Tradition or innovation approaches? The role of meme marketing on brand recall and brand engagement: The evidence in Vietnam

Le Pham Tra Mi[1,2], Cong Duc Tran[1]*, Lam Trieu Vy[1], Le Duong Thuy Ngan[1], and Tran Hue Tam[1]

[1]*Faculty of Business Administration, Ton Duc Thang University, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam*
[2]*Erasmus School of Economics, Erasmus University Rotterdam, Burgemeester Oudlaan 50, 3062 PA, Rotterdam, Netherlands*

* Corresponding author: trancongduc@tdtu.edu.vn

Abstract

Viral marketing, particularly memes, has become a popular strategy to boost customer engagement through their viral nature. The integration of memes into advertising campaigns is seen as an effective approach for advertisers and marketing professionals to effectively engage with customers and extend the influence of their marketing strategies. This study aims to address the existing gap in the literature on meme marketing by examining the influence of three primary factors of meme virality including content-related factors, customer-related factors, and media-related factors on brand engagement and brand recall in emerging countries. Our research findings indicate that meme virality is a precursor that positively affects brand recall, enhancing the probability of customer repurchase and recommendations. This study offers practical insights for managers and policymakers seeking sustainable growth amid uncertainty and competition. Additionally, while humour and relatable meme-based content can strengthen B2B brands, careful audience alignment is crucial to avoid potential reputational risks, particularly in high-end sectors.

Introduction

In 1976, Richard Dawkin introduced memes that imitated units of cultural information - music, slogan, region, and so on, which were spreadable and adaptable among the public (Dawkin, 2016). In the digital context, memes refer to ideas or concepts reproduced from original content by individual internet users, then spread rapidly to communicate on social media and web forums (Zulli and Zulli, 2020; Shifman, 2013).

A meme combines words, phrases, expressions, iconic imagery, or recognizable references (Cannizzaro, 2016). Besides that, memes appear across many platforms in different forms, such as videos, photoshopped images, and popular culture references (Vasquez and Aslan, 2021), more specifically animation, GIF, tags, images, text, or video (Malodia et al, 2022). Additionally, Malodia et al. (2022) characterise memes as the content that spreads rapidly, and it leverages profound captivation, humorousness, sarcasm, and distinctiveness to promote an idea or message.

In today's fast-changing markets, brands are facing a crucial challenge on how to connect with their audience meaningfully. Traditional advertising methods often miss the mark when dealing with the dynamic nature of emerging markets (Elkhwesky et al., 2022; Pham et al., 2023; Pham et al., 2024). The younger generation, particularly in emerging countries like Vietnam, showcases unique behaviours, especially online, with a tendency to skip ads, and capturing their attention becomes a puzzle for brands (Sterling, 2017). This shift in consumer behaviour calls for innovative strategies to break through the noise and truly resonate. Thus, meme marketing was highlighted as a powerful tool for reaching and engaging with this elusive audience (Malodia et al., 2022).

While most of previous studies addressed the positive impact of viral memes on brand recall and engagement (Malodia et al., 2022), there is a lack of a study on a direct and robust connection between meme's virality and subsequent recommendations through recall, engagement, and repurchase behaviours. The enthusiasm generated by viral memes among customers may not necessarily translate into tangible actions like recommending the brand to others or becoming repeat customers.

Therefore, this study aims to investigate the impact of meme's virality on recommendations through the mediating effects of recall, engagement, and repurchase behaviours. Particularly, our study also provides a more comprehensive understanding of how viral memes influence customer behaviour and ultimately lead to brand recommendations by exploring the relationships between these factors. Additionally, the current findings reveal how these factors influence repurchase behaviours and customers' suggestions. These insights provide marketers and businesses with valuable information to leverage memes effectively and foster stronger customer relationships and brand loyalty in the digital age. By harnessing the power of memes, businesses can potentially drive positive customer actions, leading to increased repurchases and brand recommendations.

The rest of this article is structured in the following manner. Section 2 introduces the theoretical basis and pertinent literature that forms the foundation of the research model. Section 3 provides a detailed description of the approach used for measurements and data collection. Section 4 delves into the empirical findings, and the study's

contributions and conclusions are outlined thereafter.

Literature Review

Theoretical Background

Ducoffe and Curlo (2010) demonstrated the importance of informative and entertaining advertisements, fitting into a communication-based marketing model. Arie Bowo et al. (2024) highlighted that meme-based content aligned with Generation Z's interests and values can be highly successful and viral. This generation finds satisfaction in memes due to their roles as sources of entertainment and information, leading to virality.

The framework also follows consumption theory (Sheth et al., 1991), which explains consumer behaviour based on functional, social, emotional, epistemic, and conditional values. Chen and Xie (2020) extended this theory to digital content, showing that social and functional values are crucial in meme-based posts.

Social contagion theory (Van den Bulte and Lilien, 2001) further explains how well-connected individuals can influence the spread of viral content, with "seeding" and "distribution" being key elements. Memes are seen as contagious ideas that spread through networks, with these strategies boosting their virality (Hinz et al., 2011; Vasile et al., 2021).

Finally, gratification theory (Quan-Haase and Young, 2010) suggests that users engage with content selectively, driven by motivations like information-seeking, entertainment, and social sharing. Malodia et al. (2022) showed that escapism, social, and content gratifications positively influence meme virality.

Content-related Factors

Content-related factors encompass the multiple dimensions and attributes of content that have the potential to influence its quality, appeal, and efficacy (Lou et al., 2019; Zhou et al., 2013). Social, functional, entertainment and informative values are essential components of content-related aspects. The informative value of the advertising value theory corresponds to the epistemic value in the theory of consumption values about branded material (Lou and Xie, 2021). As a result, customers are motivated to seek it out for information about the brand and product usage, allowing them to derive value. Thus, content-related factors of advertising messages are the antecedent of customers' perceived value. This concept suggests that if customers see location-based advertising (LBAs) as valuable because of certain content-related factors, they may be motivated to use them, leading to desirable user reactions (Lin and Robert Bautista, 2018).

