

## Global Trends on Meme as Popular Culture, Bibliometrics Analysis (2015 – 2025)

Muh Rivha Aldava Otto<sup>1</sup>, Filosa Gita Sukmono<sup>2</sup>.

Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta <sup>1</sup>

Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta <sup>2</sup>.

[muh.rivha.isip24@mail.umy.ac.id](mailto:muh.rivha.isip24@mail.umy.ac.id)

[filosa@umy.ac.id](mailto:filosa@umy.ac.id)

### ABSTRACT

*Internet memes have become a prominent form of popular communication within contemporary digital culture, particularly in social media environments that facilitate rapid content circulation and participatory interaction. As cultural artifacts, memes function not only as entertainment but also as carriers of social meaning that reflect collective identities and engage in broader ideological and political discourses; however, despite growing academic interest, comprehensive mappings of research trends in this field remain limited. This study examines global research trends on memes as popular culture in social media through a bibliometric analysis of publications from 2015 to 2025, employing a quantitative descriptive approach based on a Systematic Literature Review guided by the PRISMA 2020 framework. A total of 100 Scopus-indexed publications were selected using the keywords “meme” and “popular culture,” with bibliographic data analyzed using the Bibliometrix R-tool to identify publication trends, dominant themes, influential sources, institutional contributions, and geographical citation patterns. The findings reveal rapid growth in meme-related scholarship, with an annual growth rate of 25.25% and an average document age of 4.19 years, indicating the highly contemporary nature of this research field, while thematic analysis highlights strong associations with popular culture, social media, humor, and digital culture, alongside increasing attention to platform-specific communities such as Reddit. Citation analysis further demonstrates the dominance of Western countries, particularly the United States, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom, in shaping theoretical developments. Overall, this study confirms that meme research has evolved into an important multidisciplinary field within communication and cultural studies, providing a systematic overview of existing scholarship and a foundation for future research on memes as influential elements of digital culture.*

**Keywords:** memes, popular culture, social media, digital culture, bibliometric analysis

### ABSTRAK

Meme internet telah menjadi salah satu bentuk komunikasi populer yang menonjol dalam budaya digital kontemporer, khususnya di lingkungan media sosial yang memungkinkan peredaran konten secara cepat dan partisipatif. Sebagai artefak budaya, meme tidak hanya berfungsi sebagai hiburan, tetapi juga mengandung makna sosial, merefleksikan identitas kolektif, serta berperan dalam pembentukan wacana ideologis dan politik; namun demikian, meskipun kajian akademik mengenai meme terus berkembang, pemetaan komprehensif terhadap tren penelitian global dalam bidang ini masih relatif terbatas. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk memetakan perkembangan dan kecenderungan penelitian global mengenai meme sebagai bagian dari budaya populer di media sosial melalui analisis bibliometrik periode 2015–2025 dengan menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif kuantitatif dan metode Systematic Literature Review (SLR) yang mengacu pada pedoman PRISMA 2020. Sebanyak 100 publikasi relevan yang terindeks dalam basis data Scopus dipilih menggunakan kata kunci “meme” dan “popular culture,” kemudian data bibliografis dianalisis menggunakan perangkat lunak Bibliometrix berbasis bahasa pemrograman R untuk mengidentifikasi tren publikasi, tema dominan, sumber dan institusi paling berpengaruh, serta kontribusi geografis berdasarkan sitasi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan adanya pertumbuhan pesat kajian meme dengan tingkat pertumbuhan tahunan sebesar 25,25% dan usia rata-rata dokumen 4,19 tahun, yang menandakan sifat literatur yang sangat kontemporer, sementara analisis tematik mengungkap keterkaitan erat antara meme, budaya populer, media sosial, humor, dan budaya digital, serta meningkatnya perhatian pada komunitas berbasis platform seperti Reddit. Selain itu, analisis sitasi memperlihatkan dominasi negara-negara Barat dalam pengembangan teoritis kajian meme. Secara keseluruhan,

penelitian ini menegaskan bahwa kajian meme telah berkembang menjadi bidang multidisipliner yang penting dalam studi komunikasi dan budaya, serta menyediakan dasar konseptual bagi penelitian lanjutan mengenai meme dalam budaya digital.

