

WITHIN THE THREADS:
An analysis on linguistic devices used by /pol/

Master's thesis
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Tiivistelmä – Abstract <p>Internetin vakiintuessa ympäristöksi, jossa suuri osa ihmisten välisestä kanssakäymisestä tapahtuu, uusien kommunikaatiotapojen määrä laajenee. Yksi tällainen väline on tämän tutkimuksen kohteena olevat meemit. Vuosien saatossa laaja määrä meemejä on syntynyt 4chan kuvalaudan osiosta /pol/, suomeksi 'poliittisesti epäkorrekti'. Tämä pahamaineinen rasismien, naisvihan, äärioikeistoliikkeiden ja monipuolisten meemien koti on ollut mukana monessa kohussa ja on omiaan meemien analysointiin laajan kävijäkuntansa ansiosta.</p> <p>Tämän tutkimuksen tarkoitus oli selvittää, miten /pol/:in käyttäjät hyödyntävät meemejä keskustelussaan, millaisia funktioita meemeillä on, ja miten meemit yhdessä jäsenten käyttämän kielen kanssa muodostavat merkityksiä. Tutkimusdatana oli käytössä neljä keskustelulankaa, jossa jokaisessa oli sata kommenttia, ja näistä kommentteista 149 sisälsivät kuvia. Analysoin dataa hyödyntämällä multimodaalista diskurssianalyysia tekstin ja kuvien merkitysten tarkastelussa.</p> <p>Tutkimuksesta selvisi kuusi eri kategoriaa meemien käyttötarkoituksille ja kaksitoista eri funktiota, joita /pol/ hyödyntää. Tärkeimmät ja käytetyimmät näistä ovat <i>tunteita välittävät</i>, <i>pisteenä toimivat</i> (lauseen päättävän pisteen korvikkeena), <i>sisäpiirin viittauksena toimivat</i>, sekä <i>uudelleenpostatut</i> meemit. Laajasta rasismiin sekä trollaamiseen liittyvästä maineesta huolimatta tämä ei näkynyt meemeissä juurikaan. /pol/-kuvalaudan rasistiset tai trollaavat meemit olivat vain muutaman prosentin arvoinen osa meemeistä, mutta kommenttien tekstissä ne kattoivat huomattavasti laajemman osan. /pol/ käyttää keskusteluissaan laajasti meemejä ja hyvin erilaisiin käyttötarkoituksiin kuten kategorisoinneista näkyy. Kielen funktiot ovat myös yhtä laajat, ja käyttäjien ”ammattisanasto” kattaa noin 20 % datassa olleista postauksista. Tämän tutkimuksen tuloksia on mahdollista käyttää ponnahduslautana laajempimuotoiseen tutkimukseen meemeistä esimerkiksi toisessa sosiaalisen median palvelussa.</p>	
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1. INTRODUCTION

In today's world a vast amount of discourse and interpersonal communication is held online on a wide array of platforms. The emergence of the internet being the de facto place for discussion on all topics imaginable has seen changes in the ways in which discourse is conducted (McCulloch 2019: 64-65). As internet culture has grown, so has its imprint on linguistic devices that people all over the internet utilise. Nowadays one can partake in discussions on a variety of topics on multiple platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, TikTok, YouTube, and many more, using text as well as multimodal modes such as images and videos. One of the more infamous platforms where discussion on politics, social issues, and many more topics is facilitated is a message board called politically incorrect, colloquially named /pol/, on 4chan - one of the world's largest online forums (4chan Press). /pol/ has gained its infamy with many controversial operations and events such as spreading fake information about mass shootings, hosting the 2019 Christchurch Mosque shooting video, and for other acts of trolling and extremism. There is a great deal more to /pol/ than these examples, as it is a platform on which all manners of political views are discussed, but it also is coloured with very charged political views and ideologies. Thus, the target of this thesis and the topic itself shall be on how users on /pol/ communicate with each other. A lot of the discourse is coloured with the use of memes (Milner 2013), like the widespread image of a frog, Pepe the Frog. Memes come in many different formats, which is the reason why the utilisation of multimodal discourse analysis seems apparent.

As memes are the focal point of this study, there will be a section designated to explaining key concepts and terms to help with understanding the topics discussed in this thesis. Chapter 2 includes these key concepts, as well as the prior research relevant to the present study. This includes computer mediated communication (CMC) in general, the concept of a meme, and a description of what 4chan and /pol/ are. Chapter 2 will also include a section on general internet culture, to give a framework for the place of /pol/ and memes in the wider context of the internet. Chapter 3 will outline the methods of collection and analysis for the data, as well as the research questions, and notes on ethical issues. In Chapter 4, I will provide the analysis for the data, and Chapter 5 concludes the present study with a discussion on the study as a whole. /pol/ can be described as a volatile and extremist community, but this thesis will not take a moral stance on the issues discussed, but rather the way in which the discussions are held and the use of language and memes in these discussions. The interest of this study is purely descriptive: it lies in creating

an understanding of the way one can express themselves through internet culture and methods of communication associated with it as framed by /pol/ and its denizens.

2. BACKGROUND

This chapter will outline the previous research and frame the setting in which this study takes place; online. The first section (2.1.1) will explore internet culture, and its place as the de facto way of communication in the world today. The second part (2.1.2) will go into detail on what are the primary platforms and communities that will be studied, to familiarise the reader with the way 4chan operates. The last part of internet culture that will be discussed is memes, and how they have been studied in the past (2.1.3). The final section of this chapter (2.2) will examine the research of discourse through the lens of semiotics and the linking of visual communication with memes into the ‘online language’.

2.1 INTERNET CULTURE

The present study will utilise the framework of multimodal discourse analysis to be able to explain the methods with which people have discourse online. Computer-mediated communication (Herring 1996), from now on CMC, has become a large part of how people communicate in the present world, and thus topics of internet culture and how people act online have become relevant fields of study as of late. A large part of messaging and communication includes the use of visual memes, and this along with the actual medium of internet communication has shaped ‘online language’ to be very multimodal in function and form (McCulloch 2019: 237-252). It is steeped in self-reference and peculiar subcultures, and sometimes - if not most of the time - these subcultures pride themselves on being unintelligible to people outside of their culture. Understanding of online language can be linked with understanding a particular culture, thus shedding light on the way communication is being done online. Therefore, understanding the framework in which online communication operates will have to be explored, and the ways in which discourse online can be analysed will be outlined.

2.1.1 Communicating on the Net

With the emergence of the internet, and the technology to communicate with others using computers, the field of computer mediated communication has gained an increasing amount of scholarly attention from the mid-1990s to this day. (Thurlow, Tomic and Lengel 2004: 26). CMC encompasses all human communication done via computers (Thurlow, Tomic and Lengel 2004: 26-27), and as smartphones and other means of digital communication have come to be, they have also become included under the label of CMC (Herring, Stein and Virtanen 2013: 5). Communication is “negotiation of meaning between people” (Thurlow, Tomic and Lengel 2004: 29), and whereas face-to-face communication is mostly done one conversation at a time, utilising CMC one can have a multitude of conversations at the same time with different people (Herring, Stein, and Virtanen 2013: 3). However, since the emergence of the smartphone, this is changing, as face-to-face communication events can be happening at the same time as online ones. These conversations do not always follow the usual logical order of replies either, since for example in chat rooms with multiple people, there may be multiple simultaneous conversations at the same time, and it is up to the participants to refer the relevance of utterances to their conversation (Herring, Stein, and Virtanen 2013: 245-268).

A pioneer in the field, Susan Herring (1996: 3-5) posits three key issues in CMC research: the language of CMC, how human interaction is altered using the *computer medium*, and how communities are formed on the internet. The present study is interested in all three, but the focus will be on the language of CMC. Already in 1996, the difference in internet language use from speech and writing was noted by Herring (1996: 14), as she states that “messages delivered electronically are neither 'spoken' nor 'written' in the conventional sense of these words.” The language online is informal, unedited, and unfiltered (McCulloch 2019: 2-5) with characteristics from both written and spoken language (Crystal 2001: 28) depending on the context in which language is being used. Thus, written messages on mobile devices have become the medium for face-to-face -like communication (Danesi 2016: 10). Private messaging (previously instant, nowadays direct), chat rooms, group messaging platforms and the like are examples of contexts where online communication mimics that of face-to-face speech, as the participants are sending and receiving messages in real time (Herring 1996, Crystal 2001, Baron 2008, McCulloch 2019). Due to this conversation-like way of online communication it is understandable that some additions must be made to the written language to help convey tone of voice, emotion, and gestures, as they are not always visible from plain text on a screen. That

is the function of emoticons, or emoji, small images that are added to messages to take the place of normal conversational cues such as vocal intonation, facial expressions, or hand gestures (Danesi 2016: 176-181). Though previously informal communication had been possible without emoji, they allow for more elaborate expressions than written text. This multimodality of the emoji is then furthered using memes in online communication, which shall be discussed later in this chapter.

