

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

AN EMPIRICAL STUDY ON CONSUMER AWARENESS AND AD-LITERACY TOWARD MEME MARKETING IN NEPAL

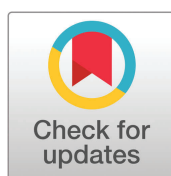
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ABSTRACT

As digital humor becomes a staple of social media interaction, the boundary between organic content and commercial promotion has blurred. This study investigates the "Awareness Level" of Nepali consumers; a foundational stage in the consumer journey; to determine whether audiences recognize memes as intentional brand communications or merely as random humor. Utilizing a quantitative approach, data was collected from 500 social media users in Nepal and analyzed through descriptive statistics and a One-Sample T-test. The findings indicate a remarkably high level of digital literacy, with 85% of respondents expressing familiarity with the concept of meme marketing and 81.4% reporting frequent exposure to meme-based advertisements. Notably, the study reveals that the Nepali audience is highly discerning, with 81.2% of participants demonstrating the ability to distinguish promotional memes from regular content, suggesting a high degree of ad-literacy. Descriptive analysis showed mean awareness scores ranging from 3.94 to 4.01, while the One-Sample T-test confirmed a significant departure from the neutral midpoint ($M = 3.9712$, $t = 106.079$, $p < .001$). The results lead to the rejection of the null hypothesis, proving that Nepali consumers are significantly aware of the strategic intent behind meme marketing. For practitioners, these findings suggest that the Nepali market has reached a level of digital maturity where "stealth marketing" is unnecessary; instead, brands can benefit from transparent, humor-based strategies that respect the intelligence and awareness of a savvy, digital-native audience.

Keywords: Digital Literacy, Consumer Awareness, Meme Marketing, Nepal, Social Media Advertising, Ad-Literacy

INTRODUCTION

The rapid transition from traditional marketplaces to a digital-first economy has redefined how brands communicate with their target audiences. In this competitive landscape, the emergence of the attention economy has forced marketers

to adopt non-traditional strategies, most notably meme marketing, to cut through the digital noise (Carr & Hayes, 2015). Internet memes, once considered mere artifacts of youth subculture, have evolved into a universal language of digital culture, reflecting complex societal trends and cultural nuances (Voigts, 2018; Teng, 2022). However, the efficacy of these strategies is fundamentally dependent on the ad-literacy and awareness level of the consumer. As Lombard (2014) suggests, the modern consumer is no longer a passive recipient of information but an active participant who decodes and filters content based on its perceived intent and authenticity.

In the South Asian context, specifically Nepal, the digital ecosystem is experiencing a profound shift characterized by high social media adoption and increasing internet penetration among younger demographics. Despite this, there is a significant gap in empirical research regarding the depth of consumer awareness; specifically, whether Nepali users recognize memes as intentional brand communications or merely as random humor. Understanding this awareness is a critical precursor to understanding purchase intention, as consumer behavior in emerging markets often differs from Western contexts due to unique socio-cultural factors (Dues et al., 2022). This study aims to fill this gap by evaluating the level of awareness, frequency of exposure, and the ability of Nepali consumers to distinguish between organic and promotional memes, providing essential insights for brands navigating Nepal's competitive digital market (Rathi & Jain, 2024).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a quantitative research design to objectively measure the depth of consumer awareness regarding meme marketing in Nepal. Primary data was gathered through a structured online survey from a sample of 500 social media users, utilizing convenience sampling to reach a diverse, digitally active demographic. The survey instrument employed a 5-point Likert scale to evaluate five specific indicators: conceptual familiarity, frequency of exposure, ad-distinction capability, brand-following tendencies, and understanding of strategic purpose. Statistical analysis was performed using SPSS, where descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) were calculated to summarize consumer literacy, and a One-Sample T-test was executed to determine if the awareness level was statistically significant. This rigorous methodological approach allowed for the validation of the hypothesis that Nepali consumers possess a sophisticated understanding of digital humor as a commercial tool.

- **H₀:** Consumers in Nepal are not significantly aware of meme marketing.
- **H₁:** Consumers in Nepal are significantly aware of meme marketing.

