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Religious Communication in Digital Culture:
A Study on Islamic Memes on Reddit

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Abstract

Internet memes, a form of expression that has come along with digital culture, define content that is usually spread through social media platforms and often contains humour. Memes, which online communities use to express their opinions, thoughts, positive or negative approaches, are a unique communication method of internet culture. Memes, especially those containing humor, spread to large masses in a short time and can explain complex issues with a single image. Internet memes offer religious communities a new tool to express their personal and social views on social media. This study analyses memes on religious channels on the Reddit platform. The study examines 166 memes shared in selected communities between 1 January and 15 April 2024 through content analysis and discusses how memes are designed in relation to which topics and how they shape their discourse and religious communication. The findings of the study show that religious memes on social media focus on perspectives, politics, cultural differences, and the transmission of religious knowledge. The study also discusses how memes contribute to the formation of online religious communities. According to this, people's similar religious experiences are effective in creating a bond between them that transcends distances. The fact that the language of religion has started to include more humor is also among the findings of the study.

Keywords: Digital Culture, Internet Culture, Religious Communication, Memes

Dijital Kültürde Dini İletişim:
Reddit'teki İslami Memler Üzerine Bir Araştırma

Öz

Dijital kültürle birlikte gelen bir ifade biçimi olan internet memleri, genellikle sosyal medya platformları aracılığıyla yayılan ve çoğu zaman mizah içeren içerikleri tanımlamaktadır. Çevrimiçi toplulukların görüşlerini, düşüncelerini, olumlu ya da olumsuz yaklaşımlarını ifade etmek için kullandıkları memler, internet kültürünün kendine özgü bir iletişim yöntemidir. Özellikle mizah unsuru içeren memler kısa zamanda geniş kitlelere yayılmakta ve karmaşık konuları tek görsel ile açıklayabilmektedir. İnternet memleri sosyal medyada dini topluluklara da kişisel ve toplumsal görüşlerini ifade edebilmek için yeni bir araç sunmaktadır. Bu çalışma, Reddit platformundaki dini kanallarda yer alan memleri analiz etmektedir. Çalışma, 1 Ocak - 15 Nisan 2024 tarihleri arasında seçilmiş topluluklarda paylaşılan 166 memi içerik analizi yoluyla incelemekte ve memlerin hangi konularla ilişkili olarak nasıl tasarlandığını, söylemlerini ve dini iletişimi nasıl şekillendirdiğini tartışmaktadır. Çalışmada ulaşılan bulgular, sosyal medyadaki dini memlerin bakış açılarına, politikaya, kültürel farklılıklara ve dini bilginin aktarımına odaklandığını göstermektedir. Çalışmada ayrıca memlerin çevrimiçi dini toplulukların oluşumuna nasıl katkıda bulunduğu da tartışılmaktadır. Buna göre, insanların benzer din deneyimleri, aralarında mesafeleri aşan bir bağ kurulmasında etkili olmaktadır. Din dilinin daha fazla mizah içermeye başlaması da çalışmanın bulguları arasında yer almaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Dijital kültür, İnternet kültürü, Dini iletişim, Memler

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Introduction

The development and spread of digital communication technologies has led to the emergence of different types and means of communication. Just as the invention of the printing press led to the rise of written culture, and just as the widespread use of television led to the emergence of a television culture, digital communication technologies have also created their own language and style. Internet memes are an important part of this new internet culture and are a practical and useful tool for people communicating over the internet.

Modern internet memes are defined as units of popular culture that are circulated, imitated and transformed by internet users to create shared cultural experiences. Internet memes, which were initially seen as insignificant, have been recognized as an important element of online communication that reflects and shapes cultural and social norms, thanks to the spread of internet culture and the adaptation of young people to the language of this culture (Miltner, 2018).

This study aims to show the role of memes in religious communication. For this purpose, the study has two research questions:

1) Which topics do internet memes produced and shared within the scope of religious communication address?
2) What is the place of memes in religious communication in the context of Islam?

In this study, based on the above research questions above, firstly, internet memes and their characteristics will be explained. Then, the role of internet memes in religious communication will be discussed. After mentioning the studies in the literature on internet memes, the method of the research will be explained. In the last section, how memes with religious content are designed, their discourses and their place in religious communication will be discussed.