Although the focus of the present thesis is on the language of CMC, it would be negligent to not discuss virtual communities, since it is an integral part of online communication. A classic definition of virtual communities is from Rheingold (1993: 5), stating that they are “social aggregations that emerge from the Net when enough people carry on public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace”. This supposes the existence of some form of sense of community (SOC) in the members of different virtual spaces. Research to SOC online has pointed out that although different and looser from traditional communities, online communities can offer an even greater SOC than their traditional counterparts (Malinen 2016: 31-35). The community being studied in the present thesis will be discussed in the upcoming chapter.

2.1.2 4chan & /pol/

The present study focuses on the anonymous imageboard website called 4chan, and /pol/, one of its discussion boards on political issues. 4chan is one of the world’s largest forums with 22 million unique monthly visitors (4chan Press), and notably for this study, a birthplace for the online “meme-culture”. 4chan’s own FAQ (frequently asked questions) page states that it is a “simple image-based bulletin board where anyone can post comments and share images”. It includes boards on varied topics from video games to creative hobbies to politics, where users can discuss these topics anonymously, and without the need to register an account (4chan FAQ). Milner (2013) describes anonymity as being equivalent to a First Amendment right, so it is not a surprise that 4chan users value their anonymity above all features of 4chan. Discussion on 4chan is held in *threads* which start with the original poster (OP) posting an image and text to one of the boards. Other users see this post, and can comment on it with either text, images, or both. The comments can be replied to by their post number, since users are anonymous apart from the OP whose post is marked with ‘(OP)’. These threads do not stay up indefinitely, since

many boards have a restricted number of pages that these threads can be on, which means that a thread could only be available for a few hours or days before being removed (4chan FAQ).

The interest of the present study lies in the board “politically incorrect”, also known as /pol/. /pol/ is infamous for housing trolls and a lot of extremist content (Ludemann 2018: 92-93; Thorleifsson 2022: 289). The users discuss global events and world politics in a way that is void of the social policing attributed to the society at large (Ludemann 2018: 94-97). /pol/ is reliant on memes in their discourse, and many notable memes have spawned from /pol/, most widely known one being Pepe the Frog, who was co-opted by conservatives in the 2016 United States Presidential Election after Donald Trump retweeted an image of Pepe. Ludemann finds in his article (2018: 98) that many users have taken an approach to online discourse which embraces trolling in all interactions, thanks to the anonymity 4chan - and the internet as a whole - provides. In his closing statements Ludemann (2018: 98) also points out that online discursive spaces help create new understanding in linguistic analysis, and that these spaces will be subject to a lot more study in the future, the present study being one of these. Understanding /pol/, and how it is viewed by the society at large, and by the users of /pol/ themselves, builds a foundation for the present study, as the focus is on the ways and functions of memes on /pol/.

2.2 MEMES AND PRIOR RESEARCH ON THEM

Meme is a concept coined by the famous biologist Richard Dawkins in his book *The Selfish Gene* (1976) to depict cultural transmission and imitation of ideas and behaviours. These include “tunes, ideas, catch-phrases, clothes fashions, ways of making pots or of building arches” (Dawkins 1976: 206). This definition has then morphed into the current topic of the present study, the internet meme. Merriam-Webster dictionary gives a definition of meme as “an amusing or interesting item (such as a captioned picture or video) or genre of items that is spread widely online especially through social media” and Milner (2013) argues memes to be a formal ‘media lingua franca’. With the emergence of social media and its widespread appeal, memes have gone global. One can find people from any age group posting memes they find relatable on social media, and this in turn allows memes to spread (Milner 2012). Zittrain (2014) states in his speech *Reflections on internet culture* that “a meme at its best exposes a truth about something, and in its versatility allows that truth to be captured and applied in new situations.” This comes with both positive and negative baggage in the history of memes, because of

'authentic', 'unguarded', and 'involuntary' moments becoming immortalised into the epoch of memes, such as 'Disaster girl' (Image 1), or 'Star Wars Kid' (Image 2) as pointed out by Zittrain (2014).



Image 1. Meme 'Disaster Girl'.



Image 2. Meme 'Star Wars Kid'.

2.2.1 Previous research on memes

This section shall focus on the variety of research that have dealt with memes, and especially political memes in different online communities, as well as giving an overview of other meme-related research from various viewpoints and contexts.

Previous studies show that political memes and their various aspects have been of key interest in recent research. However, one of these “branches” of research have taken interest from the use of social media, such as Instagram, to analyse the different effects, also roles, that political memes play in an active, image-heavy platform. For example, a study by Al-Rawi (2021) centred around fake news discourses and political memes on Instagram, gathering over 550 000 posts that fell under the radar of hashtag #fakenews. Notable aspect that Al-Rawi (2021) found was that this hashtag brought up a surprisingly vast amount of racism and hate-related issues on this platform, also showcasing the density of political polarisation (Al Rawi 2021: 276). Finding this significant trait, the research delved deeper into these aspects, proposing also a quantitative visual data to centralise around the utilisation of memes. It became evident by Al-Rawi (2021) that Instagram seems to have become a weaponized platform by two ideologically different communities to facilitate an on-going “meme-war” which has its roots in ideological differences and beliefs. This war is constantly led and boosted further by Instagram’s positive apolitical face that shows itself in the diversity of posted funny memes in the platform. Al-Rawi (2021) thus argues that community ties and collective identity can be enhanced using memes, and that sharing certain memes can showcase affiliation to ideological communities, trolling and attacking on the other side being the tool to “wield” power. With this example, it comes clear that social media platforms and different chat rooms might not be just positivity influenced arenas where people find each other to post and comment on, but there can be a variety of underlying “wars” and meaning making going on in these platforms, all of which vividly change the essence of what is “internet communication”. Thus, it would be crucial to research these communities and really bring into light how identities and beliefs are created within them, what it tells about communication in our current society etc.

Social media has thus proved themselves a very versatile, yet multi-channelled platform that also intrigues researchers to take part into understanding the communication that happens within the different communities and individuals inside these platforms, aspiring to confirm how deep-rooted some phenomena are, and how multi-layered the meanings and messages behind different actions are, both in visual and textual form, for example the use of memes.

The interest towards these multimodal tools of meaning making, especially memes, can be seen by an exemplary, extensive work by Denisova (2016) that dealt with the role of internet memes in contemporary, Russian-language Twitter. Denisova (2016) explains how memes serve as tools to discuss all topics with others, utilising them especially as sort of explosive components to have an impact on political discourse. Denisova (2016) points out that the consumption of memes has been centred especially around pro-government and anti-government activists, as a pathway to bolster their agendas, using memes as tools to discuss matters about leaders, construe recent events, as well as utilising memes to support propaganda. This shows clearly how big, powerful, and yet intricate value multimodal tools can have in the process of people posing their ideologies into the surrounding society. Whether it is comes alive as inside jokes or hardcore political shout-out, it is evident that multimodal tools, such as memes, are often the voices of activism in social media, ways of self-expression for the individuals to show their standing (Denisova 2016).

