

A New Genre of Online Memes: A Semiotic Analysis of the Harry Potter-Balenciaga Meme

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Introduction

The term "meme," first introduced by Richard Dawkins in "The Selfish Gene," refers to a unit of cultural information transmission. Today's concept of the internet meme, although derived from Dawkins' idea, has evolved into a form of humor or trend created and shared online by internet users. The advent of the internet enabled the emergence of early internet memes combining text and images, which have since evolved into various forms, becoming a significant element of modern online culture.

In April 2023, a YouTuber named Demonflyingfox gained significant attention by creating a video featuring Harry Potter characters styled in Balenciaga fashion using Generative AI technology. As it became known that this meme was made easily through an AI-based platforms, the production of AI memes became a trend, leading to the emergence of a new phenomenon in internet memes. Generative AI technology, which started becoming widely accessible in 2021, has transcended the limitations of traditional meme production, making it possible to realize abstract ideas as idea-realizing memes. This study aims to analyze the Harry Potter-Balenciaga meme, a product of the fusion of AI technology and digital online culture, to gain insights into the genre changes brought by AI to the internet meme culture.

The purpose of this study is to capture this new phenomenon and consider the Harry Potter-Balenciaga meme as a new genre of memes that overcomes the

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limitations of traditional memes. This study aims to provide insights into the advent of new meme genre brought about by Generative AI in the realm of online culture. Based on the theoretical framework of digital culture, this paper will discuss these changes through a semiotic analysis. The first section explains the evolution from Dawkins' (2016) concept of cultural memes to internet memes, and finally to Idea memes (AI memes). The second section investigates the traditional genre classification of online memes by digital media scholar Shifman (2016) and proposes the concept of the Idea (realizing) meme as a new genre, illustrated by the Harry Potter-Balenciaga meme. The third section conducts a semiotic analysis of the Harry Potter-Balenciaga meme, focusing on the three dimensions of memes suggested by Shifman (2016): content, form, and stance. This analysis will explain how new memes overcome the limitations of traditional memes and expand the communicative and epistemological possibilities for internet users.

Through this analysis, this study aims to shed light on the impact of the fusion of AI technology and online digital culture, and contribute to the research on the intersection of AI technology and online communication and media culture. Specifically, it aims to expand the scope and perspective of digital culture studies, particularly its subfield, online memes.

From Cultural Meme to Idea Meme¹⁾

The term "meme" was first introduced by Richard Dawkins in his book "The Selfish Gene" (2016), where it originally referred to a concept used to analyze cultural phenomena as cultural genes. Dawkins posited that cultural phenomena are transmitted through non-genetic means, such as imitation, and he coined the term "meme" to describe these cultural elements. The meaning of this term evolved in the late 1990s to early 2000s to describe cultural elements that are parodied,

¹⁾ The term "Idea Meme" is a concept coined by the author to emphasize the characteristics of AI-generated memes that overcome the limitations of traditional meme creation. This genre concept highlights how, with just an individual's abstract idea, it is possible to realize content through AI memes.

transformed, and spread, borrowing Dawkins' term to describe this new mode of cultural transmission proliferating with the advent of the internet. Today, the concept of memes commonly used on the internet has somewhat narrowed from Dawkins' original definition, now referring to trends and humor created and shared online (Park, 2020).

In the past, memes were primarily transmitted through face-to-face interactions or printed media. However, with the development of internet communication technologies in the late 1990s to early 2000s, a new type of meme emerged, distinct from traditional cultural memes: the 'internet meme.' Early internet memes typically combined text and images and have since evolved into various forms with the advancement of internet and digital technologies. Internet memes transform societal and cultural ideas, behaviors, and styles through user creativity, existing in independent forms such as text, images, videos, sounds, and music, or in hybrid forms, serving as unique means of online communication.

Due to their strong transmissibility, internet memes have become a significant cultural element in modern online communication. Today, much of internet culture is closely linked with internet memes (McCulloch, 2019). Increasingly, internet memes have become a primary medium for satire, criticism of social issues, humor, and entertainment in online culture. Various forms of internet memes, including text, images, and videos, were extensively integrated into the daily lives of many young internet users. Online users now easily adopt, edit, and share internet memes, allowing for interaction beyond physical limitations. In this context, internet memes were considered familiar tools of everyday communication. With the development of social media, memes spread even more rapidly, capturing public attention and shaping trends and discourse as powerful tools of dissemination.