**Kata Kunci:** *meme, budaya populer, media sosial, budaya digital, analisis bibliometrik*

## INTRODUCTION

Internet memes have become an essential component of contemporary digital communication, particularly within social media environments that accelerate the circulation of visual and textual content. As social media platforms enable rapid information exchange, memes function as efficient carriers of emotional, cultural, and symbolic meanings. Their popularity reflects broader shifts in media consumption, where users increasingly rely on humorous and relatable content to interpret social realities. However, the abundance of meme-based information also contributes to an overloaded media environment that challenges users' capacity to critically process digital content.

Within the context of popular culture, memes operate as dynamic cultural artifacts that continuously evolve alongside societal trends. Drawing from familiar references such as films, television programs, political events, and everyday experiences, memes translate complex social, political, and cultural phenomena into accessible and engaging forms. Their appeal lies not only in entertainment but also in their ability to mirror collective sentiments, reinforce shared cultural contexts, and foster a sense of belonging among online communities. As such, memes have become embedded in everyday digital practices across diverse age groups and cultural settings.

From a communication perspective, the rise of participatory and convergence-driven media environments has repositioned users as active producers and distributors of meaning. Social media users, often described as prosumers, shape the flow of information and public discourse through the creation and circulation of memes. Grounded in cultural studies and semiotic traditions, particularly Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding framework, memes can be understood as multiparticipant content that bridges vertically produced media with horizontally reproduced, peer-driven communication. Although memes circulate at a micro level, their widespread diffusion contributes to broader ideological, cultural, and political narratives.

Political communication has been significantly influenced by the emergence of political memes, which frequently employ satire to comment on current events and public figures. Research indicates that political meme creation and sharing are closely linked to users' political interest, social media engagement, and motivations for participation. Moreover, the use of memes for political expression has been associated with increased political efficacy as well as online and offline political participation, highlighting memes as influential tools within contemporary public discourse. At the same time, memes may also reproduce problematic representations, including misogynistic or exclusionary narratives, underscoring the need for critical analysis.

Beyond sociopolitical contexts, memes have also been adopted strategically in branding and marketing communication, where their humorous nature is used to capture audience attention and stimulate engagement. While

meme-based content can enhance perceived humor and interaction, its effectiveness is context-dependent and may pose risks when applied to serious or cause-related campaigns. Collectively, these dynamics demonstrate that memes are not merely trivial content but complex communicative forms that warrant systematic academic investigation to understand their cultural, social, and communicational implications in digital media.

## METHODOLOGY

This study employs a quantitative descriptive approach using the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method. SLR is a method that establishes a series of structured steps to systematically manage the literature review. The literature review is a crucial initial step in research to understand current developments and to identify gaps and challenges within the field [(Carrera- Rivera et al., 2022)].

Through Systematic Literature Review, this study synthesizes previous research findings to strengthen the knowledge base on a specific topic and provide a comprehensive overview of the literature relevant to the research questions. The SLR approach was chosen because it maintains transparency principles and reduces bias throughout the study process [(Williams et al., 2021)].

In its implementation, this research adopts the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines. The 2020 version of PRISMA replaces the 2009 statement and includes updated reporting guidelines reflecting advances in techniques for locating, selecting, assessing, and synthesizing studies. The structure and presentation of items

have also been revised to facilitate easier implementation (Veroniki et al., 2025).

The researchers explain how articles related to "Corporate Social Responsibility" were selected using these PRISMA guidelines. These guidelines cover eligibility criteria, information sources, search strategy, selection process, data collection process, and data items. At the eligibility stage, the literature review included all articles published in journals, books, or book chapters indexed in the Scopus database. One key consideration in article selection was the publication period, specifically from 2015 to 2025. Articles that did not utilize the variables "All open access" were excluded from the selection process.

The search process began by entering the keyword "Popular Culture" along with the additional keyword "Meme" into the Scopus search field. The database was then filtered to limit the literature search to publications from 2015 to 2025. Inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied to select the relevant articles. A total of 100 studies met these criteria following the systematic article screening process. These selected studies originated from international journals that had already been officially published. The data meeting the inclusion criteria were then exported in BibTex format and processed using the Bibloshiny application within the R programming language

## RESULT AND INTERPRETATION

This section presents and discusses the results of the bibliometric analysis conducted using the Bibliometrix R-tool to map global research trends on memes as popular culture within social media contexts from 2015 to 2025. Rather than merely

reporting numerical outputs, this section interprets the findings to illustrate how meme studies have evolved, both thematically and geographically, and how they increasingly occupy a strategic position within communication and digital culture research.