The aforementioned studies clearly show that social media and different online platforms serve often as bases of building a sense of community, constructing ideologies, spreading knowledge as well as the creative ground for human communication that recreates itself anew with various, constantly changing tools, such as multimedia, text, audio etc. Different phenomena emerge, multiply and spread with a variety of different shades to these online communities, even our everyday lives, challenging our notions about communication, pushing us to realise the power structures embedded in the use of these tools. However, though memes, or political memes have been recognised to have a role in constructing different representations of ideologies, and so in our online platforms, it ought to be highlighted that also the underlying humorous traits of memes in meaning-making play a big part in the 'effectiveness' and the virality of the meme. This humour aspect and its relevance have been discussed for example by Piata (2016), bringing forth the evolution of memes in various multimodal discourses. How Piata (2016) approached this aspect was by examining three different political ads that were used in an election campaign in Greece in 2015, focusing especially on the humorous representations of these in their internet meme forms. A crucial aspect Piata (2016) found was that by poking fun at these political organs, the created memes and jokes served as a new way to conceptualise the discussed matters, proving that both metaphorical and humorous aspects have an impact on the rhetoric goals of the campaigns themselves. The combination of the two created so to say a new discourse-led lens: metaphor serving as evaluation of the information spread, whereas humour gave room to criticism. Thus, it can be noticed that several elements used in multimodal and

textual meaning-making can boost one another when combined and yet again emphasise to us the absolute complexity of internet communication and what kind of power structures it can create.

Beskow, Kumar, and Carley (2020) discuss how memes have become a complex, omnipresent device of the digital era, placing themselves as certain projectors of how culturally relevant matters are linked with humour. This linkage is often done so inherently well that memes can pose a persuasive argument on people's beliefs and make them bend into specific directions. However, despite their imminent success in popular social media, the evolution of memes has often been overlooked. This falls out of the scope of the present study, but humour as a function for memes will be tangentially discussed in the analysis, as it relates to one of the categories presented in the present study.

3. SETUP OF THE STUDY

This chapter outlines the research questions and aims of the study, as well as the way the data used in it was collected and how it will be analysed, and any possible ethical considerations that may arise.

3.1 RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND AIMS

There is a growing amount of study on different online platforms and the way they are used to discuss different topics or to engage in other interactions. With the increase in multiliteracy in media (Cole and Pullen 2010: 90-91), the aim of this thesis is to take not only the written text, but also apply a more multimodal approach to the study of language and linguistic devices that are used to discuss topics online – and in the case of this study, on /pol/. In other words, the aim is to discuss the linguistic ways in which /pol/ conveys its messages and in what part do memes play in this linguistic scheme/goal. The focus will be on the content of these messages and meme related images on /pol/, not on the users themselves, the study is on language and not the people itself. The key interest is to shed light on how language has moulded itself in the swift development of internet communication and especially how this communication has become a vivid billboard of multimodal representations of discourse.

Thus, the research questions of this study are:

1. How does /pol/ utilise memes?

1.1 Does there emerge a specific kind of pattern in the usage of these memes?

2. What kind of language does /pol/ use in conjunction with the memes, and to what functions?

These research questions outline the two points of view of the present study: the visual and the linguistic. The usage of memes to convey meaning is a vast topic, and outside the scope of this study, so answering the question of how these memes are utilised is more relevant to the present study. The probability of there being patterns in the usage is notable, so being able to outline those patterns will improve the conclusions regarding the second question. The first question can lead to a more in-depth understanding towards modern communication in social media in general regarding the use of memes, since they are ingrained in the online discourse. The second question is more about the particular language that /pol/ use if there exists such a thing. My hypothesis is that there does indeed exist a way in which /pol/ speaks and conveys its messages, even though they are a mass of users from all around the world.

3.2 DATA SELECTION AND COLLECTION

The data for this study was collected on /pol/ in 4chan. This was done by choosing one thread each day for a month, to keep a good sample size in terms of amount and timespan. The chosen thread was the first on the page, and if that thread had already been collected, the next one. Since a great deal of threads are created and removed every day, this way of choosing the first thread was simple, and representative of the discussion on the board. 4chan also showcases the most active threads as the first ones, so they will be an indicator of what the community is interested in. The reason for this choice of narrowing down data collection is to keep the chosen threads as relevant as possible since there are many threads that do not spark the interest of the users of /pol/. Naturally, even threads that do not spark interest are representative of the ways in which the users of /pol/ use language and memes, but to limit the scope of this study to a data set that is as relevant as possible to the wider zeitgeist, only the first thread was collected. There are also threads with only text, but since this study focuses on both images and written text it

was not necessary to discard these threads. The threads were chosen at random times of the day to account for different people being online at different times, and to ensure a good variety in the samples for the data. Since 4chan deletes threads regularly, they were saved on a secure network drive provided by the University of Jyväskylä as .htm files using the browsers “save page as...”-function, to archive them for the use of this study. This also saved all the pictures in the threads, to allow for more in-depth analysis of the memes utilised in the conversations. These pictures unfortunately are reproduced in the quality of the thumbnail, so any smaller text became illegible, but the images and memes with larger fonts or only a picture of something should be legible. Since the dataset is already quite large for the scope of a Master’s thesis, the full resolution versions of the pictures will not be gathered as the relevance of full resolution is insignificant for the purposes of this study.

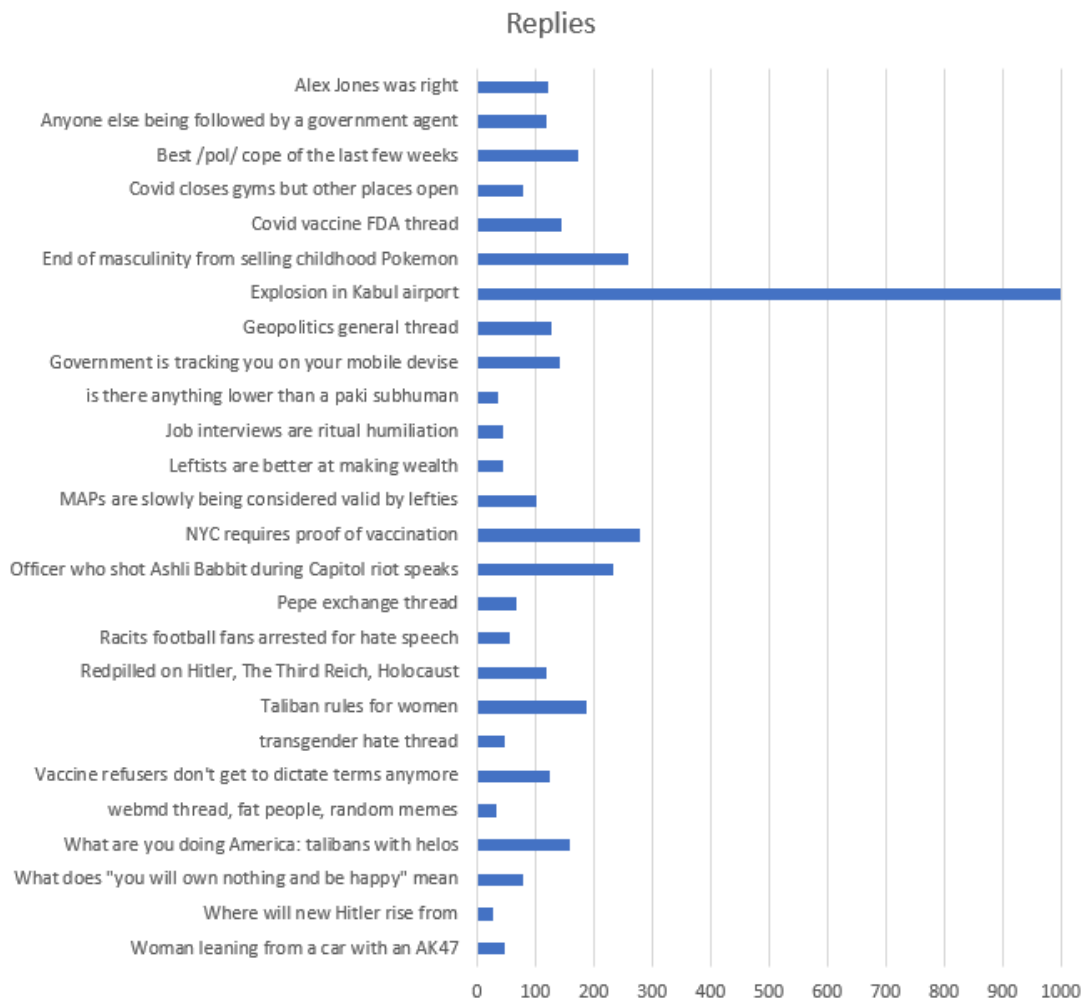


Table 1. The whole dataset in terms of replies.

