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Are My Words Weighty? A Discursive Multimodal Study of Obesity Memes on The Internet

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Abstract: Discourses within society project the sociocultural realities that are portrayed through various meaning-making resources, such as the combination of both visual and textual elements in new media. Humans use the new media resources to engage in discourses that project their ideologies, beliefs, and stances about certain societal situations, which in turn influence how they position themselves as well as others. Obesity is a major public health concern that has attracted public attention in recent times. This paper examined obesity memes on the internet. Using the qualitative method, this study analyzed twenty-two (22) internet memes on obesity, to unravel public ideologies, beliefs, and stances about obesity, as well as decipher how the obesity memes are framed to portray the various ideologies. The gathered data were coded into four major themes which are body negativity, sedentary behavior, unhealthy diet, and bad parenting. The study adopted socio-semiotics and framing theory for the data analysis. Findings from the study revealed that society generally blames obese individuals and their parents, rather than considering other factors such as health or genetics which could also contribute to obesity. Also, visual and textual elements are used to stereotypically represent obese individuals in the memes that project the negative identity of overweight individuals.

Keywords: discourse, obesity, new media, memes, socio-semiotics, framing

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INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary period, humans' means of interaction have expanded beyond just language use in physical contexts to include multimodal discourses in new media through which humans construct ideologies, identities, and stances on varying issues in society, such as health-related matters. Lupton (1992) says "discourse analysis has the potential to reveal valuable insights into the social and political contexts in which varied discourses about health take place" (146). Language is regarded as one of the basic means of communication and humans strive to transmit meaningful ideas and thoughts among themselves to perform social actions and establish social relations. In addition to language use, humans also adopt other non-verbal means such as visuals and audio to communicate their thoughts and reflect their ideas, beliefs, identities, and ideologies. Although, the new media serves as a productive avenue for public education on varying societal issues; the media resources could also be used to perpetuate stereotypes and discrimination in society. The new media introduced new forms of media resources such as internet memes which are regarded as culturally significant symbols that are often humorously influenced and widely circulated on digital platforms. "Memes are a useful metaphor for describing certain phenomena that occur in the online world" (Mondschein, 2005: p 1416). That is, memes have become a popular means through which people express their thoughts on pressing issues in society such as socio-political and health matters. Obesity has become a topic of concern to the government, individuals, and the public in the United States due to the health and social

challenges it poses According to Chooi (2018:1) "Obesity adversely affects nearly all physiological functions of the body and comprises a significant public health threat. It increases the risk of developing multiple disease conditions, such as diabetes mellitus, cardiovascular disease, several types of cancers, an array of musculoskeletal disorders, and poor mental health, all of which have negative effects on the quality of life, work productivity, and healthcare costs". As a topic of national interest, people continuously reflect on their stances and ideologies towards obesity and obese people on social media; particularly using internet memes which they humorously employ to depict and portray obesity. Memes serve as a unique means through which societal attitudes, beliefs, and ideologies can be articulated and analyzed (Phillips, 2016).

Computer-Mediated Discourse

The world is continuously experiencing a technological revolution which has prompted several developments and innovations. Therefore, there is a transition from physical communication and engagement to interaction in virtual space through networked computers. This type of discourse that occurs in the new media space is regarded as computer-mediated discourse (CMD henceforth). New media can be defined as the multimedia and digital form of communication. It is interactive, hypertextual, networked, virtual, and stimulated which distinguish it from the old media and helps to establish the globalized status of the new media discourses; some of the examples of new media include the internet, blogs, vlog, Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, forum, etc. CMD involves human communication and

interaction via the computer network. Harring (2004) posits that CMD deals with information produced when humans interact with one another by sending messages through networked computers. CMD is an aspect of computer-mediated communication mainly characterized by using language in computer-networked situations and adopting methods of discourse analysis. CMD is different from physical speaking or traditional writing as it entails all forms of interpersonal communication that occur on the internet such as social media interactions, chat, messaging, web, etc. The accessibility and interactivity nature of computer discourse distinguishes it from other forms of discourse such as physical speaking. Internet users can access information on the internet from different parts of the world and at different times.