1. Internet Memes

The concept of 'memes', defined by Richard Dawkins (1976) as small units of culture transmitted from person to person through copying and imitation, was initially exemplified by abstract ideas, texts or practices, and their dissemination was based on repetition and diversity. According to Dawkins, just as genes transmit biological information, memes transmit cultural information in a similar way. The ease of recreating memes was seen as the most important reason for their rapid spread. The first examples of memes consisted of concepts such as melodies, slogans and fashion.

A meme is a phenomenon that enables thoughts, behaviors and ideas to be transmitted from person to person in various ways. Memes spread through different methods such as gestures, writings, photographs, animations and speeches, and spread like a 'virus' among people. However, in this process of transmission, they usually do not remain in their original form and undergo 'mutation'. The user spreads a meme by modifying it with new information. While the Oxford English Dictionary defines memes as cultural units, the Merriam Webster Dictionary defines them as styles, thoughts and usages that are transmitted from person to person in a culture. In this way, memes reflect the dynamic and variable structure of cultural knowledge (Kırık & Saltık, 2017).

The concept of memes has gained more importance with the digital age because it has become easier to copy, diversify and spread cultural elements with the internet. The more frequent use of the concept of memes in daily life also occurred after the increase in these contents created and disseminated online. In the sense used today, memes consist of texts and images created and distributed by many users on the internet. Memes are communication elements that are often used to convey humor, criticism and political commentary. They also encompass the experiences, ideologies and habits of the communities that create them (Smith et al., 2024). The unique

characteristics of internet memes are their rapid diffusion and formal forms. Internet memes are part of the internet subculture and play a critical role in generating new meanings and functions in the networked environment.

Memes are important for internet culture because they provide valuable insights into how culture is produced and transmitted in new media contexts. Jenkins (2006) describes the process of cultural production and consumption in new media environments as 'participatory culture', according to which individuals create not only mass media but also digital cultural artefacts that are shared and circulated over the internet. Instead of a passive audience, new media are full of prosumers (producer-consumers), where online individuals function as producers and consumers of both images and texts. The practices of meme production and interpretation reflect this 'participatory culture'. The power of digital culture comes from the opportunity it offers people to interact, co-produce and collaborate. For example, meme creators create new texts by drawing images, texts and ideas from multiple sources, and these texts become independent of the author's intentions and agenda by remixing the original meanings. This demonstrates the importance of participatory production in digital culture.

Internet memes have been developed to describe items such as jokes, videos, gossip that spread rapidly online. The common characteristic of these memes is that each one inspires another user to create new parodies and remixes. This form of communication, in which content is constantly reinterpreted, is closely related to the participatory nature of digital culture. From this perspective, memes are a kind of postmodern folklore. Memes, which contribute to the creation and transmission of cultural and political identities, are content units created, transmitted and disseminated on the internet by groups that share common characteristics (Shifman, 2014). The network environment increases the feeling of being a group or community with its participatory structure, and meme culture supports this feeling. People can easily share their thoughts, images and events in the digital environment, and these shares spread rapidly on the internet and evolve with the contributions of users (Kırık & Saltık, 2017).

If the memes designed and shared on the internet are closely related to the agenda and contain a strong sense of humor, they can spread virally and reach millions of people in a short time on the internet. In order for memes to reach this popularity, it is important that they are also suitable for popular culture and internet jargon. A meme that is popular enough is soon imitated by writing different texts on the same image and continues to spread virally (Eskicioğlu, 2022).

2. Characteristics of Internet Memes

The origin of internet memes can be traced back to 1982, when emoticons were first used in internet forum discussions to reveal obscure humor and irony. Following the recommended ':-)' sign at the end of humorous messages, countless emoticons became widespread for different purposes. Emoticons are also seen as a kind of meme because they are easy to create and distribute. They can also have a different meaning for each person, or be used for different purposes by the people who use them. This means the possibility of a new meaning in each use (Davison, 2020). The first examples of memes that we know today appear on the website called Bert is Evil in the late 1990s. This website was creating funny and remarkable images by adding the face or body of the Sesame Street character Bert to various historical photographs or posters with visual editing programs, showing one of the first examples of meme culture. This method formed the basis of the visual and text combination memes that are widely used today. Bert is Evil has an important place in internet culture as it is considered to be the first examples of classic memes (Eskicioğlu, 2022).

