

AI, Social Commerce, and Engagement: Internet Memes in the Ecommerce 5.0 Ecosystem

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Abstract: Internet memes have emerged as strategic communicative assets within the emerging E-commerce 5.0 paradigm, where AI-driven personalization, big data analytics, and AI converge to create human-centric, hyper-personalized digital marketplaces. Positioned at the intersection of participatory culture and digital marketing, meme marketing leverages humor, relatability, and culturally situated symbolism to enhance brand awareness, perceived authenticity, and emotional connection, particularly among Generation Z and Millennial consumers who natively use memes as a primary mode of online expression. By exploiting virality and network effects across social platforms, memes generate disproportionately high levels of organic reach and engagement, often outperforming traditional branded content in driving brand recall and facilitating favorable attitudes that translate into purchase intention and, potentially, loyalty. Within E-commerce 5.0 ecosystems, meme-based content can be algorithmically targeted and optimized using AI and big data, integrated seamlessly into social commerce journeys, and amplified via user-generated content that further strengthens social proof and community co-creation around brands. This study aims to examine how Internet Memes can drive E-commerce, investigating its potential in E-commerce 5.0 context. It also outlines peculiar characteristics of e-commerce 5.0 era, highlighting the role Internet Memes play and its impact on consumer and business outcomes. Furthermore, this study proposes Integrative Framework explaining how internet memes function as strategic Communication asset within the human-centric, AI-driven, community-focused ecosystem of E-commerce 5.0. However, their effectiveness is contingent on cultural fluency, strategic alignment with brand identity, product involvement level, and demographic characteristics, as poorly calibrated or inauthentic meme usage can undermine engagement and credibility, indicating the need for nuanced, context-sensitive deployment and continued empirical investigation.

Keywords: Internet Meme, E-Commerce 5.0, meme marketing, Digital culture, AI- driven personalization, Industry 5.0, Society 5.0

I. INTRODUCTION

E-Commerce 5.0 emerges within the broader context of Society 5.0 and Industry 5.0, representing a fundamental shift in how digital commerce operates by integrating advanced technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), Internet of Things (IoT), Big Data Analytics, Augmented Reality (AR), and blockchain technology to create hyper-personalized, human-centered shopping experiences. Unlike traditional e-commerce, E-Commerce 5.0 prioritizes personalization at scale, sustainability, ethical AI practices, and real-time consumer engagement through data-driven insights. This framework shifts from product-centric to consumer-centric models, emphasizing authentic interactions and community-building rather than transactional relationships. Thus, E-commerce 5.0 represents the next stage of digital commerce where human-centricity, hyper-personalization, emotional engagement, community co-creation, and AI-driven experience design dominate. (Bakator et al., 2024; Bernovskis et al., 2024)

Within this paradigm, internet memes emerge as a strategic cultural asset—not merely humorous content, but a high-velocity communication mechanism that shapes consumer behavior, brand identity, and engagement logic in digital

marketplaces. Meme marketing—the strategic use of internet memes in brand promotion and digital marketing campaigns—has emerged as an essential communication tool that bridges the gap between traditional advertising and the authentic, participatory culture that E-Commerce 5.0 demands. (Ali et al., 2025a). Positioned at the intersection of participatory culture and digital marketing, meme marketing leverages humor, relatability, and culturally situated symbolism to enhance brand awareness, perceived authenticity, and emotional connection, particularly among Generation Z and Millennial consumers who natively use memes as a primary mode of online expression. By exploiting virality and network effects across social platforms, memes generate disproportionately high levels of organic reach and engagement, often outperforming traditional branded content in driving brand recall and facilitating favorable attitudes that translate into purchase intention and, potentially, loyalty. Within E-commerce 5.0 ecosystems, meme-based content can be algorithmically targeted and optimized using AI and big data, integrated seamlessly into social commerce journeys, and amplified via user-generated content that further strengthens social proof and community co-creation around brands. This study examines how Internet Memes can drive E-commerce, investigating its potential in E-commerce 5.0 context. It also outlines peculiar characteristics of e-commerce 5.0 era, highlighting the role Internet Memes play and its impact on consumer and business outcomes. Furthermore, this study proposes Integrative Framework explaining how internet memes function as strategic Communication asset within the human-centric, AI-driven, community-focused ecosystem of E-commerce 5.0.

II. CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

2.1 Internet Memes in Digital Marketing Contexts

Internet memes are culturally relevant, quickly replicable units of digital information that propagate across social media platforms through rapid modification, sharing, and adaptation. In marketing contexts, memes are defined as humorous, relatable, and culturally relevant images, videos, or text used to promote brands, products, or services. The critical distinction between traditional viral marketing and meme marketing lies in participatory engagement; while viral marketing relies on passive content consumption and sharing, meme marketing actively encourages community involvement in content creation and adaptation. (Arie Bowo et al., 2024)

Key characteristics that distinguish effective memes in e-commerce contexts include fidelity, fecundity (ability to replicate), longevity, relevance to target audiences, ease of replication, uniqueness, and humor (Shifman, 2013). Research on meme virality identifies composition, subjects, and target audience as dimensional factors affecting whether memes achieve high social media dissemination. Meme formats have evolved significantly from static captioned images to GIF videos and short-form vertical content, reflecting adaptation to platform affordances and generational preferences. (Analytics, 2025; Arie Bowo et al., 2024; Shifman, 2013)

2.2 Engagement Mechanisms and Consumer Psychology

Emotional Connection and Relatability

The fundamental psychological mechanism underlying meme marketing effectiveness is its capacity to create instant emotional resonance through humor and cultural relatability (Sewak et al., 2025a). Research demonstrates that consumers perceive meme-based posts as significantly more humorous than non-meme posts, leading to increased engagement metrics including likes, shares, and comments. This emotional connection is particularly pronounced among Generation Z and Millennial consumers, for whom memes represent a primary form of entertainment—preferring memes as entertainment over music albums, trending video games, and films (Sewak et al., 2025a; Tsai & Hsiao, 2025a). The power of memes in e-commerce contexts stems from their ability to make brands appear more human, approachable, and culturally aware, rather than corporate and distant. When audiences encounter brand-created or brand-adapted memes that reflect their lived experiences, values, and in-group jokes, this creates a sense of community and belonging rather than mere consumption.

Virality and Network Effects

Meme marketing operates through distinct viral dynamics that differ fundamentally from traditional advertising. Research identifies virality and digital network effects as primary drivers of consumer engagement with meme

marketing. Memes achieve approximately 10 times wider reach and 60% higher organic engagement compared to polished static graphics, with campaigns built around memes demonstrating roughly 14% higher click-through rates than standard social advertisements or email blasts (Analytics, 2025). The comparative effectiveness is striking: while typical engagement rates for marketing images on Facebook and Instagram average approximately 5%, memes achieve nearly tenfold audience reach with organic engagement rates of 60%. This viral amplification occurs because memes are inherently shareable by design—their humor, brevity, and cultural relevance make users naturally inclined to disseminate them within their social networks, creating exponential reach without additional advertising expenditure.(Analytics, 2025; M. Kim & Kim, 2025)

Brand Authenticity and Consumer Self-Expansion

The Value-Attitude-Behavior (VAB) Model provides theoretical grounding for understanding how meme marketing influences consumer purchase intentions. Research demonstrates that meme marketing facilitates consumer self-expansion—the process by which individuals extend their senses of self through association with brands—by promoting genuine brand attitudes. When brands use authentic, culturally relevant memes aligned with their brand identity and audience values, consumers perceive greater brand authenticity and credibility (Ali et al., 2025b). Importantly, misaligned meme usage, particularly in serious cause-related campaigns, results in decreased consumer engagement. This suggests that effective meme marketing requires strategic alignment between meme tone, brand personality, and campaign objectives.