Internet Memes

Mememes are transmissible patterns of cultural information that are shared from one person's mind to another, having a direct influence in shaping and conveying the fundamental behaviors, attitudes, and ideologies of a social group (Knobel and Lankshear, 2007). Scholars usually trace the inception of mememes to Richard Dawkins' study on "memetics" in "The Selfish Gene" (1976). The notion of mememes as cultural units of transmission which is similar to genes in biology was introduced by Dawkins. Shifman (2014) emphasized the relevance of user-generated resources and participatory culture while situating internet mememes within the broader historical context of meme theory. Milner (2013) expanded on this point of view by exploring mememes as linguistic phenomena and cultural artifacts in digital communities. Shifman identifies properties of mememes "Online meme transmission has higher copy fidelity (that is, accuracy) than communication through other media since digitization allows lossless information transfer. Fecundity (the number of copies made in a time unit) is also greatly increased — the Internet facilitates the swift diffusion of any given message to numerous nodes. Longevity may potentially increase, as well, because information can be stored indefinitely in numerous archives" (2017, p.17). That is, mememes transform into replica elements that explicate observable social phenomena and guide individuals' actions as the conveyed ideas influence their behaviors and ideologies. Milosavljevic (2020) posits that internet mememes are a recent media phenomenon that is popular and often humorously created through user-generated discourse materials and transmitted on various online platforms. Internet mememes are usually created and transmitted by media users. Based on the definitions of internet mememes, some key features of mememes could be identified which include imitation, cultural and social conditionality, specificity and visibility, simplicity, high compactness to meaning, and visual and textual combination (Milosavljevic, 2020). Also, mememes could be used to reflect the socio-economic, religious, and political dynamics, and a whole configuration of the discourse environment designed to convey serious messages on

private, public, national, or global issues in creative and humorous manners (Ope-Davies, 2023). That is, mememes usually entail multimodal concepts, and they directly imitate the socio-cultural reality of the environment that produces them. According to Dynel (2006: 662), a meme is referred to as "any artifact that appears on the internet and produces countless derivatives by being imitated, remixed, and rapidly diffused by countless participants in technologically mediated communication". This suggests that mememes are transmissible and reused in various contexts within the internet culture; internet users often circulate mememes and use them to depict their stances and ideologies. Dawkins (2006) states that mememes often portray the sociocultural contexts of their production and indicate various forms of information such as ideas, habits, and figures that spread, multiply, and change within the human environment and culture. This implies that mememes entail the combination of textual and visual elements that project specific meanings and the social-cultural situations of the environment that produces them. Although mememes are humorously crafted, they project people's ideologies, beliefs, and certain attitudes toward issues in society.

Obesity: An Overview

Obesity is a crucial health issue that continuously attracts public attention and debate due to the health, social, and economic challenges it poses to obese individuals and the public. The pervasiveness of obesity has reached an epidemic level which requires medical interventions, health education, and public health campaigns. Digital media have posed to be resourceful tools in the discussion of obesity, particularly using internet mememes which are often humorously expressed; societal ideologies, stances, and beliefs on obesity are often expressed through internet mememes which serve as the lens through which we can discursively explore and study societal ideologies about obesity.

Obesity occurs when one has a high amount of extra body fat which could lead to other serious health issues such as type 2 diabetes, coronary health disease, asthma, high cholesterol, and even certain types of cancer. According to the World Health Organization (2021), the worldwide obesity rate has almost tripled since 1975 and as of 2016, over 650 million adults were obese. This shows that obesity is a prevalent issue that occurs across countries in the world. "In 2019, an estimated 38.2 million children under the age of 5 years were overweight or obese. Previously considered a high-income country problem, overweight and obesity are now on the rise in low- and middle-income countries, particularly in urban settings. In Africa, the number of overweight children under 5 has increased by nearly 24% percent since 2000. Almost half of the children under 5 who were overweight or obese in 2019 lived in Asia" (WHO, 2021). The obesity facts provided by the World Health Organization show that obesity as a public health issue requires continuous attention to combat its surge in

society. Similarly, Chooi (2018:6) says “Obesity is a multifactorial disease that results from chronic positive energy balance, i.e. when dietary energy intake exceeds energy expenditure. Excess energy is converted to triglyceride which is stored in adipose tissue depots that expand in size, thereby increasing body fat and causing weight gain”.

