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# The Effectiveness of Meme-Based Content Digital Marketing: An SOR Model Approach

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**ABSTRACT**

**Introduction**: The pervasive nature of internet memes in digital culture has led to their increasing adoption in marketing. While anecdotal evidence suggests their effectiveness, a comprehensive academic understanding of how meme-based content digital marketing affects consumer behavior remains underexplored. This study addresses this gap by employing the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) model to investigate the psychological processes through which meme qualities translate into consumer responses.

**Objectives**: The primary objective of this study is to investigate the effectiveness of meme-based content digital marketing by examining the relationships between meme qualities (content appeal, emotional triggers, and relevance), consumers' internal states (cognitive processing, emotional reaction, and brand perception), and their behavioral responses (shareability, engagement, and purchase intention). The study aims to empirically confirm the SOR model as a theoretical framework for understanding the psychological processes underpinning the effectiveness of meme-based content marketing through digital platforms.

**Methods**: A quantitative research design was employed utilizing the partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM). Data were collected from social media users who had encountered meme-based digital marketing content. A researcher-made questionnaire with a seven-point Likert scale was used to measure perceptions on meme quality, internal state, and behavioral response.

**Results**: Descriptive statistics indicated high mean scores across all constructs, suggesting that meme-based content digital marketing is effective in eliciting favorable perceptions on meme qualities, consumers' internal states, and behavioral responses. The measurement model demonstrated satisfactory reliability and validity. Structural model analysis revealed a significant positive influence of Meme Quality on Internal State ($\beta$=0.577, $t$=5.183, $p$<0.001) and Internal State on Behavioral Response ($\beta$=0.663, $t$=5.741, $p$<0.001). Crucially, the Internal State significantly mediated the relationship between Meme Quality and Behavioral Response ($\beta_{mediat}$=0.383, $t$=4.185, $p$<0.001). However, the direct path from Meme Quality to Behavioral Response was not statistically significant ($\beta$=0.135, $t$=1.269, $p$=0.205).

**Conclusions**: This study confirms the effectiveness of meme-based content digital marketing, operating primarily by shaping consumers' internal states. The findings strongly support the applicability of the SOR model, demonstrating that while meme qualities do not directly lead to behavioral responses, they significantly influence consumers' cognitive processing, emotional reactions, and brand perceptions, which in turn drive shareability, engagement, and purchase intention. Digital marketers should focus on creating appealing, emotionally engaging, and relevant memes to cultivate these positive internal states.

**Keywords:** Content marketing, Digital marketing, Meme marketing, Social media marketing

## INTRODUCTION

The digital marketing landscape is constantly evolving, driven by technological advancements and the evolution of online communication and culture. In recent years, internet memes have emerged from niche online communities to become a pervasive form of digital expression and a significant element of internet culture (Davison, 2020).

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Characterized by their often humorous, relatable, and easily shareable nature, memes leverage shared cultural knowledge and trends to create resonant and engaging content. Recognizing their widespread popularity and potential for rapid dissemination, marketers have increasingly adopted meme-based content as a strategy to connect with audiences, enhance brand visibility, and drive engagement (Rathi & Jain, 2023).

Meme-based marketing campaigns aim to harness the virality and cultural influence of memes to capture consumer attention in different online spaces. While anecdotal evidence and industry reports imply the potential efficiency of this method, a comprehensive academic knowledge of how meme-based content digital marketing affects customer behavior remains comparatively underexplored (Bowo et al., 2024). Specifically, the psychological patterns through which the qualities of meme content translate into consumer responses require deeper investigation grounded in established theoretical frameworks.

To address this gap, this study employs the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) model (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974) as a theoretical foundation to explore the effectiveness of meme-based content digital marketing. The SOR model provides a straightforward framework for understanding how external environmental stimuli influence an individual's internal states and subsequently shape their behavioral responses (Eroglu et al., 2001). By applying this model, the study conceptualizes the quality of meme-based content as the stimulus, which is characterized by its content appeal, emotional triggers, and relevance to the consumer. These stimulus characteristics are expected to influence the consumers' internal psychological state, the organism, encompassing their cognitive processing of the meme, their emotional reaction to it, and their perception of the associated brand. These internal states are hypothesized to drive observable responses, including the consumers' likelihood to share the meme, engage with the content or brand, and their intention to purchase the advertised product or service.