After collecting all the data, the threads were placed in chronological order and the number of replies, images, unique posters, and the ratio of posts per poster was logged for each thread. This was done to ease the selection process of the threads that were going to become the main set of data, since the full dataset consisted of 3854 replies (Table 1), and that just wasn't feasible for the scope of this thesis, therefore, a further demarcation needed to be done. First the data was labelled into categories in terms of the theme or topic of the thread, trying to find logical ways to choose a smaller set of threads. At the end of this labelling, the most threads were on the topics of *covid* and *social*. Social in this case referred to social and societal issues ranging from "Job interviews are ritual humiliation" to "Taliban rules for women". Out of these topics the threads surpassing 100 replies were then chosen to get to the threads that had caused the most discussion, to get the best possible cross-section of the ways of interaction within /pol/. This was still too large a data set, with 1192 replies, so the first four threads in chronological order were chosen as the data to be studied. From these threads the first 100 replies of each were then transcribed to Excel to become the main dataset, as 400 replies seemed like a narrow enough amount to be feasible for this study, but vast enough for the purposes of this study.

3.3 METHODS OF ANALYSIS

As the focus of this thesis is on the textual and the visual it seemed pertinent to use multimodal discourse analysis (from now referred to as MMDA) as the main framework of analysis. MMDA looks at all the ways of meaning making through all *modes* of discourse (Kress 2012: 37). All these modes contribute to the meaning of whatever discourse is being examined, meaning that language alone is not the be-all end-all of said discourse, but becomes two distinct modes of discourse: *speech* and *writing* (Kress 2012: 38-39). Mode itself is, as outlined by Kress (2010: 79), "a socially shaped and culturally given semiotic resource for making meaning". With the interest of the present study being on language and memes (and the picture forms of memes) the applicable modes from MMDA are *image*, and *writing* (Kress 2010: 79). *Writing* 'leans on' spoken language (or as a mode: *speech*) for the basic form and function, as it mimics what the writer wishes to 'say' to the recipient of this writing, although it is distinct in its differences with *speech* (Kress 2010: 81-82). In the case of the present study where the subject is written text on a forum, where the interaction can be seen as both *synchronous* and *asynchronous*, and that can at times very closely mimic a conversation, the usage of *images* (memes) is closely linked to the meaning making of the participants. As the face-to-face

interactions have moved more and more to the online spaces the ways in which written discourse is being held has evolved (or some may say devolved) to resemble more closely that of spoken discourse, as stated in 2.1.1 (Danesi 2016: 10). Therefore, writing online needs new semiotic effects to resemble speech, one of these being memes. Other ways of achieving these effects include bolding, size, and spacing (Kress 2010: 80), but for the present study these are not salient as 4chan does not allow for changing of any of these textual attributes.

Kress (2010: 81) states that modes such as image or speech are shaped by the characteristics and needs of the society (or in the case of the present study, an online community) and that “*image* in one culture is not identical to *image* in another”. This can be related to the functions of memes that will be discussed in the upcoming analysis as an image can be just an image in a certain context, but a meme in another. When explaining the resources of the mode of *image* Kress (2010: 82) states that an image does not have words, which affects the meaning making of an image. However, many memes include text. It can therefore be argued that memes are distinct from images in that aspect, and that they are a completely different mode independent from images in the same way as speech is from writing. That is however not the purpose of this present study, but is pertinent to point out, since this is a study on a topic that has not been an area of research for as long as for example the study of images has. As a meme usually has both modes, writing and image, it can be analysed as a combination of both, in the cases it applies, as not all memes include writing.

3.4 ETHICAL QUESTIONS

Ethical issues that may rise during the present study are rather limited, since all the data is available publicly online, and requires no registration to be accessed. The IRE 3.0 ethics guidelines (2020) state informed consent should be acquired in case of gathering identifiable information but as no such information is gathered, no informed consent is needed. All the authors of the studied posts are anonymous, apart from their country of origin which is shown by 4chan by default. This country of origin was not saved with the data, so it will not be taken into consideration. The posts will most likely not be able to be found after the present study is published, due to reasons outlined in the chapter discussing the deletion of old posts by 4chan. The data collected will not be submitted for further use, and it will be stored on the secured network drive of the University of Jyväskylä until the study is concluded, after which it will be

discarded if no other need for its preservation arises. The main topic of this thesis is to research text, not people, so the users of /pol/ will not be discussed or studied in any explicit way. A consideration to be made is to the protection of the researcher since /pol/ has been flagged as a potentially dangerous subject for researchers due to users on /pol/ being associated with attacks on those trying to study them (Colley and Moore 2022: 23).

4. ANALYSIS

This chapter presents the findings from the analysis of the data. As stated in the previous chapter, the data consists of four threads with a hundred comments each, gathered in August and the beginning of September in 2021. It has been analysed using multimodal discourse analysis, and during this analysis a number of categories of meme usage were found. The following sections will discuss the patterns and their utilisation in relation to the first research question using these categories to focus the analysis. Three categories relate to the ways in which memes and writing are connected in the usage, and these are: *contextual*, *isolated*, and *either*, and these shall be discussed more in depth in 4.2. Two categories that will be discussed in 4.3 relate to the community of /pol/, and these are: *community*, and *troll behaviour*. The final two categories to be discussed in 4.4 are more about the images themselves, and they are: *meme enthusiasm*, and *non-memes*. The last section 4.5 will discuss the language that is used by /pol/, and its functions to answer the second research question, although this will be interwoven into the prior sections as well. In the following section is a general overview of the data to familiarise the reader with it and to lay a foundation for the sections to come.

4.1 OVERVIEW OF THE DATA

The introductory paragraph above laid some groundwork about the set of data used in this study. The whole set of data was much larger than what will be used here, as was discussed in chapter 3.2. Altogether 400 comments were analysed, and of those 400, 149 contained images. Per thread the percentages were roughly in the 20% per thread range, and of the 149 images around 121 were memes which again is roughly 20 percent. It is up to interpretation what the actual number is, since the difference between a meme and not-a-meme is not set in stone, but this will be further discussed in 4.4, where the fluidity of memes is explored more in depth. The

categorisation provided in the introduction can be divided into several different patterns of usage, which will be outlined next. The chart below (Table 2) includes all functions and the amount of use cases found in the data. Multiple functions can apply to a single meme, so the amount of use cases can exceed the number of 149 memes that are the data.

