment abandons clinical accuracy, here and there, some posts or a user's comment discusses what knowledge the admin or user has of the mental health term in their capacity. However, informal interpretations and far fetched metaphors that are accessible and relatable are in abundance. Within meme culture, it is evident that cultural meanings and usage are appreciated and adopted more than accuracy and clinical relevance.

The finding points towards instagram meme culture as an environment where meanings are actively formulated by transforming mental health clinical terms into culturally resonant concepts. To explain this shift through social constructionism, a shared cultural language and identity is formed from the framing and adoption of diluted mental health terms. Although Gen Z digital discourse enhances the awareness and reduces the stigma, it is also reducing the distinction among everyday blues and actual clinical diagnosis.

Tone and Framing Analysis

Irony, low self-esteem, self-deprecation and dramatic exaggeration, in short humour, sets the tone across the data collected through 49 posts. Memes stand as the central device for framing mental health terms in culturally resonant contexts. Using Framing Theory, these memes can be explained to be the mediums used to structure how mental health is interpreted by privileging relatability and humour factor over diagnostic seriousness. Goffman (1974) holds that frames facilitate meanings, applying this to the context of memes and mental health mental health is being framed as something that’s a part of everyday which is humorous and shareable. They become socially legible and not merely medical.

The usage of self as the subject and object of distress in some posts such as Post 6 (“It’s me, I’m the idiot”), speaks for the pattern of self-deprecating humour which is absorbed in a fun and relatable tone. The struggle of life and events is framed as collective humour and is further propagated and reinforced through the comments mirroring the same phrases or meanings. This culture aligns with Uses and Gratification Theory as the content shared in the meme culture provides emotional release and validation while not displaying vulnerabilities directly.

Another framing strategy is ironic detachment which is found in posts like Post 10 (“I’m fine”) and 14 (“everything is fine” following a panic attack). The contradictory framing discusses the coping mechanism and the reality in one go. Through the lens of framing, mental health condition isn’t discussed to gain attention anymore, it is a shared joke in the culture which also normalises denial. Users interpret such framings and reproduce it further by comments and shares.

Exaggeration of distress to improve engagement, relatability and shareability demonstrates hyperbolic framing. For example, in Post 8 (“What do you do for a living? suffer”), it is framed as a constant state. Such framings on repeat, according to social constructionism, contributes to a culture where suffering is normalised and framed as a part of everyday life. This not only expresses isolated feelings; it also forms a cultural narrative around mental health that is collectively accepted and adopted.

Tones are also shaped by absurd metaphors employed to increase the humour value, such as Post 12 (“mind goblins”) where playful dramatic distortion of reality trumps clinical accuracy which is more complex and does not have enough relatability value.

Mental health terms and discussions are broken down into simple and fun ways to share one’s woes and are repacked as culturally valuable, shareable and humorous material. This practice is also explained to be a coping mechanism, as posted by a user under Post 5, in which he directly states that humor helps manage trauma and its symptoms. Uses and

Gratification theory can be applied here to understand that the user is sharing valuable information he has to share his intellect and gather support while expressing himself. Such participation helps with emotional regulation, relatability and identity formation within social groups having a shared discourse.

The tone of collective validation can be found across the dataset of 49 posts such as the “You are not alone” (Post 7) which facilitates community building and support. Shared interpretations are validated and stabilized through such tonal discourse.

Overall, the use of humour to increase accessibility and relatability around mental health digital discourse is demonstrated. However, trivialisation, normalisation and lack of accuracy raises concerns.

Normalisation Vs Trivialisation

The most concerning factor in the humour-based mental health memes and conversations around them, is the trivialisation and normalisation of the seriousness in mental health diagnosis and understand this simultaneous process to be the result of cultural representations that are repeated in the digital world constructing mental health as a commonplace that’s socially acceptable and trivial. The seriousness is ignored and everyday experiences are interchanged with clinical terms which broaden the meaning into normalcy and detach their clinical intensity.

The framing device of relatability further confirms the normalisation and the proofs are in posts such as Post 3 which discusses “debilitating stomach issues & anxiety” in a normal and casual tone. The comments follow with acceptance and confirmation with the framing such as “so many people suffer from the same things we feel alone with”. This stands for collective identity. Commonality trumps seriousness and mental health conditions are framed as normative parts of daily life which almost everyone experiences. These are socially validated, acknowledged and propagated.