This paper adopts the structural framework established by Monika (2022), Kirti et al. (2023), and Devi et al. (2023) to ensure methodological consistency and academic rigor.

ANALYSIS OF AWARENESS LEVEL OF CONSUMERS ABOUT MEME MARKETING IN NEPAL

Table 1: Respondent Familiarity with Meme Marketing Concepts

I often encounter meme-based advertisements on social media.					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid %	Cumulative %
Valid	Strongly Disagree	24	4.8	4.8	4.8
	Disagree	55	11.0	11.0	15.8
	Neutral	14	2.8	2.8	18.6
	Agree	233	46.6	46.6	65.2
	Strongly Agree	174	34.8	34.8	100.0
	Total	500	100.0	100.0	

The success of any modern advertising strategy depends heavily on the target audience's ability to recognize, process, and understand the medium being used. In the context of Nepal's rapidly evolving digital landscape, meme marketing

has emerged as a dominant force, yet its effectiveness is inherently tied to the “digital literacy” of the consumer. This section explores the Awareness Level, which serves as the foundational stage of the consumer journey. It examines whether Nepali social media users merely view memes as random humor or if they consciously recognize them as intentional brand communications.

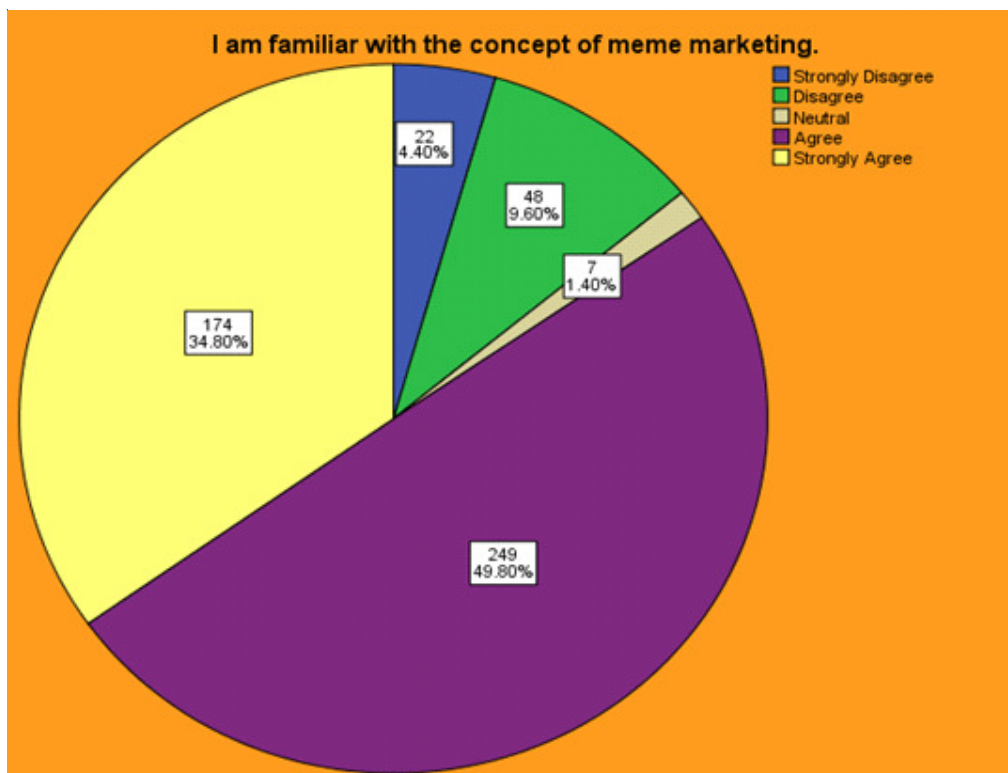


Figure 1: Respondent Familiarity with Meme Marketing Concepts

The survey results indicate a high level of awareness regarding meme marketing among the participants, with nearly 85% expressing familiarity with the concept. Specifically, 49.8% of the respondents Agree and 34.8% Strongly Agree that they understand what meme marketing entails. Only a small fraction (14%) reported a lack of awareness, while a negligible 1.4% remained neutral. This widespread recognition is a vital foundation for the study, as it shows that the Nepali audience is not just passively viewing these ads but actively recognizes them as a specific marketing strategy. Such a high degree of conceptual clarity among consumers suggests that the market is ripe for sophisticated digital campaigns that leverage internet culture and humor.