The entertainment value in the advertising value theory is an effective dimension that can fulfil customers' needs for amusement (Ducoffe, 1996). According to Yoshida et al. (2018), the entertainment value users perceive from social media pages can enhance their loyalty to the brand through brand engagement. The previous research suggests participants are more likely to share an advertisement if it evokes high rather than low amusement or anger (Berger, 2012). Thus, it stands to reason that the funnier the content is, the more viral it becomes.

In the realm of social value, the focus is on the perceived usefulness related to symbolic or conspicuous consumption (e.g., clothing) or shared consumption practices (e.g., gifts), and often involving interpersonal communication (Robertson, 1967). Within this context, we theorise the branded content holds social value when it assists individuals in obtaining social benefits like popularity or favourability within their social network. Customers may forward the content which are useful to help others, thus exhibiting their knowledge and enhancing their self-image. In addition, Others might share valuable information for the purpose of the retrieve of practical content (Berger, 2012).

Traditionally, customer choice has been assumed to be primarily influenced by functional value (Marshall, 1890; Stigler, 1950). The functional value of an alternative may be attributed to its specific characteristics (Ferber, 1973), such as reliability, durability, and price. For example, the purchase of a particular automobile depends on fuel economy and maintenance records. Thus, we propose the first hypothesis that content-related factors positively correlate with meme virality.

H1 Content-related factors, measured by informative value (a), entertainment value (b), social value (c), and functional value (d), positively influence the virality of memes.

Customer-related Factors

According to the UGT theory, the suggested construct of customer-related factors includes three gratifications: escapism, social gratification, and content gratification (Quan-Haase and Young, 2010). Escapism is described as "avoiding real-life problems by engaging in media such as TV and video games" (Li et al., 2011, p. 536) or "turning to the dreamlike world of the mass media for substitute gratifications" (Katz and Foulkes, 1962, p. 179). Consistent with the UGT literature, we suggest that escapism motivates customers to share memes and boost their virality.

Moreover, meme-based posts met customers' social gratification by pushing them to share knowledge, opinions, and feelings with others by posting, clicking the "like" button, commenting, and sharing material (Malodia et al., 2022). Therefore, the more customers satisfy the social gratification, the more the meme spreads among like-minded others (Dhir and Chen, 2017).

Lastly, content gratification means how much people use memes to exchange and get information (Kaur et al., 2020). Four gratifications come from content: life-documenting, commenting, information sharing, and entertaining others (Sepp et al., 2011). Dhir and Tsai (2017) found that young users can interact with each other by sharing content, providing feedback for resharing others' content, and showing appreciation (Gao and Feng, 2016).

Likewise, Shifman (2013) claimed that meme-based content is crucial for stating conceptions and beliefs by showing messages using memetic posts in a particular situation. The way that people engage with memes is to create content by changing meme templates or adding comments on existing ones. They showed that individuals want recognition for their messages on social media accounts; therefore, they make memes proactively to prove their understanding of specific topics (Malodia et al., 2022). Throughout this interaction, content gratification positively impacts the meme's

virality. Thus, we propound the following hypothesis:

H2   Customer-related factors, including escapism (a), social gratification (b), and content gratification (c), positively impact the virality of memes.

Media-related Factors

Malodia et al. (2022) relied on a theory of social contagion to propose two dimensions of media-related factors comprising seeding strategy, and distribution strategy. Liu-Thompkins (2012) raised that seeding strategies are the best way to start the marketing message diffusion process. According to Malodia et al. (2022), targeting the appropriate audience as the early seeds to extend the meme's reach for increasing the new users' rate of sharing. Moreover, the qualitative of previous research proposed that memes have to be timely and in the trending duration (Malodia et al., 2022). Therefore, choosing the right targets as seeds can be a method to help meme-based posts reach a huge number of users promptly and make the meme go viral among the community.

Seeding plays the establishing or encouraging factor in building the possible connections of partners and communities early in a campaign (Hagen and Macfarlane, 2008). Furthermore, the distribution strategy specifies meme pages and influencers' social profiles, where the firm's target audience sees brand promotion using memes that spread effectively (Malodia et al., 2022). Those platforms bring people into the same group who prefer viewing meme advertisements or meme-based posts that are interacted with by their favourite influencers (Malodia et al., 2022). When more followers see the content or share meme-based posts, meme advertising becomes more viral due to the growth of views and subscriptions (Lee and Theokary, 2021). In conclusion, the association between distribution strategies and meme virality is significantly positive. We then propose the following hypothesis:

H3   Media-related factors, including seeding (a) and distribution (b), positively influence the virality of memes.

Virality of Meme

Virality of meme is a term that refers to the ability of an image meme to spread widely and rapidly on social media (Malodia et al., 2022). Accordingly, an image meme is a visual content that often combines text and images to convey a humorous or satirical message. Additionally, users sometimes create, share, imitate, and transform image memes, sometimes for political or ideological purposes (Shifman, 2013).

Additionally, Ling et al. (2021) addressed that high viral memes are more likely to utilize a close-up scale, include characters, and have optimistic or pessimistic feelings. Ling et al. (2021) also found that image memes do not present a clear subject or have long text, which is rarely shared by users.