Furthermore, aside from the health problems that could develop from obesity, obese individuals also experience social and psychological issues that develop through societal and public reflections towards obesity. The attention geared towards obesity should not be limited to only medical input, but discourses surrounding obesity should also be studied to identify how the various discourses portray and shape societal perceptions on the issue of obesity.

This paper aims to examine obesity-related memes on the internet, within the context of the United States to unravel how ideologies are constructed and reflected through the memes. From the lens of discourse analysis, we aim to decipher how society discursively portrays stances, beliefs, and ideologies towards the issue of obesity; particularly as it relates to the causes, effects, and stigmatization of obesity, which often influence societal perceptions and attitudes towards obese individuals. Also, we aim to reveal the role of digital media in the representation of obesity as related to stereotypes and stigmatization.

Research Questions:

1. What ideologies and beliefs are reflected through the memes?
2. How are obesity memes framed?

Aim & Objectives

1. To unravel how ideologies are constructed and reflected through the memes.
2. To unravel the obesity framings

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this study, we adopted the Internet ethnography method which is described as a data-gathering method that involves a detailed search on the Internet (Choi and Chan, 2013); the data were extracted on the Internet. This study adopted the qualitative method for data analysis. Flick (2018) defines the qualitative method as a systematic approach employed in the interpretation of non-numeric data gathered in qualitative research. It entails a dynamic process of coding, organizing, and analyzing textual, visual, or audio data, to interpret patterns, and themes as well as explain the underlying meanings. The data (memes) were analyzed using the socio-semiotic theory and frame theory. For this study, fifty memes were gathered, but twenty-two memes were randomly extracted and analyzed due to the similar themes that the gathered memes shared. The extracted data are then coded into four categories based on the themes reflected. Charzman

(2001) defines coding as the “critical link” between data collection and their explanation of meaning. Afterward, the coded data are grounded and interpreted using the theories identified. Regarding ethical considerations, the memes are extracted from the public domain which is tagged as public discourse. Marlow (2017) defines public discourse as political or social debates found in newspapers, television, radio, and online media forums. However, following the Association of Internet Researchers' 2019 report on ethics in Internet research, the data do not include names or personal information of the persons in the memes. Also, the faces of the individuals featured in the meme content are blurred to enhance privacy.

LITERATURE REVIEW:

Various discursive scholarly works have been conducted on the study of obesity from different perspectives; some of these previous works will be examined in this section to identify the extent of the previous studies and the gap. Raposo, et al. (2021) study the influence of discourse on the perpetuation of obesity; they account for how groups show support for obesity and trace the effect of obesity from generic such as aesthetics, identity, and belonging to issues such as health and nutrition. They identify that obesity is not only a medical concern but also has implications for humans' productivity, and economic and human-capital development, particularly in low-income countries. The paper posits that discursively, obesity could occur because of pressure to satisfy one's insatiable food craving. They conclude that medical practitioners should endeavor to uncover other causes of obesity even if they are not medically related.

Lazarus et al. (2021) investigated the perpetuation of negative attitudes and stigma towards NAFLD, NASH, and obesity on Twitter. This research examined the stigma and unfavorable attitude portrayed towards non-alcoholic steatohepatitis (NASH), obesity, and non-alcoholic fatty liver disease (NAFLD) on Twitter. The research involved two phases and findings revealed that tweets on NAFLD and NASH reflected a need for information without overt indications of stigma. However, tweets about obesity portrayed intense negative attitudes. The study emphasizes the need to combat the negative stigma associated with obesity on social media to increase care involvement and lifestyle changes for people with NAFLD and NASH.