Table 2: Frequency of Exposure to Meme-Based Advertisements on Social Media

I often encounter meme-based advertisements on social media.					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid %	Cumulative %
Valid	Strongly Disagree	24	4.8	4.8	4.8
	Disagree	55	11.0	11.0	15.8
	Neutral	14	2.8	2.8	18.6
	Agree	233	46.6	46.6	65.2
	Strongly Agree	174	34.8	34.8	100.0
	Total	500	100.0	100.0	

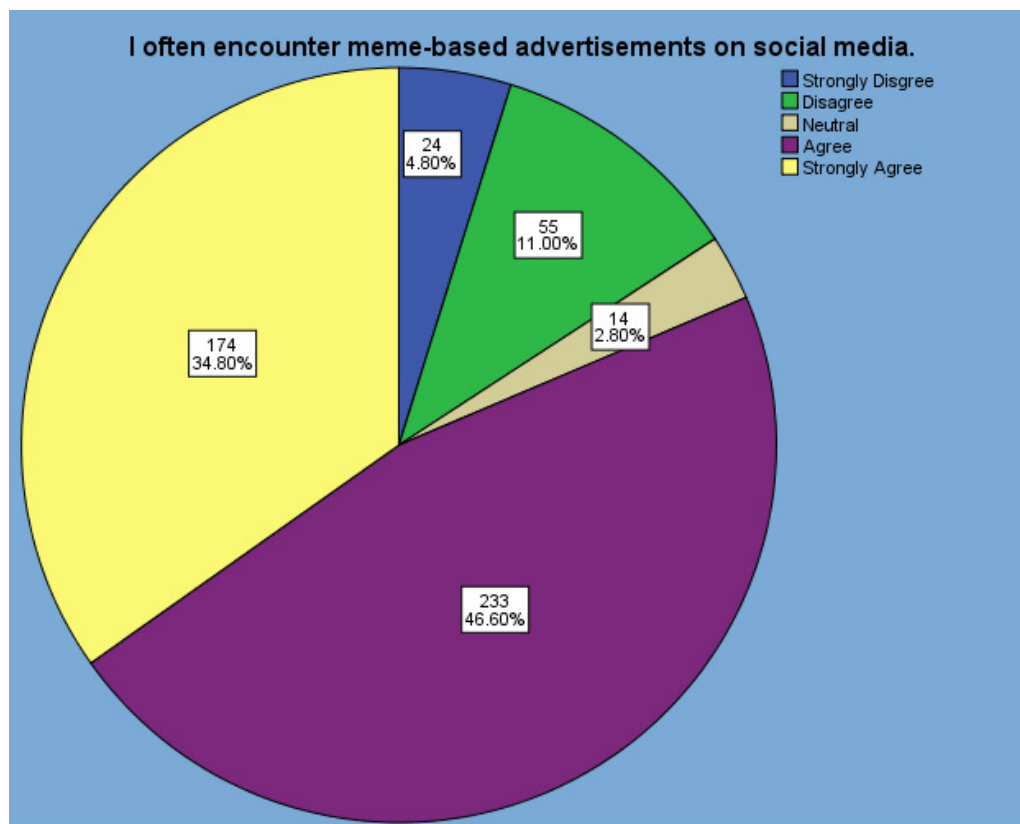


Figure 2: Frequency of Exposure to Meme-Based Advertisements on Social Media

The data confirms that meme-based advertisements have become a common fixture in the digital lives of Nepali consumers, with 81.4% of respondents reporting frequent encounters with such content on social media. Specifically, 46.6% Agree and 34.8% Strongly Agree that they often see these ads during their online activity. This high rate of visibility indicates that memes are no longer a niche marketing experiment but are now a mainstream communication tool used by brands to reach audiences on platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok. With only a minor 15.8% reporting infrequent exposure, the findings suggest that the social media landscape in Nepal is heavily saturated with meme-centric branding, making it a primary touchpoint for modern consumer engagement.

