MEMES RELATED TO COVID-19 ON SOCIAL MEDIA: A STUDY

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ABSTRACT

COVID-19 is the talk of the town presently in the whole world and the world is busy to deal with it so they can break the chain of spreading this disease amongst its citizens. For the safety of the people, most of the countries of the globe declared this as the state of emergency and announced the complete lockdown. Now, most of the population of the world is in quarantine and the best option available for them is the internet on which they could spend time interacting with people or surf it for gathering information on current affairs. Many memes are being made on COVID-19 and spread on various sites like Facebook, Instagram, Youtube etc. People are coming across the content made upon the present situation. Now the question arises, how many people actually like and share these memes further? This study is based on the aspect which focuses on social platform(s) most popular for memes at present. Also the researcher will study, how many users like and share these memes. The methodology used for the present study will be google survey as no other methodology is possible to adopt. The sample selected for the study will be the population of Tricity i.e Chandigarh, Mohali and Panchkula.

Key Words: COVID- 19, Coronavirus, Social Networking, Sites, Memes

I. INTRODUCTION

The world is currently facing an epidemic in the form of Coronavirus commonly known as COVID-19. This virus was first reported by China in the last week of December when its 41 citizens got hospitalised in Wuhan which is the capital of province of Hubei. Reportedly this virus started from the local market of Wuhan and then spread rapidly to the rest of the world. According to most of the most of the reports available on the internet, this disease first developed in bats and got passed on to human beings due to its consumption. Whatever the reason may be, the bitter truth is, this infection has taken more than one lakh lives till now and the number is still counting. The symptoms of the virus are just like the common flu, dry cough, fever, tiredness; difficulty in breathing which starts reflecting between 2 to 14 days after a person gets infected. This disease becomes difficult to diagnose. COVID-19 spreads through droplets from one person another due to sneezing, coughing, touching or human to human contacts. It also gets spread through fomites which are things including electronic devices, cardboard boxes and clothes etc around us. That is how this infection is spreading so fast. The only way which has been discovered until now to stop its shift is isolation. The contaminated persons must keep them self quarantine from others until the time of their recovery. There is a countless number of people who got infected due to Coronavirus around the world

and treating it as the biggest threat of the century, several governments called for a complete lockdown. This means an order for all of its citizens to quarantine themselves at home. Only people related to essential services are allowed to work during this crisis and it's important also as otherwise, it would be next to impossible to break the chain of infection. At this crucial time, India also called for the lockdown since March 24, 2020, so most of the people are staying home as responsible citizens. This was a very important and necessary step that the Indian government took for the safety of its citizen. It is not easy to fit into this kind of lifestyle where going out is completely banned but treating it as a duty towards country people are doing their best. To spend the time in quarantine people are using more mediums of communication like the internet, TV and radio.

A lot of individuals pass time on their mobile phone nowadays, especially; on the internet using social networking sites like Facebook, Whatsapp, youtube, Instagram and Twitter etc.. Basically, social networking sites are the platform for common people which they access to connect with other individuals through the medium of the internet. Since there is a lockdown in the world and social distancing is being maintained, most of the people are spending their time in online social interactions. They are posting photographs of quarantine or old memories, watching movies, series or random clips, chatting, video calling or just surfing on social sites and coming across with various memes.

Meme is defined as an idea, video, image or phrase that spreads rapidly or becomes viral on the internet. Memes are for humour, sarcasm, some direct/ indirect messages to communicate and pass on a specific message quickly. The message is generally very short in the form of few lines or few seconds and it directly hits the minds of its viewers. The person who creates this content is popularly known as Memer. Since the idea which is based on present or which has a personal element within has more potential to get viral, Memers prefer to make such memes which are on the latest trends, lists or happenings. Such content could be easily and immediately understood by common people and is likely made and distributed. During this lockdown, there are a lot of videos, images or phrases which are circulating on many social networking sites, based on quarantine, present situation and COVID- 19.

