

# The Implementation of Internet Memes to Build Brand Awareness of E-Commerce in Indonesia

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**Abstract**— This study aims to assess the potential of memes to be used in advertising to improve the brand awareness of an Indonesian e-commerce business, Fabelio. The method used in this study is experimental - quantitative. The experiment was conducted using Instagram posts. To answer the research question, this study measured the memes virality and the brand awareness of the respondent. There are two respondent groups involved in this experiment which are respondents who follow Fabelio's Instagram account (control group) and respondents who like the memes but do not follow Fabelio's Instagram post (experimental group). The brand awareness level for both groups were compared using t-test. The result of this study shows that the brand awareness level of the experimental group is similar with the control group which shows that memes is as effective as traditional ads in improving the brand awareness. In addition, the type of meme that has the highest virality level is silliness and sarcasm type. This finding could be used as consideration for business to implement memes as form of ads.

**Keywords**—Internet memes, brand awareness, virality, and e-commerce

## I. INTRODUCTION

E-commerce business is getting more competitive each year. To win the competition of getting customers, e-commerce businesses are required to build a strong brand. The strong brand helps customers to decide which brand to buy. Furthermore, strong brand results in higher revenue streams for both short term and long term [1]. Strong brand is often measured by brand awareness as it is one of the key determinants in brand equity [2]. Therefore, it is important for business to improve brand awareness since it can affect consumer in making a purchase decision [3].

To boost brand awareness, advertising (ads) is one of common methods used in business. Ads nowadays can be performed in various mediums and in various forms. Regarding the medium, social media is becoming more popular for ads as indicated by increasing budget of social media ads [4]. Regarding form, humor is one of the form that is frequently used in ads.

Humor is commonly contained in ads it has been used in ads on TV, magazine, radio, and online ads. Humor is used in ads as it is believed that humor would attract more attention from the audiences because it has a persuasive effect [5]. Humor can loosen the resistance of audiences in accepting the information. Humor in ads is also claimed to increase preference and create positive moods of the audience.

Although the usage of humor in ads is a common practice [6], the humor itself is a complex topic that has been studied for ages. The effectiveness of humor in ads is affected by two factors: humor relatedness and humor complexity [5]. Before we decide to add humor in ads, we should decide what the communication goals are, which type of humor that will be used, what medium that will be used, what message that will be sent, what product that will be advertised and who will be the right audience. Therefore, study of humor in ads is important especially with the widespread of internet that influence the evolution of humor.

In Internet era, the form of humor is changing. Internet meme or meme is one form of humor that emerges and popular due to Internet. Davidson defined an internet meme as a piece of culture, typically a joke, which gains influence through an online transmission. The meme was first defined as a unit of conceptual replication which identifies topics, ideas that spread through a culture [8]. By years later the definition of memes has evolved. Meme is defined as a piece

of content spreading online from user to user and changing along the way [9]. Usually, meme is identified as a content posted on humor sites. It is also defined as a way of communication and genre which adapts to a culture where it is being created and shared. According to [7], there are seven types of memes: personification, comparison, pun, exaggeration, sarcasm, silliness, and surprise.

Internet memes can be used for campaigns or advertising. For instance, Gucci lately used memes for their campaign with hashtag #TFWGucci on Instagram [10]. Besides Gucci, Carousell has used memes to attract the audience on Instagram. Although meme has been used for marketing, it has not been intensively researched as a marketing tool to show its effectiveness empirically. So the effectiveness of the meme usage remains unobserved. Furthermore, the meme itself has not been explored intensively and this leads to vagueness on how memes are used as a marketing tool to boost brand awareness in social media. Therefore, this study is conducted to measure the effectivity of the usage of internet memes to boost brand awareness of e-commerce business on social media. The author chose a furniture selling company, Fabelio, as a case study for this research. Fabelio is selected as the case study since it has been using social media as media for marketing and advertisement.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### A. Brand Awareness

For at least three reasons brand awareness plays a big role in consumer decision making [1]. First, brand awareness makes the brand appear as a choice when a customer is about to purchase a product. In other words, the brand will be a member of the consideration set. Second, brand awareness will affect the purchase decision as customers tend to purchase only familiar products. In low involvement decision settings, a minimum level of brand awareness may be sufficient for product choice, even in the absence of a well-formed attitude. Third, brand awareness affects consumer decision making by influencing the formation and strength of brand associations in the brand image. Brand image is defined as perceptions about a brand as reflected by the brand associations held in consumer memory.