Previous studies have explored the role of memes in influencing other variables. Firstly, Emeka Izogo (2016) indicated that memes have the potential to benefit businesses by fostering repurchase and recommendation behaviours among existing customers. Secondly, memes' humorous and relatable content resonates deeply with customers, creating emotional connections and brand loyalty. As customers share these engaging

memes, they become brand advocates, leading to organic word-of-mouth recommendations, and amplifying the brand's reach and influence (Cohen, 2019).

In addition to the favourable outcomes demonstrated in prior research concerning memes, such as their impact on brand loyalty, repurchase behaviour, and recommendation tendencies (Malodia et al., 2022). Consequently, this current study aims to clarify the positive impact of the virality of memes, which augment brand recall and brand engagement on social media, leading to consumer behaviour as repurchase and recommendation. We propose the following hypothesis:

H4   The virality of memes positively affects brand recall (a) and brand engagement (b).

Brand Engagement, Brand Recall and Brand Re-Purchased

Brand engagement is the process of creating and maintaining a relationship with customers, to achieve customer loyalty (Azar et al., 2016; Ho and Chung 2020). The current research describes brand engagement based on the suggested construct from Wang et al. (2020), which includes consumption, contribution, creation, and intimacy of meme-based posts. Consumption refers to the deeds of customers who passively absorb brand-related media, which represents the lowest level of brand engagement (Schivinski et al., 2016). According to Schivinski et al. (2016), customer contribution is the degree to which they willingly share their knowledge about a brand and naturally "like" the meme-based post on social media.

Moreover, customer creation is the strongest level of online brand-related engagement, authenticated as the user-generated content in the previous research (Schivinski et al., 2016). Finally, brand intimacy refers to a part of customer-firm affection and denotes the closeness along with attachment of the customer-brand relationship (Yim et al., 2008). According to Hapsari et al. (2017), to achieve the firms' goals like sales growth and cost reduction, increasing customer engagement improves customer experiences and boosts profitability.

Customers share and send the brand's specific image or information to their friend zone after seeing and interacting with the content in the meme-based post (Brodie et al., 2013; Hanna et al., 2011). The expansion, discussion and repetition of meme-based posts strengthen the customers' brand identification and recall (Langaro et al., 2018). We then propound the hypothesis:

H5   Brand re-purchased is positively affected by brand engagement, measured by consumption (a), contribution (b), creation (c), and intimacy (d).

H6   Brand engagement positively affects brand recall.

Brand recall is defined as the ability of customers to remember and recognize a particular brand when prompted with a product category or specific cues (Keller et al. 1993). According to Malodia et al. (2022), the viral meme-based post can serve as a vehicle for brand exposure, especially as it helps customers recall and engage with the brand. When customers choose products from the accustomed brand instead of the new brand (Panchal et al., 2012), brand recall leads to customer repeat business and future

repurchase behaviour after the positive effect of meme virality (Mohammed et al., 2022). Thus, we propose the hypothesis:

**H7**   Brand recall positively affects brand repurchase.

Brand Re-purchased and Brand Recommendation

The recommendation is a person's assessment of whether to suggest a good or service to someone based on personal experience (Vigripat and Chan, 2007). The positive recommendation is defined as a customer's willingness to recommend a service provider to other users (Va´zquez-Casielles et al., 2009). This study defines recommendation as referring to compliments through conversation with others. De la Sabaté and de Puente (2003) proposed that the brand recommendation would be improved when increasing brand re-purchase. Emeka Izogo (2016) implies that when customers repurchase a particular product, they will likely make business referrals. This study suggests that repurchase influences recommendation positively.

H8   Brand re-purchase positively affects brand recommendation.

From all the discussions above, the proposed research framework model is presented in **Figure 1**.

Figure 1: Conceptual framework
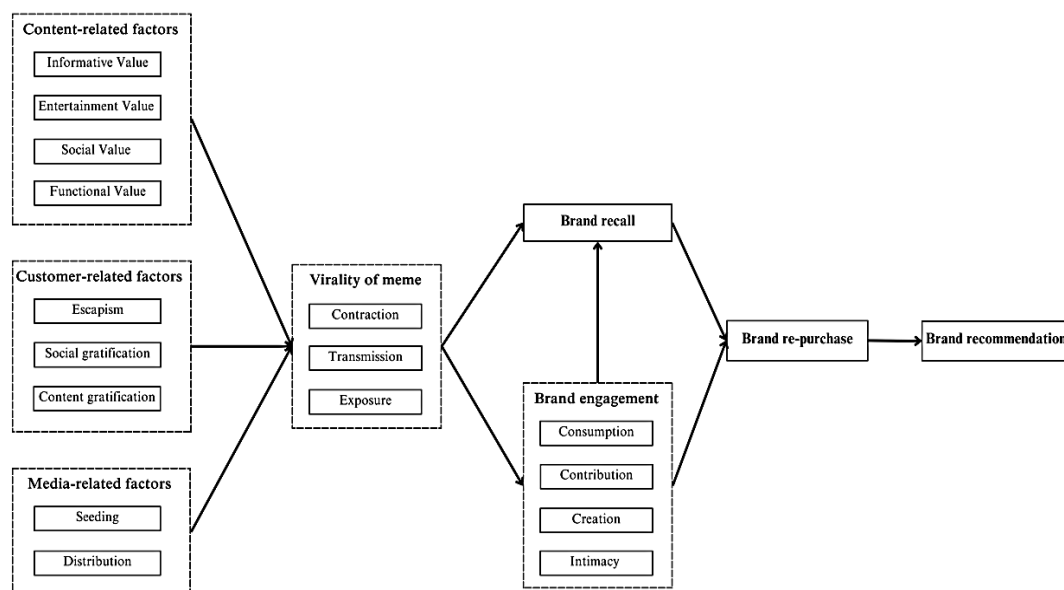
Methodology

Sample and Data Collection

The study was conducted in the emerging market of Vietnam among respondents who are consumers of various brands. We conducted a hybrid survey, recruiting 360 participants from undergraduate college students in Ho Chi Minh City. These

participants actively engage in dynamic activities, possess a keen understanding of meme advertisements, and adeptly keep up with the latest trends. The demographic is predominantly male, aged 18 to 25, showcasing a vibrant and trend-savvy community.