2.3 Impact on Consumer Behavior and E-Commerce 5.0 Adoption

Purchase Intention and Brand Loyalty

Empirical research using Media Richness Theory (MRT) reveals significant positive relationships between meme marketing and consumer purchase intention. Studies demonstrate that meme marketing has a direct and significant positive impact on consumer purchase intentions and on consumer engagement. The DEMATEL-DANP (Decision Making Trial and Evaluation Laboratory - Analytic Network Process) methodology identifies immediate feedback, creative cues, and personal focus as key mediating factors, while linguistic variety negatively impacts purchase intention (Rathi & Jain, 2023; Tsai & Hsiao, 2025b). Consumer engagement, in turn, significantly influences purchase intention through both cognitive and affective pathways. The pathway from meme exposure to purchase decision operates through brand recall and recognition enhancement, with memes proving particularly effective at building lasting brand memory compared to conventional advertising. (Fauziah et al., 2018)

Generation-Specific Effectiveness

Generational analysis reveals differentiated effectiveness across demographic cohorts. Research examining Generation Z, Millennials, and Generation X demonstrates that memes significantly boost engagement—especially among Gen Z and Millennials—across dimensions of brand recall, interest, followership, and purchase intent. For e-commerce platforms specifically targeting younger demographics, meme marketing represents a culturally congruent, cost-efficient strategy with demonstrated ROI advantages (Zaidi, 2025). The effectiveness for Gen Z emerges from their native fluency with meme culture as a communication format. Memes provide satisfaction on entertainment, social interaction, and information dimensions, aligning with Generation Z's preferences for authentic, participatory digital experiences rather than top-down brand messaging.

2.4 Integration with E-Commerce 5.0 Technologies

Personalization and Data-Driven Meme Distribution

E-Commerce 5.0's emphasis on AI and big data analytics enables sophisticated personalization of meme marketing strategies. Rather than broadcasting identical meme content to all audiences, E-Commerce 5.0 platforms can leverage machine learning to identify meme formats, cultural references, and humor styles most resonant with specific consumer segments based on behavioral data, demographics, and psychographic profiles. This represents a shift from mass meme marketing to hyper-personalized, segmented meme campaigns tailored to micro-audiences (Pande et al., 2025). IoT

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integration enables real-time monitoring of meme performance across digital touchpoints, allowing dynamic optimization of content format, distribution timing, and platform selection based on engagement metrics. Brands can rapidly identify which meme variants achieve highest engagement within specific audience segments and amplify those variants through programmatic distribution.

Social Commerce Integration

E-Commerce 5.0 platforms increasingly integrate social commerce features—shoppable posts, live shopping events, in-app purchasing—directly into social media ecosystems where meme content thrives. This integration creates seamless pathways from meme discovery to purchase completion without requiring users to navigate away from entertainment contexts. The presence of user-generated content (UGC) memes, including customer testimonials and product experiences formatted as memes, provides social proof that enhances purchase confidence (User-Generated Content (UGC), 2024). Research indicates that majority consumers identify user-generated content as significantly influencing purchase decisions, finding it 9.8 times more impactful than influencer content. When customers create memes depicting their authentic experiences with products, these function as highly credible endorsements within E-Commerce 5.0 platforms.

Omnichannel Distribution Strategies

E-Commerce 5.0's omnichannel architecture enables strategic amplification of meme content across Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, X (formerly Twitter), YouTube, and Pinterest, each with platform-specific adaptations. The flexibility to adapt meme formats across platforms—vertical short-form videos for TikTok, static images for Twitter, carousel formats for Instagram—maximizes reach while maintaining cultural resonance (J. Kim & Kim, 2025). Platform-specific algorithmic environments reward meme content differently. Instagram's Reels algorithm prioritizes short, entertaining visual content; TikTok's algorithm amplifies participatory content and UGC; Twitter/X rewards witty, text-based humor.

Understanding these platform-specific dynamics enables e-commerce brands to strategically distribute variants of meme campaigns aligned with each platform's content ecology.