Internet memes are a digital storytelling method that is often inspired by popular culture and can quickly spread to all social media channels. It is a flexible and useful tool as it can be easily interpreted and imitated (Campbell & Sheldon, 2021). Memes spread virally on the internet, but the

difference between memes and viral content is that memes transform and continue to spread. Therefore, content that spreads rapidly without changing in the network environment is not accepted as memes by some researchers. Knobel and Lankshear state that there are two types of memes: fixed and remixed. While fixed memes are not changed by other users after they are created, remixed memes evolve with the touches of users. In the remix creation process, the original form of the image changes and creates new meanings. These new meanings spread in the social media environment and are imitated by different users. This process is essentially the editing of content that does not offer anything new by different users and sharing it through a different channel. This is also called 'imitation'. For example, trends such as 'Mannequin Challenge', 'Gangnam Style dances' and 'Harlem Shake' are good examples of such memes. In the 'Mannequin Challenge', everyone freezes in position when the music starts and these images are shared on social media, which is a popular internet meme all over the world (Kırık & Saltık, 2017).

3. Religious Communication and Internet Memes

Social media in general has a significant impact on the internalization, transmission, dissemination and transformation of religious messages. Accounts on different social media platforms design and share religious messages in a way that can attract large audiences (Rustandi, 2022). Recent research has also shown a growing interest in the intersection of online memes and religion. Memes have become an important tool for the expression and dissemination of religious beliefs and practices in the digital age.

The study of religious memes is an important area for understanding not only memetics in popular culture, but also everyday religious life and the increasing integration of religion in digital environments. Religious memes should be considered in their context and may differ markedly from popular culture memes. Religious memes convey specific meanings and messages specific to religious institutions and beliefs. Religious memes, unlike popular culture memes, can carry deeper and more spiritual content and therefore have a special place in the digital representation of religious beliefs and practices. Nevertheless, this does not mean that religious memes do not interact with popular culture (Burroughs & Feller, 2015).

Rozi et al.'s (2021) research emphasizes that access to Islamic information through social media is widespread, especially among millennial Muslims. According to them, social media has an important role in shaping religious identity. Memes, like other content on social media platforms, are an important tool for enriching users' religious understanding and motivating them for a spiritual journey. In addition, memes also contribute to identity formation in social media. In their study, Nurdin and Godal (2023) examined how memes are used in religious sermons, especially by young ulema in Indonesia. In the study, the importance of memes in the transmission of religious worship and teachings was emphasized. In addition, memes containing various prayers that Muslims can recite in their daily lives are also shared. The use of memes has supported the geographical spread of Islamic teachings to a wider area.

Memes do not only convey humor to their viewers. They also convey ideas and thoughts on various topics. This feature also makes memes important for conveying religious messages. Memes sometimes help to create religious motivation for various practices. Internet memes facilitate a unique form of cultural and political critique by offering a creative visual-textual language that allows individuals to publicly express their beliefs. This flexibility allows users to speak more freely about social norms, political agendas and religious practices, often embedding deeper messages and views within humor. Campbell and Sheldon (2021) explain how users' religious responses to global challenges are expressed through memes in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The messages offered by internet memes on religious issues are analyzed in five different frameworks according to their types and approaches:

- The encouragement frame, which positively addresses religious beliefs and worship,

- Entertaining framework that does not harm religious ideas and approaches and only cares about humor,

- Questioning framework that emphasizes skepticism about religious issues and concepts

- Sarcastic framework criticizing religious subjects and characters through satire

- A metaphorical framework that presents common religious understandings and sayings in a humorous way (Aguilar et al., 2017).

4. Research Method

This study aims to present a thematic analysis of religious-themed internet memes. The study analyses Islamic-themed memes posted on the r/Izlam and r/IslamicHistoryMeme channels on Reddit between 1 January 2024 and 15 April 2024. This date range provided a sufficient time frame to understand how different memes addressed religious issues and how users reacted to them.

Reddit is an important social media platform where users share and discuss content on various topics. The r/Izlam and r/IslamicHistoryMeme channels are also places where Islamic-themed memes are mostly shared and discussed. This research aims to analyze the memes shared on these two channels within the specified date range. A total of 166 memes were shared on these channels between 1 January - 15 April 2024, 141 on r/Izlam channel and 25 on r/IslamicHistoryMeme channel. All of these memes were selected as a sample in the study.

