

# Impact of Internet Memes on Desensitizing Child Sexual Abuse

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## Abstract

This paper investigates the global propagation of Child Sexual Abuse-related memes and their role in normalizing pedophilia. The research is grounded in the desensitization theory of social media and the media effects theory. A qualitative content analysis method has been employed by analyzing 33 memes for user engagement. The findings reveal that these memes having Child Sexual Abuse content have reached more than 98 million people. This study demonstrates that widespread interaction with such content, often without critical evaluation leads to themes like glorifying pedophilia, stereotyping through memes and supportive humor. The study emphasizes the need for stricter social media regulations, enhanced digital literacy, and awareness campaigns to curb the normalization of CSA through meme culture. Policymakers, educators, and social media platforms can use these findings to design interventions promoting ethical online behavior.

Keywords: Desensitization, Internet memes, Pedophilia, Child Sexual Abuse (CSA)

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## 1. Introduction

Child sexual abuse (CSA) is any interaction between a child and an adult (or another child) in which the child is used for the sexual stimulation of the perpetrator or an observer (Peterson, 2018). Pedophilia is a psychosexual disorder, generally affecting adults, characterized by sexual interest in prepubescent children or attempts to engage in sexual acts with prepubescent children (The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, 2025). Memes are the basic unit of cultural evolution that are spread by imitation (Powell, 2006).

Investigations reveal that in recent times Instagram has promoted accounts spreading Child Sexual abuse content through algorithms (Bergman, 2023). In recent times sexual abuse content has been informally promoted on social media using humor as a tool. Such content is referred to as a meme and is increasingly used as a tool for cultural dissemination, which can have detrimental effects on society (Bhattacharya, 2019). Memes related to CSA often rely on humor, stereotypes, and shock value, contributing to a broader culture of desensitization. By framing such content as "just jokes," these memes risk normalizing harmful behaviors and diminishing the gravity of the issue (Naveed, 2018).

This research investigates how the meme culture desensitizes audiences by studying the propagation of such memes and the public comments on such content. The focus of this research is to grasp the attention of

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individuals and stakeholders over this rising issue concerning the young generations.

### *1.1. Background of the study*

In the last decade, the use of social media has changed the way of communication by turning the world into a global village. With rapid socialization, individuals have adopted several ways to present their ideas and thoughts on social media. One such way is by creating humorous and sarcastic content through memes (Dwivedi, 2023). Nowadays, Memes portray the prominent social media culture, especially among youth. According to a study, 67% of Americans between the ages of 18 and 29 use Facebook, 78% use Instagram and 65% use Snapchat (Pew Research Center, 2024). Memes are not illegal and intelligently mask dark humor under appealing visuals and texts. The visuals and texts are not sexually explicit which make them pass the community guidelines of social media (Matamoros-Fernández, Bartolo, & Troynar, 2023). Discriminatory Humor can increase a community's tolerance for discrimination and violence against a certain group of people (Ford et al., 2008). As most social media users are young people, they are continuously being exposed to such content which shapes their behavior and attitudes. Exposure to memes related to pedophilia can normalize such issues and desensitize people to CSA (Hall, 2019).

### *1.2. Problem Statement*

The massive influence and viral trends of internet memes on social media has raised significant concerns about shaping societal attitudes. The implicit and humorous nature of internet memes is contributing to normalize key issues such as pedophilia and Child Sexual Abuse in general (Hall, 2019). Sanchez (2020) explains that desensitization is further exacerbated by the viral nature of memes on social media platforms, where audience engagement—through likes, shares, and comments—often amplifies and validates such content. Despite the increasing prevalence of CSA-related memes, there is limited research on this issue globally. This study aims to fill this gap by investigating the thematic patterns, audience engagement, and normalization mechanisms present in CSA-related memes. By doing so, it aims to highlight the implications of meme culture on public awareness and attitudes toward CSA, offering insights for combating the desensitization of this critical issue in digital spaces.

### *1.3. Objectives of the study*

The primary objectives of this study are:

1. To investigate how exposure to internet memes desensitizes the public to CSA.
2. To identify thematic patterns in CSA-related memes.
3. To analyse the rate of propagation of such memes through user engagement metrics.

#### 1.4. Significance of the Study

This research holds considerable implications for understanding the relationship between social media, humor, and society attitudes of CSA. The study, which examines how memes contribute to the normalization of CSA, provides useful insights for policymakers, educators, and advocacy groups working to prevent harmful internet content. The findings can help regulate child protection policies, social media policies and support public awareness campaigns, promote ethical digital conduct, and advise social media platforms in filtering information that trivializes serious matters. Furthermore, this study adds to the expanding body of knowledge about social media's function in altering ethical norms and views.

#### 1.5. Limitations of the Study

This study is confined to memes disseminated on Instagram in the form of reels and does not extend to other social media platforms like Facebook, reddit or X. Additionally, the research focuses on public reels and comments, excluding private interactions or demographic data of users. The study's reliance on qualitative analysis and thematic interpretation may limit the generalizability of findings but provide a deep understanding of the phenomenon within the specified context.