Table 1: Sample demographics

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percent
Gender	Female	70	19.4
	Male	290	80.6
Age	18-25	360	100
Income (million VND)	2-5	318	88.3
	5-10	35	9.7
	Above 10	7	1.9

Note: The exchange rate between Vietnam Dong and USD is an average of 24,000 per 1 USD

To ensure the reliability of our proposed measurements within the Vietnamese context, we conducted a preliminary test with the participation of 15 students and 5 staff members from a university in the South of Vietnam who are highlighted as the main motivation of the modern economy (Francis and Hoefel, 2018). We accomplished this stage during two weeks in February 2023. Firstly, participants were requested to recall four brand names associated with product categories: food and beverage, fashion, skincare, and smartphones. These categories were chosen because of their popularity and relevance in Vietnam. Secondly, to avoid the measurement's reliability reduction, we asked participants to distinguish between a normal picture and a revised one, ensuring that participants understood meme-based contents clearly (**Appendix**). Moreover, the pre-test yielded valuable feedback from participants, which was used to refine the measurement items, including formulating questions.

Four hundred questionnaires were sent to the potential respondents, including 70 online and 330 paper surveys from February to April 2023. The screening questions were included to consider consumers of selected brands. Speeders and incomplete responses were deleted to ensure the data accuracy. After removing 40 invalid responses, including those who used only one answer for most of the questions and those who did not accomplish all the questions, 360 surveys were finalised for analysis.

Measurement

The survey was designed to avoid inadequate responses from the participants. Firstly, the participants start to be asked three screening questions (i.e. "What is the product category that you are most interested in?", "According to you, which of the following images is a meme advertisement" (**Appendix 1**), and "Where do you usually see these meme images?") for inadequate responses.

Content-related Factors

We adapted the measurement scales from prior research and modified the questionnaires to suit this study (**Appendix 3**). The conceptual framework indicates factors of meme advertising's content, including informative, entertainment, social, and functional value. The measurements of information value and entertainment value include four items and five items respectively, and both of them are developed by

Ducoffe (1995). Moreover, social value consists of four items, while the functional value scale, established by Dholakia et al. (2004) and Oyedele and Simpson (2018), includes five items.

Customer-related factors

Customer-related factors include escapism and social gratification, which was adapted from Dhir and Tsai (2017) and Lee and Ma (2012). Each of them consists of four items and content gratifications include three items.

Media-related Factors

The construction of media-related factors comprises seeding and distribution strategies that remarkably affect meme virality. Two items were adapted from Malodia et al. (2022).

Virality of Memes

The virality of memes was borrowed from Malodia et al. (2022), which mentioned the action of a meme-based post audience to make the brand's post viral. It was measured by three items.

Brand Recall

The measurement scales proposed by Smith et al. (2008) for brand recall were adapted, which included three items. There are four components of brand engagement, including consumption, measured by four items; contribution, measured by five items; creation includes six items; and four items of intimacy.

Brand Engagement

The construct of brand engagement was adopted by Schivinski et al. (2016), Wang et al. (2020), Muntinga et al. (2011), Thorbjørnsen et al. (2002), Moatti and Abecassis-Moedas (2018), respectively. Additionally, three items of repurchase and three items of recommendation were revised by Mattila (2001), Maxham and Netemeyer (2002), and Lee et al. (2012). Five-point Likert scales ranging from one ("totally disagree") to five ("totally agree") were used to evaluate these items.

This study used the Partial Least Square – Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) to examine the net-effect linkages among latent variables to investigate the relationship between the virality of memes, brand recall, and brand performance. PLS-SEM is appropriate for simultaneously analysing hypothesized relationships and processing data. Additionally, the technique simultaneously evaluates both measurement and structural models (Gefen et al., 2011). The measurement validity was assessed through item loading coefficients, reliability and validity of variables using Cronbach's alpha coefficient, Composite Reliability (CR), and Average Variance Extracted (AVE). The study also conducted the convergent validity analysis through cross-loadings and measured the discriminant validity using the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) ratio.

Next, the research model was evaluated by assessing the structural model. To measure

the model's fit to the research context, the authors used the R-squared coefficient, multicollinearity measurements, and standardized path coefficients (Beta coefficients). This method effectively represents the connections between many predictors and criteria variables. With SmartPLS software, the research validated the measurements and tested the model. To obtain the validated results, 5,000 bootstrapping replications from the original sample were also carried out, as advised by (Hair et al., 2017).

Results

Measurement Model

All indicators of the convergent validity met the necessary criteria for convergent validity in which loading values and all of Cronbach's alpha (CA) values were above 0.70; the AVE values were above 0.50 (Hair et al., 2017). Following the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) test, it indicates that all ratios between independent and dependent variables were less than 0.90 (Appendix 4), which confirms the discriminant of all latent variables (Henseler et al., 2015).