2.5 Strategic Implementation Frameworks for E-Commerce 5.0

Brand Positioning and Authenticity

Effective meme marketing within E-Commerce 5.0 requires strategic alignment between meme content, brand identity, and audience expectations. Research emphasizes that authenticity and strategic alignment of meme content with brand identity and audience values constitute critical success factors. Brands attempting to adopt memes without cultural fluency or forcing meme usage in contexts incongruent with brand personality risk diminished engagement and brand damage (J. Kim & Kim, 2025; Sewak et al., 2025b). Successful examples demonstrate brands inhabiting distinctive meme personas—Netflix's pop culture satire, Duolingo's absurdist humor, Ryanair's irreverent trolling, and Wendy's surreal roasting—all maintain consistent brand voices while leveraging meme formats. These brands achieve what marketing theorists term "cultural capital accrual," where consistent use of meme formats establishes brands as participants in authentic digital culture rather than corporate outsiders attempting to co-opt youth communication (Analytics, 2025).

Content Curation and Trend Participation

Given meme culture's rapidly evolving nature, E-Commerce 5.0 strategies require systematic monitoring of trending meme formats, cultural moments, and platform-specific virality patterns. The temporal window for meme relevance is compressed—memes that generate engagement today risk appearing dated within weeks. Platforms such as Know Your Meme, Reddit trending subreddits, and TikTok discovery sections serve as early indicators of emerging meme trends (Analytics, 2025; Nguyen et al., 2024). Brands must balance rapid response to trending formats with maintaining strategic consistency. The most successful meme marketing campaigns demonstrate what researchers term "trend participation," where brands adapt trending meme formats to reflect brand-specific narratives rather than generic trend

adoption. This requires dedicated social media teams with cultural fluency, rapid decision-making authority, and agile content production capabilities.

User-Generated Content and Community Co-Creation

E-Commerce 5.0 emphasizes participatory culture and community-driven content creation. Rather than brands exclusively creating meme content, advanced strategies encourage customers to generate memes featuring products, services, or brand personalities. Examples include Crocs's TikTok challenge involving shaving-foam hacks, which evolved into organic user-generated trend participation, and Balenciaga's "trash bag" handbag campaign, where user mockery transformed through community participation into viral brand advocacy (Analytics, 2025; J. Kim & Kim, 2025). Community co-creation generates multiple benefits: reduced content production costs, enhanced authenticity perception, amplified reach through customer networks, and explicit evidence of customer-brand loyalty. Brands implementing UGC meme campaigns report substantially higher engagement and conversion rates compared to brand-created content alone (J. Kim & Kim, 2025).

III. DEVELOPING THE INTEGRATIVE FRAMEWORK

3.1 Internet Meme functions and their Relevance for E-Commerce 5.0

3.1.1. Memes as Hyper-Personalized Emotional Touchpoints

E-commerce 5.0 emphasizes empathy, emotional resonance, and human-centered design. Memes serve this by:

- Creating instant emotional connection (humor, relatability, nostalgia).
- Humanizing brands in crowded digital environments.
- Enabling micro-targeting through culturally contextual content.

Memes make consumers feel seen, because they speak the language of specific subcultures.(Shifman, 2013)

3.1.2. Memes as High-Velocity Social Currency and Virality Drivers

Memes travel faster than traditional marketing messages. In E-commerce 5.0:

- They function as viral accelerators in AI-driven recommendation systems.
- Algorithms reward meme formats with high engagement, boosting brand visibility at low cost.
- Memes enable rapid peer-to-peer diffusion, leveraging digital communities as amplifiers.

This supports the 5.0 shift toward community-empowered commerce ecosystems.(Kietzmann et al., 2018)

3.1.3. Memes as Tools for Co-Creation and Participatory Branding

E-commerce 5.0 encourages consumer involvement in shaping brand narratives. Memes enable:

- User-generated content (UGC) where customers remix or reinterpret brand messages.
- Collaborative meaning-making between consumers and brands.
- Growth of shared —inside jokes || that strengthen brand communities.

