Digital Déjà vu: The Enduring Presence of Gender Stereotypes in Memes

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Abstract
Memes are a crucial cultural unit for exploring and understanding the dynamics of the digital society in which examining the gender balance is a key pathway for measuring where it states. It is very important for any social science researcher to read and see if the new generation is rewriting the sexist behavior composed by the culture over the past ages and that too in a platform, which is extensively dominated by them. Hence, the main purpose of this study is to explore gender communication and gender construction in new media through memes. The study was conducted by analyzing 152 memes collected from Facebook. Theoretically it attempts to read gender from a gender-constructionist perspective. Thematic analysis was used as the method of going through these memes and the major themes were pointed out and an overall analysis was presented. The main finding from the analysis is that despite the expectation of progressive views, memes continue to reinforce traditional gender stereotypes, with a predominant focus on men narrating content that perpetuates established roles, overshadowing limited challenges to patriarchal norms. This study attempts to decode the influence of memes as cultural artifacts on the portrayal and reinterpretation of gender roles in the digital era. By scrutinizing the interplay between the new generation's expressions and prevailing cultural norms, the study unravels the transformative potential of memes in reshaping societal attitudes towards gender.

Keywords: Digital Déjà vu, gender construction, memes, meme-culture, new media

Introduction
It was initially believed that internet would be a space free from gender identity and such distinctions (Abir 194). Unfortunately, that has not been the case. Positioned at the intersection of technology and culture, the internet serves as a cultural text that offers a fundamental insight into its role in shaping societal norms (Gersch 306). This study acknowledges the rise of gender politics on the internet, which is influenced by the...
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development of preexisting gender related ideas within the online community, especially in the context of popular new media forms such as memes. Memes stand as a distinctive expression of our generation, ingrained in our pop culture and a mirror of our collective thoughts as a society. It is considered a powerful language of new media that reflects and comment on societal norms, including issues of sexism. The study seeks answer to how dominant online elements, particularly memes, contribute to the construction and dissemination of gender-related ideas, and what is their impact on shaping perspectives within the online community, as well as on the understanding and analysis of contemporary society and its global manifestations.

As a prominent form of new media and cultural expression, memes have garnered increasing academic interest due to their pervasive impact on society. For instance, Limor Shifman argues, “Internet users are on to something, and researchers should follow” (340). Thus, scholars delve into its various aspects such as cultural significance, expressive value, gender representation, and communicative approaches, reflecting a growing fascination within academia emphasizes the increasing importance of memes in qualitative research (Iloh 1) considering them valuable cultural units.

The study by Nasrin Akter investigates the persistence of sexism in internet memes by analyzing 12 Facebook memes (107). It reveals a prevalence of stereotypes reinforcing traditional gender roles, promoting violence against women, and perpetuating patriarchal norms. Jenina Abir's work on Facebook users explores how gender roles influence virtual communication, revealing both positive and negative aspects (194). The study emphasizes the need for gender sensitivity on social media platforms like Facebook. Although Theresa M. Senft shows us while discrimination is present, the internet could potentially reduce gender disparities and memes can indeed start a conversation about identity (202). We get an idea of how memes contribute to creating a collective identity from Noam Gal, Limor Shifman, and Zohar Kampf’s work using the “It gets better” video phenomenon as a case study (1698). The study reveals that, despite the absence of formal gatekeepers, participants tend to conform to established norms within the LGBTQ community. The study identifies potential domains of subversion, not just in the content but also in the unique forms facilitated by digital media. Victoria Gbadegesin focuses on Nigerian social media users, highlighting memes as tools for expressing gender ideologies (529). The study observes a shift in women reclaiming their identity, while men continue to adhere to patriarchal norms. Whereas Jessica Drakett, Bridgette Rickett, Katy Day, and Kate Milnes show that, despite the discourses on gender identity, memes can perpetuate heteronormative masculinity othering women and reinforcing exclusionary dynamics (109). Despite the identification of instances of online sexism and harassment reframed as 'acceptable' through humor in internet memes, it is imperative to acknowledge the continued significance of memes in articulating gender identity (Akhther 11).