Table 3: Consumer Ability to Distinguish Marketing Memes from Regular Memes

I can easily identify a marketing meme from a regular meme.					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid %	Cumulative %
Valid	Strongly Disagree	26	5.2	5.2	5.2
	Disagree	42	8.4	8.4	13.6
	Neutral	26	5.2	5.2	18.8
	Disagree	214	42.8	42.8	61.6
	Strongly Agree	192	38.4	38.4	100.0
	Total	500	100.0	100.0	

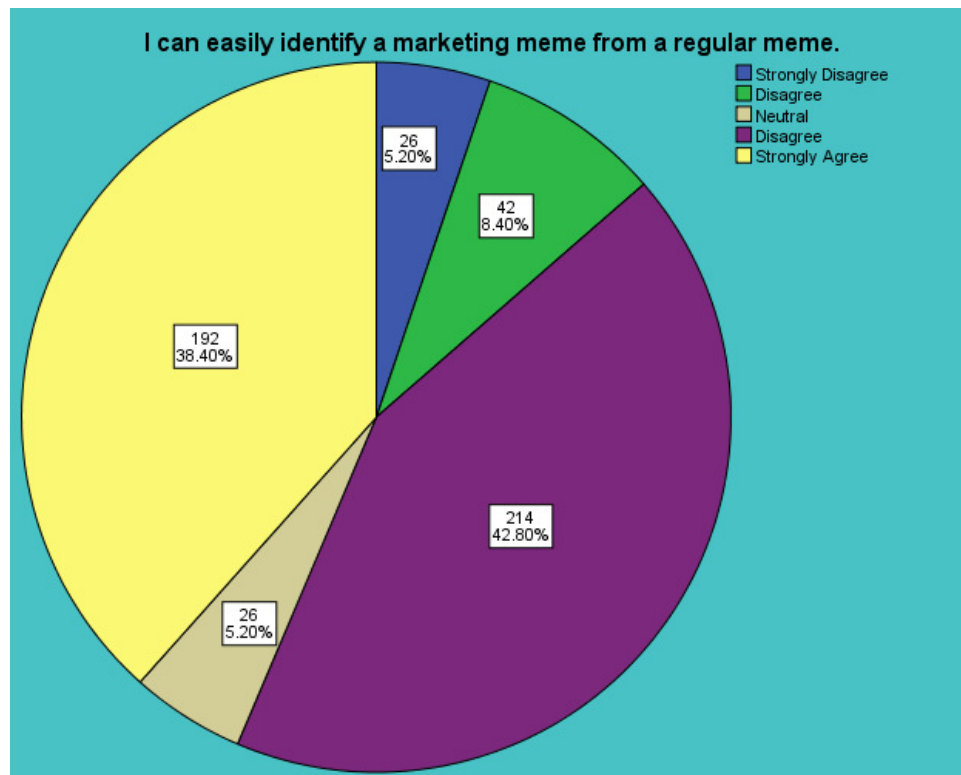


Figure 3: Consumer Ability to Distinguish Marketing Memes from Regular Memes

The results demonstrate that the majority of Nepali consumers possess a high level of ad literacy when it comes to digital humor, with 81.2% of respondents stating they can easily tell the difference between a promotional meme and a regular one. Specifically, 42.8% Agree and 38.4% Strongly Agree that they recognize the commercial intent behind such posts. This suggests that while memes are informal, their marketing purpose remains transparent to the audience. For brands, this clarity is crucial; it indicates that consumers are not being tricked into viewing ads, but rather they are consciously engaging with branded content because they find it valuable or entertaining. This conscious recognition further reinforces the idea that the effectiveness of meme marketing lies in its honesty and relatability rather than in deceptive placement.