Therefore, the primary objective of this study is to investigate the effectiveness of meme-based content marketing by examining the relationships between meme qualities, consumers' internal states, and their behavioral responses. Then, the findings will empirically confirm the model as a theoretical framework for understanding the psychological processes that underpin the effectiveness of meme-based content marketing through digital platforms.

## LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

### Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) Model

The SOR model, originally proposed by Mehrabian and Russell (1974), assumes that environmental stimuli influence an individual's internal state or organism, which in turn drives their behavioral responses. In the context of marketing, this model helps to understand how marketing stimuli affect consumers' internal psychological processes, and thus their purchase decisions and other significant behaviors (Eroglu et al., 2001).

Applying the SOR model to meme-based content digital marketing, the meme serves as the Stimulus. The qualities of the meme content, specifically its appeal, emotional triggers, and relevance to the target audience, are expected to influence the consumer's internal state. The Organism represents the consumer's internal processing and reactions to the meme stimulus. This includes cognitive processing, emotional reaction, and the resulting brand perception. Finally, the Response encompasses the observable behaviors of the consumer, such as the likelihood to share the meme, engage with the content or brand, and the intention to purchase the advertised product or service. Existing literature supports the application of the SOR model in various digital marketing contexts, including the effectiveness of online advertising and social media marketing (Mishra et al., 2022; Park & Lennon, 2009). These studies demonstrate that online stimuli can indeed trigger internal responses that lead to behavioral outcomes.

Moreover, meme-based marketing has gained significant traction due to the pervasive nature and cultural relevance of internet memes (Davison, 2020). Memes are generally defined by their humor, relatability, and simplicity of dissemination, making them a potentially valuable tool for content marketing. (Rathi & Jain, 2023). Research on humor in advertising suggests that it can enhance attention, improve brand recall, and foster positive brand attitudes (Eisend, 2010). Similarly, emotional triggers in advertising are known to influence consumer attitudes and behavioral intentions (Holbrook & Batra, 1987). The relevance of content to the target audience is also a critical factor in determining its effectiveness, as relevant content is more likely to capture attention and lead to deeper processing (Keller, 2001).

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### Meme Quality (or Stimulus Construct)

Understanding the effectiveness of meme-based content digital marketing necessitates a focused examination of the meme itself as a stimulus. In this study, the perceived qualities of the meme content that influence customer reaction are referred to as meme quality. Particular attention is paid to the content's emotional triggering potential, audience relevance, and attractiveness.

*Content appeal* refers to the subjective attractiveness, likeability, and engaging quality of the meme content from the perspective of the viewer. It shows how aesthetically pleasing, interesting, and captivating the meme is perceived to be, thereby capturing consumer's attention (Nadube & Isenah, 2023). In the context of meme marketing, the virality and shareability of memes are often linked to their appeal (Rathi & Jain, 2023). Understanding content appeal as a stimulus helps to determine its initial impact on the consumer's internal state. Studies on advertising effectiveness consistently highlight the importance of advertisement appeal in influencing consumer attitudes and responses (Clow & Baack, 2011; Nadube & Isenah, 2023). Also, interesting contents positively affect consumers' sharing behavior (Maclean, 2025).

*Emotional trigger* refers to the capacity of the meme content to evoke specific feelings or emotional responses in the viewer (Jerab, 2025). They contribute to consumer decision-making and behavior (Jagtap & Gurao, 2016). In digital marketing, emotional triggers are intentionally used to create memorable experiences, foster brand loyalty, and influence action. Memes are inherently emotional, often relying on humor or shared experiences to resonate with audiences, making emotional triggers a crucial stimulus variable. Research confirms that the emotional impact of advertising can lead to higher engagement and influence purchase intentions (Holbrook & Batra, 1987; Ojah, 2022).