In 2019, with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and the consequent restrictions on direct social interactions, online communication spaces became more

active and vibrant. The increased use of social networks manifested as a form of humor spreading on the internet during the lockdown period. As a result, memes took on a more central role in online communication culture, with their creation and usage increasing significantly compared to pre-pandemic times (Priyadarshini et al., 2022). Additionally, following the pandemic, the advancement of AI technology reached its peak, leading to the widespread use of open services capable of creating various multimodal content, such as Chat-GPT, DALL-E, Midjourney, and ElevenLabs, in 2021. Consequently, online users' accessibility to AI has steadily increased, resulting in a rise in creative meme production and dissemination using AI (Merali & Merali, 2023).

In this context, in April 2023, a promotional video uploaded by the American YouTuber, Demonflyingfox garnered significant attention from global online users. This video featured characters from J.K. Rowling's fantasy novel Harry Potter styled in the fashion of the French luxury brand Balenciaga, created using Generative AI technology. The video received three million views within two weeks of its upload. Initially, people thought this video was a professionally produced promotional material created in collaboration between the Balenciaga brand and J.K. Rowling. However, it was later revealed that the video was a complex AI creation easily made by an individual using free AI-based platforms such as Chat-GPT, Midjourney, and ElevenLabs. Following this revelation, various Balenciaga meme videos imitating this style proliferated across the internet, showcasing diverse creative transformations and spreading widely. Consequently, the Harry Potter-Balenciaga meme gained attention as an innovative and trendy new form of internet meme.

Traditional internet memes, composed of images, videos, and sounds, have inherent limitations for individual manipulation without professional skills. Consequently, the space for creativity in meme creation has been restricted. Unless new content is produced, individuals largely rely on minor image modifications and

creative combinations of existing multimodal content. However, the Harry Potter-Balenciaga meme, created using Generative AI, has completely transcended these limitations of traditional meme creation. It enables the realization of infinite creativity from abstract ideas alone, ushering in a new form of meme production. Without requiring professional skills, individuals can transform abstract concepts like Harry Potter and Balenciaga into tangible content, thus actualizing the realm of idea memes (idea meme/AI-generated meme).

A New Genre of Memes

Shifman (2016) proposed a more practical approach to defining online memes. She argued that memes as a genre (a) encompass several aspects of the disseminated unit that people can imitate, and (b) should be seen not as single entities that spread well, but as groups of content units with common characteristics. Accordingly, online memes are defined as collections of digital items that share common characteristics in content, form, and stance, created with awareness of each other, and circulated, imitated, and transformed by many users via the internet. Based on this definition, Shifman (2016) classified memes into nine genres, as presented below:

- 1) **Reaction Photoshops:** Using Photoshop to express their reactions to a specific image or event. By manipulating the image, people are able to provide new contexts or interpretations
- 2) **Photo Fads:** Sharing photos online of themselves in specific poses or actions, leading to widespread participation and replication
- 3) **Flash Mobs:** Large groups of people gather at a specific time and place to perform a particular action together, and the process is shared as a video

- 4) **Lipsynchs:** Lip-sync to specific music or dialogue, recording and sharing these videos online
- 5) **Misheard Lyrics:** Deliberately misinterpreting or reinterpreting the lyrics of a song and share their versions
- 6) **Recut Trailers:** Re-editing existing movie trailers to provide new interpretations or satirical commentary
- 7) **LOLCats:** Creating photos of cats and other animals with humorous captions, often using "lolspeak," a form of idiosyncratic grammar and spelling
- 8) **Stock Character Macros:** Using a standardized image macro to depict specific characters or stereotypes, commonly used in internet communities
- 9) **Rage Comics:** A simple comic form featuring characters with exaggerated facial expressions, used primarily for expressing everyday communication and reactions

However, not all online memes completely conform to Shifman's (2016) classification, and certain memes may be better described as composites of multiple genres. The Harry Potter-Balenciaga video meme, for instance, does not fit into any one of Shifman's defined meme genres, nor is it appropriately viewed as a composite of these genres. This is primarily because this meme was created using a new unprecedented technology, Generative AI, rather than traditional content combination methods. Specifically, the Harry Potter-Balenciaga meme exhibits more complex and integrative characteristics in terms of content, form, and stance compared to traditional memes. Therefore, Shifman's (2016) genre classification fails to accommodate the Harry Potter-Balenciaga meme, suggesting the need to revise the existing meme genre classifications.