### 1. Main Information



The initial descriptive statistics provide an essential overview of the dataset and reveal the broader dynamics of meme-related scholarship. The dataset spans a ten-year period from 2015 to 2025 and consists of 100 academic documents published across 74 different sources. This distribution indicates that meme research has gained considerable scholarly attention while remaining relatively dispersed across journals and disciplines.

The most striking indicator is the annual growth rate of 25.25%, which signifies a rapid expansion of academic interest in memes. Such a growth rate is notably high within social science research and suggests that memes have emerged as a contemporary research “hot spot.” This expansion reflects the increasing relevance of memes in digital communication, particularly as social media platforms have become central arenas for cultural expression, political discourse, and social interaction.

Furthermore, the average document age of 4.19 years highlights the contemporary orientation of the literature. The dominance of recent publications suggests that meme studies are closely

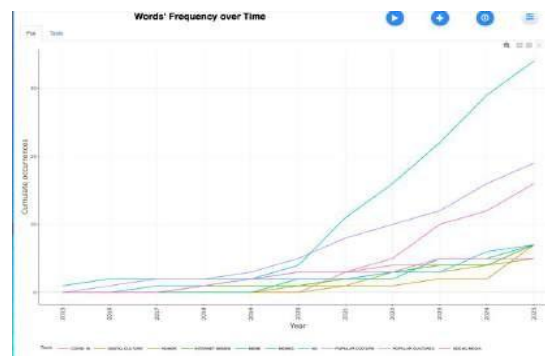
aligned with ongoing digital developments, indicating a field that is still evolving and responsive to current social and technological changes rather than relying heavily on established or canonical works.

### 2. WordCloud

The WordCloud analysis visually represents the dominant thematic orientations within the dataset. The most frequently occurring keywords—“memes,” “popular culture,” and “social media”—clearly demonstrate the conceptual core of the field. This result confirms that meme research is intrinsically embedded within popular culture studies and platform-based communication analysis.

Secondary keywords such as “humor” and “digital culture” further enrich this thematic landscape. Humor appears as a central mechanism through which memes operate, functioning not only as entertainment but also as a vehicle for critique and social commentary. Meanwhile, the presence of “digital culture” indicates that scholars increasingly situate memes within broader discussions of digitally mediated lifestyles, identities, and meaning-making practices. Together, these keywords reveal that meme studies bridge micro-level content analysis with macro-level cultural interpretation.

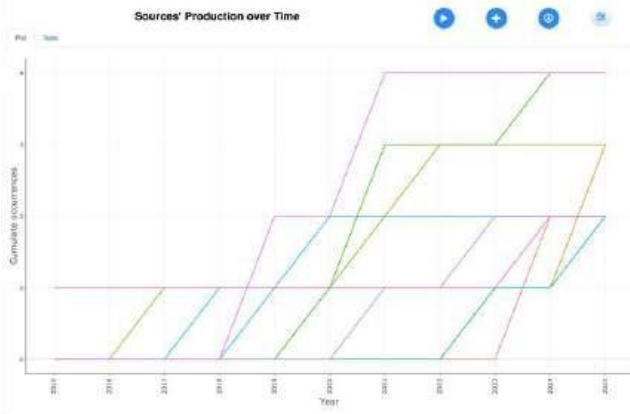
### 3. Co-occurrence Network





status as a serious area of inquiry rather than a marginal topic.

### 6. Sources' Production over Time



The analysis of source production over time further reinforces the stability of the field’s theoretical foundations. While the frequency of “memes” increases sharply, foundational terms such as “popular culture” show a steady and consistent presence throughout the decade.

This pattern indicates that meme research does not abandon classical cultural frameworks in favor of purely platform-driven analysis. Instead, scholars continue to draw on established popular culture theories to interpret new digital phenomena. As a result, meme studies demonstrate both adaptability to emerging platforms and continuity with long-standing cultural studies traditions.

### 7. Most Relevant Affiliations

At the institutional level, the analysis identifies Brigham Young University and Curtin University as the most productive affiliations, each contributing three articles. This finding highlights the role of established research institutions in shaping the direction of meme scholarship.

The presence of leading institutions from the United States and Australia also underscores the geographically distributed nature of expertise in this field. Meme research is not confined to a single national context but emerges from multiple academic centers that contribute diverse perspectives and methodological approaches.