## 2.0. Literature Review

According to Article 1 of the Convention on the Rights of Children, any human being below the age of 18 years is a child (Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989). Whereas, Child sexual abuse (CSA) is any interaction between a child and an adult (or another child) in which the child is used for the sexual stimulation of the perpetrator or an observer (Children's Advocacy Center, n.d.). Sexual abuse can include both touching and non-touching behaviors. Non-touching behaviors can consist of voyeurism (trying to look at a child's naked body), exhibitionism, or exposing the child to pornography (National Child Traumatic Stress Network, n.d.). Children of all ages, races, ethnicities, and economic backgrounds may experience sexual abuse. Child sexual abuse affects both girls and boys in all kinds of neighborhoods and communities (Peterson, 2018b). According to Merck Manuals (2023), pedophilia is a psychosexual disorder that is associated with people having sexual attraction for children. Child sexual abuse imagery (CSAI) is defined as Images or videos that show the sexual abuse of children (IWF annual report, 2023). An Internet meme, or meme, is a unit of cultural information spread by imitation across the Internet, primarily through social media platforms. Memes can be in various formats, including images, videos, GIFs, and other viral content. Whereas, memers are people who create or distribute memes (Shifman, 2014).

In the last decade, the use of social media has changed the way of communication by turning the world into a global village. With rapid socialization, individuals have adopted several ways to present their ideas and thoughts on social media. One such way is by creating humorous and sarcastic content through memes (Sawyer, 2011). Nowadays, Memes portray the prominent social media culture, especially among youth. According to a study, 67% of Americans between the ages of 18 and 29 use Facebook, 78% use Instagram and 65% use Snapchat (Pew Research Center, 2024). This shows that the majority of users belong to Generation Z and millennials. Over the last decade, the National Center for Missing and Reported Children

(NCMEC) reported 54% of abusive reports from the United States and 68% of reports related to Asia. In the United Kingdom, research concluded that 46% of 11-year-olds, 51% of 12-year-olds and 28% of 10-year-olds are Facebook users despite the 13-year age limitation on the platform (BBC, 2011). The rise of gaming communities in the last few years has also increased the risk of abuse among children. Simplified video sharing and recording led to a 379% increase in CSAI videos in 2017 (Bursztein et al., n.d.). However, these issues are illegal and have some sort of punishment worldwide. Whereas, the use of social media for humor and other entertainment purposes is not unlawful and is often misused by its users, mostly millennials and Gen Z (Sharma et al., 2022).

### *2.1. Rise of Internet and CSAI*

Despite policy making and implementation, online sexual abuse is still rapidly growing. Before the advent of internet technology, accessing child abuse material was not easy as it was available on CDs and disks (S. Ali et al., 2021). But now assessing such content has become so easy that anyone having a smartphone and the internet can watch child pornography and the offender does not have to be in the same country to molest a child (Ali & Abou Haykal, 2021). Even from an abuser's point of view, online settings are more convenient to perform horrific acts against children (Cohen-Almagor, 2013).

According to a study that compares pre-internet and contemporary child sexual abuse material, the severity of the abuse has increased due to the formation of online abuse networks, and the normalization of more extreme content on the internet. The findings reinforce the gendered nature of CSAM, with mostly female victims and male perpetrators, and suggest that women may play a co-offending or facilitating role rather than a primary perpetrating one (Salter & Whitten, 2021). Moreover, there are many risk factors associated towards online sexual solicitation of children including experiencing problematic Internet experiences such as cyberbullying, high levels of Internet use, and accessing the Internet from mobile devices or computers away from home (Ospina et al., 2010).

Snapchat is among the social media applications with the highest number of young users but it still aids in CSA due to its technical design. A study also proves this phenomenon by examining the media accounts of coach perpetrators who were arrested for sexual abuse that involved the use of Snapchat. Snapchat's feature of disappearing content may motivate a coach perpetrator to engage in sexual behaviour with young athletes. It can facilitate the coach perpetrators in overcoming internal inhibitions and external barriers to groom athletes for sexual contact. In a way, Snapchat also offers coach perpetrators the ability to assess victims and their receptiveness to sexual activity (Sanderson & Weathers, 2019). Many online platforms that are run by individuals interested in pedophilic activities lead towards the creation of online pedophile subculture (Holt et al., 2010). These communities have a tendency to sexualize and normalize relationships with minors by sharing narratives that depict such relationships are consensual (Holt et al., 2010).

Therefore, this research particularly focuses on the impact of meme culture in desensitizing CSA, especially among youth as they have more exposure to it. It evaluates how exposure to dark-humored content make people less empathetic and emotionally irresponsible. The framework is grounded in Desensitization Theory which posits that repeated exposure to certain stimuli reduces emotional responsiveness (Bandura, 1963) and Media Effects Theory which says that media has such a powerful impact on audiences that it can inject ideas into their minds (Laswell, 1927). Originating in psychology and often applied to media studies, these theories

highlight how individuals become less sensitive to content that initially provoked strong emotional reactions. In the context of social media meme culture, this theory is increasingly relevant given its humorous nature, engagement and the impact it creates among the youth.

## 2.2. Global Creation and Spread of Memes

According to Forbes, an average millennial looks at 20-30 memes every day (Forbes Communications Council, 2018). According to Instagram (2020) users share one million memes daily. A YPulse (2019) survey revealed that 74% of people share memes for humor, 53% use them as responses, 35% as cryptic messages, and 28% when words are insufficient, frequently engaging in meme-based conversations. Pew Research Center (2021) found that 75% of individuals aged 13 to 36 post memes, with 55% sharing them weekly and 30% daily, indicating a strong meme presence among young adults. Whereas, YPulse (2020) survey found out that 75% of 13 to 36-year-olds and 79% of 13 to 17-year-olds share memes. 29% of respondents said they shared their own meme content.