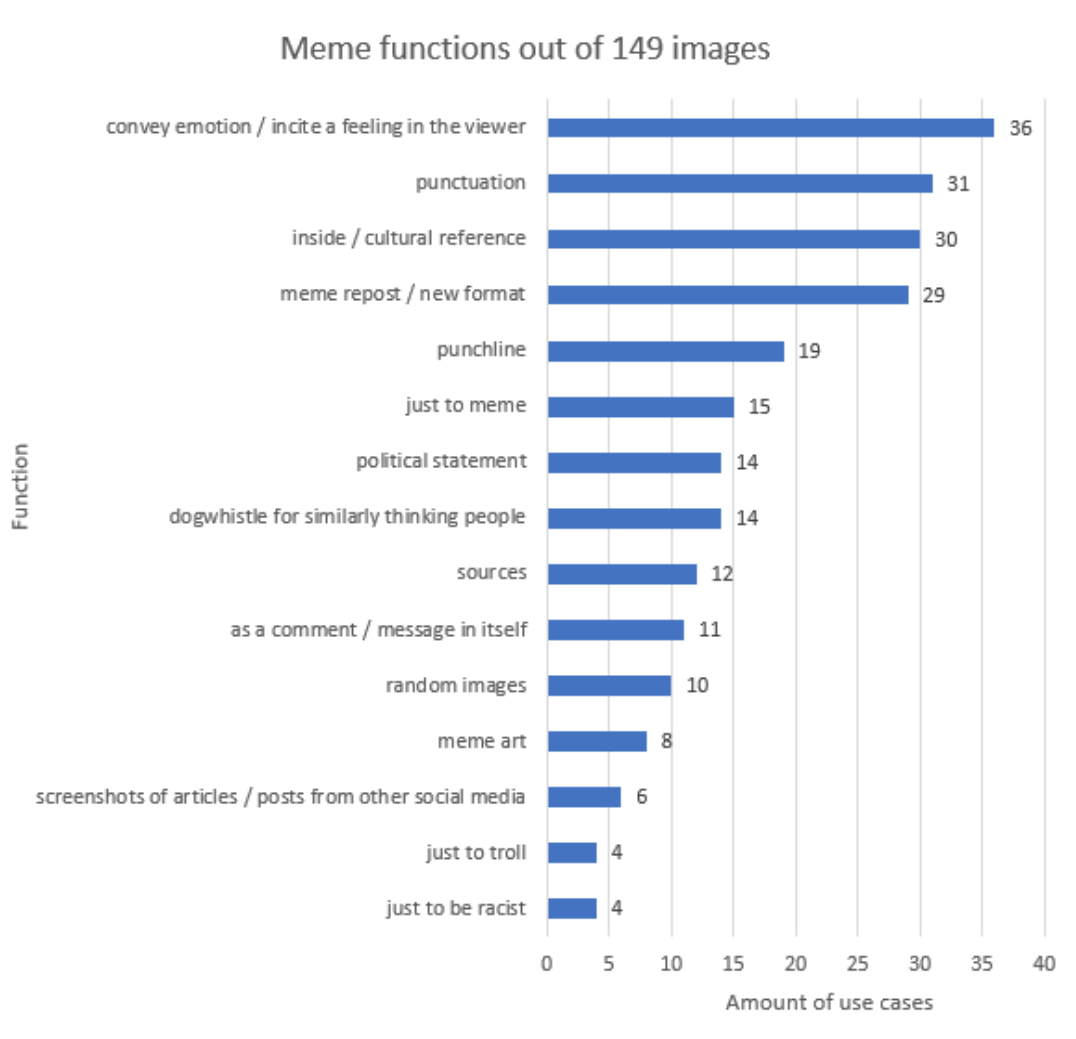


Table 2. A chart outlining the functions and use cases of memes in the data.

The three categories relating to the connection between written language and memes were *contextual*, *isolated*, and *either*. *Contextual* includes patterns *punctuation* and *punchline*, which are related to the comment that the image belonged to. *Punctuation* means the meme somehow ends the comment as one would with an emoji or an exclamation point. These can include anything from a meme relating to the comment to a meme that conveys emotion to, or incites emotion in, the viewer. The actual number of ways to use memes as punctuation falls out of the scope of the present study, but the topic will be discussed in 4.2 to an extent that should provide

sufficient answers for the purpose of this thesis. *Punchline* works in a somewhat similar way, but instead of purely ending the comment, memes used as punchlines enhance or **are** the actual content of the comment. These can for example include familiar meme formats used to bring home the point being made (Image 7), or an image of Pepe the Frog (Image 8) edited to fit the scenario discussed in the comment.

Isolated and *either* have one pattern each, but since they are different to each other and to *contextual*, they have been given their own categories. The pattern belonging in *isolated* is the use of memes *as the message or comment*. This pattern speaks for itself, as the meme includes everything the poster wanted to convey. *Either* was difficult to place in the analysis, since it falls under the same umbrella of general patterns that can be best used in conjunction with other patterns as the patterns in *contextual* and *isolated*, but it could also be categorised under *community*. For the sake of brevity and the composition of this thesis it is categorised under *either*, and the pattern itself is *conveying emotion or inciting a feeling in the viewer*. This is also explained in the name of the pattern, and memes fitting this pattern can be images of people's faces with a particular emotion on them, or any other representation of emotion imaginable, for example the famous Arthur's Fist meme that represents pent up anger (Image 3).



Image 3. Arthur's Fist-meme.

The next two categories that will be discussed further in 4.3 are *community* and *troll behaviour*. These two are related to the posters and the ways in which they use memes to enhance the meaning of their comments or to bring forth their ideas and views. *Community* houses three patterns: *dog whistle*, *political statement*, and *reference*. *Dog whistle* is a term used in politics

to mean the use of language that is coded in a way that does not provoke the opposition (Merriam-Webster). In this analysis it is used in a similar way, but the coding is more akin to jargon, just in an image form, that only those in the know understand. This is a difficult category to conceptualise, but these types of memes can include ones such as this Knights Templar (Image 4), or this image of Joe Biden (Image 5). *Political statement* memes are used to further a narrative, whether it be left or right leaning. A lot of the analysed communication on 4chan was very black and white in terms of political leanings, and that was represented in the memes as well, which will be elaborated on later in the chapter. *Reference* patterns can be inside references or cultural references. These can include the aforementioned Arthur's Fist (Image 3), an image of a celebrity, or a reference to popular culture. *Dog whistle* could be argued to just be a part of *reference*, but for the sake of the clarity of the study they are separate.



Image 4. Image of a Knights Templar.



Image 5. A meme of Joe Biden

Troll behaviour includes patterns that relate to commenting *just to be racist* or *just to troll*. These are self-explanatory, as the function of the memes under *just to be racist* are to just be racist memes, and *just to troll* memes are meant to troll either the OP or other users and posters.

Just to troll could be a whole thesis, since trolling is a very wide and difficult subject, so it will be discussed in a scope that is narrow enough to fit the requirements of the current study.



Image 6. A comment from data with a random image.

The last categories are *meme enthusiasm* and *non-memes*. These are related to the images themselves, and the functions they have as images. *Non-memes* are images that are not used as memes in the context of the comment. These include *sources*, for example screenshots of articles, *posts from other social media* for example tweets, and *random images*, which includes images that are none of the above. Random images can be used as memes, but even if the context seems like the image is used as a meme, sometimes the meaning is too difficult to decipher to reliably say it functions as such. Image 6 has this problem, since the way the comment is laid out makes it seem like the image would be a punchline of sorts, but it is too obscure a reference to make any sense of the meaning behind it. *Meme enthusiasm* includes *meme reposting*, *meme art*, and *just to meme*. *Meme reposting* and *just to meme* are similar in that a lot of posts that are posted *just to meme* include *meme reposting*, but not all reposting is used for the sole purpose of memeing. Reposting means posting something again, but in the case of the present study it also includes reposting with modified content, such as the Drake meme with the text changed to fit the narrative of anti-vaxxers in this comment (Image 7). *Meme art* is used here to include new meme formats, and remixes of old meme formats, as this is a very integral part of the lifecycle of memes. This can include new iterations of Pepe the Frog (Image 8), or completely new images made for the sole purpose to fit a particular comment or topic. *Meme reposting* also falls near *meme art* in the remixing part, but the distinction the present study makes is that with *meme reposting* the meme is not altered significantly, whereas in *meme art* the core of the meme is present but the meme itself is a unique product.



Image 7. A comment from data with a reposted meme.

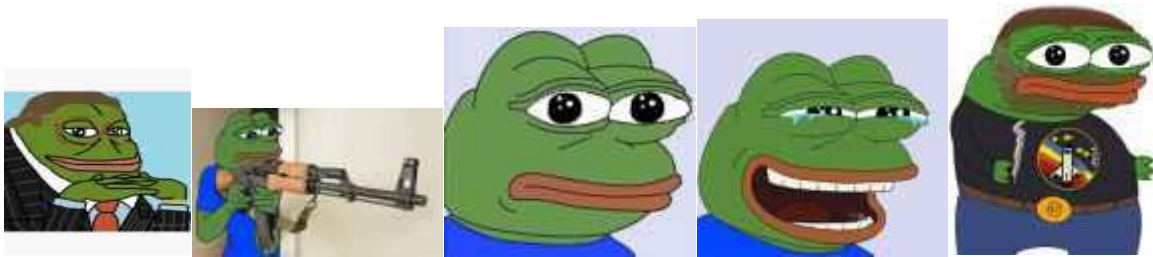


Image 8. Different iterations of Pepe the Frog.

The final portion of this chapter will analyse the written language found in the comments, and how the use of memes in conjunction with the written comment create meaning. Much of the chapter before this portion will include parts of an answer to research question two:

What kind of language does /pol/ use in conjunction with the memes and to what functions?

It is the purpose of this chapter to gather the strands of analysis together into a coherent answer, and to present the reader with all the findings from this analysis.

4.2 MEMES AND WRITING

This chapter explores the functions of memes in categories *contextual*, *isolated*, and *either*. These include 97 use cases out of the 149 in the data, and the function of *conveying emotion*, which is in the category of *either*, is the most used function out of all the functions, as can be seen in Table 2. The categories in this chapter relate to the ways in which memes and writing are used in making meaning in the posts on /pol/, and they are examined through examples taken from the data.