Structure Model

Table 2 shows the structural model which supports for hypotheses 1, 2, and 3. The content-related factors ($\beta=0.204$, t=4.205, p<0.01), customer-related factors ($\beta=0.181$, t=2.986, p<0.01), and media-related factors ($\beta=0.485$, t=9.247, p<0.01) positively and significantly affect the virality of memes at the 1% level. The virality of memes also significantly and positively impacts brand recall ($\beta=0.482$, t=6.438, p<0.01). However, a non-significant relationship was found between the virality of memes and brand engagement ($\beta=0.002$, t=1.896, p>0.05). The structure of brand engagement, which includes consumption, contribution, creation, and intimacy, positively influences brand recall ($\beta=0.185$, t=2.605, p<0.01) and repurchase intentions ($\beta=0.475$, t=9.786, p<0.01). Furthermore, brand recall positively affects brand re-purchased ($\beta=0.250$, t=4.657, p<0.01), which in turn positively impacts brand recommendation ($\beta=0.753$, t=28.140, p<0.01). Thus, the statistical results indicate that all proposed hypotheses, except H4b, are supported.

Additionally, Table 3 shows that content-related, customer-related, and media-related factors strongly influence the extent to which memes spread. This finding underscores the significance of well-crafted, engaging, and strategically distributed meme content in digital marketing. The R-square value for brand recall (0.388) indicates that meme virality significantly contributes to brand recognition which supports the argument that meme-based advertisements are effective in enhancing consumers' ability to remember a brand. However, brand engagement, despite being theoretically linked to meme virality, was found to be non-significant in prior structural model results. Furthermore, the relatively high R-square value for brand recommendation suggests that once consumers recall and repurchase a brand, they are likely to recommend it. This highlights the effectiveness of meme marketing in driving word-of-mouth marketing and fostering customer loyalty.

Table 2: Structural model path coefficients testing results

Hypothesis	Description	β	t	p	Decisions
H1a	I → Content	0.267	29.754	0.000	Supported
H1b	E → Content	0.362	22.376	0.000	Supported
H1c	S → Content	0.316	28.322	0.000	Supported
H1d	R → Content	0.382	33.684	0.000	Supported
H2a	ES → Customer	0.413	32.817	0.000	Supported
H2b	SO → Customer	0.457	43.205	0.000	Supported
H2c	CO → Customer	0.325	31.383	0.000	Supported
H3a	SE → Media	0.548	48.559	0.000	Supported
H3b	DI → Media	0.552	50.863	0.000	Supported
H1	Content → VM	0.204	4.205	0.000	Supported
H2	Customer → VM	0.181	2.986	0.000	Supported
H3	Media → VM	0.485	9.247	0.000	Supported
H4a	VM → BR	0.482	6.438	0.000	Supported
H4b	VM → Brand engagement	0.002	1.896	0.058	NS
H5a	CON → Brand engagement	0.249	30.799	0.000	Supported
H5b	CTB → Brand engagement	0.314	46.437	0.000	Supported
H5c	CRE → Brand engagement	0.349	43.664	0.000	Supported
H5d	IN → Brand engagement	0.261	38.782	0.000	Supported
H5	Brand engagement → RE	0.475	9.786	0.000	Supported
H6	Brand engagement → BR	0.185	2.605	0.000	Supported
H7	BR → RE	0.250	4.657	0.000	Supported
H8	RE → SU	0.753	28.140	0.000	Supported

Note: The null hypothesis of constant variance was rejected if the p-value is lower than 0.05 (Hair et al., 2017). NS denotes that the hypothesis was not supported

Table 3: R-square

	R-square	R-square adjusted
Virality of meme	0.600	0.597
Brand recall	0.388	0.385
Brand re-purchase	0.410	0.407
Brand recommendation	0.567	0.597

Discussion

Firstly, H1 was supported, indicating that the virality of memes is influenced by aspects relating to content such as informative, entertainment, social and functional value. Customers seek value in brand knowledge and product usage through these content aspects, shaping their perception of advertising. This idea stems from the realisation that users may be more inclined to use LBAs if they find the content valuable, leading to the desired responses (Lin and Robert Bautista, 2018).

Secondly, H2 demonstrated that escapism, social satisfaction, and content gratification are the customer-related elements affecting meme virality, as per the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT). Escapism is the practice of turning to memes for solace in the face of life's difficulties, which enhances the virality of memes. Consumers who share their thoughts, feelings, and information contribute to the social satisfaction that comes from seeing memes go viral on social media. Additionally, meme virality is greatly increased by content pleasure, fuelled by information creation and interchange. These revelations highlight the complex incentives behind meme participation and

throw light on the various ways people engage with and contribute to the spread of memes online.

Thirdly, H3 showed that using seeding and distribution strategies helps efficiently increase memes' virality. Particularly, if a brand wants to increase the reach and shares of memes, it has to target the right audience as early seeds. Concurrently, seeding is a fundamental component that builds a project's overall efficacy and alignment with its objectives by connecting potential partners and communities early on (Hagen and Macfarlane, 2008). Additionally, Malodia et al. (2022) believed that distribution strategy calls for carefully distributing memes on platforms that the target audience prefers, utilising meme pages and influencers' social media.

Fourthly, in the ever-growing presence of social media, memes are tools to capture the attention of young people, especially Generation Z, and are content that spreads quickly and widely. Since H4a was accepted, meme advertising helps enhance brand recall powerfully and profoundly. However, the virality of a meme-based post will not encourage people to engage with the brand (H4b was rejected). The finding acknowledged that even though people see this meme everywhere, they are not motivated enough to participate.

Therefore, we suggest that administrators, marketers, or meme designers who want to spread out brand information on all platforms and reach the most people in the shortest time or want to be reminded after a period of absence (without making any social media content) can use meme-based posts as a communication tool to deliver the most engaging information, and for successful brand identification, except brand engagement. Thus, in the shortest amount of time, the ultimate business goal is increased revenue, owing to greater buy intention from brand memory.

Additionally, regarding repurchasing, the more people engage, the more they patronise the brand (H5 was accepted). This finding may help marketers achieve corporate goals, such as sales growth and cost reduction, involving increasing customer engagement, thereby improving customer experiences and ultimately leading to higher profitability.