*Relevance* refers to the extent to which a meme content is perceived as applicable, significant, and appropriate to the target audience's interests, needs, values, or current context (Johnson, 2022). Relevant contents are more likely to capture and hold the attention of the target audience, leading to deeper processing and a greater impact on their internal states and responses (Keller, 2001). In content marketing, relevancy is crucial to developing a relationship with the audience and achieving marketing objectives (Pazeraite & Repoviene, 2022). For meme marketing, leveraging culturally relevant themes and inside jokes is key to resonating with specific online communities (Rathi & Jain, 2023). Studies on content marketing effectiveness emphasize that creating content that addresses specific customer needs and interests improves online presence and brand awareness (Bansal, 2024).

*H1: Meme Qualities positively influence Internal States*

*H2: Meme Qualities positively influence Behavioral Responses*

### Internal State (or Organism Construct)

Building upon the influence of external stimuli, the consumer's internal state represents the crucial psychological processes that occur upon exposure to meme-based content. This internal state, encompassing cognitive processing, emotional reaction, and brand perception, acts as a mediator, translating the characteristics of the meme into subsequent behavioral responses.

*Cognitive Processing* refers to consumers' mental activity when exposed to the meme stimulus, including attention, comprehension, interpretation, and integration of the information presented (Chatterjee et al., 2023). According to the SOR model, the stimulus must be processed by the organism to elicit a response (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). Cognitive processing is a crucial internal state that determines how well the meme's message is understood and how it is integrated into existing knowledge structures, influencing subsequent attitudes and behaviors. Research on online advertising and consumer behavior highlights how individuals process digital information and the factors that influence attention and comprehension (Pasqualloti & Baccino, 2014). Also, information processing shows the understanding of how consumers encode, store, and retrieve information from marketing stimuli (Bouchrika, 2022).

*Emotional Reaction* refers to the affective feelings and states experienced by the consumer in response to viewing the meme content (Jagtap & Gurao, 2016). These reactions include positive emotions like delight, amusement, and excitement, or even negative emotions depending on the meme's content and context, and their intensity can vary. They are a core component of the SOR model, as they directly link the external stimulus to internal affective states

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(Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). These emotions significantly influence consumer attitudes towards the content and the brand, and can drive behavioral responses like sharing and engagement (Ojah, 2022; Vazifehdoust et al., 2024). Studies have demonstrated the impact of emotional reactions to advertising on brand attitude, purchase intention, and word-of-mouth (Holbrook & Batra, 1987; Ojah, 2022).

*Brand Perception* refers to the consumer's overall impression, beliefs, and feelings about the brand associated with the meme content (Qualtrics, 2019). It is a subjective evaluation formed through exposure to various brand touchpoints, including marketing communications. Brand perception is a product of marketing efforts affecting consumer responses (Barben & Drexler, 2025). A positive brand perception fostered by engaging and relevant meme content is likely to lead to favorable behavioral outcomes. Digital marketing strategies, including social media marketing, have been shown to influence brand perception (Nuseir et al., 2023). Also, a positive brand perception is linked to increased purchase intention and loyalty (Kour, 2025).

*H3: Internal States positively influence Behavioral Responses*

*H4: Internal States mediate the influence of Meme Qualities on Behavioral Responses*

### Behavioral Response (or Response Construct)

Ultimately, the effectiveness of meme-based content digital marketing is measured by the observable actions and intentions of consumers. This study focuses on key behavioral responses in the digital environment, notably shareability, engagement, and purchase intention, as signs of successful meme marketing.

*Shareability* refers to the likelihood of consumers disseminating the meme content through their personal networks on social media or other online platforms. It reflects the content's potential for viral spread. In content marketing, shareability is a key metric of success, indicating that the content resonates strongly enough with viewers that they are willing to amplify its reach (Carlton, 2018). For meme marketing, shareability is particularly relevant as memes are inherently designed for widespread distribution and adaptation (Rathi & Jain, 2023). Research on viral content identifies several factors that drive shareability, including emotional appeal, social currency, and practical value (Maclean, 2025). Moreover, social media marketing often uses shareability as a measure of content effectiveness and audience engagement (Carlton, 2018).