India being the largest country by population has around 320 million active Facebook users who upload more than 100 million images daily including memes. Among these 320 million around 8.6 crore (86 million) users, representing 3% of the total Facebook users in India are under the age of eighteen (R. Sharma, 2022). A study found that many Facebook meme groups in India have administrators who are minors and promote content that encourages sexist, racist, and homophobic stereotypes. One example highlighted in this study was the "fake geek girl meme," which perpetuates the stereotype that women only pretend to be interested in traditionally male-dominated hobbies. Some meme groups glorify violence against women, with examples of memes joking about rape and other forms of abuse (R. Sharma, 2022).

## 2.3. Impact of Memes:

Humor is ambiguous and widely replicated, and its presence on social media makes it accessible to general public, where people engage in different genres of humor without any filter (Matamoros-Fernández, Rodríguez & Wikström, 2022).

Salcudean (2020) states the nature of internet memes and their potential impact on society and culture. Memes work as a source of visual argument that uses humour, sarcasm and interconnection of texts and visuals. Memes have the potential to spread misinformation and hate speech. The ease and speed of sharing memes can lead to the rapid dissemination of false information and harmful opinions. This highlights the need for critical engagement with memes and awareness of their potential impact, especially given the potential for memes to be used to target and marginalise specific groups, such as black and yellow people in western world (Matamoros-Fernández, Rodríguez & Wikström, 2022).

Benavides-Vanegas (2020) argues that the state has a duty to protect vulnerable individuals from cyberbullying and ensure that their freedoms are not infringed upon by hateful online behaviour. Memes should be considered within the scope of freedom of expression, recognizing both their potential and their limitation (Matamoros-Fernández, Bartolo, & Troynar, 2023). While freedom of expression is essential, it is not absolute and must be balanced against the need to protect individuals from harm. It is crucial to realize that emojis and memes are not merely jokes and can be used to spread dangerous and harmful speech

(Benavides-Vanegas, 2020).

#### 2.4. Meme culture and desensitization of child sexual abuse

One of the studies on the “attack on titan memes” shows that when themes like sexualization, violence and suicide ideation are presented humorously they can desensitize young adults. These memes not only shape the ideas of fans but also affect the general youth culture on digital spaces (Teo et al., 2024).

Shan (2024) finds out that animated visuals and movies are becoming a great source of memetic material. The engaging visuals are repeatedly used in memes, and young people internalize the concepts, picking up on the cues and further amplifying the cultural impact.

As memes are often humorous, there has been a rise in their use for trolling and cyberbullying. Memes can be used for both oppressive and emancipatory purposes. However, their ambiguity makes it difficult to determine whether they are intended to be insulting or discriminatory. This ambiguity can shield individuals from accountability for harmful online behaviour. It is important to understand that memes are not merely jokes and can be used to spread dangerous and destructive speech (Benavides-Vanegas, 2020).

Facebook groups, Instagram reels and group chats are places where trolling anyone has become a norm (Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, 2018). Sharma (2022) found out that the darkest memes on Facebook groups included memes on suicide, rapes, differently abled and pedophilic activities, amongst others and the users who report are thrown out of the groups and labelled as ‘normies’ in meme terminology. For the sake of being cool, memers often cross lines. In the context of India, the research examines legal cases and relevant laws, including the Indian Contract Act, the Information and Technology Act, and the Indecent Representation of Women Act, highlighting the legal implications for underage users who create and share inappropriate content (Sharma, 2022).

One study highlights the phenomenon of meme repackaging, where existing memes are repurposed for harmful agendas by altering their content or context. Examples cited include the "Distracted Boyfriend" and "Proud Boys" memes, illustrating how seemingly innocuous memes can be manipulated to promote harmful ideologies (DeCook, 2018).

Several challenges hinder the progress of harmful meme detection. The inherent nature of memes to convey complex messages with abstruse visuals and textual messages makes it difficult for social media security guidelines to filter such content (S. Sharma et al., 2022).

### 3.0. Research Methodology

The qualitative content analysis approach is used to collect data through user engagement on Instagram reels. The data collected was scraped through APIFY and the data was transferred to excel for further analysis. Content analysis is effective at gathering qualitative data and it is also helpful in identification of patterns and connections. The sample size for this study is 33 memes in the form of Instagram reels. Data was collected through the purposive sampling method. The study focuses on youth, especially active social media users.

### 3.1. Data Analysis

The thematic analysis of the comments was done in excel using Braun and Clarke's six-step framework for thematic analysis:

- i. Familiarization with data: Reviewed memes and comments to gain an overall understanding.
- ii. Generating initial codes: Identifying key elements in the content.
- iii. Searching for themes: Grouping codes into broader themes (e.g., glorifying paedophilia, stereotyping through memes).
- iv. Reviewing themes: Refining themes for coherence and relevance.
- v. Defining and naming themes: Finalizing themes with clear descriptions and labels.
- vi. Producing the report: Synthesizing findings into descriptive and analytical narratives.

### 3.2. Quantitative Descriptive Analysis

Summarized engagement metrics, such as total likes, comments, shares, and views to understand the propagation of memes having child sexual abuse material. For data visualization Microsoft Excel and Word was used.