Moreover, H6 was accepted indicating that customers tend to share and forward a brand's specific image or information within their social circles after engaging with meme-based posts, which helps reinforce and strengthen the customers' memory of the brand. Thus, marketers can focus on creating more funny content to attract target customers to recall the brand afterward. Besides, if customers remember the brand, they will tend to repurchase the next time (confirmed by H7).

Finally, H8 indicated that customers who make repeated purchases from a business are more likely to recommend it to others. According to Vigripat and Chan (2007), a recommendation is a person's assessment, based on personal experiences, of whether to suggest a good or service to others. Vázquez-Casielles et al. (2009) also presented that a positive recommendation indicates that a client is willing to refer a service provider to other users.

Although the study provides a comprehensive theoretical foundation for the development of meme marketing campaigns, it still has certain limitations. In this section, we acknowledge these limitations and propose potential directions for future

research. First, the study has not clarified the diffusion of meme advertising for specific product categories and whether meme advertising is suitable for any product category as a communication tool. Second, our study provides useful guidance for marketers who want to create and implement meme marketing campaigns, but they still need to determine if an event has the potential to become a meme or not. Future research could examine the diffusion of meme advertising across different product categories and identify the factors that influence its effectiveness and appropriateness for each category. For example, researchers could compare customers' responses to meme advertising for high-involvement versus low-involvement products or hedonic versus utilitarian products. Lastly, future research could also develop methods or several criteria to investigate the difference in how customers with low vs. high brand knowledge perceive and share memes.

Practical Implications for Asian Business

The findings of this study demonstrate that content, customer and media factors significantly enhance meme virality, which provides several implications for brands operating in emerging markets as follows:

Firstly, our findings about content-related factors also shed light on how marketers can make meme-based advertisement content go viral. Previous research found that relaxing advertisements are less viral than amusing ones (Berger et al., 2012). Moreover, marketers can enhance meme ads by tailoring content to preferences and facilitating easy sharing for wider reach (Oyedele et al., 2018). On the other hand, meme-based ads should combine information and entertainment to enhance the customer experience for a more enjoyable impact. Furthermore, meme ads should provide social and functional benefits, encouraging customer interactions (Lou and Xie, 2021).

The final findings guide marketers and brand managers aiming to develop meme-based marketing strategies. Previous studies on meme advertisements only focused on the humour of the content (Iloh et al., 2021). However, humour is not the sole aspect affecting meme virality and marketing success (Malodia et al., 2022). Besides, meme humour may elicit offence due to its content or presentation (Iloh et al., 2021). Therefore, managers must prioritize customer and media factors for effective meme virality, especially brand or product information.

Brand managers in traditional companies can use the proposed framework (Iloh et al., 2021) to create relevant, memorable, and shareable memes. Thus, marketers should align meme content with customer desires and brand values. Besides, meme pages offer a valuable platform to reach engaged meme enthusiasts.

Secondly, the current study explored the impact of meme virality on brand recall and engagement. Moreover, the finding indicates that increased brand engagement positively influences brand recall, which, in turn, correlates with higher customer purchase intentions (Wilson, 1981). Thus, improving brand recall through meme virality can increase consideration and purchase decisions.

Hoffman and Novak (2012) showed that higher customer engagement with memes led

to increased future repurchase intentions and a higher possibility of recommending the brand to others. Therefore, marketers should strategically integrate brand elements into memes to boost brand recall and encourage repurchase. Moreover, marketers need to track relevant metrics related to brand engagement in meme advertising, such as "likes", "shares", "comments", and "reach", to get valuable insights and then enhance the quality of meme campaigns.

Thirdly, when customers have positive repurchase experiences with a brand promoted through meme advertising, they are more likely to recommend the brand to others (Izogo et al., 2016). Positive experiences could result in higher customer satisfaction and greater likelihood of repeat purchases (Berger and Milkman, 2012). Thus, the brand should prioritize delivering exceptional customer experiences.

Finally, in the business-to-business online context, companies use fast social media apps like Facebook and LinkedIn to reach customers, which is the channel where the virality of memes can enhance the high communication performance (Wang et al., 2016; Sundström et al., 2020). Meire et al. (2022) suggested that if companies, whose target audiences exhibit a preference for humorous linguistic style, the memes-related content enhances brand engagement.

The current findings acknowledged that by leveraging humour and relatable content, B2B brands can foster stronger connections, stand out in a competitive market, and enhance their brand image in a fun yet meaningful way (Lubis et al., 2021). However, B2B companies should be aware that using memes that are not relevant to their target audience can do more harm than good. For example, high-end B2B financial institutes and accounting firms may not appreciate memes.

Future research should further explore the types of businesses that are best match for meme advertisement and identify the most appropriate channels for each company to optimize meme marketing effectiveness. By carefully examining these factors, future studies can provide valuable insights that enable marketers to craft highly impactful campaigns tailored to the specific needs of their brand, while also mitigating any potential negative consequences, such as consumer backlash or brand misalignment.