To address this, a new genre, "Idea Realizing Meme," is proposed. This

emphasizes that AI-generated memes represent a genre evolution from traditional memes and highlight the need for epistemological expansion in this area.

Idea-Realizing Meme: A form that overcomes the limitations of traditional meme creation by using Generative AI technology to bring individual abstract ideas to reality

As a starting point for analyzing the case study meme, this research presents the Harry Potter-Balenciaga meme as an example of the genre of Idea-Realizing Memes, as defined by Shifman (2016). This not only signifies an expansion of existing meme genres but also suggests the potential for functioning as a unique genre system that technically encompasses and integrates all existing meme genres. It is posited that only through an epistemological expansion beyond traditional genre classifications can an insightful analysis of the Harry Potter-Balenciaga meme be achieved.

Methodology

The analysis of this study centers on a 55-second video titled "Harry Potter by Balenciaga," posted on the Demonflyingfox Youtube channel. Initially, several scenes from the moving-image data are captured and presented for analysis. These scenes are compared and analyzed alongside traditional online meme examples, such as the Nicolas Cage meme and existing Harry Potter meme images. Additionally, the sound text embedded in the Harry Potter-Balenciaga meme video is transcribed into written text for semiotic analysis. The data are discussed according to the three core dimensions of meme genres proposed by Shifman (2016): content, form, and stance. These discussions are grounded in semiotic concepts and theories from 1) Roland Barthes (1967) and Saussure (1916); 2) Soja

(1998); and 3) Jakobson (1987).

The Three Dimensions of Meme Genres

To understand and define the Harry Potter-Balenciaga meme as a new genre, it is essential to grasp the concepts of the three core dimensions that are central to how users imitate and disseminate memes: Content, Form, and Stance. The explanations of these three core dimensions are as follows (Shifman, 2016):

- 1) **Content:** The specific text and content, or the ideas and ideologies conveyed by it.
- 2) **Form:** The physical reality of the message as perceived through the senses. This includes the visual/auditory dimensions specific to the text and the complex genre-related patterns.
- 3) **Stance:** The manner in which meme users position themselves concerning the text, linguistic code, audience, and potential speakers.

The following sections will present an analysis of traditional genre memes and the Harry Potter-Balenciaga meme through semiotic concepts and theories within each of these dimensions.

Content

In terms of the first dimension, Content, traditional online memes often faced challenges in merging two different pieces of content unless they shared some commonality. As a result, the simplest and most straightforward way to create and imitate memes was to combine one's desired ideas with existing single-modal or multi-modal content. Additionally, individuals without advanced content

manipulation skills found it challenging to seamlessly integrate new text or dialogue into the original content while maintaining a high level of authenticity.

For instance, one of the most famous online memes features Nicolas Cage's bewildered expression with the caption "You don't say?" This meme, originating from a scene in the film "Face/Off" (1997), pairs Cage's image with a text that is entirely unrelated to the movie's dialogue. It became a popular means for internet users to express disbelief or sarcasm in response to absurd or outrageous statements. The meme was widely adopted and adapted by users who added their own captions like "?????!" or "You don't say?" to convey their reactions, independent of the original movie context.

Despite its long-standing popularity, the Nicolas Cage meme primarily saw creative transformations in the form of text font changes, enlargements, or stylistic alterations of the image. However, bold transformations that significantly altered the visual form of the character to generate new creative ideas from the content were not typically executed. This indicates the limitations of traditional meme content manipulation, where creativity was often restricted to minor textual and stylistic modifications rather than profound visual innovation.

[Figure 1] 'You don't say?' meme of Nicolas Cage



However, AI-generated Idea (Realizing) Memes break down the boundaries

between all forms of content, allowing users to freely merge themes and narratives they desire, regardless of any pre-existing connection. This enables a more autonomous and creative meme creation process. Users can now seamlessly combine two disparate ideas, such as the novel Harry Potter and the fashion brand Balenciaga, into a single, cohesive creative work. Instead of awkwardly merging an image from a Harry Potter scene with pre-existing Balenciaga outfits using Photoshop, resulting in a disjointed appearance, users can achieve a complete visual synthesis, producing a unified outcome where the two narratives converge successfully.