Memes have played a substantial role among internet users in the exploration, expression, and reflection of thoughts pertaining to gender. A study (Rolando et al. 492) on the portrayal of drunk women and men in new media, finding that they often perpetuate stereotypes. Cornelia Brantner and Katharina Lobinger analyze the aftermath of the #distractinglysexy hashtag on Twitter, emphasizing its success as a feminist meme event (674). The study contrasts media reactions in the UK and Germany, noting the former's success in sparking a broader debate on sexism. And Tonny Krijnen’s exploration of the complex relationship between gender and media in the context of digitization and globalization, emphasizing power configurations lays a background for it.
Memes contribute to the creation of a shared cultural language (Shifman's 187). Nissenbaum and Shifman's examination of meme templates explores cultural and societal implications, revealing contradictions in emotions across different cultures (294). Another study by Shifman highlights the significance of memes in understanding digital culture, addressing obstacles and advocating for their inclusion in research (362). The collective body of literature highlights the complex, influential, and multifaceted role of memes in shaping various aspects of contemporary society.

Limited studies have been conducted in the intersection of new media and gender communication, particularly in the era dominated by social media given its pervasive influence, notably through elements like memes. It has become integral to our self-expression and communication. This study recognizes the significance of delving into these phenomenon, understanding their impact on identity formation, social norms, and values related to gender. Memes, as potent tools of the new generation, encapsulate opinions and expressions, offering a broader insight into culture and societal issues. The study, rooted in the social sciences, aims to analyze these social elements, identify patterns, and contribute to our understanding of contemporary society.

This study recognizes the cultural significance of memes and focuses specifically on unraveling the intricacies of gender construction within the meme culture of Bangladesh. The primary objectives include delving into gender communication within new media and examining the nuanced ways in which gender is constructed through memes, shedding light on the broader societal perspectives on gender, class, and other relevant issues.

The internet and new media have not only broadened our perspectives but also condensed the world into our hands. In this dynamic digital landscape, memes are progressively evolving into powerful instruments for communication, self-expression, and the articulation of opinions. Studying memes is crucial as they wield substantial influence over the younger generation in our culture. Understanding the expanding meme scene in Bangladesh is vital for grasping the cultural phenomenon that shapes the online community.

Memes act as a medium for carrying cultural ideas, symbols, or practices from one person to another through writing, speech, gesture, ritual, or other mimetic events, including mimetic contexts. They are a form of public discourse (Milner 285) and a commentary on popular culture.

The definition of memes may vary across different communities on the internet and it evolves and changes through time. Traditionally, the term mostly applied to images, concepts, or catchphrases, but it has since become broader and more multifaceted, evolving to include more elaborate structures such as challenges, GIFs, videos, and viral sensations (Börzsei 5).

Memes are often used as a way to express humor, satire, or social commentary. They can be created by anyone and are often shared widely on social media platforms. Memes can be used to comment on current events, to express political opinions, or to make fun of popular culture.

Meme culture refers to the shared set of values, attitudes, and behaviors that have developed around the creation, sharing, and consumption of memes. It encompasses not only the content of the memes themselves but also the social interactions and communities that form around them. Meme Culture can be defined as the evolving culture surrounding Memes (“Meme Culture”). Originally only found on the internet, meme culture can be seen in many real world examples, such as the dab and bottle flip, among many others.
Initially, meme was merely a means of entertainment for people. People used to find, get entertained, and exchange memes with each other on various topics on the internet. Slowly, memes started becoming an integral part of people's social media lives. Memes have now begun to influence people's daily lives beyond the internet. Memes have even been studied as eudaemonic media, revealing their positive impact on psychological well-being. Not only that, it can be used as a means of teaching, highlighting the importance of how technology is utilized (Boa Sorte 51). Topics related to memes have also started to come up in people's daily conversations and activities, and vice-versa.

Like other elements of media, memes have begun to influence our lives from personal to national interests and have become an essential tool for expressing peoples’ opinion. People now express their views through memes on various political decisions and even national level events (e.g. recently the Covid-19 pandemic) (Azad). Thus, a meme-centric culture develops in the virtual and non-internet world and that is called meme culture.

The Internet was opened to the public in the 90’s (Dennis and Khan). Even in Bangladesh a handful of people had access to internet at that time. There has been a boom in internet communication in Bangladesh since the arrival of social media and smartphones in the country. Due to the availability of both these at affordable prices, people of different classes, professions and ages from all over the country started joining social media.