### 8. Trend Topics

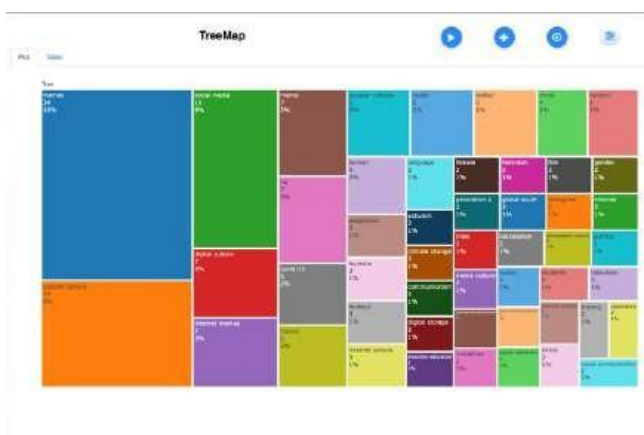
Topic	Frequency	Year (201)	Year (Median)	Year (205)
popular culture	8	2019	2020	2029
digital media	8	2020	2021	2029
internet	8	2020	2021	2029
popular culture	18	2020	2022	2029
internet	8	2020	2022	2029
internet	24	2020	2022	2029
social media	18	2020	2022	2029
digital culture	7	2024	2025	2029
digital culture	7	2024	2025	2029
internet	8	2020	2026	2029

Trend topic analysis reveals how research interests evolve as the field matures. Keywords such as “digital culture” and “Reddit” show a median trend year of 2025, indicating a recent shift toward platform-specific and community-oriented studies.

This trend suggests a movement away from generalized analyses of social media platforms, such as Twitter, toward more nuanced examinations of digital subcultures. Platforms like Reddit, characterized by community-based interaction and participatory norms, provide fertile ground for understanding how memes circulate, gain meaning, and reinforce group identities within specific online environments.



9. TreeMap



The TreeMap analysis provides a proportional overview of thematic priorities within the dataset. “Memes” account for 16% of the keyword share, followed by “popular culture” (9%) and “social media” (8%). This distribution confirms that memes function as the central analytical object of the field.

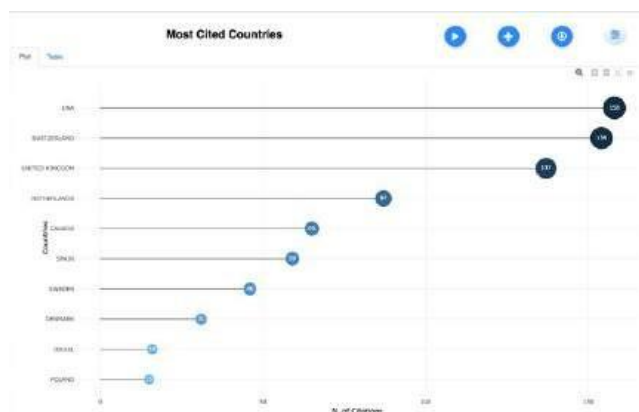
At the same time, the strong presence of “popular culture” and “social media” indicates that memes are consistently contextualized within broader cultural and technological frameworks. Rather than being examined in isolation, memes are

understood as cultural texts shaped by platform environments and popular discourse.

10. Most Cited Countries

Finally, the analysis of country-specific citations reveals that the United States (158 citations), Switzerland (154), and the United Kingdom (137) are the most influential contributors to meme research. These findings indicate that Western academic institutions continue to dominate the theoretical development and global visibility of meme studies.

While meme culture itself is globally distributed, the concentration of citations in Western countries suggests an imbalance in knowledge production. This highlights the need for future research to incorporate perspectives from non- Western contexts, where memes may function differently due to distinct cultural, political, and linguistic conditions.



CONCLUSION

This study addresses its research objective by demonstrating that memes have become an essential form of popular communication within contemporary digital culture. Through a systematic bibliometric review of studies published between 2015 and 2025, the findings show that memes function not merely as

entertainment, but as cultural artifacts that carry social meanings, reflect collective identities, and participate in the construction of public discourse on social media. The study highlights the strong connection between memes, popular culture, and participatory media practices, where users actively create and circulate content. Overall, this research confirms that the study of memes has developed into an important multidisciplinary field within communication and cultural studies, underscoring the significance of memes in understanding digital interaction and cultural expression in the modern media environment.

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