So in this study, the researcher will focus on COVID-19 memes which are circulating on social networking platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and other popular social sites. For the present study, the survey methodology will be followed. Thesurvey will be carried out with the sample population of tricity include the Tricity that is Chandigarh, Mohali and Panchkula.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Archana Kumari and Jyotsna Verma (2015) in the study "Impact of Social Networking Sites on Social Interaction – A Study of College Students" explained that use of social networking platforms makes students more confident. The students are using these social networking sites to interact

not only with friends but also they like to use social sites to connect with their parents and teachers. The use of this platform is not only just communication but it is also being used as a source of information. Moreover, with the increasing trend of using smart phones among youth popularity of social networking sites is also increased.

Suraj Sharma and Sunita Godiyal (2016) in the research paper "A Study on the Social Networking Sites Usage by Undergraduate Students" studied the students' pattern of using social networking sites. It explained that most of the undergraduate students spend time on social networking platforms. Males are using Facebook the most while females are using WhatsApp. It was also found that students used their mobiles and laptops to access social networks. The males accessed the social networking platforms for entertainment like to stay in touch with their friends while females use these platforms to get education as. It was also stressed that females were more dedicated to gain knowledge to prepare for competitive exams.

Dr. Anushka Kulkarni (2017) "Internet meme and Political Discourse: A study on the impact of internet meme as a tool in communicating political satire" focussed that Memes are considered as humour or sarcastic way to comment on a person, group or ideology. The audience knew this concept very well so they were not influenced by these memes. It was also been found that the internet has been used as a tool of communication and political discourse yet it does not influence voting behaviour. They were more influenced by traditional media like newspapers or television for their voting decision.

Heidi E. Huntington (2017) in research study "The Affect And Effect of Internet Memes: Assessing Perceptions and Influence of Online User-Generated Political Discourse as Media" states that political memes rise aversion in comparison to non- political memes. This is because non-political memes are mere jokes but there is a reason behind political memes. These political memes can persuade viewers' perception.

In the study "A Quantitative Study: The Attitudes of Grade 12 Steam Students on Memes With Sensitive Content" conducted by Jomari L. Lambojon, Clive Ortega , Ofer Ravid and Carlos Bautista, it was found that the content provided in these memes is very sensitive, offensive and inappropriate. All the respondent in this study were youth of 12th Class. Some of the respondents under study were of the opinion that memes with sensitive content are only for entertainment. According to the data collected in this research, the respondents had an average awareness about the sensitive content in the form of memes available on internet. Thus, it is a shared responsibility of everyone to promote a safe and healthy community for the welfare of other people on the internet

Objectives of the study:

➢   To determine the most popular social networking website used by the people of Tricity.
➢   To find out the awareness about COVID 19 in Tricity.

> ➤ To study the popularity of memes with the social networking users in Tricity.

III. METHODOLOGY

For this research paper survey method is used in which 112 responses are taken as sample from tricity that includes Chandigarh, Mohali and Panchkula.

IV. DATA ANALYSIS

Memes are usually shared to convey, meaning, theme, idea from person to person. These memes are presented sarcastically and dramatically manner. The present study is conducted to know the perception of people towards the memes. For this purpose, a sample of 112 people was selected from Tricity i.e.Chandigarh, Mohali and Panchkula. The data seeking the views about memes from the sampled subjects have been collected with the help of Google survey. The representation of the data collected is as follow.

Number of respondents mentioned their names

Table 1:

Number of Respondent

- ■ Mentioned Their Names
- ■ Didn't Mentioned Names
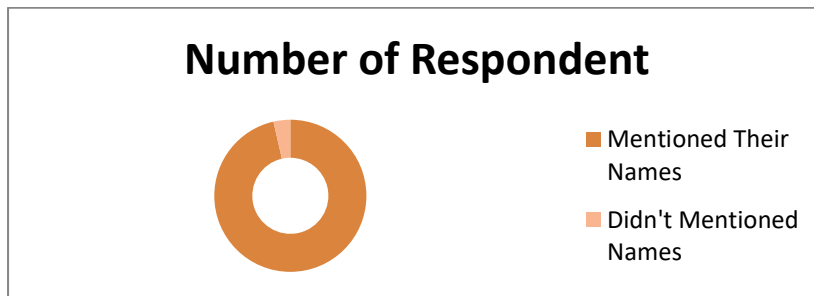
According to the above table, 108 people revealed their names and only 4 preferred to remain anonymous.