The thematic analysis method was used to analyses the data obtained in the study. This method is a qualitative research method that allows the data to be analyzed systematically to reveal certain themes. Thematic analysis is a process of discovering recurring patterns and meanings in the data. In our study, the thematic analysis method was used to identify the prominent themes related to religion in the memes of Islamic content shared on Reddit. The first step of thematic analysis is to define and code the data. In this study, firstly, 166 memes selected as a sample were analyzed and the ideas and messages in each meme were identified. The texts in the memes were also analyzed and the first codes were determined. To ensure the reliability of coding and categorisation, 25 memes were selected from the sample and the memes were recoded by a different coder. The similarity between the coding of the researcher and the coder was found to be 88%. After that, the problems found in the coding frame were eliminated and the data were recoded.

On the next step, similar codes were grouped and themes were formed. The revised themes were finally defined in detail and what this theme identified was explained. Thus, interpretation and understanding of the research findings became easier.

The themes created based on the findings are as follows:

1. POV (Point of View): This theme includes memes that show a particular perspective or point of view on any subject.

2. Politics: This theme includes memes that reveal the relationships between Islamic religion and political events.

3. Cultural Differences: This theme includes memes that present and interpret various cultural elements in the Islamic world.

4. Transmission of Religious Knowledge: This theme includes memes that aim to convey religious knowledge on different topics.

After determining the themes, the data analysis phase started. At this stage, each theme was analyzed in detail and explanations of the themes were made through specific examples in the memes.

5. Findings

In this study in which 166 different memes were analyzed, all memes were grouped under four different themes in terms of their content. It is possible to explain these themes as follows:

POV (Point of View): This theme consists of memes that show prominent perspectives on a particular subject. In the memes, personal experiences, observations and interpretations about Islam come to the fore. This theme is important for understanding how memes reflect individual and social perspectives on religion.

Politics: The memes under this theme deal with the relationship between Islam and political events. Religious references and criticisms about political leaders, events and ideologies are frequently included in the memes.

Cultural Differences: The theme of cultural differences examines how memes present and interpret various cultural elements in the Islamic world. This theme is important for understanding cultural diversity, traditions and social norms in memes. The memes reflect different cultural practices and how they are interpreted in a religious context.

Transmission of Religious Knowledge: This theme examines how memes convey religious knowledge and teachings. Qur'anic verses, hadiths and information about Islamic history are frequently used in memes. This theme shows how memes are used as an educational tool and how they play a role in the dissemination of religious knowledge.

5.1. POV (Point of View)

As seen in Image 1 (mhabarneh, 2024) and Image 2 (sameer2285, 2024), some of the memes shared on Islamic humor channels on Reddit encompass a variety of humorous approaches to common experiences and challenges faced by Muslims, with a particular focus on social and religious contexts. These memes reflect the intersection of religious practices, cultural nuances and the everyday life of Muslims in a humorous and relatable way. These memes aim to humorously reflect the difficulties experienced during prayers, the time spent in mosques and masjids by religiously educated children, the reflections of discipline in religious education, and similar situations experienced by Muslims in their daily lives. This form of interpretation provides a shortcut to the intersection of cultural identity and religious affiliation, and the common experiences of people who share the same faith on a global scale. In general, the memes discussed under this theme function as a cultural reflection, using humor to bring to light the everyday experiences, challenges and nuances of Muslim life.

The increasing integration of daily religious life with digital media is an issue that has been addressed in previous studies. The fact that memes include topics related to daily religious life reveals a similar result to previous studies.

Image 1. Stars were made, and Imams were made angry

Image 2. What is my name (sameer2285, 2024)

5.2. Politics

The memes covered under the theme of politics encompass a mix of humor, political commentary and historical reflection from a Muslim perspective. They offer insights into how specific historical events, political dynamics and cultural contexts are perceived and criticized within the Muslim community. This theme includes memes that sometimes show the different interpretations of a historical event among Muslims, and sometimes the reflections of current political events of interest to Muslims.