Also, a study on “Framing obesity through public discourse: representation through metaphor across text type” was undertaken by Cotter et al. (2021). In the study, the researchers examined the function of conceptual metaphors in messages on obesity across text forms, with a concentration on social meanings and actions. The study portrayed how meaning is often reflected through metaphor in news reports, texts outlining government policy, and the personal narratives of individuals who self-identify as obese. The study

focuses on the most used metaphors in the semantic frames of conflict, religion, addiction, and pandemic; they portray the intricacy of the obesity issue and assist in understanding public and individual responses or attitudes to obesity. The intersections reveal the interconnectedness between meaning, language, and agency which shows how societal attitudes are portrayed and accepted in discourse.

Hara et al. (2015) examined weight-related public health initiatives (WR-PHI) through the health promotion ethic lens which promotes ethical health practice. Using the multimedia critical discourse analysis approach, the study examined the claims, assumptions, beliefs, ideologies, and power relations within the Australian WR-PHI. The study examined ten (10) initiatives and findings revealed that the initiatives lacked compliance with ethical values, such as promoting active participation, respecting personal autonomy, and establishing a strong evidence base. The study indicates the need for greater ethical considerations in health promotion practices.

What is more, the studies identified above have examined obesity from various perspectives, but not including obesity memes on the internet. This present study aims to fill this gap by examining obesity memes on the internet, to reflect the various ideologies, attitudes, popular beliefs, and stances about obesity in society and the effects on obese individuals as well as society at large.

Theoretical Framework: Socio-Semiotics Multimodality & Frame Theory

Multimodal discourse analysis is an approach to discourse that focuses on the construction of meaning through multiple modes of communication. As a discursive analysis method, multimodal discourse analysis adopts multiple communication modalities which include text, color, and visuals by examining how different modes interact to produce semiotic meaning, rather than only focusing on how they communicate alone. "Human action is built by bringing different kinds of meaning-making resources together. The only way we can understand the uniqueness of language is by embedding it within this larger ecology of historically-sedimented meaning-making resources" (Goodwin, 2018:2). The focus of multimodality goes beyond just words but includes the non-verbal means through which humans communicate their thoughts and ideas. Multimodality is a communication concept that refers to the use of multiple semiotic resources such as language, image, sound, gesture, and other non-verbal means of meaning-making at the same time (Kress & Leeuwen, 1996). According to Kress (2010:1) "Using three modes in one sign - writing and image and color as well - has real benefits. Each mode does a specific thing: the image shows what takes too long to read, and writing names that would be difficult to show. Color is used to highlight specific aspects of the overall message" Thus, evaluating

several modes concurrently results in a more detailed and comprehensive study, particularly when examining online contexts.

Broadly speaking, the goal of MMDA is to develop instruments that can shed light on the relationship between a community's meanings and its semiotic expressions. The appropriate use of modes for the realization of discourses in text in specific situations is a key question in MMDA. A multimodal approach assumes that language, in its spoken or written form, is just one medium among other means that can be used to describe and interpret human actions.

Multimodality is closely related to the theory of socio-semiotics which deals with the relationship of sign and its social meaning. "Multimodality and social semiotics, together, make it possible to ask questions around meaning and meaning-making; about the agency of meaning-makers, the constitution of identity in sign-and meaning-making; about the (social) constraints they face in making meaning; around social semiotic and knowledge; how 'knowledge' is produced, shaped, and constituted distinctly in different modes; and by whom. Multimodality includes questions around the potentials – the affordances – of the resources that are available in any one society for the making of meaning; and how, therefore, 'knowledge' appears differently in different modes" (Kress, 2011:38). As the contextual background is essential for the interpretation of meaning in discourse analysis, it is also important in the interpretation of modes in multimodal discourse analysis. The sociocultural context that shapes the discourse is often considered in the interpretation of multimodal discourse.