Age wise distribution of Subjects

Table 2

Age
107 responses
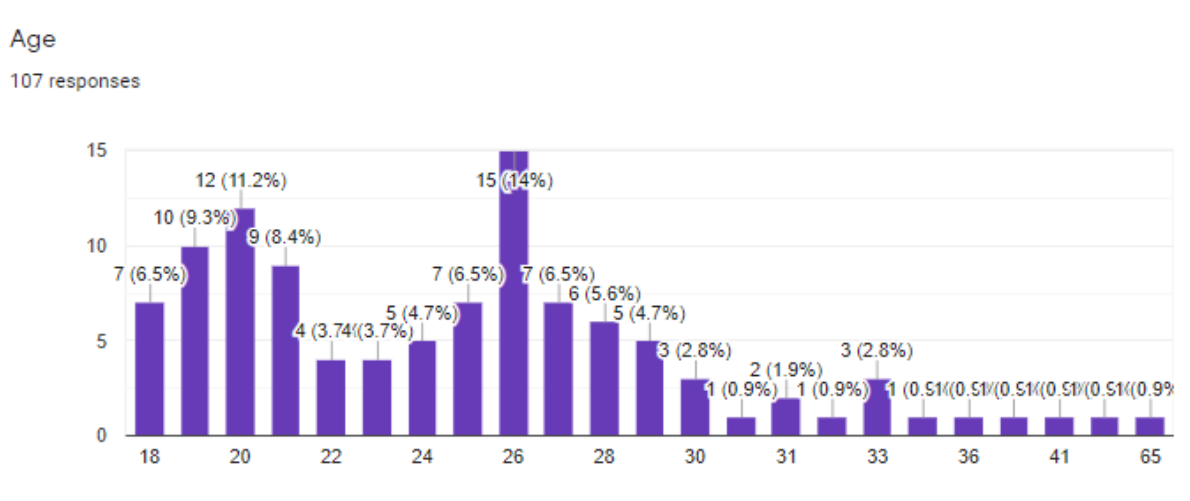
The collected data shows that the maximum response was collected by the people aged 26 years. They responded all the questions given in the survey form while the respondents of aged 20 years have replied 12 questions out of 15.

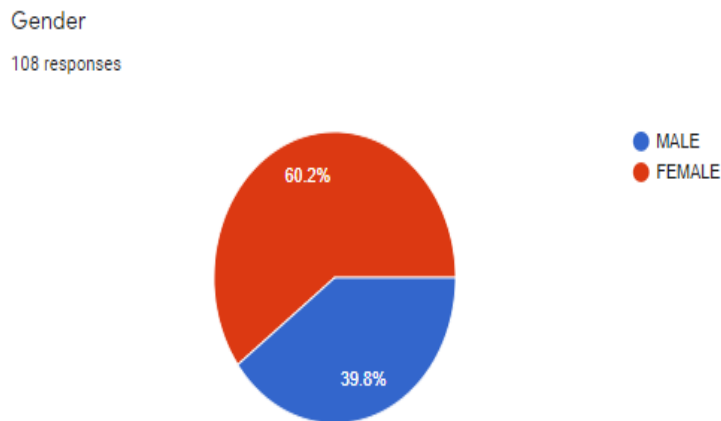**Gender wise distribution of Subjects**

Table 3

Gender

108 responses

60.2%

39.8%

- MALE
- FEMALE

Table 3 pie chart represents, out of a total of 108 respondents 60.2% were female and 39.8% were male. That means females are more interested in memes related to COVID-19 on social networking sites in comparison to males.

Familiarity with the term COVID-19

Table 4

Are you familiar with the term COVID-19 ?