These memes reflect a critical stance towards how Muslim history is portrayed, especially by Western sources. Emphasis is placed on the need for an accurate acknowledgement of the contributions and struggles of Muslim civilizations. This critique highlights the importance of decolonizing history and including different perspectives. The memes also contain important political commentary criticizing both historical and contemporary actions against Muslim communities, as in Image 3 (LocalSpawn, 2024). This includes criticism of extremist groups, military actions of states and colonial powers. Reflecting concerns about both state and non-state actors

perpetrating injustice against Muslim communities, as seen in Image 4, this critique is relevant to debates in security studies and human rights about the ethics and impact of military action (blitzkreiging, 2024). Another feature of the memes considered under this theme is the juxtaposition of important historical or political events with personal experiences, emphasizing the deep emotional ties that many Muslims feel towards these issues.

The humor in the memes considered under this theme reflects a sense of resilience and the ability to find humor in discussing serious and often painful historical and political realities, and highlights how communities use humor and other coping mechanisms to overcome adversity.

Memes have become an accessible means of social and political critique because they are easy for users to produce and distribute. As previous studies have shown, memes allow users to talk more freely about social norms, political agendas and religious practices. In this study, it was observed that users utilized memes to express their political criticisms or opinions.

Image 3. Who even says this?

Image 4. Isis actually released a statement condemning H

5.3. Cultural Differences

The memes discussed under the theme of cultural differences illustrate cultural differences between Muslims and non-Muslims, especially in the context of religious practices and daily

routines. By using humor to highlight these differences, these memes provide insights into how humor is used to bridge cultural gaps and dispel misunderstandings.

These memes use humor to address the cultural shock or misunderstanding that is likely to occur between different cultures. Thus, people with different beliefs and approaches can more easily understand and empathize with each other. Humor also serves to normalize Islamic practices, making them less foreign and more understandable to non-Muslims. This in turn helps to reduce cultural barriers and helps Muslims' daily practices to be understood by people from different cultures. For example, in Image 5 there is a meme about how the Muslim practice of fasting might be viewed by a non-Muslim (Many_Rip6642, 2024). This is because it is unusual for non-Muslims to go without eating or drinking for a whole day. Image 6 shows the reaction of Muslims to a video of a person waking up early for a month (bhattfaizaan, 2024). This is because Muslims already wake up early in the day to perform morning prayers. Such memes also serve an educational purpose, informing non-Muslims about the realities of Islamic practices in an upbeat and engaging way.

The memes in this theme are also examples of how humor can be a powerful tool in intercultural communication. They address common misconceptions and curiosities in a non-confrontational and inclusive way. Areas of curiosity and potential friction are softened through humor.

Image 5. They are like that though
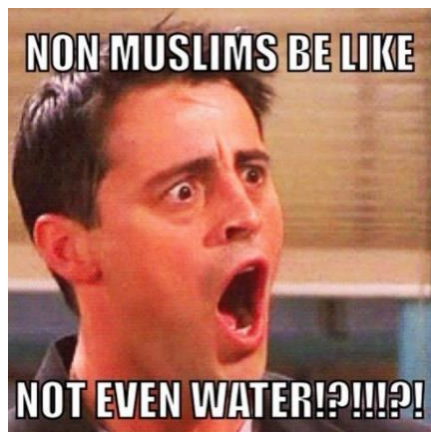
Image 6. A meme about the waking hours of Muslims.

5.4. Transmission of Religious Knowledge

Memes are sometimes used to convey Islamic rules, religious practices and knowledge to a wider audience. These memes are particularly effective in making religious concepts more accessible and relatable to younger audiences who are more familiar with internet culture. Such memes often relate verses or hadiths to everyday events or phenomena. Islamic teachings can thus be more memorable.

A humorous approach to religious teachings can enhance learning and retention, especially among younger audiences who are accustomed to consuming information through entertaining formats. Humor also makes religious rules more acceptable to a wider audience when addressing sensitive issues.

These memes also demonstrate the potential of digital media as a tool for religious education. Combining humor and scenarios relatable to everyday life can make religious teachings more engaging, especially for young people. Image 7 (milkywomen, 2024) is a humorous interpretation of the hadith that the sunnah of the morning prayer is more valuable than anything else in the world (Nevevî, 2014, p. 293). Image 8 (mukulaal_, 2024) dramatises the hadith about locking up the devil during Ramadan (Nevevî, 2014, p. 484) using a popular meme.