Brand awareness has two dimensions which are the brand recall and brand recognition. The brand recall relates to consumer's ability to retrieve the brand when given the product

category, the needs fulfilled by the category, or some other type of probe as a cue [1]. Brand recall requires memorization of a brand's name, while brand recognition captures familiarity with the perceptual features of a brand and its products. Brand recognition relates to consumer's ability to confirm prior exposure to the brand when given the brand as a cue [1]. Customers can discriminate the brand as having been seen or heard previously.

### B. Humor Type

Bases on previous study, there are two types of humor: positive and negative. Catanescu and Tom divides humor into more specific types which are comparison, personification, exaggeration, pun, sarcasm, silliness and surprise [7].

Comparison meme is a meme that puts more than one element together to produce humorous situations [11]. Those elements are put together to be compared and the comparison is the humorous part. Meanwhile, personification is a meme that contains things like animals, plant, and objects which are attributed by human characteristic, for example fictional characters or dead objects that act like a human.

Exaggeration is a meme that exaggerate something out of proportion to produce humorous situations. Wendy's commercial shows the example of exaggeration type [11]. In that commercial, two young men order "4 Biggie Fries and 4 Biggie Drinks" at a drive-thru and as soon as they pick up the order, the car tilts on one side [11].

Pun is a meme that uses an element of languages to create a humorous response. In other words pun uses word play to give humorous effect. Sarcasm is a meme that uses a sarcastic statement to create humor. Sarcasm joke is one kind of joke that uses words that means the opposite words to insult someone. The example of the sarcasm type can be seen in Lexmark advertisement [11]. The ads showed a conflict between a sister and a brother. The brother, with his legs up on the desk, was thinking of printing "some sort of a real cool sign" for his room. The sister's sarcastic response was "How about 'For Rent'?" [11].

Silliness is a meme that uses funny faces or behavior. The example of this silliness type was shown by an advertising for "T 800-Collect," when a couple of muscular men run around the beach on their toes to avoid the hot sand [11]. Another example is the commercial for the

Weather Channel in which two men painted their faces red and blue to predict the weather.

Surprise is a meme that uses an unexpected situation as starting point where humor can be created. According to [11], the example of this type was the advertisement for Primestar Satellite TV. This ads makes good use of the surprise element to arrive at a hilarious outcome. The ads starts with a man carefully washing his car. Just before he gives the car a kiss, he notices a giant pipe rolling down the street toward him. In a state of desperation, the man manages to quickly move his car. As he breathes a sigh of relief, the punch line hits the audience: The car is badly damaged as he saves the satellite dish, which he initially intended to protect by moving his car.

### C. Meme

An evolutionary biologist, Richard Dawkins first conceptualized the term of ‘meme’ (based on the Ancient Greek word ‘mīmēmain’ that means ‘something imitated’) as small cultural units of transmission that flow from person to person by copying or imitation [8]. In other words, defined meme is defined as “unit of conceptual replication which identifies spread an idea or topic from a person to person within a culture” [8]. Meanwhile, another study defined memes as contagious patterns of cultural information that are passed from mind to mind and that directly shape and generate key actions and mindsets of a social group [12]. In the context of internet, meme is defined as a piece of content spreading online from user to user and changing along the way [13]. This concept has evolved as digital era came in. The term meme is nowadays known as the internet meme. Internet meme, according to [14], is defined as a piece of culture, typically a joke, which gains influence through the online transmission.

To clarify the study of internet memes by [8], some researchers set characteristics for internet memes which consist of fidelity, fecundity, and longevity. Fidelity, according to [15], refers to the quality of a meme that enable it to be readily copied and passed from mind to mind as a relatively intact idea. Meanwhile, fidelity has very little to do with truth. Memes are often successful because they are memorable, rather than because they are important or useful. Fecundity, according to [16], refers to the rate at which an idea or pattern is copied and spread. The rate implies that internet meme will be replicated and distributed even more if it spreads quickly. The quick meme spreading may catch robust attention and that is what makes internet

meme goes viral. Longevity, according to [17], refers to how long internet meme survives. The longevity enables meme to be copied and shared with new person exponentially. The longevity also represents that meme fits the current conditions which make it stays.

### III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research used quantitative-experimental approach. There are two main instruments used for this research which are memes and surveys. This study created ads for Fabelio product in the form of memes. The memes are created by modifying and using popular memes templates to answer the research questions. The popular memes are gathered from websites that provide meme templates such as [Imgflip.com](http://imgflip.com) and [Memegenerator.com](http://Memegenerator.com). This study also explores [Knowyourmeme.com](http://Knowyourmeme.com) to discover how the meme templates emerge originally in the first place.