In the multimodal approach, all modes are framed as one field; that is, all modes are considered intrinsically connected for meaning-making by social groups in a specific context; this suggests that multimodal discourse analysis entails all modes employed in any text or discourse, intending to identify how the used modes contribute to meaning-making in the text. Framing relates to how discourse or communication is constructed to influence how speakers conceptualize, perceive, and understand language use in specific contexts or events. "Framing refers to the process by which people develop a particular conceptualization of an issue or reorient their thinking about an issue" (Chong & Druckman, 2007:104). Framing theory is often used in discourse and communication to explain how specific events are constructed and interpreted. Ervin Goffman is one of the major proponents of frame theory, particularly from the perspective of discourse analysis. Goffman posits that humans do not create their reality from scratch at every encounter but involve frames to organize and ascribe meaning to their ongoing experience in a social situation (191b). "Given their understanding of what it is that is going on, individuals fit their actions to this understanding and ordinarily find that the ongoing world supports this fitting. These

organizational premises – sustained both in the mind and in activity – I call the frame of the activity” (Goffman, 1974:247). The way information is framed on social media can influence how people decode and interpret the message. Frame theory indicates that people’s comprehension of information is influenced by how the information is presented, known as “the frame”. Frames function as frameworks that assist in structuring the meaning of a message; frames are often used in news and media to shape and influence the audience’s perception and understanding of the messages. What is more, frames do not only indicate what the audience should know but also guide their thought processes about the topic at hand. Lorino (2017:35) states that “Through framing, actors actively extend the immediate, face-to-face situation to its assumed or remembered pasts, predicted or projected futures, and other socially distant but connected settings, and they attach it to a narrative which is always in-the-making”. This implies that people employ framing to make sense of the current situation by linking their past experiences to the present and future situations. “In the framing perspective, the relationship between social/institutional “structures” and situated actions is not a “container/content” inclusion relationship: situated actions are not particular occurrences of an institutional structure. It is rather a semiotic and dynamic meaning-making relationship: meanings involved in experienced events make some practical transformation of the situation achievable” (Lorino 2017: 35)

DATA ANALYSIS

Body Negativity Framing

The memes reflect the societal norms and expectations about the standard and acceptable physical appearance which links beauty, acceptance, and body positivity to thinness. The memes used images of obese individuals and words to show the public perception of obesity and specifically emphasized the physical body features that develop with weight gain. The use of distorted overweight individuals in the memes serves as semiotic cues that position obese individuals as shabby-

looking and unattractive people. The positioning of the obese individuals within the memes is done specifically to emphasize their unattractive appearance which reinforces the societal ideology and expectation. In memes 1 and 4, the obese images are specifically placed at the center of the memes alongside the texts to depict the space that the overweight individuals occupy; this signifies that obese people appear unappealing and consume more space than normal. The mention of ‘America’ in meme 1 does not only create an identity for obese individuals but tends to construct a spatial identity for the country as a nation where obesity is very prevalent. In memes 2, 3, 5, and 6, images of other individuals are used to strongly reinforce the public ideology that depicts a negative perception of an overweight body. Also, the use of ‘we’ in meme 3 creates membership categorization within society which excludes obese individuals from the public definition of beauty and body acceptance. Although the memes appear humorous, they reflect underlying scornful attitudes toward obesity. The use of language in the memes underpins societal beliefs on obesity; the images and texts reinforce the ideology that overweight individuals are naturally unattractive which projects negative stereotypes and societal disalignment from obesity. What is more, the memes portray both epistemic and affective stances which contribute to the projection of ideology and identity; affective stance refers to “the mood, attitude, feelings, and disposition, as well as degree of emotional intensity, vis a vis some focus of concern” (Ochs 1996, 420), while epistemic stance entails how speakers reflect certainty, beliefs, doubt, or commitment to issues (Strauss & Feiz, 2005). For instance, the word ‘disgusting’ in meme 1 portrays an affective stance, while memes 2 & 5 portray an epistemic stance. The memes signify that society emphasizes body image and measures people’s worth based on their physical appearance which creates stereotypic identity and marginalization of obese individuals. The framing of the memes emphasizes obesity as an unacceptable and unattractive body size; depicting it as a result of unhealthy choices made by obese individuals, without considering other factors that could result in obesity.