*Engagement* encompasses the various ways consumers interact with the meme content or the associated brand online, including liking, commenting, sharing, clicking through to a website, or spending time viewing the content (Malodia et al., 2022). Engagement is a direct indicator of consumer interest and interaction with marketing content in the digital environment. Higher engagement indicates that the meme stimuli successfully caught attention and elicited a reaction from the organism, making it an important indicator of content effectiveness. Studies on social media marketing and meme marketing usually employ engagement metrics to analyze campaign performance (Bowo et al., 2024; Ghosh, 2025), and that engaging content can lead to increased brand awareness and a stronger connection with the audience (Bansal, 2024).

*Purchase Intention* represents the consumer's stated willingness and likelihood to buy a specific product or service in the future (Bond, 2023). It is a strong predictor of actual purchasing behavior. From a marketing perspective, purchase intention is a critical outcome variable that reflects the effectiveness of marketing efforts in influencing consumer behavior. In the context of the SOR model, it is the ultimate behavioral response that marketing stimuli aim to draw out, mediated by the consumer's internal states. Numerous studies in marketing research investigate the factors that influence purchase intention, including advertising appeals, emotional responses, and brand perception (Isamudin & Tahir, 2021; Wei, 2025).

Drawing upon the SOR model and the discussed literature, this study operationalized a model, as shown in Figure 1.

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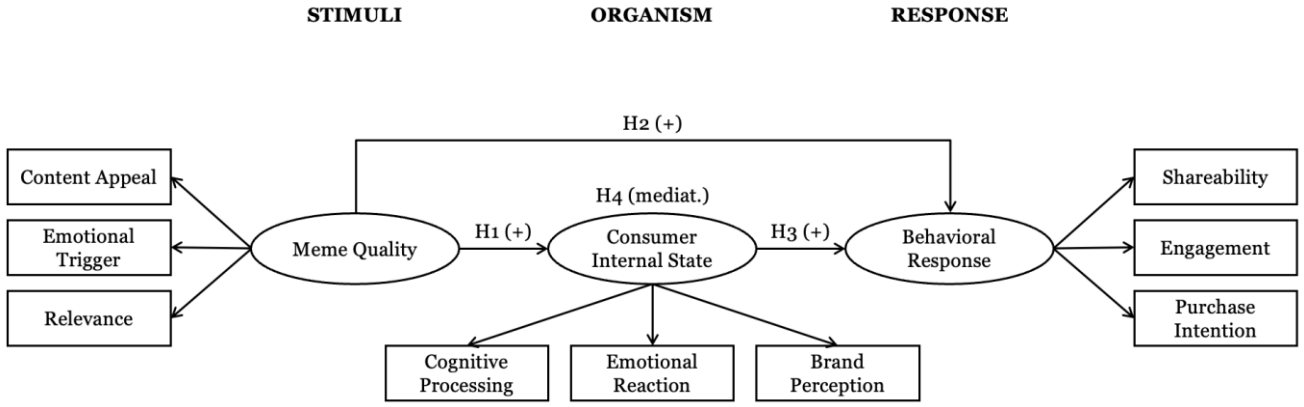


***Figure 1.*** *Research Model*
*Source:* Adapted from SOR Model of Mehrabian and Russell (1974)

## METHODS

### Research Design

The study employs a quantitative research design to examine the relationships between SOR model components and test the applicability of the conceptual model in the context of meme-based marketing. A composite-based structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM), using SmartPLS4 version 4.1.0.9, is applied due to its ability to handle complex models, predict outcomes, and analyze small samples efficiently. Likewise, PLS-SEM focuses on assessing the strength and significance of hypothesized relationships among variables while also examining mediation effects within the research model (Hair et al., 2022).

### Research Participants

The respondents of this study are social media users who have encountered meme-based digital marketing contents of various businesses. Using purposive sampling technique, primary information is obtained from respondents who were readily available to respond to the questionnaire. A total of 230 respondents have been considered, whereas 163 (71%) of them are from Generation Z, 44 (19%) are Millennials, and 23 (10%) are from Generation X. In terms of gender, 135 (59%) are females and 95 (41%) are males.