In contemporary society, media communication is mostly held through various social media platforms (Ohiagu and Okorie 93). The single most important social networking site that is used widely by the people of our country is Facebook. Statistics show that the percentage of Facebook users among the netizens is 85.65 (“Social Media Stats Bangladesh”). News and information flow quickly through Facebook, which sometimes have remarkable impact on the people of Bangladesh.

Facebook was launched in 2004, and after just a few years in 2009 it came to Bangladesh. In 2010, just six years after its beginning, the number of Facebook users crossed 500 million. Now this number is over 800 million. In Bangladesh, 99,5560 of total number of people are involved with internet and about 83% of them are involved with social media (Islam 5). There is a large and active community who are involved with different social media.

Not much people, yet, use the internet in relation to the total population of Bangladesh. Although a significant community of internet users is growing by time. The online community in this country consists of various class, age, gender, religion and economic status. They respond to and express their opinions on various socioeconomic and political issues. Their opinion plays a very meaningful role in the formation and dissolution of many institutes, laws etc. and play a vital role in policy-making. It is like a “daily opinion poll” (Islam 5) for the young generation.

Internet memes and digital culture (Wiggins and Bowers 1886) are practically inseparable. Modern digital culture functions as a mutation pod for content makers (Shifman 340). This digital mutation pod establishes necessary environments, which enables the transformation of generic content into internet memes.

Memes are extremely popular among the social media users of Bangladesh, specially to millennials and generation-Z. It was around 2012 when memes started to circulate frequently in the online community of Bangladesh (Shovon). At that time some of the dialogues of the Sikandar Box play starring the popular actor Musharraf Karim took place in the Bengali meme scene. The dialogue was in the vernacular of Mymensingh, “Quittalbam Tore”. A picture of Musharraf Kareem along with the
dialogue has been created and shared many times on Facebook, and was accompanied by various funny captions.

Since then it has been an internet memes era created and structured by its own people. As Shifman said about the production and dissemination of internet memes – digital culture has increased opportunities for idea sharing and the easy transfer or replication of web content (340), which has, in turn, influenced the production and dissemination of internet memes. So was the case for Bangladesh.

As mentioned earlier, Facebook was founded in 2004. Within a few years, Facebook gained popularity among Internet users in Bangladesh in 2008-09. According to the statistics (“Social Media Stats Bangladesh”) of Statcounter in 2009, 80% of the Internet users at that time were connected to Facebook. Bangladesh’s meme culture thus naturally evolved around Facebook.

First it was a mere tool for entertainment and light fun. But with time, memes became more mature in its expression with the memers themselves. It slowly began to work as a media for opinions about personal, social and political preferences. Just recently, during the Covid-19 pandemic memes played a vital role in expressing opinions in various fields like spreading awareness, miss-management of the situation by the Government in various cases and even as a coping mechanism for people (Akram et al. 2).

Later various other studies found out that memes played vital role in the sociocultural platforms of Bangladesh. From questioning the authority during Covid-19 pandemic (Azad) to influencing the political culture (Hossain Rakib 5) or persisting or breaking the gender roles or other sociocultural norms (Akter 107).

The virtual realm of Bangladesh is heavily shaped by memes which inevitably affects the real-life happenings. Therefore, it is vital that one looks into the meme-culture of Bangladesh if one wants to get a hold of the meme-scenes and the extent to which it is playing roles in our society.

Methodology

Since memes spread so quickly and are easily adopted by people, and the same meme (template) takes on new forms under different contexts, it can be assumed that the number of memes is infinite. And right now, there is no complete database of exactly how many memes exist on any given topic. For sample collection, 152 memes were selected from the total number of memes posted in the Bengali Memes Facebook page from 2012 to 2022 — a total of ten years.

The research sample was collected according to purposive sampling method which makes it possible to select only the fittest samples under a specific context so that more accurate results can be expected.

As stated before, in Bangladesh, memes have been in circulation from around 2012 (Shovon). The Facebook page selected for the study, Bengali Memes, was established in that same year. And this page is still active till 2023 at the time of current research. The Facebook page has about two lakhs (195k) likes, and about two lakhs (197k) following at the time of this research. The selected 152 memes from 2012 to 2022 of the Bengali Memes page were first randomly assigned a serial number from 1 to 152. And each meme is given a title to facilitate identification and classification of memes.