Such memes often emphasize common religious practices and community identity. For example, communal worship and celebrations at special times such as Ramadan and festivals are among the topics frequently covered in memes. Another issue addressed is the conflict between religious identity and social norms.

The findings of the study support the view in the literature about the advantages of using religious memes in religious education, especially for young social media users.

Image 7. Lol

Image 8. Eid Mubarak!

6. Conclusion

This study examines the topics that religious memes shared on social media focus on and the purposes for which memes are used in religious communication. For this purpose, the memes shared on the r/Izlam and r/IslamicHistoryMeme channels on Reddit between 1 January 2024 and 15 April 2024 were examined by thematic analysis method. As a result of the analysis, it was determined that the memes were concentrated under four themes: POV (Point of View), Politics, Cultural Differences and Transfer of Religious Knowledge. Each of these themes encompasses the multifaceted nature of Islamic internet memes and their role in contemporary digital discourse.

The theme of perspective emphasizes how memes reflect personal and communal perspectives on religious practices and everyday challenges faced by Muslims. These memes serve as a cultural mirror reflecting the intersection of cultural identity and religious commitment. By depicting everyday experiences in a humorous way, these memes provide insight into the realities Muslims live with and foster a sense of shared identity and community. The theme of politics reveals the critical and often satirical nature of memes in addressing historical and current political events affecting Muslim communities. These memes criticize the portrayal of Muslim history by Western sources and stress the importance of acknowledging the contributions and struggles of Muslim civilizations. They also reflect wider debates about military actions against Muslim communities. The Cultural Differences theme illustrates how memes use humor to bridge cultural gaps and dispel misconceptions about Islamic practices. By relating Islamic practices to everyday life, these memes promote greater understanding and empathy between different cultural groups. The theme of Transmission of Religious Knowledge underlines the role of memes in the dissemination of religious teachings and practices. By incorporating Qur'anic verses, hadiths and Islamic history into humorous contexts, these memes increase the accessibility and memorability of religious knowledge, especially among younger audiences. This is in line with the existing literature on the use of digital media in religious education and emphasizes the potential of memes as effective educational tools.

The findings of the study support the view that internet memes are powerful tools for cultural and religious expression. They facilitate the dissemination of religious knowledge, strengthen community identity, and provide a platform for social and political commentary. The study also emphasizes the importance of digital media in shaping contemporary religious practices and identities, especially among younger generations.

Internet memes serve as a unique and dynamic form of digital narrative that reflects the complex interplay between religion, culture and politics in the digital age. Their ability to convey deep and subtle messages through humor underlines the importance of memes in today's digital culture. Future research could further investigate the impact of internet memes on religious education and social cohesion by examining how different demographic groups interact with and interpret these digital artefacts. In addition, the potential of memes to create dialogue between different cultures is another topic that needs to be explored.

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Genişletilmiş Özet

Mem, düşünce, davranış ve fikirlerin çeşitli yollarla kişiden kişiye aktarılmasını sağlayan bir olgudur. Jestler, yazılar, fotoğraflar, animasyonlar ve konuşmalar gibi farklı yöntemlerle yayılan memler, insanlar arasında "virüs" gibi dağılır. Ancak, bu aktarım sürecinde genellikle ilk halleriyle kalmazlar ve "mutasyon" geçirirler. Yani, bir kişi aldığı bir memi öğrendiği bilgilerle değiştirerek yayar.

Mem kavramı dijital çağ ile birlikte daha fazla önem kazanmıştır çünkü kültürel ögeleri kopyalamak, çeşitlendirmek ve yaymak internet ile birlikte daha kolay hale gelmiştir. Mem kavramının günlük hayatta daha sık kullanılması da çevrimiçi olarak yaratılan ve yayılan bu içeriklerin artması sonrasında gerçekleşmiştir. Bugün kullanılan anlamıyla memler, internet ortamındaki birçok kullanıcı tarafından yaratılan ve dağıtılan metinlerden ve görüntülerden oluşmaktadır. Memler genellikle mizah, eleştiri ve siyasi yorumların iletilmesi amacıyla kullanılan iletişim ögeleridir. İnternet memlerinin benzersiz özellikleri, hızlı yayılmaları ve şekilsel formlarıdır. Dijital kültürü anlamak için büyük önem taşıyan internet memleri, internet alt kültürünün bir parçası olmanın yanı sıra, ağ ortamında yeni anlamlar ve işlevler üretmeleri açısından da kritik bir rol oynar.