Sedentary Behavior Framin

This category of obesity memes frames obesity as a signal of laziness by representing obese individuals as people who portray sedentary behavior. The memes employ various visual images and texts to depict obese individuals, using words and phrases such as ‘lazy,’ ‘true laziness,’ and ‘except exercising’. The memes portray obese individuals as lazy people who desire to remain inactive rather than be involved in minimal activity. The framing of memes depicts obese individuals as the architects of their condition by emphasizing their personal acts that contribute to their body weight, excluding other factors that could also cause their obese condition. The memes portray more epistemic stances to claim that obese people are lazy and unproductive in society. This claim sprung out of the societal belief that obese people are usually inactive. The memes appear

humorous but the underlying negative and stereotypic representation of obese individuals is apparent; showing disalignment from obesity due to the public perception that judges obese individuals as lazy which in turn constructs a negative and stereotypic identity of the obese persons. Meme 7 shows that obese individuals are mostly seen as greedy and lazy, ignoring other factors that contribute to it. Memes 8, 9, and 10 show obese women who chose to sit rather than stand or walk around to exercise their bodies and refuse to engage in any act of exercising, while meme 12 portrays obese individuals as disabled due to their inability to move or walk without support. The graphic positioning of the obese individuals in the memes such as the obese woman sitting on the electric scooter, serve as semiotic cues that help construct the lazy identity of the obese people.



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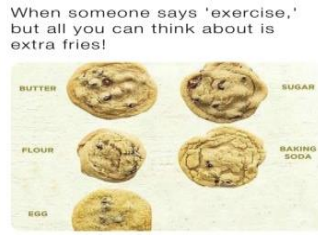
Unhealthy Dietary Framing

Obesity is considered a result of excessive eating and an unhealthy diet. The memes depict obese individuals as the cause of their condition due to their unhealthy choices of food and greediness to consume large portions of food at a time. The visual and textual combination portrays the public beliefs that obesity is directly linked to excessive consumption of food and lack of self-control. The memes in this category use images of obese individuals and large portions of food as semiotic cues to signify overindulgent and unhealthy choices made by obese individuals. In memes 13-17, obese individuals are represented as greedy people who are always eager to get free and extra food. The accompanying texts are used to buttress the perception and belief that excessive eating is a dominant factor that contributes to obesity. Meme 18 attempts to ignore genetics as a cause of obesity but indirectly links obesity

to unhealthy food consumption; the refrigerator filled with soda has a spatial implication in the construction of the identity of obese persons as those who overindulge in consuming sugary food that consequently affects their weight. Also, the accompanying text metaphorically links genetics to soda in the refrigerator which indirectly disregards other factors that could lead to obesity such as medical complications, environment, and genetics. The memes frame obesity as the effect of an excessive and uncontrollable desire to eat much food. The visual images of pizza and cookies in the memes signify that obese individuals mostly consume junk rather than healthy food which results in overweight body size. The public ideology portrayed through these memes reinforces the stigmatization of obese individuals as persons who are only active in food consumption and inactive in exercising their bodies to keep fit.



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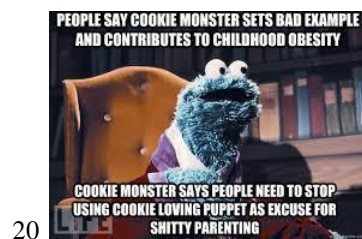
Bad Parenting Framing

The framing of these memes blames parental practices as the cause of childhood obesity. The memes reflect societal norms and expectations that parents are responsible for guiding their children; therefore, when a child behaves unacceptably, the parents receive the blame. The memes emphasize that parents should be rebuked for their overweight child's body size rather than any other factor. The ideology portrayed centers on parents' role in monitoring and balancing their child's food intake. The combination of visual images and texts reinforces the public perception and epistemic stance towards obesity which signifies disalignment from certain parental practices. The texts within the memes directly underpin bad parenting habits and irresponsible parental behavior. The visual image of an animal in

meme 19 serves as a semiotic cue that signifies innocence and vulnerability which are attributes of children; this further reveals the societal beliefs that children are innocent and cannot independently make choices regarding what they consume. The use of the cookie monster in meme 20 metaphorically signifies children's insatiable craving for unhealthy food and sugary products which are attributed to childhood obesity. Memes 21 & 22 directly link child obesity to bad parenting and child abuse which is a punishable act in society. The framing of the memes identifies parents as the cause of their children's obesity, disregarding the multi-dimensional factors that could result in obesity. The ideology reflected through the memes informs stereotypes and stigmatization of both the parents and their obese children.