This is a qualitative study. And as internet memes appear and convey its meaning through both textual and visual elements simultaneously, it was considered appropriate to take into account both texts and images in analyzing them.

Page Link: https://www.facebook.com/BengaliMemesOfficial?mibextid=ZbWKwL
As the method of studying the memes, this study has chosen thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 77) for its compatibility with large data sets (Drakett et al. 109). Thematic analysis is also flexible enough to support the exploratory nature of this study.

The final thematic categorization was conducted as per the Braun and Clarke guidelines. Initially, the study involved an iterative examination of the sample data, aiming to develop a comprehensive familiarity with its content. Then a straightforward categorization was made following the titles, content and dialogues from the samples. Different tags were added to these categories. For example, one meme has a picture of a middle aged brown man along with the text that says, “Approach life with the same confidence that random Indian men approach women online.” This meme was tagged with men, brown men, online harassment, sexual harassment. Then the tags were examined with the aim of searching for specific themes covering a broader area.

As Braun and Clarke state, this phase re-focusses the analysis, working towards the identification of themes and sub-themes from initial codes (qtd in Drakett et al. 109). For example, tags like Biryani, Burnt Samosa, Mother Cooking, Men Waiting, Food, Cooking Skill can be placed under the umbrella of Chores and Responsibilities. These sub-themes were utilized then in reviewing the overall, general themes of the data.

**Theoretical Framework**

This study constructs a theoretical framework based on the different gender constructionist theories and the representation theory. Here, it explores a gender construction in memes, adopting a social constructionist perspective that challenges biological classifications. Constructivist theories aim to transcend rigid gender polarization, questioning the essentiality of the binary concepts of "woman" and "man."

Gayle Rubin’s "Sex/Gender System" emphasizes gender as a socially imposed division shaped by human intervention (157). The American feminist writer, artist, and activist Kate Millett emphasizes the cultural, rather than biological, basis of gender classification (28). According to her, the social identity of gender varies according to sociocultural bias. Judith Butler’s influential book *Gender Trouble* rejects the notion of fixed gender identity, proposing performativity as a learned and regulated feature of social interactions (179). The Icelandic philosopher Asta Kristjana Sveinsdóttir, in her book *Categories We Live By*, delves into societal categorization of gender roles, highlighting socially significant factors that confer social status (72).

This study has also taken into account the theory of male gaze by Laura Mulvey. The theory posits that the camera, narrative, and characters are aligned with the male perspective, objectifying women as passive objects of desire. Mulvey argues that this reinforces gender power dynamics, with women existing primarily for visual pleasure and men maintaining an active, controlling role in the experience (6). This study has extended male gaze narrative into studying the new media component like memes. To see how a certain gaze is imposed upon us through our consumption and expressions in media.

From a constructionist standpoint, gender is viewed as a social relation that is acquired through ages of socialization, challenging the idea of innate femininity or masculinity. This theoretical framework combines diverse perspectives to unravel the multifaceted nature of gender construction in memes, acknowledging its social, cultural, and performative dimensions.

Stuart Hall, a pioneer in cultural studies, introduced representation theory, emphasizing the role of language in shaping the meaning of things. Media, a powerful cultural tool, plays a key role in presenting and embedding meaning in reality. This study is guided by Stuart Hall’s constructivist attitude oh the representation theory and explores
how reality is constructed in our mind. This approach acknowledges that the material world exists, but meaning is constructed through language and symbols (25). The constructionist view, prevalent in cultural studies, highlights the significance of context, producers, and audience in shaping meaning. This aspect of representation has had the most significant influence on cultural studies in recent years (Haq 23).

The study applies this lens to analyze how gender is represented in memes, examining the role of meme-culture in constructing gender roles within a constructionist framework.

**Results and Discussion**

It should be noted here that as with any classification, the issue of overlapping came to the fore when categorizing these memes. Memes here are classified according to their dominating tendency. Beyond these tendencies, memes may have other, more latent tendencies, but these are divided according to the main tone of the meme's content.