There were seven memes created, one for each humor type. The memes were posted using Fabelio Instagram account and distributed more by using promote feature provided by Instagram. There were two groups of respondent: control group and experimental group. The control group consists of followers of Fabelio on Instagram who are Indonesians. The experimental group consists of Indonesian Instagram users (not Fabelio’s followers) who hit the like button on the memes posted on Instagram.

There are surveys in the form of online questionnaire to measure brand awareness for both control and experimental group. The first survey targets the control group and the second survey targets the experimental group. Both surveys aim to measure the brand awareness. To measure the brand awareness the following questions were asked to the respondents. The questions are developed based on previous studies on brand awareness.

- BA1. I have difficulty in imagining this brand in mind.
- BA2. I can recognize this brand among competing brands.
- BA3. This brand is the only brand I recalled when I need to make purchase decision on the product.
- BA4. This brand comes up first in my mind when I need to make a purchase decision on the product.

Respondents were asked to submit their answers for each question using the following

Likert scale, 1: Strongly Disagree, 2: Disagree; 3: Neutral; 4: Agree; and 5: Strongly Agree.

The memes created were validated before posted. The validation was done by consulting to three credible experts: two psychology lecturers and one marketing expert. The first psychology lecturer has done a research about humor in advertising and the second psychology lecturer is expert in consumer psychology domain. The last expert is a marketing lecturer in Universitas Indonesia who is also an owner of a branding company. He has experience as a brand strategist for more than 10 years.

The data was analyzed using descriptive statistic and t-test statistic. Descriptive statistic is used to observe the virality of memes and traditional ads. T-test was used to analyze whether memes ads are more effective in improving brand awareness compared to traditional ads. To measure the effectiveness, the brand awareness of control group and experimental group are compared using t-test. Therefore, the formulated hypothesis is:

$$\mu_1 = \text{control group population}$$

$$\mu_2 = \text{experimental group population}$$

$$H_0: \mu_1 = \mu_2$$

$H_0$  hypothesis means that brand awareness between control group and experimental group are equal. If the null hypothesis is rejected, it means there is difference of effectiveness between memes and traditional ads in improving brand awareness.

#### IV. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Data is collected from Instagram and questionnaire. Data from Instagram are number of likes and followers that are used to analyze the virality aspect. Meanwhile, the questionnaire was used to collect the brand awareness data which was distributed for three weeks. The first questionnaire has collected 124 valid data for control group and the second questionnaire has collected 101 valid data for experimental group. The questionnaires also collected demographic information of respondents as shown in Table 1.

TABLE I. RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

Variable		Control	Experimental
Gender	Male	45 (36.3%)	55 (54.5%)
	Female	79 (63.7%)	46 (45.5%)
Age (years)	<21	15 (12.1%)	10 (9.9%)
	21-30	93 (75%)	69 (68.31%)

	31-40	14 (11.3%)	18 (17.8%)
	>40	2 (1.6%)	4 (3.96%)
Occupation	Student	30 (24.2%)	24 (23.7%)
	Government Employee	6 (1.69%)	3 (2.97%)
	Private Company Employee	49 (39.5%)	36 (35.6%)
	Entrepreneur	10 (2.81%)	34 (33.66%)
	Unemployed	12 (9.7%)	2 (1.98%)
	Others	17 (22.1%)	2 (1.898%)
Education	Elementary/Junior/Senior	27 (19.4%)	12 (11.88%)
	Diploma	10 (8.1%)	14 (13.86%)
	Bachelor	79 (63.7%)	68 (67.3%)
	Master	12 (8.9%)	7 (6.93%)
Salary (in thousand rupiah)	<500	18 (14.5%)	7 (6.93%)
	500-1000	6 (4.9%)	9 (8.91%)
	1000-5000	36 (29%)	51 (50.49%)
	5000-10,000	42 (33.9%)	27 (26.73%)
	>10,000	24 (17.7%)	7 (6.93%)

There are two main objects that are being observed in this study: memes virality and memes effects on brand awareness. This study uses two main variables: memes (independent variable) and brand awareness level (dependent variable). In addition to two main variables, there are also control variables in this research: the advertised product, date and time posting, hashtags, media and the caption.