### Data Collection

The instrument used is a set of self-made questionnaires that was created using Microsoft Forms. It consists of three sections viz., (1) data privacy and eligibility confirmation, (2) demographic characteristics, and (3) perceptions on measurement items. The third section was measured using a seven-point Likert scale (1=Strongly Disagree to 7=Strongly Agree), which, as listed in Table 1, includes three measurement items for each of the three latent variables.

***Table 1.*** *Measurement Items*

| Construct/Indicator | | Measurement Items |
|---|---|---|
| Meme Quality | | |
| Content Appeal | MQ1 | The meme is visually and textually engaging. |
| Emotional Trigger | MQ2 | The meme effectively uses humor, irony, or relatability to evoke a reaction. |
| Relevance | MQ3 | The meme aligns with my personal interests or experiences. |
| Internal State | | |
| Cognitive Processing | IS1 | The meme made me think or reflect on its meaning and message. |
| Emotional Reaction | IS2 | I felt amused, nostalgic, or emotionally engaged when viewing the meme. |
| Brand Perception | IS3 | The meme positively influences my perception of the brand associated with it. |
| Behavioral Response | | |
| Shareability | BR1 | I am likely to share the meme with my friends or on social media. |
| Engagement | BR2 | The meme increases my interest in engaging with the brand's future content. |
| Purchase Intention | BR3 | The meme makes me more likely to consider purchasing from the brand. |

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## RESULTS

Prior to assessing the measurement and structural models, descriptive statistics were computed to summarize the characteristics of the sample data for the key constructs: Meme Quality, Internal State, and Behavioral Response. Table 2 presents the mean, standard deviation, rank based on the grand mean, and the corresponding verbal rating for each construct.

***Table 2.*** *Descriptive Statistics*

| Constructs | Measurement Items | | | *M* | *SD* | Rank | Verbal Rating |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | | | | |
| Meme Quality | 6.138 | 5.963 | 6.125 | 6.075 | .600 | 3 | Agree |
| Internal State | 6.275 | 6.088 | 6.163 | 6.175 | .721 | 2 | Strongly Agree |
| Behavioral Response | 6.275 | 6.325 | 6.163 | 6.254 | .678 | 1 | Strongly Agree |

The descriptive statistics show that participants, on average, rated the Meme Quality highly (*M*=6.075, *SD*=.600), experienced strongly positive Internal States (*M*=6.175, *SD*=.721), and exhibited strong Behavioral Responses (*M*=6.254, *SD*=.678). The high mean scores across all constructs suggest that the meme-based content digital marketing is effective in eliciting favorable perceptions, internal reactions, and behavioral intentions.

### Measurement Model

Then, the measurement model was assessed for reliability, convergent validity, and outer collinearity (Hair et al., 2022). The results of this assessment are presented in Table 3.

***Table 3.*** *Reliability, Convergent Validity, and Outer Collinearity*

| Constructs | Items | Loadings | α | *CR* | *AVE* | *VIF* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | ≥.708 | ≥.7 | ≥.7 | ≥.5 | <5.0 |
| Meme Quality | MQ1 | .921 | .898 | .898 | .830 | 3.217 |
| | MQ2 | .889 | | | | 2.285 |
| | MQ3 | .923 | | | | 3.278 |
| Internal State | IS1 | .902 | .920 | .922 | .863 | 2.671 |
| | IS2 | .942 | | | | 4.180 |
| | IS3 | .942 | | | | 4.279 |
| Behavioral Response | BR1 | .911 | .920 | .929 | .862 | 3.223 |
| | BR2 | .946 | | | | 4.301 |
| | BR3 | .928 | | | | 3.142 |

The quality of the measurement model was evaluated based on internal consistency reliability, convergent validity, and outer collinearity (Hair et al., 2022). Internal consistency, assessed via Cronbach's alpha (α) and Composite Reliability (CR), indicated that all constructs exceeded the commonly accepted threshold of .70 for both measures. Convergent validity was established as all item loadings surpassed the recommended threshold of .708 and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values for all constructs were greater than the .50 criterion. Furthermore, outer collinearity among indicators, evaluated using Variance Inflation Factor (VIF), showed values well below the common cutoff of 5.0. Collectively, these results confirm the satisfactory psychometric properties of the measurement model.