Brands move from being message senders to culture participants.(Berger & Milkman, 2012; Shifman, 2013)

3.1.4. Memes as Social Proof and Trust Builders

Consumers in E-commerce 5.0 rely on community cues more than corporate statements. Memes reinforce trust by:

- Reflecting authentic, peer-mediated communication.
- Reducing psychological distance between brands and consumers.
- Acting as informal —reviews || that endorse or critique products humorously.

Memes create a low-pressure persuasion environment, increasing purchase willingness.(Filieri, 2016; Milner R.M. & Wolff P., 2023; Shifman, 2013)

3.1.5. Memes as AI-Optimized Micro-Content for Engagement

With AI, E-commerce 5.0 enables:

- Automated generation of context-specific memes.
- Behavioral tracking to personalize meme formats to user moods or interests.
- Real-time adaptation of memes in chatbots, recommendation engines, and dynamic ads.

Memes become adaptive marketing entities, not static images.(Kietzmann et al., 2018)

3.1.6. Memes as Catalysts for Social Commerce (S-Commerce)

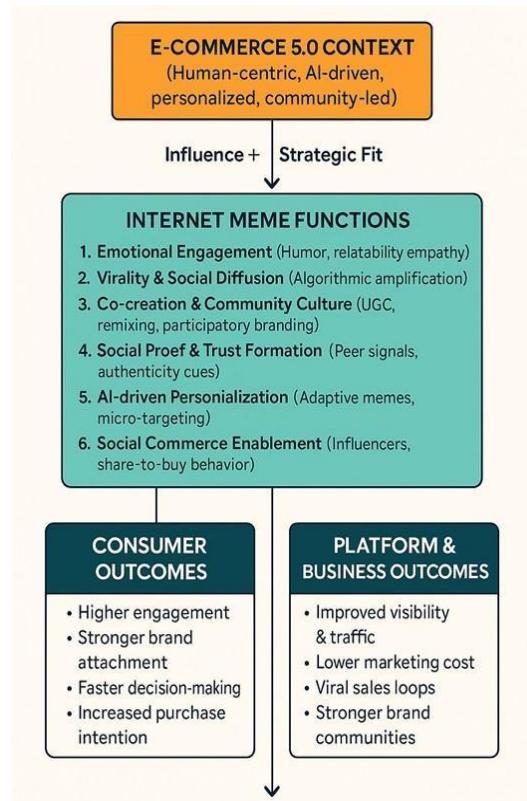
Memes seamlessly blend entertainment and shopping. Their role in S-commerce includes:

- Being used in influencer content to spark conversation and trend waves.
- Anchoring interactive formats (Reels, TikTok, Stories) that drive impulse buying.
- Fueling meme-based product pages, reviews, and livestream commerce.

Memes reduce friction between browsing → laughing → sharing → buying (Abidin, 2016; Zulli & Zulli, 2022).

Function	Role of Memes	Contribution to E-Commerce 5.0
Emotional Connection	Humor, relatability	Human-centricity
Virality	Rapid cultural diffusion	Community-driven growth
Co-Creation	UGC, participatory branding	Consumer empowerment
Trust	Social proof, authenticity	Psychological comfort
AI Integration	Personalized meme generation	Hyper-personalization
Social Commerce	Engagement → conversation → purchase	Entertainment-driven shopping