Table 4: Consumer Tendency to Follow Brands Utilizing Meme Marketing

I follow brands that use memes in their promotions.					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid %	Cumulative %
Valid	Strongly Disagree	26	5.2	5.2	5.2
	Disagree	50	10.0	10.0	15.2
	Neutral	29	5.8	5.8	21.0
	Agree	220	44.0	44.0	65.0
	Strongly Agree	175	35.0	35.0	100.0
	Total	500	100.0	100.0	

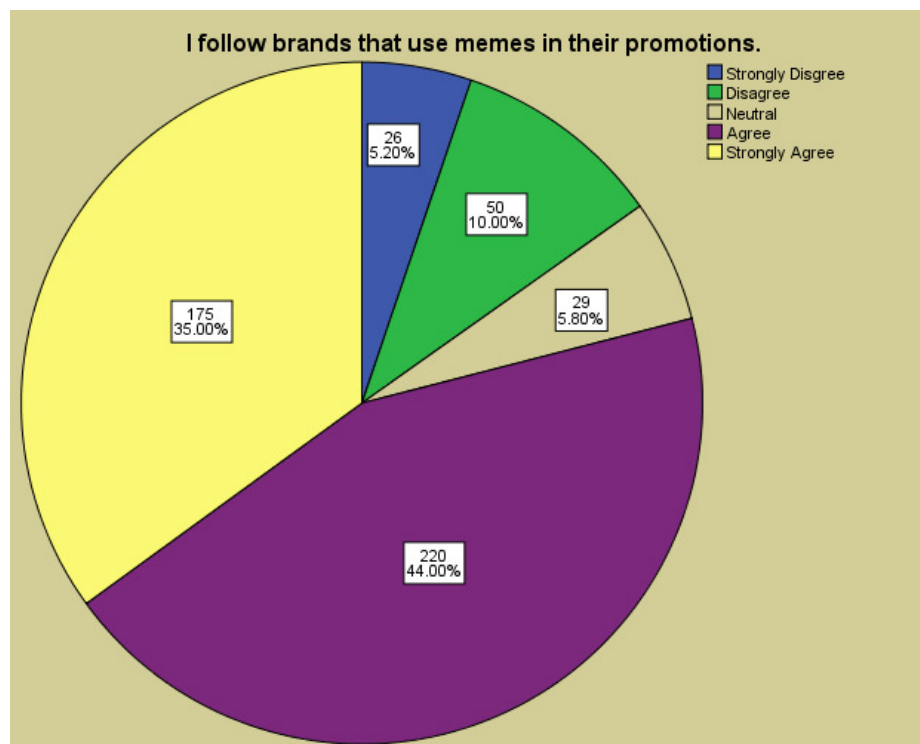


Figure 4: Consumer Tendency to Follow Brands Utilizing Meme Marketing

The data indicates that a brand's choice of content significantly influences its social media following, with 79% of respondents expressing a preference for following brands that incorporate memes into their promotional strategy. Specifically, 44% of the participants Agree and 35% Strongly Agree that meme usage is a factor in their decision to follow a brand's digital profile. This suggests that memes act as a powerful retention tool in the Nepali market, transforming a standard brand-consumer relationship into a more interactive and entertaining connection. Only about 15% of the sample showed a lack of interest in this approach, while 5.8% remained neutral. For businesses, these findings highlight that humorous and culturally relevant content is essential for building a loyal digital community and maintaining long-term audience engagement.

Table 5: Consumer Understanding of the Purpose Behind Meme Marketing

I understand the purpose behind meme marketing.					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative %
Valid	Strongly Disagree	22	4.4	4.4	4.4
	Disagree	53	10.6	10.6	15.0
	Neutral	18	3.6	3.6	18.6
	Agree	244	48.8	48.8	67.4
	Strongly Agree	163	32.6	32.6	100.0
	Total	500	100.0	100.0	