Users in return to these posts, interact actively and participate in the comments to seek validations and satisfy needs as explained by Uses and Gratification

theory. Needs such as validation, reassurance, identity, community and self-expression are satisfied through this cultural discourse. Post 7, “you are not alone” responses directly stand for the purpose of meme culture in destigmatising mental health discourses and making it more visible and widespread.

Along the lines of normalisation, trivialisation poses a threat without much benefits. Serious mental health conditions that should be properly diagnosed and treated are normalised and humourised, diminishing the need for seeking medical care professionally. A user interacting with such posts could treat it as a coping mechanism and believe everything about the triviality and normalcy of mental health conditions as it is often hard to distinguish the fact from the farce in memes. The depth and variability is sacrificed to increase relatability and engagement. Concern becomes entertainment and therefore, safety concerns arise.

The predominant usage of laughing emojis in the comments, brief affirmations such as “I’m going to be okay” and exaggerated responses aimed at farming replies and likes, amplify the effect of the lack of seriousness and urgency. Although some comments discuss therapy and symptoms seriously, casual relatability holds the reins.

The dataset while analysed proposes trivialisation and normalisation to be co-existing factors inside the meme culture. Mental health is made visible but ambiguously as normalisation reduces taboo and stigma fostering a communal environment while trivialisation undermines the seriousness and complexity of mental health conditions.

Relatability and Collective Identify

A prominent feature of the dataset of 49 posts and comments is the use of relatability as the central pivot that connects everything. Through social constructionism, we can understand that repeated interactions and shared symbolic language together forms meanings inside the culture that is adopted and reiterated. Mental health is not framed as an isolated experience or individual factor that happens in silos of the society, it is treated as something that everyone

experiences collectively and recognised socially.

Relatability stands at the centre of this construct. Inclusive language formation, shared experiences and relatable responses all point towards a “we” collectively. The mental health conditions are broadened to include various aspects of life and it's sufferings while intentionally keeping the interpretations broad and generalisable. A wide array of audiences identify with the content universally. The framing of mental health conditions in such general terms transforms it into a cultural experience shared by most, rather than a personal or private experience to be taken seriously.

As discussed above, users comment “same”, “literally me” and so on, proving their identification with the material and language to form a collective identity. By doing so, they are claiming a membership within that culture and community that discusses emotions in a humorous tone. Self-deprecation humor, specifically, acts as a collective identifier which pushes the individual into an environment of acceptance and shared experiences. Repetitive validations from users and the content confirm the shared meanings and form collective cultural norms in the digital space.

Uses and Gratification theory can be used to explain how audience engagement plays a role in this process. Active users engage with the meme content to fulfill needs as discussed before and comment patterns point towards relatability as the key gratification in which users gain reassurance. Isolation is reduced and collective mentality and community is propagated. Direct comments or posts such as “you are not alone” stand as an example.

Mental health in digital space is also approached as a factor to form identities. Informal labels such as “ADHD gang”, “OCD gang” show how terminologies are reframed to form categories of collective belonging. Mental health terms become collective identifiers.

However, this framing results in a homogenised area of discussion reducing awareness about diverse experiences which need different treatments. Generalising and normalising to make the content

universal, risks differences in understanding the seriousness, depth and urgency of mental health diagnosis. Simplifying narratives help open doors but oversimplification brings in carelessness and misinformation.

A sense of collective identity is formed around mental health in Instagram, where relatability is both a cultural and community strategy. Belonging and support is reinforced in Gen Z digital spaces by social construction, framing practices and the engagement with the former by the users.

Emotional Expression

Emotional expression is set in a humour-based, indirect manner in which feelings are depicted in a not serious way. Instead of showing actual distress, emotions are hidden underneath a layer of humour, exaggeration and irony. From the Framing Theory point of view, the memes are constructed in a strategic manner where the framing remains humorous and relatable but the meaning is deep, personal and highly subjective and also accepted widely among counterparts.