In this context, Harry Potter is depicted as a quintessential Balenciaga model, wearing Balenciaga outfits designed to fit the Harry Potter character, while delivering promotional dialogues that blend the Harry Potter narrative with Balenciaga's branding. This seamless integration not only creates a powerful promotional synergy distinct from traditional Balenciaga marketing materials but also expands Balenciaga's marketing reach by attracting Harry Potter fans into its target demographic. Thus, it forms an economic ideology that appeals to both Balenciaga and Harry Potter enthusiasts.

[Figure 2] Harry Potter scene in the Harry Potter-Balenciaga meme



The French philosopher Roland Barthes, in his work "The Death of the

Author" (1967), argued that with the "death of the author," a "text" becomes subject to subjective meaning-making by numerous "readers," allowing for the infinite creation of new, unfixed meanings, thus emphasizing interpretive freedom. This meme case reaffirms that the standard for interpreting original content lies not with the "author" but with the "reader." In the process of enjoying and communicating through memes, online users freely share and communicate ideas and ideologies beyond the fixed content structure established by the original text. Furthermore, the introduction of AI technology into the realm of memes allows users to break away from traditional meme creation methods, fostering a more autonomous and creative approach to meme production. This can be understood as the birth of a new meme genre.

[Table 1] Sound-Text of the Harry Potter-Balenciaga meme²⁾

Hagrid	You're a Balenciaga (Wizard), Harry
Snape	What is the difference, Potter, between H&M and Balenciaga (monkshood and wolfsbane)?
Dumbledore	After all to the well-organized mind, Balenciaga (Death) is but the next great adventure.
Malfoy	You'll soon find out that some fashion (wizarding families are) is better than other, Potter
Voldmot	There is no good and evil. There is only Balenciaga (Power) and those too weak to seek it.
Harry Potter	I bought a Balenciaga (Abada Cadabra)

In terms of content, examining the text aspect of the case meme more closely, as shown in [Table 1], the characters from Harry Potter deliver altered movie dialogues in which the keyword "Balenciaga" is substituted for certain words in

²⁾ The words in bold are those replaced in the meme by combining the Harry Potter character with Balenciaga, while the words in parentheses are the original dialogue from the novel of Harry Potter.

the original dialogue. Language consists of the signifier and the signified (Saussure, 1916). In the Harry Potter-Balenciaga video, both the original dialogue and the words replaced with "Balenciaga" in the voice-over text can be seen as signifiers. By substituting some of the signifiers in the sentences, the creator modifies the original meaning of the dialogue to amplify the intended idea. Through this substitution, the video creators aim to convey the value and ideas of the Balenciaga fashion brand to the audience by associating it with the contextual significance of the original words in the dialogue.

For instance, in the novel, the line "You're a Balenciaga (Wizard), Harry" marks the moment Harry discovers that he is not just an ordinary, downtrodden orphan but a wizard with special abilities. The word "Wizard" serves as a turning point in Harry's life, marking the beginning of his fantastical adventure. By replacing this signifier with "Balenciaga," the meme creator projects the surprise and greatness that the word "Wizard" signifies for Harry onto Balenciaga, thereby conveying this to the audience familiar with the original narrative and context.

Similarly, in the line "What is the difference, Potter, between H&M and Balenciaga (monkshood and wolfsbane)?," Professor Snape tests Harry's knowledge of the difference between the magical ingredients monkshood and wolfsbane. This line creates an ideology where the recipient is prompted to recognize the difference between Balenciaga and another fashion brand, H&M.

In Dumbledore's line, "After all, to the well-organized mind, Balenciaga (Death) is but the next great adventure," the original signifies that death is not the end of the journey but the beginning of a new adventure. Replacing "Death" with "Balenciaga" emphasizes that Balenciaga represents a new frontier of epistemological innovation in the fashion realm.

Voldemort's line, "There is no good and evil. There is only Balenciaga (Power) and those too weak to seek it," asserts that morality is not defined by absolute good and evil but by the pursuit of power. By substituting "Power" with

"Balenciaga," the meme indirectly imprints the idea that Balenciaga is the ultimate truth in the fashion world.

Finally, by replacing the most powerful curse in the magical world, "Avada Kedavra," with the phonetically similar "I bought a Balenciaga," the meme creates linguistic play and humor, emphasizing the powerful influence and impact of declaring one's purchase of Balenciaga.