Image 9. A comment from data with a meme as punctuation.

The above comment (Image 9) is a good representation of written language and image interwoven into one message. Although the text itself is understandable enough, and one can get the sentiment it attempts to convey, the added meme *punctuates* the meaning of the writing. As Kress (2012: 37) writes.

“A multimodal approach assumes that language, whether as speech or as writing, is one means among many available for representation for making meaning.”

The multimodal approach looks at more than the written word, which in the case of the present study is memes in image form. The meaning in Image 9 is made through the written language of the comment, and the emotion conveyed through the meme of a black and white image of a man displaying disgust on his face, and the bottom text (a term used in memes to refer to text overlaid or placed at the bottom of the image) reading “absolutely degenerate”. The word ‘degenerate’ itself is a part of the vocabulary of /pol/, in reference to groups or behaviour not accepted by /pol/ (e.g., furies or people who watch anime). As the scope of the present study is not on lexical analysis, or image analysis, comments on these features will not be in depth, but some comments will be provided to supplement the analysis, since much of the phenomena discussed in the present study have not been studied to a sufficient degree. The meme represents the poster’s emotion towards the board (read as /pol/ or 4chan, shortened from imageboard). A similar effect could have been accomplished with the use of an emoji, or other multimodal conduit for conveying emotion, but the use of this meme in this context with this post is what creates the full meaning of the comment. For the community privy to the style of memes /pol/ uses, the meme in Image 9 can hold more meaning than to the random visitor of the board. This is a part of the *dog whistling* and *inside referencing* that happens within the threads of /pol/. This will be further elaborated on chapter 4.3.

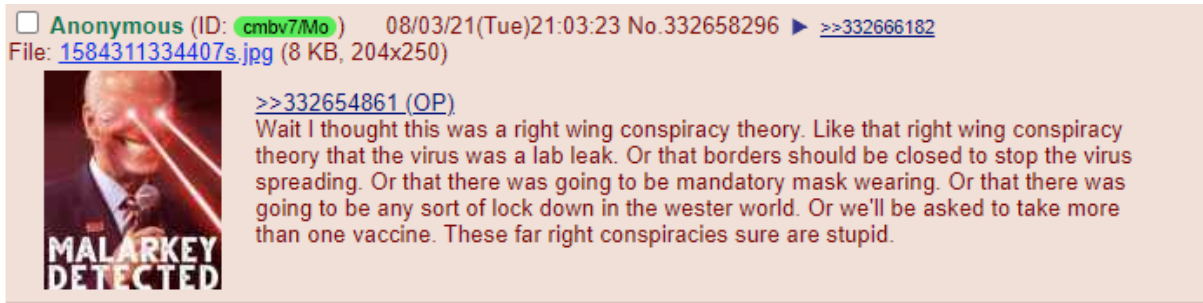


Image 10. A comment from data with a meme as punctuation.

Image 10 includes the meme from Image 5 in context with the comment about a right-wing conspiracy theory, which is a relatively common topic on /pol/, as 61 out of the 400 comments, roughly 15% in the data were about it. The poster reflects on different conspiracy theories and their validity, and the meme attached enhances the message as to what their stance on the topic is, thus punctuating the comment with an ironic meme. Again, as with Image 9 a similar effect could probably have been achieved using words, emoji, or some other format, but using a meme allowed the poster to better convey their thoughts. Both Images 9 and 10 include memes that function as punctuation, but the nuances they allow for the poster are deeper and more varied. Whereas the meme in Image 9 portrays emotion, the meme in Image 10 conveys a stance on a topic. This is also where issues emerge in analysing comments with memes: irony. On the first reading Image 10 might convey a negative message about far-right conspiracies, as it begins with a theory that is more or less silly, but as the comment continues the poster outlines events that ended up happening with regard to action taken to stop Covid-19 from spreading. Thus, the message under the irony ends up being the complete opposite, and the poster actually means that far right theories are not stupid. The addition of Joe Biden, the 46th and at the time of writing this thesis the current president of the United States, in the meme can also be viewed as supporting either of the ways of reading the comment. /pol/, 4chan, and the internet at large are steeped in irony and post-irony, and these yet again are topics that would be interesting and important to study but go out of the scope of the present study.



Image 11. A comment from data with a meme as a punchline.

The Cambridge Dictionary (2022) defines punchline as the “*last part of a story or a joke that explains the meaning of what has happened previously or makes it funny*”. This also what the present study means with a meme that functions as a punchline, it completes the comment in a way that makes it humorous or explains it. The above comment (Image 11) is about New York setting a mandate for proof of vaccination, and the poster comments “Like who goes there now?”, with a reposted meme of journalist Jeremy Clarkson from Top Gear where he comments on something that seems to warrant a large response, but then averts the viewers assumption with a simple “anyway” and continues with the show. This conveys the feeling of indifference towards the original post, and in context makes a dry joke about the situation. Analysis of humour as a topic will fall outside the scope of this study.

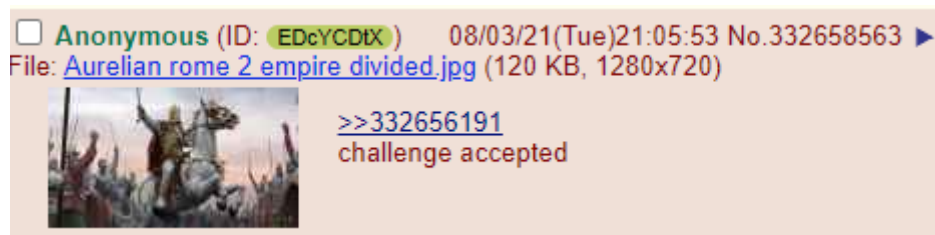


Image 12. A comment with a meme as a punchline.

Image 12 includes the previously mentioned meme (Image 4) of a templar on a horse seemingly ready to charge into battle, and a comment “challenge accepted”. This comment showcases the importance of multimodal analysis of interaction, since the meme includes half of the joke, and the written comment the other half. The joke being that whatever the challenge posed was, the poster is ready to charge into battle. Templars seem to be a commonly used theme in memes, especially with the phrases ‘Deus vult’ (Eng. ‘God wills it’) and ‘heresy’. The use of the image

as a vehicle to make a comment that on its own might be construed as somewhat hostile or confrontational with a humorous reference is a common use of memes as punchlines. This is also true with memes that include dry humour attached to serious comments, such as example 8. The comment itself is serious and just states the opinion of the poster, but the meme makes light of the way in which the limitations posed by New York were worded using the ubiquitous Drake meme.

Isolated memes are memes that function as the whole message in themselves. These can include memes with most of the functions discussed in this study if the context clarifies the meaning of the meme. For example, the post below (Image 13) is from the previously mentioned thread about covid regulations in New York, so the meaning behind the meme can be inferred from the surrounding context. This is also one of the cases where the meme could be classified as a random image, but since the image is a somewhat cartoonish depiction of a Molotov cocktail it lends credence to the assumption that it is posted as a meme and not as a serious call for violence. As isolated memes can have most of the functions discussed in this study, it is not pertinent to analyse them further within the limits of this study.



Image 13. A post with an isolated meme.

The final function to be covered in this section is memes that convey emotion. This is the largest of the functions in terms of use cases in the data, as can be seen in Table 2. Images 3-5 and 7-13 all convey some emotion to the reader even if the emotion is not the main function of the meme. Whereas in the aforementioned examples the conveying of emotion is a secondary function, there are also memes where the emotion is the primary one, for example in the comment below (Image 14). The meme attached is a *meme art* remix of a popular Rage Comics face that together with the comment seem to exude enthusiasm about the topic being discussed. These memes function in a similar way as emoji, but with the distinction that no number of

emoji can encompass the wealth of memes that are created on /pol/ alone, allowing for expressions of emotion and meaning making far greater than those of plain emoji.