In Post 10, the meme says “I’m fine” when actually suffering from denial but in the comment section, the audience commented “hilariously true” which showcases how the audience perceive the scenario in a light-hearted manner but the engagement itself reflects the mental status of the audience. Likewise, Post 8 represents extreme emotional distress in an exaggerated manner which is humorous on the surface level. This ironic framing helps the audience to express their serious emotions without really being open or direct. The framing process converts a highly emotional topic into a content that the audience can engage with as it is not straightforward about the mental health topic which reduces the discomfort of association.

From the viewpoint of Uses and Gratifications theory, these memes serve as an emotional outlet for the audience to gratify their needs of association and visibility. Instead of directly expressing their mental health concerns, audiences engage with the content from a distant lens which means audiences would rather prioritise relatability over their expression of

introspective thoughts. Comments include phrases like “literally me”, “same” or use emojis to show their emotions.

In few posts like Post 9, audiences have expressed physical symptoms that they experienced when facing stress or high emotional distress like how they really struggle with depression or stomach pain indicating a direct and more real response but even those few comments are accompanied with phrases like “lol” or laughing emojis which maintains a distant tone.

Using the Social Constructionism theory, it can be observed that how emotional expressions are portrayed are defined by cultural expressions and expectations. It shows that this type of expressional style places relatability, brevity, humour and less disruption over vulnerability because that is the expectation of accepted social standards.

Overall Instagram meme culture provides a platform for expressing mental distress but there is a balance that exists between showcasing emotional resonance and socially accepted display of those emotions.

4.2 Major Findings

By analyzing the memes posted on Instagram and the comment section, it shows that the discussion about mental health that exists among the Gen Z digital culture actively gets constructed through such communicative practices online. The results show how meme culture provides an environment for Gen Z where meanings are simplistic, sharable and is open for interpretation, thus making mental health more visible while its meaning is transformed at the same time.

1. Cultural Translation of Mental Health

One of the major findings is the cultural translation of medical terms. Words like depression, burnout and anxiety are no more limited to clinical context, as they are now used to describe daily emotional moods like stress and exhaustion. The benefit of doing so is that the text becomes easier to relate to, increasing the chances of engagement. On the contrary, the boundary between clinical diagnoses and regular life events

are diminishing, which further creates ambiguity around the definition of mental health.

2. **Humor as a Dominant Communicative Strategy**
 Humour is used as the major tone through which mental health concepts are communicated. This approach is efficient because mental health conversations are serious subjects but in memes it is portrayed as making fun of oneself or through exaggeration and irony. This enables the audience to interact with such sensitive topics in an indirect manner without being vulnerable. Therefore humour becomes a tool for communication as well as a coping mechanism. A concern that becomes evident is that this approach diminishes the seriousness of mental health narratives and often ends up communicated and interpreted in a humorous way.
3. **Simultaneous Normalization and Trivialization**
 From the results, it can be seen that there is a simultaneous process of normalization and trivialization concerning mental illnesses. In some cases, mental health issues are portrayed to be normal and common in memes. The reactions from users further affirm the occurrence of such instances. At the same time, the continuous use of humor and exaggeration makes mental health appear normal, minimizing its complexity and severity.
4. **Formation of Collective Identity**
 Relatability becomes key in creating collective identity amongst users. Memes help people relate through their common experiences, which is evident in the comments posted where similarities are expressed. Mental health acts as a cultural identifier through which people create a link to an extended community. However, the focus on shared experiences can lead to generalizing diverse individual mental health experiences.

Engagement Type	Description	Example Pattern
Validation	Agreement or identification	“same”, “so real”
Humor Reinforcement	Extending the joke	memes in replies
Emotional Disclosure	Sharing personal experience	“I actually feel this daily”

Informational	Giving advice or corrections	therapy suggestions
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Table 1: Types of Audience Engagement in Comments

5. **Indirect and Mediated Emotional Expression**
 The expression of emotions in this dataset is predominantly indirect and mediated through the use of humor and symbolism. Strong emotions such as depression, exhaustion and anxiety are indirectly showcased in the memes, these feelings are expressed under the disguise of comedy or irony. Therefore, this approach allows audiences to express their emotions without being vulnerable and in a way which is generally accepted by the society. But, this behaviour tends to limit the depth and precision of emotional expression.
6. **Prevalence of Simplification and Inaccuracy**
 In addition to the above insights, the research uncovers a phenomenon of simplification and partial inaccuracy when describing mental health issues. Mental processes then to be explained in simplified terms which makes them easy to understand although not always entirely accurate, as clinical terms are used loosely in cultural contexts. Although it makes the discussion of mental health easier to access, it does add to its semantic dilution. In the comment sections, validation and collective identity are observed but there is limited help-seeking behaviour or corrective actions are suggested. This showcases that the audience engages with these posts and relate to the shared interpretations formed of cultural contexts than actually think about the clinical accuracy of the mental health concepts.