In conclusion, all the signifiers in the original Harry Potter dialogues, as presented in [Table 1], which have been substituted with Balenciaga-related terms, serve to elevate and emphasize the brand value of Balenciaga within the context of the surrounding signifiers embedded in the Harry Potter narrative.

Form

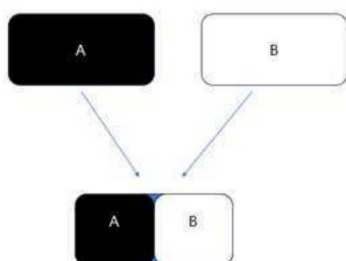
From the perspective of Form, traditional memes typically involve altering or adding text or captions to single images or short graphic images, editing and compositing parts of existing images or videos, and either using the original audio or recording the creator's voice. However, the Harry Potter-Balenciaga meme transcends these limited imitation and transformation forms of traditional memes. This case meme is created as a complete video in which a separate narrative is combined with the characters, delivering the altered text in the characters' original voices.

For this reason, the case meme video exhibits full and complex multimodality. The flexibility of these modal boundaries has driven the creation of creatively imitative memes, contributing to the emergence of a new genre of online memes.

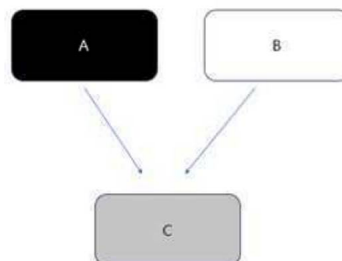
In terms of form, traditional memes create a combination of A and B resulting in A+B (see Figure 3). In contrast, AI-generated Idea Memes combine A and B to create a fusion resulting in C (see Figure 4). This creation, referred to as C,

is not merely a sum of the two but a completely new space, a "Third Place." The Third Place is a creative space where boundaries between the two are dissolved, forming new possibilities and understanding (Soja, 1998). This Third Place is not merely a physical location but a new genre of memes and a significant contextual space where social and cultural interactions occur.

[Figure 3] $A+B= A+B$ (Sum)



[Figure 4] $A+B=C$ (Third place)



For example, when comparing a traditional Harry Potter meme with the new Harry Potter-Balenciaga video meme, the traditional Harry Potter meme recontextualizes single scenes from the movie by arbitrarily adding user-desired text and placing the two pieces of content side by side to create a combined effect. In <Figure 5>, a meme is created by photoshopping and combining a scene where Professor McGonagall asks Harry a question with a scene where Dumbledore is in agony due to dark magic, then adding the text "Albus, have you seen my make-up bag?" to produce a humorous recontextualization.

Another example, as shown in <Figure 6>, features a scene where Harry and Ron are in a flying car, heading to school but finding themselves in danger. The original scene is used unchanged, with the humorous text "Ron, hold on! Are those shoes on sale?" added to comically recontextualize the perilous situation.

[Figure 5] Traditional Harry Potter Meme 1 [Figure 6] Traditional Harry Potter Meme 2



However, the Harry Potter-Balenciaga meme differs significantly from traditional memes. It goes beyond recontextualization to create an original and integrative contextual space. This distinction is made even clearer through the production process of the Harry Potter-Balenciaga video meme. The creation process is as follows:

1. Using the conversational AI, Chat GPT, the names of the Harry Potter characters are extracted, and each character is requested to be styled in the 1990s Balenciaga fashion. Chat GPT provides detailed descriptions of the Balenciaga styling.
2. The extracted character-specific styling descriptions are pasted into the image-generating AI service, Midjourney, to create the images.
3. Interview videos of the Harry Potter actors are searched on YouTube, and appropriate audio files are downloaded as Mp3 files.
4. The voice files of the actors are uploaded to ElevenLabs, an AI voice synthesis and text-to-speech conversion service, where the user-written scripts are read and saved as audio files.
5. The generated Harry Potter images from Midjourney are imported into the AI video creation service, D-ID, to create animated videos, and the character voices created in ElevenLabs are synthesized with the animated image videos.

This innovative approach highlights the creative and integrative nature of the Harry Potter-Balenciaga meme, distinguishing it from traditional meme formats.