108 responses

96.3%

- YES
- NO
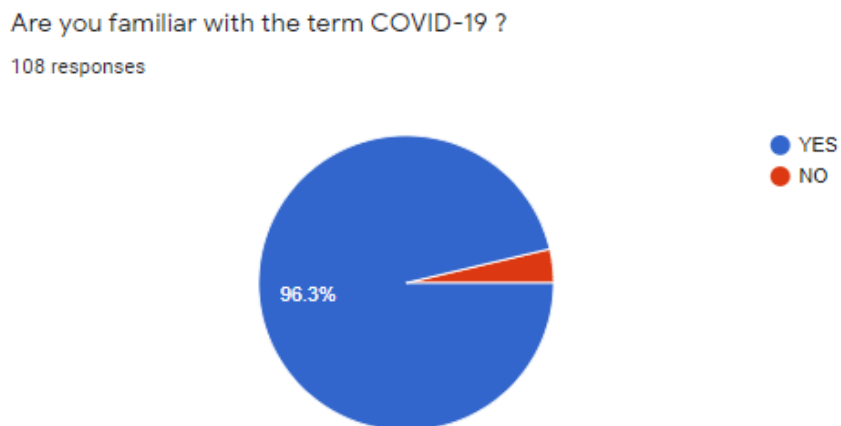
The above table 4 shows that 96% respondents were aware of COVID-19, as WHO declared its an epidemic in the month of March and there is a complete lockdown in the country from 25th March, 2020. All news channels, newspapers and other mediums of communication are providing a lot of information related to COVID-19. It is very shocking that 3.7% still

are unaware about the term. It is also possible they knew it with the name of Corona virus.

Active/ Passive on Social Networking Platforms

Table 5

Are you active on social networking platforms?

108 responses

97.2%

● YES
● NO
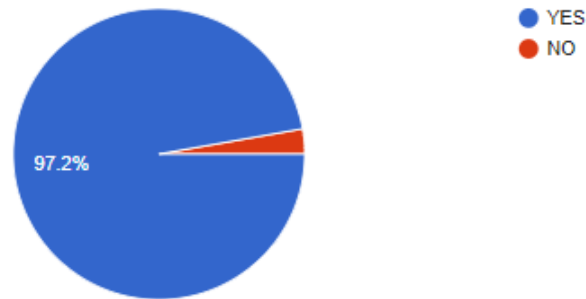
According to Table 5, Out of the 108 respondents, 97.2% were active on social networking sites. This depicts that nowadays people are using social networking platforms to get the information as well as entertainment. These platforms can be easily accessed on mobile phones. According to The report 'Digital India - Technology to Transform a Connection Nation' India is the largest and fastest growing markets for digital consumers, with 560 million internet subscribers in 2018, second only to China.

Social platform used by people

Table 6

Which social platform you use the most?

108 responses

29.6%

52.8%   15.7%

● Facebook
● YouTube
● Instagram
● WhatsApp
● Twitter
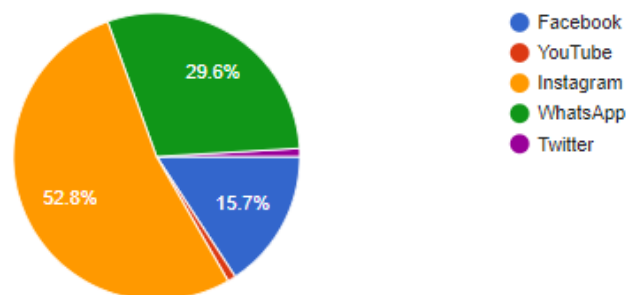
According to the pie chart, more than half of the respondents (53%) are active on Instagram while 30% preferred to use WhatsApp as social platform. Facebook is used by only 15.7%. only a few respondents follow YouTube and Twitter. This shows that Instagram is the most famous among respondents to connect with others and also to explore content in the form of visuals, videos or audios.

Memes on social platform

Table 7

Have you noticed memes on a social platform?