Category	Identified Key Pattern	Indicators	Frequency of Posts
Concept Translation	Use of casual language than clinical language	r stress, slang terms”	36
Tone and Framing	the dominant theme	, self-deprecation, exaggeration”	44

Normalisation	ning of shared experience	everyone feels this, "relatability"	38
Trivialisation	Lack of seriousness	ness is recorded comically	29
Relatability	Collective identity	memes like "same", "literally me"	41
Emotional Expression	Expression is indirect	Humour is used to disguise distress	33
Issues related to accuracy	Terms are simplified or wrongly used	Overuse of terms	27

Table 2: Thematic Distribution of Mental Health Representation in Memes

Overall the findings of this study shows how Instagram meme culture on mental health is shaping the audience narratives about the understanding of mental health concepts. Meme culture enables the audience to relate, contribute and interact with like-minded people strengthening the sense of visibility and empathy which further reflects the wider influence of the online culture in influencing how mental health is interpreted, communicated and experienced.

V. CONCLUSION

5.1 Conclusion

This paper studies how Instagram meme culture engages the audience in mental health conversations centered around communication styles influenced by the GenZ. From the analysis of these memes and its comment section, it is found that these posts not only provide a platform for expression but also demonstrate how understanding is remodeled through participation and cultural contexts.

One key finding of the research paper is that memes have a dual role when it comes to mental health on digital platforms. One they act as a tool that brings awareness to the audience about existing mental health conditions making what used to be a stigmatised topic more approachable in everyday life.

With humour, simple language and personal experiences, these memes create a net of relatability and collective identity among its audience. The second role of this meme culture is that by incorporating diagnosable mental health terminologies into everyday routine, it weakens the depth and seriousness of these conditions. This leads to a divide in the understanding of how these mental health conditions should actually be perceived and how they are portrayed and received by the audience.

This study also shows that audience engagement is a major factor that keeps this meme culture in practice. Audiences engage with the content, find it relatable, share the ideology and also express their views. This pattern shows a sense of community building where participants identify and seek validation. These interactions and communications shape and circulate the discourse on mental health.

Based on the Social Constructionism, Framing Theory and Uses and Gratifications Theory, the study depicts how in this meme culture meanings are formed, framed and shared among the audience on digital platforms. These theories illustrate that through continuous interaction and participation, a shared cultural understanding has been created among the GenZ culture regarding mental health using memes as a tool.

Collectively, though memes on mental health in digital platforms seem to be a trend, it has deeper implications. It shows how audiences communicate such emotionally and psychologically complex issues in the modern day. There is a shift in the pattern of communication which reinforces awareness and understanding. The digital discourse on mental health shows the openness and proactive nature of the current society about highly stigmatised conversations. This research paper adds to how digital content influences, reshapes and transforms the notions of the society.

5.2 Limitations

This study uses a small number of sample posts for the analysis which means the entire diversity in the online platforms is not captured. The memes analysed are in English language, this reduces the generalisability across different online platforms,

languages and cultures. Furthermore, as the study employs a qualitative approach, the analysis of the contents of the memes and the comment sections are subjective. It is also hard to compile the audience engagement into specific groups because the user information is not available. Audience behaviour and psychological and emotional impact are not accurately measured in this study.

5.3 Scope for Future Research

Future research can amplify this study by collecting data from different digital platforms like TikTok, Facebook and also collect memes in various languages to understand the diversified audience belonging to different cultures. Mixed methods approach or quantitative approach can be employed to measure audience behaviour, psychological and emotional impacts. To make the research more well equipped, algorithms of digital platforms, why a content gets viral and how the platforms are designed should also be studied. These suggestions will give an all-inclusive insight into how meme culture on mental health is shaped in the digital discourse.

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