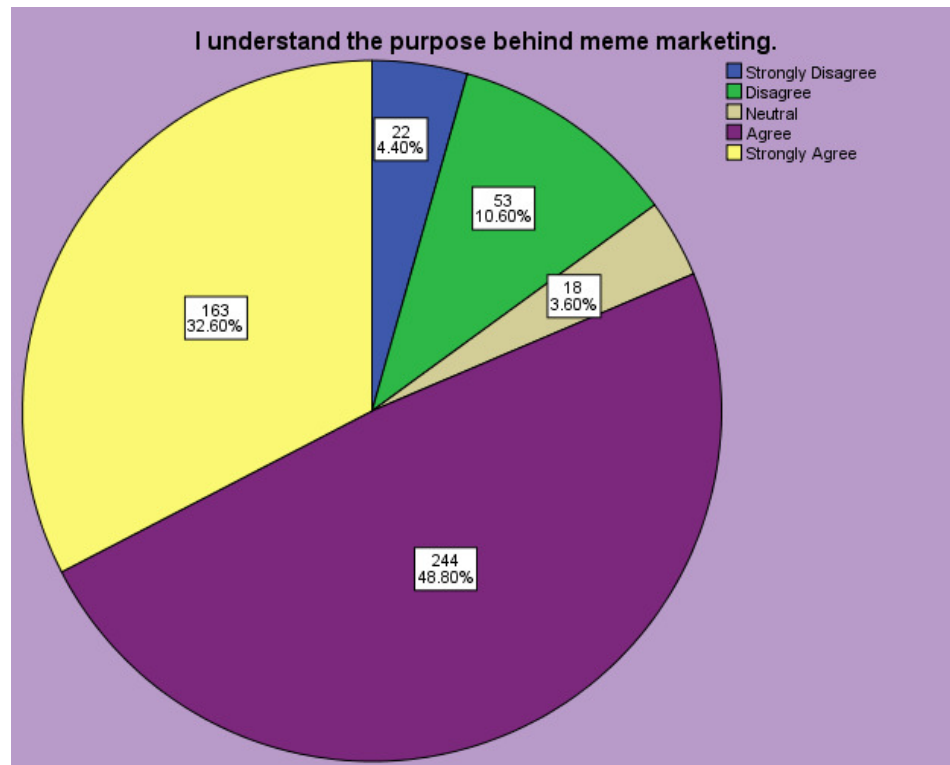


Figure 5: Consumer Understanding of the Purpose Behind Meme Marketing

The results indicate that a vast majority of the respondents are well-aware of the strategic intent behind using memes for business, with 81.4% expressing a clear understanding of its purpose. Specifically, 48.8% Agree and 32.6% Strongly Agree that they recognize why brands shift toward this humorous medium. This suggests that the Nepali audience is digitally savvy enough to look past the surface-level joke and identify the underlying objectives, such as brand building, community engagement, or product promotion. Only about 15% of the participants reported a lack of clarity, while 3.6% remained neutral. This high level of comprehension is a positive sign for marketers, as it shows the audience is not just viewing content passively but is actively decoding the marketing messages presented in this modern format.

Table 6: Descriptive Statistics for Consumer Awareness of Meme Marketing

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Mean		Std. Deviation	Variance
	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Err	Statistic	Statistic
I am familiar with the concept of meme marketing.	500	4.01	.048	1.070	1.144
I often encounter meme-based advertisements on social media.	500	3.96	.050	1.117	1.249
I can easily identify a marketing meme from a regular meme.	500	4.01	.050	1.115	1.242
I follow brands that use memes in their promotions.	500	3.94	.050	1.129	1.274
I understand the purpose behind meme marketing.	500	3.95	.049	1.087	1.181

The descriptive statistics for consumer awareness reveal a high level of literacy and engagement regarding meme marketing in the Nepali digital space. All five indicators achieved strong mean scores ranging from 3.94 to 4.01. The highest mean scores (4.01) were recorded for conceptual familiarity and the ability to distinguish marketing memes, indicating that consumers are not only aware of the trend but are also highly discerning when navigating social media content.

The standard deviation across all variables remains relatively tight, between 1.070 and 1.129, which suggests that the majority of respondents share a consistent level of understanding and exposure. Furthermore, the mean score of 3.94 for following brands that use memes suggests that this awareness translates directly into consumer behavior and brand loyalty. Collectively, these statistics confirm that the target audience is well-informed and actively participates in the meme-centric ecosystem, providing a stable foundation for brands to execute more creative and complex digital marketing strategies.

Hypothesis Testing

The objective of this research is to measure the depth of consumer awareness regarding meme marketing within the Nepali digital ecosystem. While consumers may view memes daily, this testing determines if their understanding of these memes as a marketing tool is statistically significant. A One-Sample T-test was employed to validate whether the observed level of awareness among respondents differs significantly from a neutral stance.