108 responses
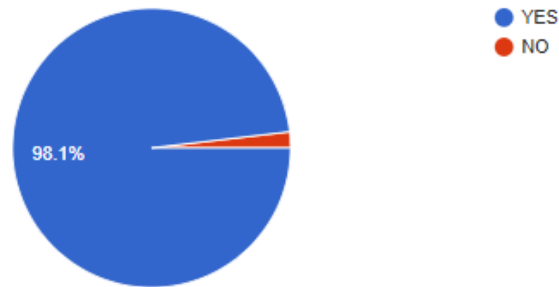
In table 7 it is quite clearly visible that 98.1% social site users notice memes on social networking sites like on Instagram, WhatsApp, Facebook and others. This shows people are very much interested in the memes and the content presented in these memes. These memes are full of humour and sarcasm. There is some indirect or direct message hidden through which they can connect.

Number Of people noticed memes on COVID-19

Table 8

Since lockdown, have u noticed that memes are presented more on COVID -19 in comparison to others?

108 responses
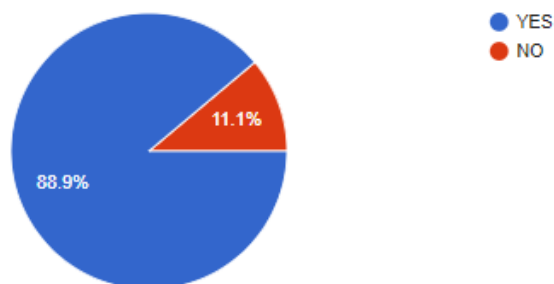
 Table no 8 shows that more memes on COVID 19 were noticed by social platform users in comparison to other memes since lockdown. 88.9% users say that they noticed more memes on COVID- 19. The reason behind the increasing number of memes is that these are created on current issue or happening which impact a large number of audience. Millions of people worldwide are affected by the disease. So to aware the people, more memes are created and shared.

Month from which subjects started notice memes

Table 9

From which month you started to notice memes specifically on COVID-19?

105 responses

- From January, 2020
- From February, 2020
- From March, 2020
- From April, 2020
- Before January, 2020
- From January, 20220
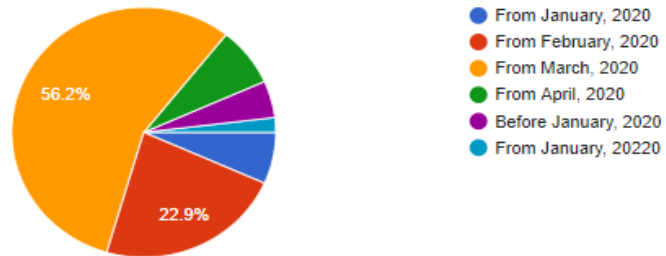
As per above pie chat, maximum people started noticing memes from March, 2020. In the month of February, 22.9% people noticed memes while a very few people noticed them from January 2020. This means circulation of the memes about COVID-19 started before January 2020 when it was started in China. After that number of memes is increasing day by day.

Type of Memes noticed

Table 10

Which type of memes did you notice the most about COVID- 19?

105 responses

- Stills/Photographs
- Video
- Audio
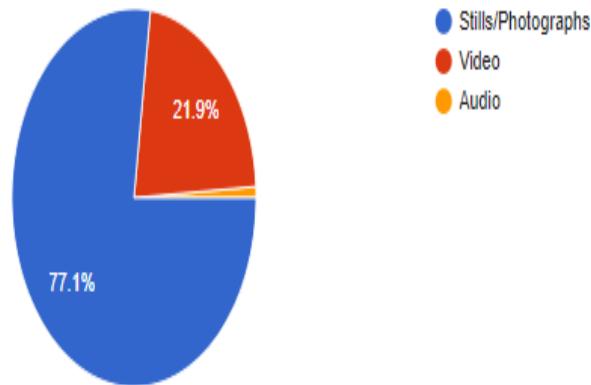
This Pie chart represents that maximum people i.e 77.1 % noticed stills or photographs on COVID-19 followed by Video memes which is 21.9%. The memes in the form of Audio are noticed by a few people only. This shows memes are mostly presented in the form of more stills or photographs.
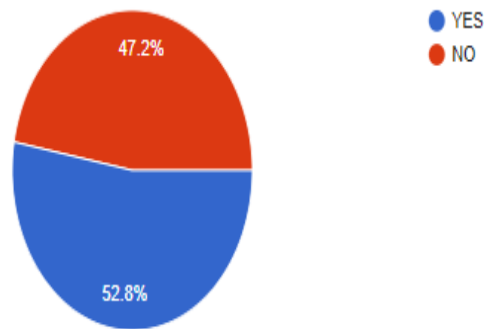
Click on Like option

Table 11

Have you clicked on 'LIKE' options on these memes?