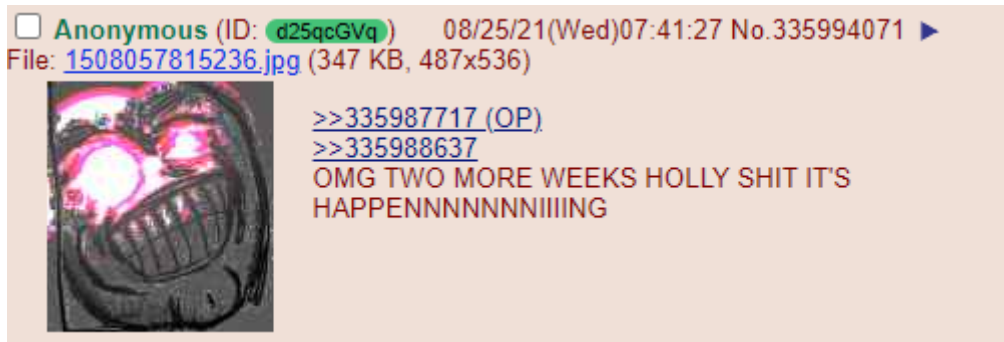


Image 14. A comment from data with a meme conveying emotion.

4.3 COMMUNITY

/pol/ is not easy to define as a community. The groups that frequent it are varied, and the only common denominator is the way people interact with one another, through memes and ‘shitposting’. Nothing really can be taken at face value, as one cannot be sure if anyone is being serious or not. Therefore, the only thing that matters is that the frequenters get some pleasure out of posting, whether it be through memes, trolling, or a more civil discussion. Even if it is difficult to define /pol/ in terms of group dynamics, there exist ways in which memes create a sense of community through *references* that are understandable by the board but unintelligible to outsiders, or through *dog whistling* to other members of a smaller ingroup. These two are very much linked in their ways of functioning, with the biggest difference being in the way meaning is made between the poster and the viewer. Images 15 & 16 illustrate this difference, with both memes being references, but Image 15 is a dog whistle for anti-vaxxers and right leaning users, whereas Image 16 is a reference that people who know can recognise Alan Watts from the picture understand. The difference in the making of meaning is in the purpose and the audience of the meme, and to be more exact, dog whistles function as vehicles for meaning between members of the same ingroup that is antagonistic towards another group. Since /pol/ is about politics, these antagonisms tend to be between the left and the right, as from what the data for this study showed, /pol/ tends to be very black and white with the ways in which political ideations are branded. A thing is either left or right, with or against. In terms of

frequency, *dog whistle* was around the middle of the 149-image dataset in terms of use cases with 14 analysed cases, and eight of those cases were also used as *reference* in function. Image 15 is one of these cases, as the meme references the video game franchise Resident Evil, but in context it also functions as a dog whistle to the above stated group of anti-vaxxers and right leaning users. Another one is the meme from Image 10, as the format of the meme is a remix of the ‘silence, liberal’ meme (Image 17), but the context and the content make it a dog whistle to right leaning users.



Image 15. A comment from data with a meme that functions as a dog whistle

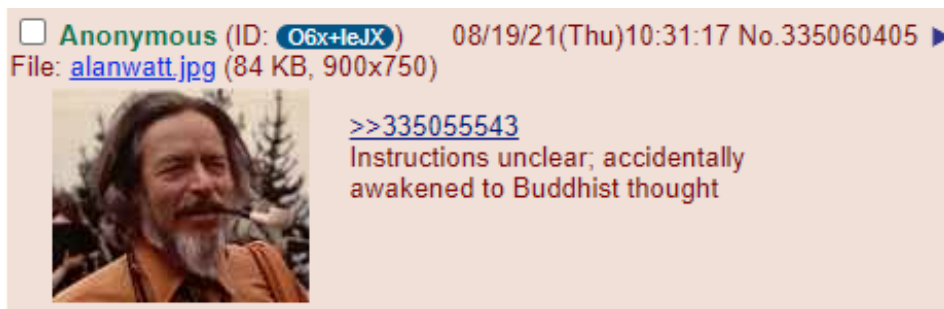


Image 16. A comment from data with a meme that functions as a reference.

The internet at large can be found very referential, with cultural references all over social media, in ads, and in movies and series. Memes are particularly prone to this, as even the original definition by Richard Dawkins (1976) was coined as a concept to depict imitation of ideas. Referential memes are the third most used function in the data set with 30 use cases, which equals twenty percent of the data. These are often *meme art* remixes and *reposts* of memes with altered text or other features, but recognisable, nevertheless. They can also be *random images* in reference to whatever the topic of conversation is, to provide more context to the interaction. The use cases of reference memes are wide and varied, and their analysis falls out of the scope of the present study, but they would be a good subject for further research due to their prominence.



Image 17. Meme: silence, liberal.

Trolling is a favourite pastime of many denizens of the internet, and /pol/ has been connected to several troll operations (known as OPs), for example the disruption of the HEWILLNOTDIVIDEUS (HWNDU 2017-2021) project. Trolling through memes on the other hand seems to not be as widely utilised, and this was one finding that took me by surprise, as I believed it would have been a major portion of the memes posted. The number of posts with memes used *just to troll* was only four which is only two percent of the data, but it needs to be noted that overall the threads that were analysed seemed more well conducted than what I had hypothesised. Trolling seems to be done using ‘normal’ memes with functions discussed in this study, alongside writing that is created to divert the other posters or to incite some response from the other posters. For further reading on trolling, Zvereva (2020) explains the history, and the current state of trolling, especially in relation to Russian trolls. Yet again analysing trolling falls out of the scope of the present study. Memes used *just to be racist* are also included in the same wrongly hypothesised premise held by me, as they too are attributed for only four out of the 149 images. As racism is such a vast topic, and a difficult issue, it does not seem appropriate for the scope of this study to explore. A note to be brought up from the data is that around 50 out of the 400 comments analysed were related to racism, so even though the memes themselves played a minor role, racism was still present in the threads.

4.4 MEME AS AN IMAGE / MULTIMODALITY IN MEMES

Not all images are memes, and not all memes are images, but in the context of the present study the latter is not considered, as video and other modes are not a part of the data. A meme as an image can appear in a multitude of forms, the most usual being an image of something with text overlaid on top of it. Other memes can be *random images* that become memes in context, but

without it they might not appear to be so (Images 12, 13, 16). The fluidity of an image in terms of its meaning in different contexts is also an important consideration in attempting to understand memes. Image 18 includes an innocent picture of a cat in a tank, that on its own could be considered as cute, or adorable, and at the very least innocent. However, the context is the shooting of an unarmed civilian by a police officer in the 2021 Capitol riots, so in context and with the written comment the meaning becomes quite different. Most likely the comment is ironic, and the image of the cat corroborates the possibility, but the meaning from just the image being posted on its own is markedly different than with the added comment. This interplay has been discussed previously in the present study and remains one of the key factors in the meaning making of memes.

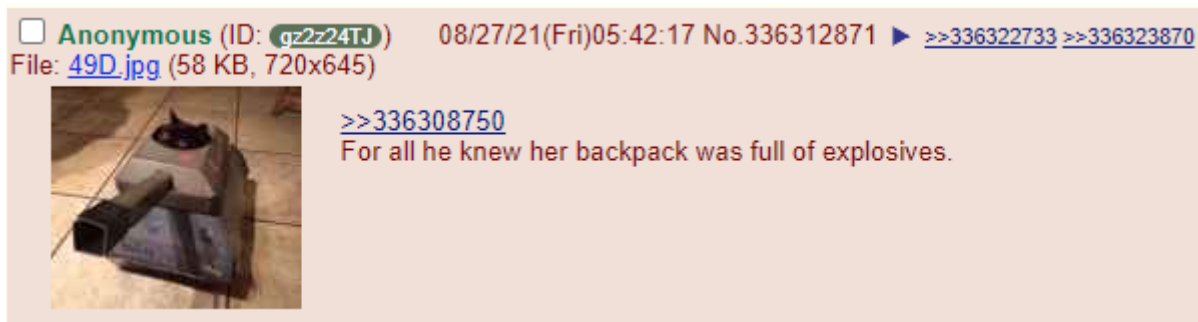


Image 18. A comment from the data with a random image as a meme.