By tagging and analyzing the sub-themes and common patterns, this study established two overall themes of the tendency of the humor through which genders are constructed in the memes. First, the entitlement towards the women or the creation of the women through sub-themes like: appearance, marriage-criteria, chores, aunties and objectification. A specific image of “how the women are” and “how the women should be” is a reoccurring theme in the memes presented here. On the other hand, the second theme of these memes is the men as the spectator. We are viewing women through the eyes of the men. Men are playing an active role. Most of the visuals here are of women as whereas most of the dialogues here are from men.

**Shundori: The External Appearance**

Analyzing the memes, it can be seen that discussions, critiques and suggestions about the external appearance of girls (and to some extent of boys) are present within a part of the total memes. It can be seen that the beauty of girls is not only desirable and important, but that beauty should also be natural. Society demands girls to be naturally beautiful. What is natural, self-natured, is not beautiful. That naturalness has to fit with society's and culture's prevailing notions of beauty. Only then can the girl be "naturally beautiful".

In one of the memes we see a picture of Fair and Lovely Cream (a cream advertised to lighten the skin-color when applied on the face) in its image section, and on it a circle with a line in the middle is drawn, which means it's forbidden. And above the text of the meme it says, "Tag someone who is *shundor* [beautiful] without Fair & Lovely". The point to be noted here is that a face without beauty cream does not mean it is radiant with natural beauty. Here the memer wants two things, someone (generally a girl) who is firstly beautiful and secondly does not use Fair & Lovely cream.

The idea that not all girls are naturally beautiful is also seen in another meme, which is shown in Fig. 1. In the image section of this meme is a picture of former Home Minister of Bangladesh, Sahara Khatun. Below Sahara Khatun’s picture is a dialog-box, which reads, "O Fair & Lovely, please make me forsha!" Meaning, fair and lovely, make me fair please!

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Fig. 1. Challenge Denied. 2012. Bengali Memes

At the bottom is, again, a tube of Fair & Lovely cream. A painted hand is coming out of it, and the hands are in a non-comprehending gesture. The text above the tube reads, "Na Baba" and the text below reads, "Challenge denied". This meme can be interpreted in two ways. First of all, the woman presented here is clearly not a woman wearing Fair & Lovely cream. The woman here is in her natural appearance, given by birth. The lack of natural representation of the face that we complained about in the case of the previous meme is not present here. The woman is here in her natural form. But the meme's woman, or rather memer themselves are uncomfortable with this normality. They beg Fair & Lovely via meme to make the woman fairer. But the woman's skin color is so dark that even the famous Fair and Lovely cream is forced to lose to her saying, "challenge denied". So, a natural face without Fair & Lovely is not acceptable here.

Another aspect of this meme is that the woman present in the meme, who is demanding to be fair, as stated before, is the former home minister of Bangladesh late Sahara Khatun. It appears that even a woman who reached that stage of personal career, empowerment and success, and came to such an important position in the state could not rise above her external beauty, appearance and complexion. The meme is requesting the cream company to make her fair.

Just as it is not desirable for girls to be normal in appearance, it is also not desirable for them to apply beauty creams on their face. And it is undesirable and a matter of humor for girls to wear make-up. Several other memes make fun of the amount of make-up a Lux Superstar, or a wedding bride or women in general put on their face.

Not only the appearance, but also the society's desire for a woman's physical structure can be seen in the memes. Here, in one of the memes a picture of a Disney princess is shown, and right above the picture is written "Before marriage" and on the other side, the same picture is photoshopped to make the princess fat, and above it is written, "After marriage". It is a humorous meme about girls getting fat after marriage.

It is a common idea in our society that women get fat after they get married. A man who does not do regular manual labor also becomes fat or gain a fat belly after a certain age. After marriage, most women have to go through the process of childbirth one or more times. During the nine months of pregnancy and delivery and later
breastfeeding the child, the whole process of raising the child is full of stress on the body and mind for the woman. This is also a reason for the change in body shape of women after marriage. Regardless of these factors, or even in the case of the absence of these factors, a woman's obesity is a matter of judgment here as well as has a comical value in a demeaning way.

There is no denying that boys also have certain ideals in terms of beauty. Although beauty rules are relatively less applicable to men, those that do exist are strongly present in society. In one of the samples there is a man suffering from gynaecomastia. Above is written, "We all have that one friend*". Men suffering from gynaecomastia have relatively large breasts. Since larger breasts are a feature of girls, the presence of large breasts in boys is considered highly humorous and degrading in our society. Men with this disorder also face a lot of bullying, usually from other male friends. It indicates the insecurity produced in a patriarchal society.