##### A. Meme Virality

Meme virality is one of objects that are being observed in this experiment. Taecharungroj [7] stated that there are two indicators to measure the virality on social media (Facebook): likes and share. Like is represented by the amount of audience who hit the like button on a post while share is represented by the amount of audience who hit the share button on a post. Since Instagram has no feature to share post publicly so the share indicator was removed. In another study, the virality in social media can be measured using other indicators: brand search value, growth of followers, and website traffic [19]. But in this research, none of these indicators can be used. The brand search value could not be used because the brand does not use any analytic tool to measure the amount of appearance of the brand in search. The growth of the followers could not be measured accurately due to the utilization of bot followers in Fabelio

Instagram account so that their actual follower number remains unknown. The website traffic could not be used because it could not track which post that leads audience to access the website. Therefore, only “like” indicator is used in this research.

To measure the virality of the memes, descriptive statistics of the memes was observed. The statistics include the month of when the a post is posted, number of post per month, maximum likes, minimum likes, average likes, number of followers, and engagement level. The main points of the statistics are the engagement level and the average likes (virality). While the virality represents how viral a the post is, the engagement represents how big the engagement of the post. According to [20], engagement level is the percentage of audience that responds to a post or content. The engagement level is calculated from the average likes divides by the number of followers. The engagement level has four levels: low (0-1.64%), good (1.64-3.48%), high (3.48-6.67%), and very high (6.67-100%). The virality is determined by how much likes the post can get. Since there are numerous posts, the virality is represented by the average likes the posts can get. The formulation of average likes is showed below:

$$Engagement\ Level = \frac{\text{average likes}}{\text{number of followers}}$$

$$Average\ Likes = \frac{\sum_{k=0}^k \text{likes of X - th post}}{\text{number of posts}}$$

To determine whether the virality of the memes is better than non-memes, this study calculated the virality of post in Fabelio Instagram account. This study used the statistics of Instagram post within October 2018 as shown in Table 3. The statistics include the month of when a post is posted, number of post per month, average likes, number of followers, and engagement level. This was used as a base to determine if the memes are more viral than non-memes post.

TABLE II. VIRALITY OF FABELIO’S NON-MEME POST

Month	October
Number of Post	45
Average Likes	104.30
Number of Followers	68000
Engagement Level	0.00153

Meanwhile, the virality of the memes compared to the Non-meme’s post is shown in Table 3.

TABLE III. VIRALITY COMPARISON BETWEEN MEMES AND NON-MEMES POST

	Non-memes Post	Memes Post
Average Likes	104.30	62.43
Engagement level	0.00153	0.00091

The virality between each type of meme is shown in Table 4.

TABLE IV. VIRALITY COMPARISON BETWEEN MEMES AND NON-MEMES POST

Meme Type	Virality (Number of Likes)	Rank
Silliness	105	1
Surprise	76	2
Comparison	58	3
Pun	56	4
Sarcasm	54	5
Personification	53	6
Exaggeration	35	7

. This experiment shows that silliness type of meme gets the highest number of likes. The likes number indicated that this type of meme is the most favorable among all other meme types. This study also shows that although the virality of memes are lower than the control, it does not mean that memes are bad or unable to get viral. Factor such as the preference of memes, quality of memes, length of observation might influence the likes number. However, we can also see that there are two types of memes that have better virality than the non-memes type.

#### B. Brand Awareness

To measure the brand awareness level, this study used the aforementioned constructs of brand awareness explained in methodology section. The difference of brand awareness between control and experimental group is measured using t-test. The result of t-test is as follows.

TABLE V. T-TEST RESULT OF CONTROL AND EXPERIMENT GROUP

Component	Control Group	Experimental Group
Mean	3.34475806451613	3.1509900990099

Variance	0.756699940991345	0.46259900990099
Observation	124	101
Hypothesis	0	
df	223	
t Stat	1.874749954	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.031067176	
t Critical one-tail	1.65171532	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.062134351	
t Critical two-tail	1.970658961	

This study run t-test with two sample assuming unequal variances because it was found from F-test that the variances of the populations are unequal. If  $t \text{ Stat} < -t \text{ Critical two-tail}$  or  $t \text{ Stat} > t \text{ Critical two-tail}$ , the null hypothesis is rejected. From the result, we see that t test did not meet the criteria; therefore, we did not reject the null hypothesis. It means that there is no difference of effectiveness between memes and traditional ads in improving brand awareness.

#### V. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE WORK

The experiment of this research shows that the usage of memes is as effective as traditional ads in improving brand awareness of Fabelio's customer. Therefore, it can be concluded that memes can be used to promote brand awareness; however, it is not more effective or less effective than traditional ads. The most favorable meme based on the virality is silliness type. This is contradictory to the research conducted by the Taecharunroj which stated that there is no significant preference among the memes [7]. Further research could explore other business as a case study with high conversion rate in order to test whether memes could boost their products' brand awareness.

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