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DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The analyzed memes reflect various societal ideologies, attitudes, and beliefs about obesity which are framed in categories. The memes generally allot the blame of obesity on the obese individuals and their parents, rather than considering other factors such as health or genetics which could also contribute to obesity.

The negative body image framing of obesity memes represents obesity as unattractive which reinforces the stereotype and stigmatization of obesity in society; the societal ideology that thinness equates to beauty is reinforced through the memes, placing the overweight persons on the back bench of attraction and body acceptance. Images and verbal grammar are used to stereotypically represent the obese individuals in the

memes which project negative impressions of the obese persons. A category of obesity memes also projects obese individuals as indolent people who prefer to stay idle rather than be involved in a minimal activity that could help them exercise their body and keep them fit; this framing also reinforces the societal ideology that every overweight person is lazy, which is also stereotypical as it reflects a negative personality for the obese persons. Also, obese persons are represented with unhealthy food and eating habits that signify that they become overweight due to their choice of eating. In the analyzed memes, obese individuals are portrayed as persons who eat excessively and particularly prefer junk to healthy dietary, which project obese individuals as persons who lack personal control. What is more, the memes emphasize bad parental practices as the cause of obesity in childhood; this shows the societal belief that parents are solely responsible for their children's choices. Thus, parents are stereotypically blamed for their children's obesity.

The analysis revealed that society mostly blames obese individuals for their condition as all the analyzed memes focused on the individuals rather than considering other factors such as health or genetics. According to the Centre for Disease Control and Genetics, "studies of resemblances and differences among family members, twins, and adoptees offer indirect scientific evidence that a sizable portion of the variation in weight among adults is due to genetic factors. Other studies have compared obese and non-obese people for variations in genes that could influence behaviors (such as a drive to overeat, or a tendency to be sedentary) or metabolism (such as a diminished capacity to use dietary fats as fuel, or an increased tendency to store body fat)" (2018). These studies show that obesity could also develop as a result of genetics which is beyond individual's control. Also, "some conditions, such as metabolic syndrome and polycystic ovary syndrome, cause people to gain weight. These medical conditions must be treated for a person's weight to come close to or into normal range" (National Institute of Health, 2022). In addition, studies also reveal that some medicines such as antidepressants, insulin, antipsychotics, and birth control could also contribute to obesity. What is more, the environment a person stays in could also contribute to unhealthy eating and an individual's inactivity; the types of restaurants in an environment and access to sidewalks could influence an individual's body weight. These show that aside from the habits of obese individuals, obesity could also develop from other factors such as health, genetics, and environment.

Furthermore, the obesity memes on the internet stereotype fatness and applaud thinness as a positive body image. The stereotypic representation could have negative effects on obese individuals which could lead to depression and affect their mental health as well as their self-esteem. Although it is necessary to encourage obese individuals to keep fit, derogatory representations of

obesity may even worsen the situation. Also, obese individuals may not have direct control of their genetics or environment, but they can control what they consume.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, we have examined obesity memes on the internet using the qualitative method of analysis. The study categorized obesity memes based on the framing which includes body negativity, sedentary behavior, unhealthy diet, and bad parenting. The analyzed memes blame obese individuals and parents for childhood obesity. Visual and textual elements are used to stereotypically represent obese individuals in the memes that project the negative identity of overweight individuals. The stereotypic representation could have negative effects on obese individuals which could lead to depression and affect their mental health as well as their self-esteem. This study recommends that rather than blaming obesity on personal lifestyles, other factors such as health and genetics should be examined to control the rate of obesity. Obesity, as a public health issue, should receive continuous medical attention to help obese individuals maintain their health. Also, obese individuals should be encouraged to keep fit without stereotyping and discrimination; stereotypical positioning of obese individuals could even cause more harm to their mental health than obesity itself.

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