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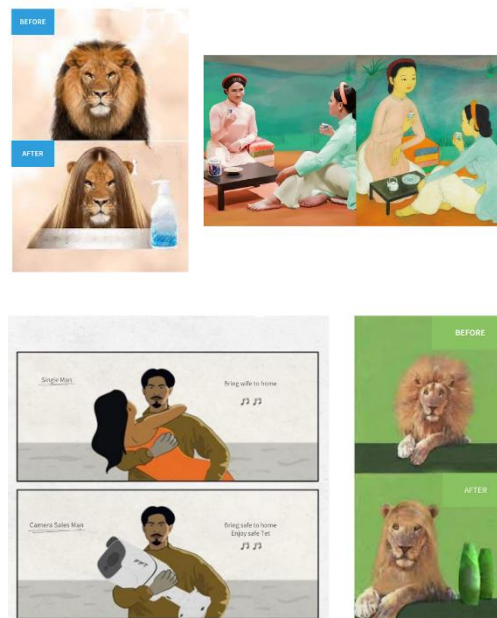
Appendix

Appendix 1: Meme-based post awareness test
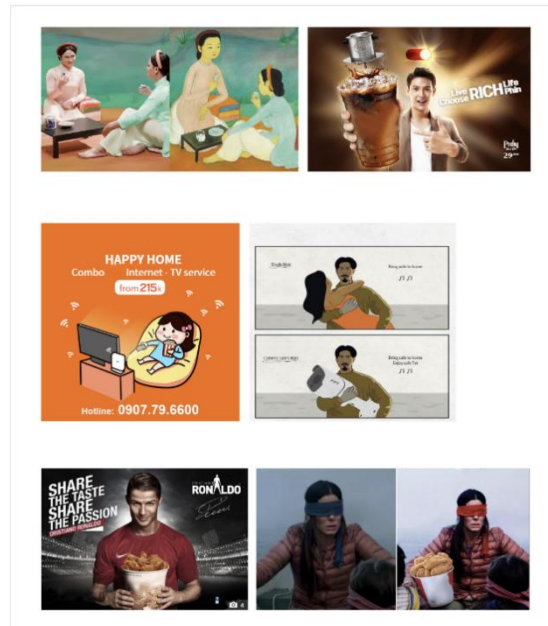
Note: 2nd screening question - "According to you, which of the following images is a meme advertisement")

Appendix 2: Experimental conditions

Note: Before questionnaire of Virality of memes - "Please choose one meme-based advertising post from the following brands that you are familiar with"

Appendix 3: Descriptive statistics, item loadings, and validities

Construct	Items	Loadings	Mean	Std. D	AVE	CR	CA	VIF
	Content-related factors							
Informative value (I)	Relevant brand information is provided through meme-based posts. (I1)	0.819	3.180	0.986	0.641	0.877	0.812	1.823
	Timely brand information is provided through meme-based posts. (I2)	0.751	3.425	0.935				1.495
	Useful brand information is provided through meme-based posts. (I3)	0.844	3.272	0.963				2.073
	Value brand information is provided through meme-based posts. (I4)	0.786	3.178	0.933				1.781
Entertainment value (E)	Reading meme-based posts is very entertaining. (E1)	0.742	4.444	0.829	0.654	0.654	0.868	1.932
	Reading meme-based posts is very enjoyable. (E2)	0.825	4.397	0.841				2.529
	Reading meme-based posts is very exciting. (E3)	0.838	4.183	0.870				2.286
	Reading meme-based posts is very pleasing. (E4)	0.821	4.011	0.883				2.239
	Reading meme-based posts is very relaxing. (E5)	0.814	4.008	0.912				2.150
Social value (S)	Sharing my experiences with meme-based posts on the internet with others will boost my popularity. (S1)	0.797	3.102	1.049	0.689	0.898	0.849	1.771
	Sharing my experiences with meme-based posts on the internet with others helps foster mutual understanding among people. (S2)	0.862	3.069	0.977				2.188
	Sharing my experiences with meme-based posts on the internet helps me gain attention and engage with others. (S3)	0.849	2.783	1.038				2.110

Functional value (R)	Sharing my experiences with meme-based posts on the internet can lead to forming closer relationships with others. (S4)	0.810	3.241	1.092				1.821
	Using internet meme-based posts to share brand/product information is reliable. (R1)	0.796	3.205	0.930	0.598	0.881	0.831	1.849
	Using internet meme-based posts to share brand/product information is satisfactory. (R2)	0.821	3.366	0.931				1.878
	Using internet meme-based posts to share brand/product information is good. (R3)	0.769	3.616	0.945				1.693
	Using internet meme-based posts to share brand/product information is timely. (R4)	0.741	3.427	0.883				1.559
	The information about the brand's product from a meme-based post on the internet fulfils my needs well. (R5)	0.736	3.286	0.925				1.506
Customer-related factors								
Escapism (ES)	Watching meme-based posts as an escape from daily routines. (ES1)	0.838	3.558	1.188	0.729	0.915	0.876	2.046
	Watching meme-based posts as a distraction from tasks, I should be tackling. (ES2)	0.843	3.586	1.075				2.031
	Watching meme-based posts as a way to pass the time for me. (ES3)	0.846	3.408	1.169				2.312
	Watching meme-based posts helps me alleviate boredom. (ES4)	0.887	3.661	1.095				2.720
Social gratification (SO)	Meme-based posts help me to connect with others. (SO1)	0.814	3.600	0.999	0.701	0.904	0.857	1.947
	Meme-based posts let me show my interests to my friends. (SO2)	0.878	3.527	0.989				2.412
	Sharing memes enables me to spread joy to others. (SO3)	0.867	3.669	1.015				2.261