### 3.3. Theoretical framework

This study examines how meme culture on social media contributes to the desensitization of a grave issue like child sexual abuse among the users. It evaluates how exposure to dark-humoured content makes people less empathetic and emotionally irresponsible. The framework is grounded in Desensitization Theory which posits that repeated exposure to certain stimuli reduces emotional responsiveness and media affects theory which states how media content and consumption shape individuals' and society's thoughts. Originating in psychology and often applied to media studies, these theories highlight how individuals become less sensitive to content that initially provoked strong emotional reactions. In the context of social media meme culture, these theories are increasingly relevant as youth is being exposed to a bombardment of content on social media daily.

### 3.4. Ethical Considerations

**Anonymity and Privacy:** The privacy of Instagram users was ensured by hiding usernames and avoiding identifiable details in the data.

**Data Authenticity:** Data was collected from publicly available content, with no manipulation of comments or engagement statistics.

**Impartiality:** The context of comments was analysed in detail to avoid researcher bias.

## 4.0. Data Analysis

### 4.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to interpret the findings presented in the previous chapter and connect them to the research objectives. This study aimed to explore the role of internet memes in desensitizing child sexual

abuse (CSA). By analyzing 33 Instagram reels and their associated comments, user engagement data, and thematic patterns, this chapter discusses how humor, stereotypes, and normalization mechanisms contribute to societal attitudes toward CSA. The eight themes identified—glorifying pedophilia, stereotyping through memes, supportive humor, Associating Celebrities, sexualizing children, Objectors on social media, Internet slangs and identifying pedophilic subculture—are analyzed in-depth.

## 4.2 Interpretation of Findings

### 4.2.1 Glorifying pedophilia

The findings highlight how certain reels and their comments normalize and glorify pedophilic behavior, often masking it as humor. This concept aligns with existing research on memes emoticons and cyberbullying which says that the ambiguity of memes makes it difficult to determine whether they are meant to be insulting or discriminatory (Benavides-Vanegas, 2020). 48 out of 357 comments depicted the glorification of pedophilia. This shows that the humorous nature of memes hinders people's ability to differentiate between right and wrong.

For example, one person commented *“The younger the soul, the tighter the hole”* on a meme that had the text *“When your bro said he liked single girls, but you didn’t know he was talking about the digits in their age”*. Another person commented *“If she can bleed she can breed”* on the same post. As shown in Figure. 1, one comment explicitly glorifying pedophilia was liked by more than 4,000 users, reflecting a disturbing degree of public endorsement and the potential normalization of exploitative narratives through online platforms.

This type of behavior shows how child sexual abuse is being glorified and enjoyed. One of the reels showing a small girl with a pregnant belly alone has reached more than 27 million people. This particular reel has more than 12 thousand comments which can reinforce the idea of desensitization theory of social media, which states that people may become less sensitive to violence and aggression if they are exposed to it frequently. One person commented *“age is just a number”* which shows his views on a meme saying: *“what does a mathematician and pedo agree upon? 11 is a prime number”*. This kind of mindset leads to child abuse as proven by the media affects theory that repeated exposure to certain content can trigger actions of people. These memes have a very high reach due to the suggestive newsfeed of Instagram which can further lead to the increased glorification of pedophilic behavior by providing social validation under the guise of humour.

### 4.2.2 Stereotyping Through Memes

In meme culture, stereotypes are used as an essential tool in making fun of certain groups based on their gender, age or subculture. Salcudean (2020) mentions that the ease and speed of sharing memes can lead to the rapid dissemination of false information and harmful opinions. Several comments showed how people have formed opinions against a person or place due to meme culture. Some reels associated Rajasthan with pedophilia such as one reel shows a small girl dressed up as an Indian bride with the text *“Do baar nursery me fail hogayi”* (failed two times in nursery) portraying child marriage as a norm in India. Many users under such reels supported this idea by commenting *“Scroll krte krte Rajasthan pohoch gya”* (reached Rajasthan while scrolling) Another commented *“Rajasthan se hogi”* (She must be from Rajasthan) which shows how people associate a place with child sexual abuse humorously. Other examples include creating stereotypes

against a subculture or gender by assuming that they are hypersexual or sexually pleasing. For example, “*I wouldn't snitch if it's a goth girl tho*” here goth girls are being hypersexualized. A lot of comments were seen objectifying goth girls. For example, a person commented “*I need a goth girl*”, another commented “*understandable*” on a reel sexualizing young goth girls. The comments on this particular post were leading to create a stereotype that Goth girls are sexually promiscuous. According to our data, 33 memes have reached more than 98 million people on the basis of view count. Repeated exposure to such content makes the viewers insensitive towards a particular group (Matamoros-Fernández, Bartolo, & Troynar, 2023). This can pose serious psychological threats to people and may slander a place or occupation in the name of entertainment. It can stigmatize specific groups or communities while neglecting the actual accountability of CSA (Sharma, Akhtar, & Chakraborty, 2022). Therefore, as a major tool of communication and cultural dissemination in the post-digital world, memes can significantly influence ideologies and perspectives.