By utilizing multiple multimodal AI generation services in a complex manner, the Harry Potter-Balenciaga meme recreates the context of existing content in an entirely new way. For instance, the scenes in Figures 7 and 8 depict new scenarios that have never appeared in the original movies. While the characters' appearances remain consistent, the backgrounds, facial expressions, atmosphere, and styles are all newly created. Moreover, the voices of the characters in the video perfectly match those of the movie characters, but they deliver modified lines and ideas such as, "There is no good and evil. There is only Balenciaga and those too weak to seek it," and "I bought a Balenciaga," which do not exist in the original film.

Through this meme, users not only break down the boundaries between the realms of Harry Potter and Balenciaga but also transcend traditional meme formats to create a unique space for their own understanding and discourse. This enables linguistic, social, and cultural interactions, providing users with new epistemological expansions and experiences in the process.

[Figure 7] Voldemort in the Case Meme



[Figure 8] Harry Potter in the Case Meme



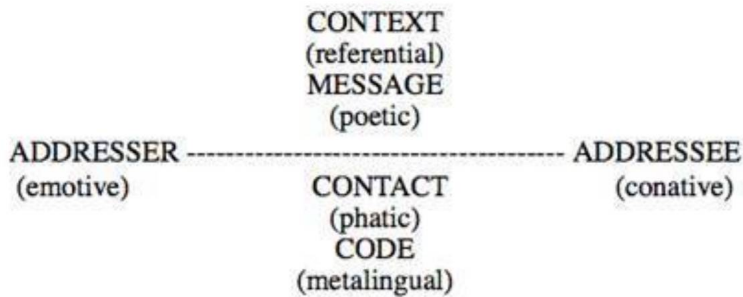
Stance

To explore the stance aspect, we can synthesize the content and form of the Harry Potter-Balenciaga video to understand the position, attitude, and values that the video creator sought to convey by linking the value of the Harry Potter narrative to the Balenciaga brand. Overall, this video aims to project values associated with Harry Potter—such as fantasy, classicism, adventure, uniqueness, and secrecy—onto the Balenciaga brand. The goal is to differentiate Balenciaga from other fashion brands, emphasizing the brand's allure and generating consumer interest and consumption.

By merging characters and narrative in a completely new format, transforming a lengthy video, and converting text into an integrated multimodal form with auditory elements, the video presents Harry Potter characters styled in Balenciaga, exhibiting elegance and confidence. This creative and striking approach aims to stimulate consumer desire and reinforce the brand's value visually and audibly.

To analyze the stance structurally from the perspective of interactive positioning among users, Roman Jakobson's (1987) Model of six functions of communication were used as an analytical framework. Jakobson's six functions of communication can be classified as follows: a. Referential function (context); b. Emotive function (addresser); c. Conative function (addressee); d. Phatic function (contact); e. Metalingual function (code); f. Poetic function (message). This six functions were presented

[Figure 9] Communication Model by Jakobson (1987)



Analysis of the Harry Potter-Balenciaga Meme's Stance based on Jakobson's Communication Model are as follows:

First, from the perspective of the Referential Function, the case meme combines the cultural icon of Harry Potter with the high-end fashion brand Balenciaga, linking two very different cultural contexts. By understanding these two reference contexts, the receivers generate a new third contextual space.

Second, in terms of the Emotive Function, the sender of the Harry Potter-Balenciaga video meme elicits humor by substituting parts of the original Harry Potter dialogue with Balenciaga. This creative alteration reveals the creator's humorous emotion and attitude, inducing laughter and interest from the receiver.

Third, regarding the Conative Function, this meme prompts the receiver to engage in creative interpretation and humor. The originality and humor of the meme reinforce the brand's image, increase online virality, and encourage the receiver's brand consumption. It also urges imitation and sharing of the content, fostering the receiver's participation in online communities.

Fourth, through the Phatic Function, this meme establishes a point of contact between popular culture and the fashion community, opening a new communication channel between the two domains. It enables communication between Harry Potter fans and fashion enthusiasts, promoting new online community activities through

these interactions.

Fifth, from the perspective of the Metalingual Function, this meme creates new linguistic play by combining movie dialogue with a fashion brand name. It triggers meta-discussion and discourse about language and culture, enhancing awareness of language's flexibility and creativity.

Lastly, through the Poetic Function, the meme creatively combines linguistic, visual, and auditory elements to produce audiovisual aesthetics. Harry Potter characters donning Balenciaga outfits can be seen as a form of artistic expression, offering new styling and visual effects.

In conclusion, compared to traditional memes, the Harry Potter meme more distinctly and complexly reflects all aspects of Jakobson's communication functions. This indicates that new AI-generated memes can enrich and diversify the modes of communication among people interacting online.