106 responses

The above figure reveals that more than half of the respondents liked the memes and also clicked on the 'like' option. It means that they enjoyed the memes. Also, once liked it is viewed by other people in the Users network and is in turn liked by them as well as they get inspired to view and like the meme

Sharing of Memes

Table 12

Did you also SHARE these memes with others?

106 responses
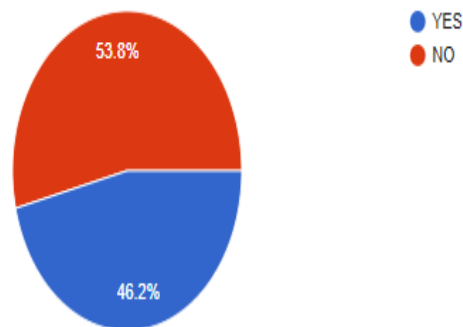
Approximately 54 percent of the respondents were of the opinion that they shared the memes with their friends on social media platforms. It means that they wanted other people to view and enjoy the memes.

Number of people to whom memes are shared

Table 13

If, YES, approximately with how many people?

55 responses
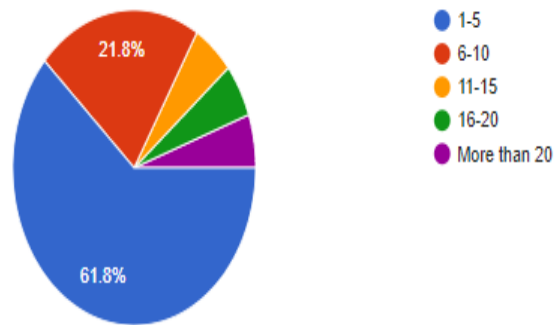
Most of the respondents share the memes with less than 5 people in their friends list while 22 percent surveys revealed that they shared the memes in between 6-10 people. It means that people share a lot. Though the number of people to whom they share the memes is very small yet it shows that they are quite positive towards these memes.

Appeal in COVID-19 Memes
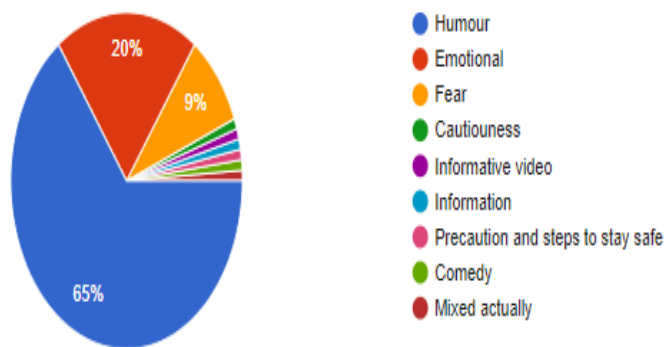
Table 14

Which type of Appeal did you notice the most on COVID 19 memes?

100 responses

Table 14 shows that 65% of the respondents under study noticed that there is humour appeal in the COVID-19 memes. These memes provided the information in a humorous way. Humour appeals evoke the feelings of amusement and pleasure and thus help in attracting attention, creating a good mood. 20% of the subjects under study opined that there is emotional appeal in memes regarding COVID-19. Emotional appeal is usually considered to be the best to study attitude and behavioral changes.

Memes are Informative

Table 15

Do you think these memes on COVID- 19 are informative?