#### 4.2.3 Supportive humour:

This theme reflects how supportive humor in the comment section promotes child sexual abuse and normalizes it, reducing the likelihood of critical engagement. Sharma (2022) found out how people support dark humor and make others feel bad for calling out wrong behaviour in Facebook groups by labelling them as ‘normies’ and throwing them out of the groups. This encourages social media users to use supportive humour to look “cool”. 135 out of 357 Comments contains supportive humor by users. For example, a reel where a movie scene of a law court, edited with the text “*But your honor i thought the chinese girl was saying her name 'tu yung'*” has several comments containing supportive humor such as: “*Yeah I thought her name was 'Oon Lee tuu'*” and “*she said her name was eye maa mai nor*” (pronounced as: I’m a minor). These suggestive jokes mask serious implications under layers of humor. People commenting “*I think ima pre-order her*” and “*Bagged a 10 ✖ bagged a 10 year old ✔*” on posts where a guy is holding a hand of a minor girl. All these comments show how much this filth has been normalized. Viewer engagement metrics indicate that such content is viral and replicative in nature. Social media users often fail to recognize the harmful nature of such content, viewing it as purely comedic. This aligns with the social media theory of desensitization as increased exposure numbs the audience sensitivity. Supportive humor aids the normalization of CSA by making it socially acceptable to engage with and share such content without questioning its ethical standards. Social media users are often drawn to humor, and the more effective or entertaining the humor, the more praise and validation it tends to receive. In the analyzed comments, users employed supportive humor related to pedophilia—likely as a means to appear witty or gain social approval as evidenced by the large number of likes these comments received.

#### 4.2.4 Associating Celebrities

Table 1: Celebrity names used

Names of celebrities	Number of mentions
Drake	40
Diddy	19

Henry	8
Badshah	4

Celebrities are frequently implicated in dark humor memes, trivializing CSA by associating it with satire. This theme reflects both points of view how celebrities are bullied for being pedophiles without concrete evidence and how some celebrities have potential link with CSA. This theme reflects both perspectives: the tendency for celebrities to be labeled as pedophiles without concrete evidence, and the existence of potential links between certain celebrities and child sexual abuse.

Salcudean (2020) mentions that the ease and speed of sharing memes can lead to the rapid dissemination of false information and harmful opinions. 81 comments mention celebrities out of which 73 comments are in a negative context, whereas, only 8 of them show a positive outlook. This shows how meme culture can make or break a famous personality's reputation under the guise of humour. For example, comments like *"Did drake post this?"* and *"Diddy, get off insta"* on pedophilic memes show how these celebrities are linked to pedophilia by making funny content. Most of the comments mentioning this theme mocks rappers; Drake, Diddy and Badshah as pedophiles. This shows a strange connection with rap culture. Figure 4 illustrates that comments mocking celebrities garnered substantially more likes than other types of comments. This is even more sad as all the allegations are made in a fun way and no one is motivated to take real action against them if they are really involved. An Indian rapper named "Badshah" was humorized in a post showing a controversial video clip involving a minor. In that clip, the mentioned rapper is showing inappropriate behaviour towards a little girl. While viewers compared him to celebrities like Drake and Diddy, for example: *"Badshah interning for diddy"*, there was a noticeable absence of critical commentary addressing the actual content of the reel.

In one post, a well-known Hollywood actor, Henry Cavill, was accused of looking at his underage co-actor with expressions interpreted as affectionate or lustful. The accusation prompted mixed responses from the audience. Memers are often paid to defame a famous personality which can bring serious consequences to mental health (McMullen, 2024).

People nowadays use memes as a tool to defame their enemies or competitors. This can harm the reputation of innocent people as on social media, users follow the trends without really assessing the authenticity of the information. This creates an insensitive environment regarding child sexual abuse which can lead to a lack of demand for legal action against criminals.

#### 4.2.5 Sexualizing children:

Memes often sexualize children, perpetuating harmful narratives that normalize predatory behaviors. Memes are ambiguous and do not determine whether they are intended to be insulting or discriminatory (Benavides-Vanegas, 2020). One of the reels studied, mentions this text *"My professor realising that my essay is actually a detailed description of linked evidence on how he cheats with his wife with a 16-year-old Goth Girl (I'm getting an A+)"*. This meme shows how a girl is being sexualised based on her subculture and age. The comments on this Instagram post also promote the sexualisation of Goth girls such as *"can't blame 16 and goth"* shows how the person is validating child sexual abuse. Such content also reinforces negative stereotypes as discussed in theme 4.2.2. Around 30 comments from the data, specifically mention ages such as *"10 years supremacy"*, *"Anything after 12 is lunch"*, *"Yeh true, 11 months right..!?"*. all these comments

show how people are sexualizing babies on the basis of their ages. These comments show how people are sexualizing children based on their age, and subculture. This pattern depicts that the younger they are the more sexually attractive they will be. Online consumption becomes harmful when it starts shaping your behaviors in real life. According to Media Effects Theory, such content can be very harmful if it is repeatedly consumed. The implicit nature of memes helps them mask disturbing issues like sexualizing children. Normalizing the sexualization of children poses significant risks to public safety and perpetuates a culture that trivializes abuse (Kumari et al., 2025).