Conclusion

This study aimed to illuminate the emergence and significance of a new genre of memes by analyzing the impact of Generative AI technology on the internet meme ecosystem, using the Harry Potter-Balenciaga meme as a case study. The Harry Potter-Balenciaga meme overcomes the formal and content limitations of traditional internet memes, showcasing a new dimension of creativity. Moving beyond Shifman's (2016) classification of meme genres, the advent of the Idea-Realizing Meme suggests that AI technology has become an important cultural mediator that maximizes user-driven creative expression, transcending its role as a mere tool.

Firstly, from the Content perspective, the Harry Potter-Balenciaga meme surpasses the limitations that required traditional memes to find commonalities between two pieces of content. It successfully realizes abstract ideas. Through

Roland Barthes' concept of the "death of the author" and Saussure's semiotic theory, it was confirmed that AI-generated memes enrich the user-centered process of interpretation and meaning-making.

Secondly, in terms of Form, unlike traditional single or short graphic images, the Harry Potter-Balenciaga meme creates an entirely new formal space by utilizing multiple AI tools. Using Soja's concept of the Third Place, it was revealed that the new formal space generated by AI technology facilitates interaction and creative discourse among users.

Thirdly, from the Stance perspective, by applying Roman Jakobson's communication model, it was found that the Harry Potter-Balenciaga meme encompasses all six functions: referential, emotive, conative, phatic, metalingual, and poetic. This results in a complex and multilayered communication. This indicates that AI-generated memes enable richer and more diverse communication among users than traditional memes, which holds significant implications.

Overall, the study demonstrates that AI technology not only transforms the creative landscape of meme production but also enhances the depth and breadth of user interactions, heralding a new era of digital cultural expression.

In conclusion, the combination of Generative AI technology and online digital culture profoundly impacts cultural life and communication methods in modern society. This study, through the Harry Potter-Balenciaga meme, highlights that AI-generated memes are establishing themselves as a new genre that surpasses traditional internet memes. Such changes suggest new directions for digital culture studies and online communication research. Notably, the impact of AI technology advancements and increased user accessibility on meme creation and dissemination after the COVID-19 pandemic is significant. With the continuous development of AI technology, it is expected that various forms of Idea-Realizing Memes will emerge, necessitating ongoing research. This will expand the scope and perspective of digital culture and explore new possibilities in online communication.

While some scholars prefer to define memes as a cultural participatory activity rather than as a genre (Blackmore et al., 2000; Blommaert & Varis, 2015), academic research on memes is a relatively recent work. Apart from Shifman (2013), there are few studies that have precisely defined and categorized meme genres. However, as we have observed, with the expanding scope of memes due to social changes and the deepening academic research on memes, there will be an increasing need for defining and classifying new meme genres. As the forms and functions of memes and their social significance continue to evolve, ongoing research on meme genres, particularly those regarding AI, will be essential.

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[Abstract]

A New Genre of Online Memes: A Semiotic Analysis of the Harry Potter-Balenciaga Meme

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This study analyzed the Harry Potter-Balenciaga meme to explore the impact of new memes generated by Generative AI technology on online meme culture. The concept of memes, introduced by Richard Dawkins in "The Selfish Gene" as units of cultural information, has evolved into contemporary internet memes, becoming a significant element of online culture. The Harry Potter-Balenciaga video, created using AI technology in 2023, garnered significant attention as an innovative online meme, demonstrating an epistemological expansion in the realm of online memes. It transcended the limitations of traditional meme creation by realizing abstract ideas, leading to the emergence of a new meme genre, the 'Idea Meme.' This study captured this phenomenon by considering the Harry Potter-Balenciaga meme as a new genre. It discussed the meme as an Idea-Realizing Meme, based on Shifman's (2016) traditional meme classification, through semiotic analysis of the images and text. By analyzing the three dimensions (content, form, and stance) of the Harry Potter-Balenciaga meme from a semiotic perspective, the study explained how AI-generated memes overcome the limitations of traditional memes and expand communicative and epistemological possibilities. This research aimed to shed light on the impact of the fusion of AI technology and online digital culture on cultural life and contribute to digital culture studies and online communication research.

Keywords : Online memes, Meme Genres, Semiotic Analysis, Harry Potter, Balenciaga.

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