- **H₀2:** Consumers in Nepal are not significantly aware of meme marketing.
- **H₁2:** Consumers in Nepal are significantly aware of meme marketing.

Table 7: One-Sample Statistics for Awareness Level

One-Sample Statistics				
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
AW_Mean	500	3.9712	.83710	.03744

Table 8: One-Sample Test Results for Awareness Level

One-Sample Test						
	Test Value = 0					
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
AW_Mean	106.079	499	.000	3.97120	3.8976	4.0448

The statistical analysis reveals a mean awareness score of 3.9712, which positions the average respondent firmly in the Agree category. The t-value of 106.079 is exceptionally high, indicating a very strong departure from the null hypothesis. Furthermore, the significance value (p-value) is .000, which is well below the threshold of 0.05.

Since the p-value is less than 0.05, we reject the Null Hypothesis (H₀) and accept the Alternative Hypothesis (H₁). This leads to the conclusion that consumers in Nepal possess a significantly high level of awareness regarding meme marketing. The result implies that the audience is not only exposed to this content frequently but also understands the mechanics and purpose of memes as a commercial communication tool. This high awareness level confirms that the Nepali market is a mature environment for brands to implement humor-based digital strategies effectively.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of the awareness level reveals that meme marketing has become a deeply embedded component of the digital experience for Nepali consumers. A primary finding of this study is the exceptionally high level of conceptual

familiarity, with 84.6% of respondents acknowledging they understand what meme marketing entails. This familiarity is not merely theoretical but is driven by constant exposure; 81.4% of participants reported frequently encountering meme-based advertisements on social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram. These results suggest that the frequency of exposure has reached a saturation point where memes are no longer viewed as novel experiments but as a standard fixture of the modern digital landscape. This aligns with the observations of Voigts (2018), who noted that internet memes have transitioned from subcultural artifacts to a dominant form of digital content.

A critical aspect of this awareness is the high degree of ad-literacy displayed by the respondents. Data indicates that 81.2% of the participants can easily distinguish a marketing meme from a regular, non-branded meme. This clarity is a significant finding, as it suggests that meme marketing in Nepal does not rely on deception to be effective; rather, consumers are consciously aware of the commercial intent and choose to engage with it regardless. Furthermore, 79% of respondents stated a preference for following brands that utilize memes, with a mean score of 3.94. This implies that awareness of the medium directly translates into brand-following behavior. For brands, this signifies that a transparent, humor-centric identity is a powerful tool for community building and long-term digital retention in a market that is increasingly savvy and discerning.

The statistical validation provided by the One-Sample T-test further reinforces these observations. With a mean score of 3.9712 and an exceptionally high t-value of 106.079, the results demonstrate a significant departure from a neutral stance. The p-value of .000 leads to the rejection of the null hypothesis (H0), confirming that the Nepali audience possesses a statistically significant awareness of meme marketing strategies. Collectively, these findings suggest that the Nepali digital market has reached a state of maturity. Consumers are not only passive viewers but active decoders of digital humor, understanding both the creative form and the underlying commercial purpose of the content they consume.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study concludes that there is a profound and statistically significant level of awareness regarding meme marketing among consumers in Nepal. The audience has moved beyond simple exposure to a sophisticated level of digital literacy where they can accurately identify branded content and understand its strategic purpose. The high frequency of exposure and the ability of consumers to distinguish between organic and promotional memes indicate that the Nepali social media ecosystem is a mature environment for digital innovation. The research proves that memes are a highly visible and recognized touchpoint, serving as a primary gateway for brand interaction in the contemporary attention economy.

Based on these findings, it is recommended that marketers in Nepal prioritize authenticity and transparency over stealth-based advertising. Since consumers are highly aware of marketing intents, brands should focus on the quality and vibe of the humor rather than trying to hide the promotional nature of the post. Additionally, because a high percentage of users follow brands specifically for their meme content, businesses should treat meme-creation as a consistent engagement strategy rather than a one-off viral attempt. Future digital campaigns in Nepal should leverage this high awareness by creating more complex, culturally nuanced content that rewards the audience's digital savvy, thereby fostering deeper brand loyalty and more meaningful community connections.

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