İnternet memlerinin kökeni ilk defa 1982 yılında internet forumlarındaki tartışmalarda, zor anlaşılan esprileri ve ironileri açığa çıkarması amacıyla kullanılan emoticonlara dayandırılır. Mizah içeren iletilerin sonuna konulması tavsiye edilen ":-)" işaretinin ardından sayısız emoticon farklı amaçlarla yaygınlaşmıştır. Emoticonlar da bir çeşit mem olarak görülür zira onları oluşturmak ve dağıtmak kolaydır. Ayrıca her kişide farklı bir anlam oluşturabilir ya da onları kullanan kişiler farklı amaçlarla kullanabilir. Bugün bildiğimiz memlerin ilk örnekleri ise 1990'ların sonlarında Bert is Evil adlı web sitesinde karşımıza çıkar. Bu site, Susam Sokağı karakteri Bert'in yüzünü veya bedenini, görsel düzenleme programları ile çeşitli tarihi fotoğraflara veya posterlere ekleyerek komik ve dikkat çekici görüntüler oluşturuyordu ve mem kültürünün ilk örneklerinden birini gösteriyordu. Bu yöntem, günümüzde yaygın olarak kullanılan görsel ve metin birleşimi memlerin temelini oluşturdu.

Dini İletişim ve İnternet Memleri

Son zamanlarda yapılan araştırmalar, çevrimiçi memler ve dinin kesişimine yönelik artan bir ilgi olduğunu göstermiştir. Memler, dijital çağda dini inanç ve uygulamaların ifade edilmesi ve yayılması için önemli bir araç haline gelmiştir.

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Dini içerikli memler hakkındaki çalışmalar, dini yaşantının ve dijital ortamlarda dinin artan görünürlüğünün anlaşılmasında önemli bir rol oynamaktadır. Memler izleyicilerine yalnızca mizahı iletmez. Onlara çeşitli konularda fikirler ve düşünceler de iletir. Bu özellik memleri dini mesajların iletilmesi için de önemli hale getirir. Memler kimi zaman çeşitli uygulamalar için dini motivasyon oluşturulmasına da yardım eder. İnternet memleri, bireylerin inançlarını kamuya açık bir şekilde dile getirmelerine olanak tanıyan yaratıcı bir görsel-metinsel dil sunarak benzersiz bir kültürel ve siyasi eleştiri biçimini kolaylaştırmaktadır. Dini içerikli memler inançlara özgü belirli anlamları ve mesajları iletir. Öte yandan popüler kültür memlerinden farklı olarak, daha derin ve manevi içerikler taşıyabilir ve bu nedenle dini inanç ve uygulamaların dijital temsilinde özel bir yer tutarlar. Özellikle Y kuşağına mensup Müslümanlar arasında dini bilgilere erişim için sosyal medyadan sıkça yararlanılması, bu mecraları dini kimliğin şekillenmesinde önemli bir role büründürmektedir. Sosyal medya platformlarında diğer içerikler gibi memler de kullanıcıların dinî anlayışlarının zenginleşmesi ve manevi yolculuk için motivasyon kazanılması konusunda önemli bir araçtır. Ayrıca memler sosyal medyada kimlik oluşumuna da katkı sunmaktadır. Memlerin kullanımı, İslam öğretilerinin coğrafi olarak daha geniş bir alana yayılmasını da desteklemiştir.

Yöntem

Bu çalışma, dinî içerikli internet memlerinin tematik bir analizini sunmayı amaçlamaktadır. Çalışma kapsamında, Reddit platformundaki r/Izlam ve r/IslamicHistoryMeme kanallarında 1 Ocak - 15 Nisan 2024 tarihleri arasında paylaşılan İslami temalı 166 memin tamamı incelenmiştir. Bu tarih aralığı, farklı memlerin din ile ilgili konuları ele alış biçimlerini ve kullanıcıların bu konulara nasıl tepki verdiğini anlamak için yeterli sayıda içerik sağlamıştır.