	Sharing memes is a great way to swap thoughts with others. (SO4)	0.788	3.461	1.052				1.728
Content gratification (CO)	I follow meme-based content to stay informed about current topics. (CO1)	0.868	3.538	1.001	0.749	0.900	0.833	1.900
	Meme-based posts are a good source of information. (CO2)	0.859	3.122	0.899				1.894
	Watching memes helps me find out about what's happening now. (CO3)	0.869	3/613	1.022				1.975
Media-related factors								
Seeding strategies (SE)	I enjoy memes that are relevant to current events. (SE1)	0.875	3.394	1.192	0.759	0.759	0.682	1.365
	I post memes that my friends like. (SE2)		0.867	2.930	1.169			
Distribution Strategies (DI)	I follow meme pages to see the newest memes. (DI1)	0.872	3.236	1.138	0.763	0.763	0.689	1.383
	I like meme-based posts that my favourite influencers also like. (DI2)	0.875	3.325	1.225				1.383
Virality of memes (VM)	I'm going to give this meme post a like. (VM1)	0.879	3.503	1.045	0.713	0.881	0.798	1.948
	I'm probably going to share this meme post. (VM2)	0.832	2.681	1.154				1.591
	I think this meme post has the potential to go viral. (VM3)	0.820	3.441	1.041				1.713
Brand recall								
Brand recall (BR)	I recognize the brand featured in the meme post. (BR1)	0.859	3.405	1.118	0.814	0.929	0.885	2.036
	I can recall the brand on the meme-based post. (BR2)	0.932	3.488	1.017				3.504
	I can recognize the brands on the meme-based post. (BR3)	0.914	3.492	1.031				3.050

	Brand engagement							
Consumption (CON)	I read the brand's meme-based posts. (CON1)	0.883	3.269	0.994	0.755	0.925	0.891	2.892
	I read meme-based posts on the brand's fan pages. (CON2)	0.898	3.153	1.010				3.165
	I watch the brand's meme-based pictures or images. (CON3)	0.879	3.397	1.031				2.604
	I keep up with the company on social media. (CON4)	0.813	3.083	1.063				1.792
Contribution (CTB)	I drop the comment on the brand's postings that use memes. (CTB1)	0.895	2.594	1.132	0.740	0.934	0.912	5.115
	I drop a comment on the brand's pictures or images that use memes. (CTB2)	0.896	2.619	1.157				5.215
	I disseminate the brand's meme-based posts. (CTB3)	0.830	2.533	1.114				2.340
	I click the "like" button for the brand's meme-based pictures or images. (CTB4)	0.844	3.114	1.211				4.378
	I click the "like" button for the brand's meme-based posts. (CTB5)	0.834	3.052	1.173				4.270
Creation (CRE)	I initiate to post about the brand on blogs. (CRE1)	0.884	2.111	1.129	0.807	0.962	0.952	5.528
	I initiate to post about the brand on social media. (CRE2)	0.912	2.069	1.111				6.494
	I post pictures or images about the brand. (CRE3)	0.916	2.261	1.101				5.080
	I post videos about the brand. (CRE4)	0.925	2.242	1.114				6.134
	I write posts about the brand on forums. (CRE5)	0.929	2.272	1.151				5.707
	I write reviews about the brand. (CRE6)	0.818	2.450	1.193				2.268
Intimacy (IN)	I feel that this brand cares about me. (IN1)	0.894	2.741	1.027	0.794	0.939	0.914	3.029

	I feel this brand can speak my soul. (IN2)	0.900	2.847	1.032				3.217
	I feel as though I really understand this brand. (IN3)	0.863	2.625	1.042				2.493
	I feel as though this brand really understands. (IN4)	0.907	2.750	1.106				3.285
	Brand Re-Purchase							
Brand Re-Purchase (RE)	I consider this brand as my first choice compared to other brands. (RE1)	0.899	3.203	0.998	0.832	0.937	0.899	2.673
	I plan to choose this brand in my next purchase. (RE2)	0.939	3.311	0.994				3.657
	I plan to choose this brand for future purchases. (RE3)	0.899	3.405	0.971				2.641
	Brand Recommendation							
Brand Recommendation (SU)	I would convey a positive perception of this brand to other people. (SU1)	0.902	3.536	0.964	0.840	0.940	0.905	2.525
	I would advocate for others to try this brand. (SU2)	0.922	3.483	0.998				3.228
	I would inspire my loved ones to select this brand. (SU3)	0.927	3.413	1.059				3.309

Note: Std.D.: Standard deviation. Std. Error: Standard error. AVE: Average variance extracted. CR: Composite reliability. CA: Cronbach's alpha. According to Hair et al., the ratios of loading, AVE, CR, and CA are required to be above 0.7, 0.5, 0.7, and 0.7, respectively

Appendix 4: Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) discriminant analysis

	I	E	S	R	ES	SO	CO	DI	SE	VM	BR	CON	CTB	CRE	IN	RE
E	0.400															
S	0.392	0.449														
R	0.658	0.446	0.596													
ES	0.243	0.519	0.465	0.510												
SO	0.383	0.590	0.601	0.535	0.668											
CO	0.548	0.493	0.513	0.736	0.520	0.700										
DI	0.416	0.481	0.543	0.590	0.606	0.806	0.681									
SE	0.416	0.502	0.556	0.617	0.589	0.779	0.737	0.949								
VM	0.476	0.526	0.564	0.638	0.558	0.758	0.698	0.892	0.896							
BR	0.330	0.368	0.351	0.596	0.429	0.553	0.629	0.627	0.690	0.724						
CON	0.389	0.424	0.451	0.598	0.499	0.643	0.618	0.735	0.726	0.828	0.652					
CTB	0.408	0.359	0.461	0.527	0.343	0.502	0.478	0.745	0.737	0.758	0.557	0.777				
CRE	0.275	0.115	0.362	0.337	0.193	0.243	0.291	0.444	0.504	0.485	0.330	0.527	0.762			
IN	0.358	0.249	0.479	0.477	0.292	0.409	0.515	0.529	0.594	0.665	0.446	0.637	0.689	0.704		
RE	0.319	0.306	0.352	0.435	0.405	0.495	0.523	0.565	0.620	0.601	0.553	0.626	0.564	0.447	0.669	
SU	0.351	0.330	0.370	0.479	0.412	0.511	0.555	0.565	0.603	0.638	0.524	0.661	0.598	0.439	0.646	0.834