#### 4.2.6 Objectors on Social Media

This theme identifies and explores the positive attitudes shown by people in the comment section. Some users actively oppose such content, acting as objectors. Sharma (2022) noticed some people in Facebook groups were opposing the harmful memes but were thrown out of the groups for not being cool enough. In this research, some comments were found to call out the perpetrators or to oppose the dissemination of memes with child sexual abuse content. A few comments also depicted diverse perspectives with a sense of moral and ethical considerations. For example, in one of the memes, Henry Cavill (a famous actor) is depicted as being attracted to a minor co-star. Comments such as *“He played role being her dad, treats like a Lil sister”* and *“If you saw the interviews he was looking at her proudly because they were talking about her. He was extremely proud. That’s why he was looking at her like that both times. Don’t slander our Henry”* show how people came to defend the actor. Another reel studied shows a small girl with a pregnant belly on which someone commented *“Humanity died in chat It’s a disease Endo belly”*. Few other comments showed some people are not really enjoying these posts such as *“this is one of those times i regret being able to read”*, *“u needa be locked up”*, and *“What a bad day to be literate”*. The study finds out that the total number of likes on 33 reels is more than 10 million, which means that the reach is very high. The number of such comments was insignificant compared to supportive humor and other themes. Many people feel bad about such content but they do not want to look “uncool” on social media (Sharma, 2022). This proves the desensitization theory of social media to be true because even the potential objectors find such content less problematic due to increased exposure. Continuous exposure and online peer pressure to be cool can dampen the ethical and moral standards of individuals thereby increasing the dissemination of such memes (Linz, Donnerstein, & Penrod, 1988).

#### 4.2.7: Internet slangs

Internet language really shows the digital culture and is easily understood by users especially youth. According to the data “bro” word has been used 35 times and “relatable” has been used 10 times. This frequency shows how people have been taking such harmful content. Comments like *“Bro doing a preorder”*, *“BRO FR THO”* and *“Bro pre-ordered the Baddie xD”* on posts endorsing pedophilia shows that how frankly people are interacting with such content. Words like “fr” which means ‘for real’ show how people are validating such content by relating with it. These words not only show the connection but also how CSA propagation is not affecting the people like it should. For example, *“BRO FR THO”* this particular person is not only considering such content normal but also relating with it. One person commented *“Can’t blame bro*

*tbh*” on a reel mentioning how a 16-year-old Goth girl is sexually appealing to his professor. All these comments promote a culture of insensitivity. “Bro” word itself is used to express closeness, agreement, or mutual understanding, like the digital equivalent of a fist bump. According to existing research, such language on Instagram shows that easy access and repeated exposure to memes spreading pedophilia generates a sense of desensitization among people thereby affecting their mentality and actions (Linz, Donnerstein, & Penrod, 1988). Slang provides users a way to talk about horrific things without confronting the horror. It gives them emotional distance, so they can participate without feeling guilt or disgust, making it easier to ignore the seriousness of the content.

#### 4.2.8) Identifying pedophilic subculture:

Many people have commented relatable on posts claiming to love minors for example, *“Liking this cause it’s relatable not funny”* and *“Relatable (I’m the professor)”*. “Relatable” is widely used on the internet to show support and sympathy to a certain practice. Other comments like *“happens too often”* on a post where a person was defending himself in the court saying he dated a Chinese minor because he thought that her name was “tu yung” when she said she is “too young”. One of the users commented *“Me nd who”* on a post where someone is holding kinder joy in their hands with a text *“let me spoil u princess”* depicting how he wants to relate to this absurd idea of dating a minor. These comments promoting CSA can highlight an internet subculture of people that think sharing such content is okay. Some other comments like *“I liked this because it is funny not relatable”* shows how this person has sarcastically said that the particular post is not relatable but funny. People increasingly used irony to mention their sexual preference towards minors. A person literally commented *“Open the stitches and slip the money in”* on a meme saying *“When the lap dance is fire and you see them C-section scars”* with the visual of a man giving 20 dollars tip and saying *“FOR THE KID”*. On the same reel, a user commented, *“I’ve worked hard for the algorithm I possess”*. Irony and sarcasm are prevalent rhetorical strategies on social media, where users often express the opposite of their intended meaning or communicate through mockery. These forms of expression complicate the efforts of social media platforms and legal systems to identify and regulate harmful content (Benavides-Vanegas, 2020). As demonstrated by existing research, such discursive practices not only facilitate the promotion of pedophilia and child sexual abuse but also contribute to their normalization, ultimately fostering harmful online subcultures centered around pedophilic ideologies (Holt et al., 2010)

## 5.0 Findings:

- Glorifying Pedophilia

As shown in Figure 1, this theme reflects how certain comments subtly or explicitly endorse pedophilic behavior. Some reels depict the attraction towards children as cool by using anime visuals to make the content more appealing and relatable to the younger generation. On the other hand, several comments were observed to glorify pedophilic behavior through the use of sexually explicit language. Comments

like, “Someone say (younger the soul tighter the hole)” indicate a level of audience desensitization towards this crime.

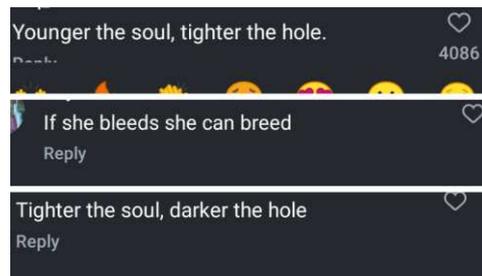


Figure 1. Comments glorifying pedophilia.