"Aunties be like...": The “Behavioral Science” of Women

Not only the appearance of women, but also an exaggerated display mixed with all the stereotypes of how women behave was seen in the samples of this study. Characterization of middle-aged, married women is a major part of the discussion of these memes. Since memes are mostly created by the younger generation, those women are referred to as ‘aunties’ here.


A significant point these memes make is that aunties generally gossip. One of the memes presents a tripartite structure, featuring a teacher emphasizing the speed of light, a man refuting the notion, and an image of two women engaged in gossip. The message is explicit: women excel at gossip, and the humorous depiction suggests that gossip among women surpasses the speed of light. And these women "sit around" and "gossip all day". As if women had no more work to do. Even if a woman is not working outside earning money, in our society in most cases, women have to bear the main responsibility of all the household chores and child rearing. And working outside does not make any difference. A working woman generally has to do all the household works that a housewife does as well. As a result, sitting around all day on the phone gossiping with others seems unrealistic in this context, but this theme returns in various ways in memes. Notably, male characters are used pointing out these behaviors implying that men are the observers and critics of women's gossiping tendencies, not the ones who gossip. This theme continues in Fig. 2, where Bengali parties are depicted. We see two
different images of women and men, both sitting together and chatting. Although they are seemingly involved in the same activities, women’s conversation is labeled as "gossip," while men's discussions are portrayed as “political talks". This stereotype is reiterated in several other memes, like showcasing men posing proudly after winning a debate on politics.

In another meme a pie chart captures the prevailing societal discourse that women, particularly mothers, invest a substantial amount of time watching Hindi serials. The chart compares the watch-time of family members, highlighting the mother's focus on these soap operas. This meme exemplifies the stereotype of women's interest in serial dramas. Additionally, it contrasts the mother's preference with the father's inclination toward science-based entertainment, illustrating a stereotypical gendered division of media consumption within the household.

Is Your Roti Round?

Cooking or housework is not a genetic characteristic of girls. These are some of the most important life skills that everyone, regardless of gender, should master. However, in our society, the responsibility of all family work, including cooking, falls on the shoulders of women by default. The imprint of this social custom that has been going on for ages can be seen in the meme culture of the current era.

Thus, a Mughal-era painting is used in a meme to depict a private moment between a male and female couple. The conversation revolves around the male partner casually assuming that the wife should be able to cook biryani and instructing her to start cooking. This meme reflects the prevalent expectation that women are inherently responsible for cooking, catering to the desires and instructions of their male partners without any request. This behavior is not an uncommon phenomenon, as evidenced by similar sentiments in several other memes.

One sample portrays an image of a newlywed couple holding hands, emphasizing the importance of the girl's ability to make round rotis to be an ideal wife, with the text, “This could be us, but your roti is not round". The humor lies in the implication that despite the potential for a romantic relationship, the girl's inability to make perfectly round bread jeopardizes the entire marriage. Fig. 3 presents the image of some burnt samosa with a text that indicates what happens when you don't marry a desi girl because foreigner women are believed to not quite follow the gender roles, hence not so good at cooking. This perpetuates the notion that a woman's competence in cooking is a fundamental qualification for an ideal marriage, overshadowing the importance of mutual respect, love, and understanding.

Another meme presents a thought-provoking narrative with a boy ceremoniously marrying a rice cooker as it is "white and good at cooking". The image describes the notion that cooking and skin-color are the sole criteria for marriage, suggesting one could marry a cooking machine if that were the case. The meme unfolds as a skit, detailing how the boy divorced the rice cooker after four days, highlighting its limited culinary capabilities. This irony is further emphasized in other memes where the absence of a wife is humorously linked to culinary disasters or even the risk of the entire house catching fire due to the wife's perceived inability to cook. These memes collectively underscore the stereotypes associated with gender roles and marriage expectations.

The “Ever Demanding” Girls and The "Ever Providing" Boys

The recurring theme in the collected memes is the prevailing sentiment that suggests a girl should assess a potential partner based on the opportunities and resources he can provide. This trend reflects societal expectations and reinforces traditional gender roles in relationship dynamics.