104 responses
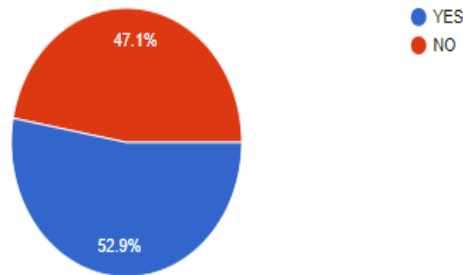
Approximately 53% of the respondents under study were of the opinion that these memes are informative in nature. They inform about the symptoms of disease, prevention of the disease and other related information. The information provided through these memes is very beneficial to stop the spread of Corona Virus.

Information provided by memes

Table 16

If YES, what type of information these memes provide

75 responses
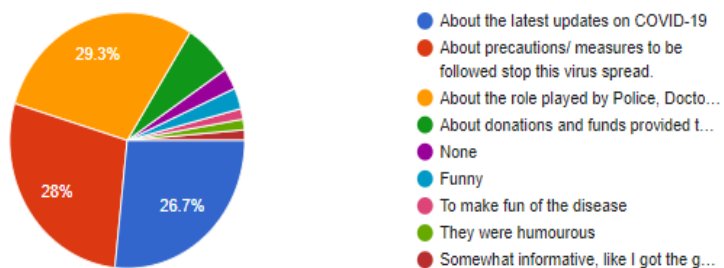
29% people said that these memes provided the information related to the role played by doctors, police and other workers in fight against this disease, while 28% respondents said that the memes related to COVID-19 guided them about the precautions that should be taken to stop this virus spread. 27% revealed that they get latest updates about COVID-19 with the help of these memes.

Memes pages followed by people

More than half of the respondents could not remember the memes pages. Some of them could only remember a single page only. Approximately 30 percent were able to write the names of three memes pages including Sarcaster, Idiotic sperm, Trolls Officials, I Love Sarcasm, Troll Fuckers, Backchod India and many more.

Social Networking Sites on which memes are present

Table 18

Social networking Platform on which above mentioned page is present

88 responses

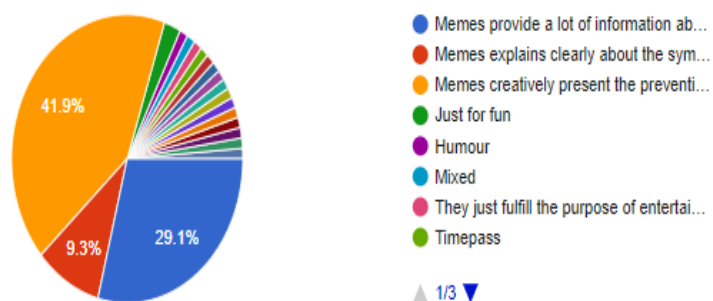- Facebook
- Youtube
- Instagram
- Whatsapp
- Til Tok
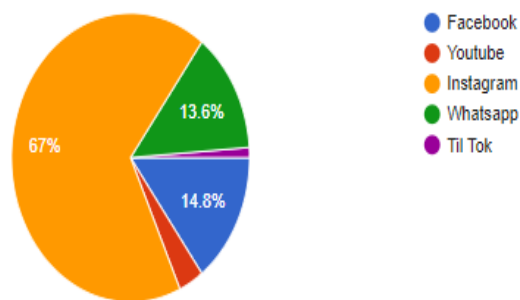
The table 18 reveals that 67% people viewed these memes on Instagram. Its users are increasing day by day. While only 15% viewed them on Facebook, the largest **social networking site**.

Role played by Memes about COVID-19

Table 19

What is your opinion on role of memes on social networking platforms about COVID-19?

86 responses

- Memes provide a lot of information ab...
- Memes explains clearly about the sym...
- Memes creatively present the preventi...
- Just for fun
- Humour
- Mixed
- They just fulfill the purpose of entertai...
- Timepass

1/3 ▼

When the subjects under study were asked to share their opinion about the role played by COVID-19 memes on social networking platforms, many of

them said that these memes creatively present the prevention and caution of COVID 19. It means that memes are formed by creative people with creative strategy to reach the maximum audience. 29% people think that Memes provide a lot of information about the meaning and concept of COVID-19.

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