- Stereotyping Through Memes

This theme shows how memes and comments reinforce societal stereotypes against people on the basis of subculture or the places they belong to. Several comments portrayed “Rajasthan” a state in India, being associated with a culture of pedophilia. Comments such as “Average kids in Rajasthan” and as shown in Figure 2, “Average relationship advice from Rajasthani” show how people reinforce stereotypes through humor. There was one specific reel that was reinforcing the stereotype that Goth girls are hypersexual and sexually appealing. A person commented “I need a goth girl” and “understandable”. These comments reinforce the stereotypes associated with Goth girls being hypersexual or in other words “Easy”.



Figure 2. Reinforcing stereotypes in comment section

- Supportive humour

This theme explores how repeated exposure to such memes can normalize the abuse of children. Reels often incorporated subtle jokes or puns about children, such as the text on a meme “me trying to figure out what goo goo gaga means when I thought the worst she could say is no”. one of the comments on this reel was: “I thought, she told me her name when she said googoo gaga”. The comments were even more disturbing as shown in Figure 3, “If she knows the A B C then she’s ready for the D” to embed suggestive

meanings in an otherwise comedic context. Viewer engagement metrics suggested that audiences frequently liked the comments having supportive humor further validating harmful ideas.

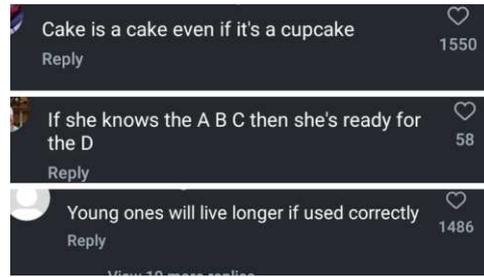


Figure 3. Comments showing supportive humor

- Associating celebrities:

This theme explores the memes and comments where celebrities are depicted as child sexual abusers by involving them in dark-humored content. Most of the memes studied had visuals of celebrities involved in pedophilic activities by using poems and songs as humorous tools. 40 comments across the data mocked Drake as being a pedophile using irony or sarcasm. As shown in Figure 4, “*Drake Drake go away Rizz up kids another day*” is a prominent example. “*Drake ahh moment*” and “*Drake’s speaking from personal experience*” is an example of how Drake is being associated in a humorous way. Other celebrities like Diddy and Badshah were also mentioned. For example, “*It should be "Diddy. Diddy, go away rizz up kiddies another day"*” and “*Badshah interning for diddy*”. All the celebrities mentioned earlier are rappers, leading towards a disturbing link between rap culture and pedophilia. The humorous response leads to the lack of serious accountability and legal actions against the perpetrators and also defaming the ones that are innocent. For example, few reels tried to spread dark humor about Henry Cavill who has not been charged or associated with any of such content and is considered a decent man. Many people came up in his support but some took it as a joke. The comments mocking celebrities got more likes than usual.



Figure 4. Celebrities being mocked as pedophiles

- Sexualizing Children:

This theme examines the comments on reels that sexualise children based on their age, gender or subculture. Some memes showed male adults attracted towards small girls. One of the reels showed how under-18 goth girls are sexually appealing to men. As shown in Figure 5, comments like “Need goth girl” show how people specifically mentioned goth girls as their sexual interests. Other comments included “Me nd That 14 years girl ( She Pulled Me With Her Story)”, “Three feet ✖ Three years old ✔”, and “10 years supremacy”, or “does minors include 3 years old”. Most of these comments involved irony and sarcasm while sexualizing children.



Figure 5. Sexualizing children in comment section

- Objectors on social media:

This theme studies how some people call out the memers and social media users that create and support such content. Some people commented against such content or disliked it showing responsible online behaviour. Comments like “Humanity died in chat It's a disease Endo belly” and “leave this shit behind bro” show how some people opposed the toxic online culture. Some people came in defense of a famous celebrity who was being accused. For example, “This is a very creepy video. He treats her like a little kid. Wtf is this?” and “I have seen the whole interview, he looks at her for 2 scenes in a 1hour long video cause theyre talking about her... henry cavill is the pinnacle of a man, hes the opposite of creepy”. This theme reflects how people critically objected harmful content.

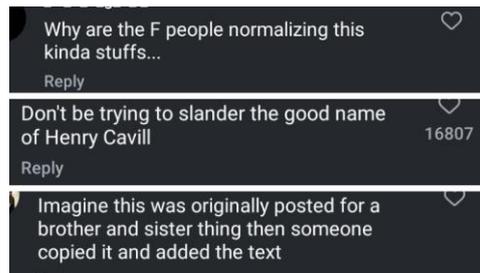


Figure 6. People showing positive behavior in comments.

- Internet slangs:

In internet language, words like bro, homie and relatable are used in a very informal and comfortable sense. Many people used the word “bro” for the account owner posting CSA related memes showing the level of comfort. Comments like “*“bagged a 10” bro she IS 10*”, “*BRO FR THO*”, and “*lmaoo*” (laughing my ass off) are some examples of how people are normalizing such stuff. The excessive use of such words in the data depicts a culture of normalization among the online users.

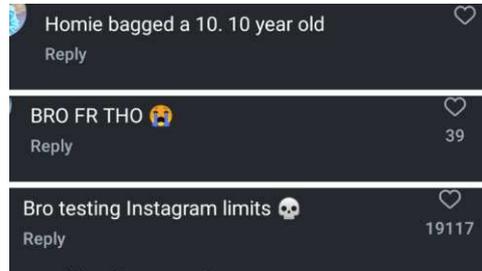


Figure 7. Slangs promoting a culture of normalization.