One of these memes featuring an image of the famous actress Katrina Kaif with a text that implies that girls not only “steal” hearts but also wallets. Another meme portrays the Disney cartoon character Aladdin using a MasterCard to meet his lover Jasmine, suggesting the necessity of financial investment for love, typically expected from boys. One of the other memes satirizes girls' materialistic expectations, showing a boy buying a burger for a girl who, in return, offers a kiss. Notably, the memes highlight a recurring pattern: boys contribute money, cars, or food, while girls reciprocate with gestures like kisses, symbolizing beauty and desire.

Fig. 4. Only Son Responsibilities. 2021, Bengali Memes

Fig. 4 illustrates the heavy burden of responsibilities placed on boys, specifically the only son in a family. The image portrays a building where the first floor, labeled "Only son," appears significantly smaller than the second floor labeled "Responsibilities". This visual metaphor conveys the idea that only the son carries an overwhelming load of responsibilities, emphasizing the challenges boys face not only in love but also in life. Notably, the absence of memes depicting the responsibilities of
daughters or in general women in the family highlights a gendered perspective in societal expectations and reinforces traditional gender roles.

Another meme humorously exemplifies the belief that boys take on the role of providers and caretakers, not only within families but also in relationships. The meme portrays a boy reclining on two stones, creating a bridge for the girl to pass over a small water gap. Despite the short distance that the girl could easily jump, the boy goes the extra mile to ensure her comfort. This meme reinforces the idea that boys are expected to take on responsibilities and provide support, even in situations where it may not be necessary, highlighting the enduring stereotype of male roles in relationships as a provider.

**Discussion**

The data analysis presented above underscores the permeation of preexisting stereotypes about gender roles into the realm of memes within our society. Despite memes serving as a platform for the expression and opinions of a new generation that has overcome many traditional constraints, the study reveals that prevailing notions about gender persist. The memes predominantly echo Laura Mulvey's Male Gaze Theory, depicting a passive role for women, emphasizing their "to be looked-at-ness." Men take center stage in meme narration, often focusing on women's physical attributes, habits, and appearance, perpetuating traditional gender norms.

It effectively demonstrates the construction and assignment of gender roles to specific genders, aligning with the concepts discussed in the theoretical framework. While some memes challenge patriarchal dominance, they represent a minority compared to those reinforcing established gender constructs. The analysis identifies recurring trends, such as the pressure on girls to conform to beauty ideals, the assumption of women’s behavior in romantic scenarios, stereotyping of middle-aged married women, the expectation for women to excel in domestic tasks like cooking, and the limited agency afforded to girls in matters of marriage. These memes collectively contribute to and reflect the enduring gender constructions ingrained in society, portraying girls as passive recipients and emphasizing external attributes as defining factors.

In summary, the study illuminates the significant role memes play in perpetuating and reflecting societal gender norms. Despite some memes challenging traditional constructs, the overall landscape remains dominated by narratives reinforcing established gender roles and expectations, which are deeply ingrained in the cultural discourse.

**Conclusion**

The issue of gender in memes is a complex and multifaceted one. Memes often rely on humor, satire, and cultural references to convey their messages. These messages can also perpetuate harmful stereotypes and reinforce traditional gender roles. Although there are also memes that challenge traditional gender roles and promote more progressive attitudes towards gender, these memes may make fun of gender stereotypes or promote gender equality, however, even these memes can be problematic if they rely on gendered language or reinforce other harmful stereotypes.

Overall, the issue of gender in memes is a complex one that requires careful analysis and consideration. As stated before, memes possess the potential to challenge conventional gender roles and advocate for progressive attitudes; however, they also have the capability to conserve damaging stereotypes and uphold traditional gender
norms. As such, it is important to approach gender-related memes with a critical eye and to be mindful of the messages they convey.

This study, conducted within a short time-frame and limited resources, acknowledges its constraints in thoroughly exploring the vast realm of society and new media. The traditional binary gender focus is recognized as a limitation, especially considering the evolving perspectives within contemporary gender studies that extend beyond the binary framework. Furthermore, the scarcity of existing work on memes and gender issues in Bangladesh underscores the novelty of this study. Despite its limitations, the research aims to contribute to future investigations in this domain, providing a foundation for more extensive and nuanced studies on the intricate relationship between memes, gender, and cultural dynamics in the context of Bangladesh.

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