Araştırmada elde edilen verilerin analizi için tematik analiz yönteminden yararlanılmıştır ve Reddit'te paylaşılan İslami içerikli memlerde din ile ilgili öne çıkan temalar tespit edilmiştir

Bulgular ve Yorum

166 farklı memin ele alındığı bu araştırmada tüm memler içerikleri bakımından dört farklı tema altında toplanmıştır. Bu temaları şu şekilde açıklamak mümkündür:

POV (Bakış Açısı): Bu tema, belirli bir konuda öne çıkan bakış açılarını gösteren memlerden oluşmaktadır. Memlerde, İslam dini ile ilgili kişisel deneyimler, gözlemler ve yorumlar ön plana çıkmaktadır. Bu tema, memlerin din hakkında bireysel ve toplumsal bakış açılarını nasıl yansıttığını anlamak için önemlidir. Günlük dini yaşantının dijital ortam ile entegrasyonunun artması, önceki çalışmalarda da ele alınan bir konudur. Memlerin günlük dini yaşama dair konuları içermesi de daha önce yapılan çalışmalara benzer bir sonucu ortaya koymaktadır.

Politika: Bu tema altında ele alınan memler, İslam dini ve politik olaylar arasındaki ilişkileri ele almaktadır. Memlerde, politik liderler, olaylar ve ideolojilerle ilgili dini referanslar ve eleştiriler sıkça yer almaktadır. Memler kullanıcılara üretim ve dağıtım konusunda kolaylık sağladığı için toplumsal ve politik eleştirinin erişilebilir bir aracı olmuştur. Daha önce yapılan çalışmaların gösterdiği gibi, kullanıcılar memler sayesinde sosyal normlar, siyasi gündemler ve dini uygulamalar hakkında daha rahat konuşabilmektedir.

Kültürel Farklılıklar: Kültürel farklılıklar teması, memlerin İslam dünyasındaki çeşitli kültürel unsurları nasıl sunduğunu ve yorumladığını incelemektedir. Bu tema, memlerde yer alan kültürel çeşitlilik, gelenekler ve sosyal normları anlamak için önemlidir. Memler, farklı kültürel pratikler ve bunların dini bağlamda nasıl yorumlandığını yansıtmaktadır. Bu temada yer alan memler aynı zamanda, mizahın kültürlerarası iletişimde nasıl güçlü bir araç olabileceğine dair örneklerdir. Yaygın yanlış anlamaları ve merakları çatışmacı olmayan ve kapsayıcı bir şekilde ele alırlar. Merak uyandıran alanlar ve potansiyel sürtüşmeleri mizah sayesinde yumuşatılır.

Dinî Bilgilerin Aktarılması: Bu tema, memlerin dinî bilgiler ve öğretileri nasıl ilettiğini incelemektedir. Memlerde, Kur'an ayetleri, hadisler ve İslam tarihi ile ilgili bilgiler sıkça

kullanılmaktadır. Bu tema, memlerin eğitimsel bir araç olarak nasıl kullanıldığını ve dinî bilgilerin yayılmasında nasıl bir rol oynadığını göstermektedir. Dini öğretilere mizahi yaklaşım, özellikle bilgiyi eğlenceli formatlar aracılığıyla tüketmeye alışkın olan genç kitleler arasında öğrenmeyi ve akılda tutmayı artırabilir. Mizah ayrıca hassas konulara değinirken dini kuralları daha geniş bir kitle için daha kabul edilebilir hale getirir.

Sonuç

Çalışmada elde edilen bulgular, internet memlerinin kültürel ve dini ifade için güçlü bir araç olduğu görüşünü desteklemektedir. İnternet memleri dini bilginin yayılmasını kolaylaştırmakta, topluluk kimliğini güçlendirmekte, sosyal ve siyasi yorumlar için bir platform sağlamaktadırlar. Çalışma ayrıca dijital medyanın özellikle genç nesiller arasında çağdaş dini pratikleri ve kimlikleri şekillendirmedeki önemini vurgulamaktadır. Elde edilen bir başka bulgu ise sosyal medyanın dini kimlik oluşturulmasında önemli bir rol oynadığıdır.

İnternet memleri dijital çağda din, kültür ve siyaset arasındaki karmaşık etkileşimi yansıtan benzersiz ve dinamik bir dijital anlatı biçimi olarak hizmet etmektedir. Mizah aracılığıyla derin ve incelikli mesajlar iletme becerileri, memlerin günümüz dijital kültüründeki öneminin altını çizmektedir.