3.2 Conceptual Model: “How Internet Memes Drive E-Commerce 5.0”



IV. LIMITATIONS AND CONTEXTUAL CONSIDERATIONS

While meme marketing demonstrates significant effectiveness in E-Commerce 5.0 contexts, research identifies important boundary conditions. Serious, cause-related campaigns experience diminished engagement when utilizing meme formats, suggesting meme marketing functions optimally for entertainment, convenience, and lifestyle products rather than high-involvement, functionally-driven purchases or social cause messaging (Sewak et al., 2025b). Product involvement levels moderate meme marketing effectiveness. The Elaboration Likelihood Model suggests that peripheral cues like humor have stronger effects on low-involvement products than high-involvement products requiring substantial consumer cognitive processing. Consequently, meme marketing proves particularly effective for quick commerce and impulse purchases while requiring integration with educational, functional product information for higher-involvement categories (Pilavcioglu et al., 2023). Additionally, generational preferences vary. While meme marketing proves highly effective for Gen Z and Millennials, effectiveness diminishes for Generation X and older consumers with lower cultural fluency in meme formats. Sophisticated E-Commerce 5.0 segmentation enables demographic-specific content strategies rather than assuming universal meme effectiveness.(Zaidi, 2025)

V. RESEARCH GAPS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Despite extensive contemporary research, significant gaps remain. Longitudinal studies tracking meme marketing's sustained impact on brand loyalty beyond immediate engagement are limited. Cross-cultural comparative research examining how meme effectiveness varies across geographic and cultural contexts remains sparse, despite emerging markets like India and Southeast Asia demonstrating sophisticated meme marketing adoption (J. Kim & Kim, 2025; Zahra & Prathisara, 2025; Zaidi, 2025). The intersection of ethical considerations in meme marketing—particularly regarding exploitative humor, cultural appropriation, and offensive content—requires further scholarly attention. As E-Commerce 5.0 platforms expand globally, understanding how meme content norms vary across cultural contexts becomes increasingly critical. (Sewak et al., 2025b).

The role of emerging technologies such as generative AI in meme creation, blockchain-based authenticity verification for user-generated memes, and metaverse-based meme-driven shopping experiences represents fertile research territory as e-commerce platforms evolve toward Web 3.0 architectures. Internet memes demonstrate significant potential as engagement drivers and purchase intention influencers in the Indian digital marketing context, but their specific role within E-Commerce 5.0 frameworks—including integration with AI personalization, omnichannel strategies, and advanced analytics—remains unexamined in the current literature. None of the studies examined advanced e-commerce features such as AI personalization, omnichannel strategies, advanced analytics, or IoT integration. Additionally, business performance metrics including sales, ROI, and customer acquisition costs were not reported , and India-specific factors such as language considerations and regional variations remain unexplored . While the existing literature establishes memes as effective engagement and purchase intention drivers in Indian digital marketing contexts, their specific role within E-Commerce 5.0 frameworks requires dedicated investigation.

VI. CONCLUSION

E-Commerce 5.0 marks a shift from simply "buying things online" to Emotional Commerce. It is characterized by the convergence of AI, blockchain, and highly personalized, human- centric experiences. In this era, transactions are driven less by utility and more by community, belonging, and shared values. Internet memes—once dismissed as trivial internet junk—have evolved into the cultural currency of this new landscape. They are the primary language used to build the emotional bridges required in E-Commerce 5.0.

Internet memes have transitioned from peripheral internet culture to strategically central marketing tools within E-Commerce 5.0 ecosystems. Their capacity to generate authentic emotional engagement, achieve exponential organic reach, facilitate community co-creation, and integrate seamlessly with hyper-personalized, data-driven e-commerce platforms makes them indispensable for digital marketing success. The convergence of meme culture's communicative efficiency with E-Commerce 5.0's technological infrastructure- particularly AI-driven personalization, social commerce integration, and omnichannel distribution- enables unprecedented consumer engagement opportunities.

For researchers examining digital marketing, consumer behavior, and e-commerce evolution, memes represent a distinctive phenomenon demanding systematic investigation through quantitative engagement analysis, qualitative cultural interpretation, and longitudinal impact assessment. For practitioners implementing E-Commerce 5.0 strategies, authentic meme marketing—grounded in cultural fluency, strategic brand alignment, and community participation—constitutes a cost-effective, high-impact engagement mechanism commanding organizational attention and resource allocation. In E-Commerce 5.0, memes are not just "funny pictures." They are a strategic interface. They function as the connective tissue between cold AI algorithms and warm human emotion, transforming passive buyers into active, emotionally invested community members.

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