The final categories of meme functions are *meme reposting*, *meme art*, and *just to meme*. Just to meme is a function that is rather self-explanatory as memes posted just to meme are just that. They can have other secondary functions but the primary purpose of posting them is for the sake of it. For example, the cat in the tank (Image 18) can be seen as being posted *just to meme* as it does not take a marked stance on the discussion and is rather light-hearted in tone. This function is very up to interpretation though, as it is impossible to gauge someone's intent in their posts, but from the context, and other visual inferences it is possible to come to a sufficient conclusion as to what might have been the purpose of posting such a meme. *Meme reposting* was explained earlier as:

Reposting means posting something again, but in the case of the present study it also includes reposting with modified content, such as the Drake meme with the text changed to fit the narrative of anti-vaxxers in this comment (Image 7). (See also section 4.1)

Reposting is a practice that is used a lot and it also coincides with the function of *reference* memes. On /pol/ it is not uncommon to take a ‘normie’ meme (normie means a normal person, someone not in the ingroup of 4chan or /pol/ frequenters) and repost it with the text changed as can be seen in Image 7 where the text has been altered to be more /pol/ appropriate. Another example of this occurrence is with the Trolley Problem meme (Image 19).

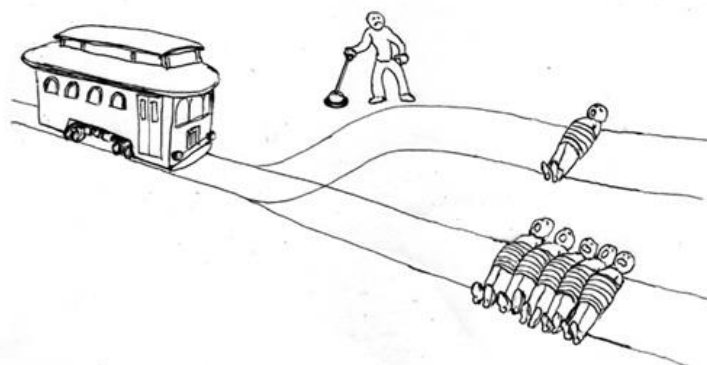


Image 19. The Trolley Problem meme.

This meme is from the ethical problem of whether it is right to kill one person to save multiple. In the comment below (Image 20) this meme has been altered with caricature faces of people of colour and a person of purported Jewish descent (another group disliked by /pol/).

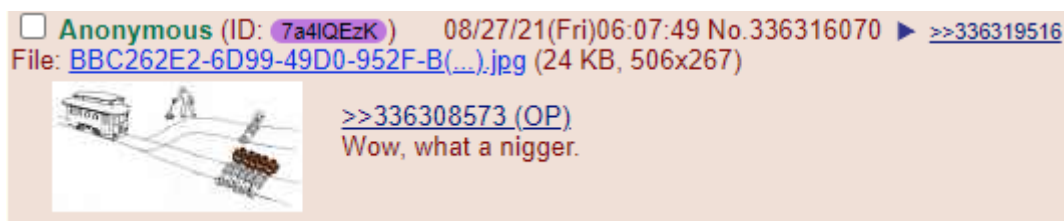


Image 20. A comment with a racist repost of a meme.

Meme art can be considered to encompass all memes, as it is up to the beholder if something has artistic value to them or not, but in the context of the present study meme art has been used to describe remixes of memes that go beyond mere alteration of small details. A good example of this is the different iterations of Pepe the Frog (Image 8) as they have a central character but are all considerably different from one another. Meme art can also be a completely new piece,

such as the image below (Image 21). The drawing is related to the 2021 Capitol riots with added meme flags.



Image 21. A post of a meme art piece.

As stated at the beginning of this section, not all images are memes. In particular the present study classified two more categories of images: *sources*, and *posts from other social media*. The third non-meme function is *random image*, but this was covered before in this chapter. Sources can be posts from other social media, but the distinction was made due to the content of the images. Sources are strictly posted for referencing purposes, whereas posts from other social media can include tweets by politicians, screenshots of articles, or anything else of interest one might wish to post on /pol/.

4.5 THE LANGUAGE OF /pol/

All the previously discussed and analysed functions relate to the language of /pol/. This final portion of the analysis will attempt to answer the research questions in a concise manner, since much of the analysis answers to all of the questions at once. The research questions posed in the present study are the following:

1. How does /pol/ utilise memes?

1.1 Does there emerge a specific kind of pattern in the usage of these memes?

2. What kind of language does /pol/ use in conjunction with the memes, and to what functions?

Research question one has been thoroughly covered in the prior sections, and the utilisation and functions of memes have been examined and analysed in depth. The second research question however remains yet to be clearly answered, although the contents for the answer have been discussed several times. The link between written language and memes has been established as convergent, and the way in which they create meaning in conjunction with one another can be seen in Images 10, 11, and 18. When it comes to the actual written language used by /pol/ in conjunction with the memes, the answer is vaguer. Depending on the topic at hand the posts include vastly different types of language, from almost academic style of writing to very crass remarks and crude racism (as can be seen in Image 20). There do seem to be certain standards the users hold for their writing especially when discussing more serious topics, and poor writing and grammar tends to get commented on by others when in context with a serious topic of conversation. Apart from this ‘proper’ way of writing there does exist a vast number of words and phrases that are utilised by /pol/ in their lexicon. As the purpose of this study is not to provide a detailed account of the vocabulary of /pol/, the following examples offer a brief overview of some of the most common categories of words in the data. A few word categories were used frequently enough to be reasonable to point out as functions of the language /pol/ uses. These are *racial slurs*, *insults*, and */pol/ words* (anon, normie, bump, kek). These three categories accounted for roughly 20% of the comments in the data, but further analysis of a larger and more systematic sample size would be required to make definitive conclusions as to what type of lexicon /pol/ has. The overall language use is argumentative and at times very confrontational with insults thrown seemingly without any provocation. From the data analysed and the findings provided, the main ways in which /pol/ use written language and memes are the functions discussed prior in the analysis, and as ways of bringing their views and arguments across, as well as to insult, denigrate or to troll the other posters.

5 DISCUSSION

As more communities grow on the internet the ways of communication evolve over time. The way in which memes have become ingrained in the way of communication all around the internet is an interesting topic for study on its own, and an area of which there is a wide scope for different studies in the future. The main aims of the present study were to find out how the infamous imageboard /pol/ uses memes in their discourse using multimodal discourse analysis on a data set of 400 posts. Even though the field of study on internet culture already vast and

ever-growing, with research from multiple studies only in the past few years discussing 4chan's online culture war against Tumblr (Nagle 2017), /pol/ culture and memetic violence (Thorleifsson 2022), and the ways in which memes are used to further Neo-Nazi agenda (Askanius 2021), the present study utilised the 'expertise' of the researcher and prior knowledge on the topic of internet memes and internet culture at large. This however did not pose issues, as the nature of the present study was to outline different functions of memes and their usage, which is a task needing pattern recognition, while comparison with prior research was only a secondary aim. Multimodal discourse analysis was used to supplement the analysis with a robust but malleable framework that aided in the analysis of the multimodal set of data.

The findings of the present study are as follows: /pol/ uses memes to convey emotion, messages, and political opinions, as well as to punctuate their comments and to deliver punchlines and references to the discourse. Some members also use memes to troll, be racist, or to simply have a laugh and meme. There also exists several users who create new memes and remix and repost old memes as a form of creativity. The way in which language is used in conjunction with memes is varied and in need of further research to come to conclusive conclusions, but generalised findings include tendencies for argumentative language use, slurs and insults, and jargon that is particular to /pol/ with words such as 'normie' and 'anon'. These findings answer the research questions posed in the study, but the data for the present study was purposefully limited and the analysis not as in depth as such a major topic would require for proper inference to be made, so further research on the topic is highly recommended.

The present study gives a launching point for further research on the meaning making of memes in online discourse, and a brief summary of internet culture with respect to /pol/, but also to the sphere of internet denizens who participate in discussions using memes in different social media and contexts. For the broader community the present study can help understand the somewhat difficult-to-navigate world of internet memes, and to shed light on the people on /pol/ and what type of discourse is conducted there.

This research area would benefit from being a doctoral dissertation or a larger scale study with more researchers to undertake a wider analysis of the ways in which meaning is made through memes. While the chosen procedure was sufficient in order to respond satisfactorily to the research questions of the study, any future reduplications with a similar aim could start with the functions outlined here and reanalyse the data with them as the driving force behind the analysis, as in the present study the analysis was done in conjunction with the finding of the

functions, and therefore some of the categorisation of the data fell out of the scope of the analysed functions. That said, the analysis conducted here still managed to produce results of the depth and validity that I had hoped for. Further research could switch the lens of the study to a less researched form of digital discourse or social media, to gauge as /pol/ users might say, a more 'normie' community.

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