- Identifying pedophilic subculture:

A lot of people were seen relating to pedophilic content in the comment section. This is one of the most alarming findings. A social media subculture of pedophilia was seen in the comment section with people commenting relatable either directly or indirectly in a sarcastic manner. “*Liking this cause it’s relatable not funny*” and “*Relatable (I’m the professor)*”, “*Real (I’m the professor)*”, “*For real(I’m that bro)*”, and “*Same (I’m bro)*” are comments found on posts sexualizing children. These comments can easily depict an online culture where pedophilia is not only normalized but validated.

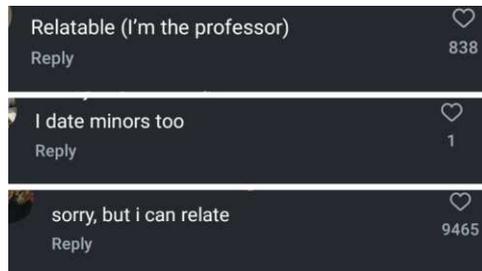


Figure 8. People relating to pedophilic behavior in the comment section.

5.5 Visual representation:

User engagement of 33 reels was analyzed and visualized in detail.

- Total number of likes = 10,128,493.
- Total number of comments = 58,679.
- Total number of shares = 8,796,675.
- Total view count = 98,831,997.

This data shows that only 33 memes(reels) have reached more than 98 million people around the world.

Table 2

User engagement	Numbers	Numbers (Million)
Likes	10128493	10.13
Comments	58679	0.06
Shares	8796675	8.80
Views	98,831,997	98.83

### 5.6 Key Observations

One of the key findings of this study is the high dissemination potential of such content; notably, only 33 reels collectively reached over 98 million users. User engagement patterns revealed that likes were the primary mode of interaction, with significantly fewer users opting to comment, suggesting a passive but widespread endorsement of the content.

The reels analyzed originated from meme pages across different countries, indicating a diverse geographic presence. However, despite this diversity, the cultural expressions and user behaviors displayed a notable consistency, pointing towards the emergence of a shared global meme culture.

Humor was frequently employed to trivialize the seriousness of child sexual abuse, often through the use of appealing visuals, catchy audio tracks, and popular anime characters. One particularly significant finding was the large number of likes on comments that used sarcasm, explicit sexual commentary, supportive humor or the mocking of celebrities in response to pedophilic memes. This kind of engagement reflects a disturbing trend where humor becomes a vehicle for the normalization and indirect validation of harmful ideologies.

A specific pattern emerged linking these memes with rap culture, where users often referenced celebrities like Drake, Diddy, or Badshah in accusations of pedophilia, frequently without concrete evidence. Furthermore, users casually mentioned the ages of minors, often 10 years or younger, whom they claimed to find attractive, framed through irony or dark humor.

Overall, audience interactions revealed a deeply concerning trend: not only was such content widely consumed, but it was also relatable and entertaining to many viewers. This reflects the growth of a disturbing online subculture, where the boundaries between satire, humor, and actual support for pedophilic behavior become increasingly blurred.

## 6.0 Suggestions

- Development organizations should prioritize the integration of comprehensive Child Protection Policies that explicitly address digital environments. These policies must recognize the unique vulnerabilities children face on social media platforms and place a strong emphasis on safeguarding their mental health in the post-digital world.
- Awareness campaigns for responsible online behavior should be introduced by social media platforms.
- Workshops and educational seminars for responsible and ethical online conduct should be arranged by government in all educational institutes.
- Content moderation tools should be updated to detect the ambiguity of memes thereby detecting irony, satire and sarcasm with the help of artificial intelligence.
- Government should partner with social media influencers and memers to amplify the message against CSA meme culture.
- Advocacy groups can create online forums for survivors and their allies to discuss and counteract the spread of CSA-related meme culture.
- Active social media users should launch campaigns with hashtags like #MemesWithMorals or #AbuseIsNotAJoke to build community resistance against harmful memes.

## 7.0 Conclusion

This research has studied an emerging issue that explores the meme culture and its implications on desensitizing serious crimes like child sexual abuse. The findings suggest that memes normalize inappropriate behavior and reinforce harmful stereotypes about CSA under the guise of humor. The thematic content analysis of comment section revealed audience insensitivity regarding memes related to pedophilia and child sexual abuse in general. Analysis also depicted a concerning online sub-culture of pedophilia, where such content is being validated, normalized and enjoyed. The numbers of users opposed such harmful behaviors were comparatively insignificant. Memes included pictures and videos of celebrities, trendy music and anime characters. The findings underscore the need for enhanced child protection policies, updating content moderation tools, enhanced digital literacy, and comprehensive awareness campaigns to combat the normalization of CSA in meme culture. A shift is needed from passive consumption of content to a more conscious, ethical approach of humor in digital spaces. Addressing this phenomenon requires collaborative efforts from governments, social media platforms, civil society and social media celebrities such as influencers and memers. Future research should explore the psychological impact of such memes on survivors of CSA and investigate the situation of such content on other social media platforms. By fostering a digital culture of accountability and empathy, we can work towards mitigating the harmful effects of such content and ensuring a safer online environment for all users.

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