***Table 4.*** *Discriminant Validity*

| Constructs | Meme Quality | Internal State | Behavioral Response |
|---|---|---|---|
| Meme Quality | **.911** | .635 | .568 |
| Internal State | .577 | **.929** | .800 |
| Behavioral Response | .518 | .742 | **.928** |

*Note. Diagonal values (in bold) are the square root of AVE. Below-diagonal values are correlations, and above-diagonal values are HTMT ratios.*

Discriminant validity was assessed through the Fornell-Larcker criterion and the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT), as shown in Table 4. The analysis confirmed that the constructs satisfied the Fornell-Larcker criterion,

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where the square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each construct was greater than its correlations with other constructs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Further assessment using the *HTMT* ratio (Henseler et al., 2014) yielded values below the commonly accepted threshold of .90, and also below the more conservative threshold of .85 (Hair et al., 2022). These findings provide convergent support for the discriminant validity of all constructs, indicating they are empirically distinct entities within the model.

## Structural Model

Following the assessment of the measurement model, the structural model was evaluated to examine the hypothesized relationships between the constructs. The structural model analysis included evaluating the model's ability to explain the variance in the endogenous constructs, the effect size of the predictor constructs, and the assessment of inner collinearity (Hair et al., 2022). The results are presented in Table 5.

***Table 5.*** *Effect Size, Variance Explained, Inner Collinearity*

| Endogenous | Exogenous | $f^2$ | Effect | $R^2$ | adj. $R^2$ | Strength | VIF |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Behavioral Response | Meme Quality | .028 | Small | .562 | .551 | Large | 1.000 |
| | Internal State | .671 | Large | | | | 1.499 |
| Internal State | Meme Quality | .499 | Large | .333 | .324 | Moderate | 1.499 |

The inner collinearity among predictor constructs in the structural model was assessed using the *VIF* values, indicating the extent to which collinearity among exogenous constructs inflates the variance of estimated path coefficients for predicting endogenous constructs (Hair et al., 2022). The analysis revealed that all values were well below the common threshold of 5.0, indicating that multicollinearity is not a significant issue among the predictor constructs in the structural model.

The effect size was identified to quantify the relative impact of specific exogenous constructs on endogenous constructs within the model (Hair et al., 2022). The effect size of Meme Quality on Internal State was large ($f^2$=.499), while its effect on Behavioral Response is small ($f^2$=.028). Meanwhile, the effect of Internal State on Behavioral Response was large ($f^2$=.671).

Further, the proportion of variance in the endogenous constructs explained by their predictors was assessed using the $R^2$ and adjusted $R^2$ values. The $R^2$ value indicates the amount of variance explained, with the adjusted $R^2$ providing a less biased estimate (Hair et al., 2022). Following common guidelines for interpreting variance explained (Hair et al., 2022; Lachenbruch & Cohen, 1989), the Meme Quality explained a moderate portion of the variance in the Internal State, $R^2$=.333, adjusted $R^2$=.324. Meanwhile, the combined Meme Quality and Internal State explained a large portion of the variance in Behavioral Response, $R^2$=.562, adjusted $R^2$=.551.

## Model Fit

Assessment of model fit revealed a standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) of 0.054, which is below the recommended upper limit of .08 (Henseler et al., 2014). This finding suggests a good model fit, indicating that the observed correlations are well-reproduced by the model's predicted correlations and that the structural model is appropriately specified. Also, the normed fit index (NFI) of .954 met the standard threshold of .95 (Hair et al., 2022).

## Hypotheses Testing Results

The hypothesized relationships were tested by examining the significance of the path coefficients in the structural model. The significance of the path coefficients was determined using bootstrapping with a resample size of 5,000. The results of the hypotheses testing are presented in Table 6.

***Table 6.*** *PLS Path Coefficients*

| | Path | β | *M* | *SD* | *t* | *p* | Decision |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| H1 | Meme Quality → Internal State | .577 | .568 | .111 | 5.183 | <.001 | Accept |
| H2 | Meme Quality → Behavioral Response | .135 | .140 | .107 | 1.269 | .205 | Reject |
| H3 | Internal State → Behavioral Response | .663 | .646 | .116 | 5.741 | <.001 | Accept |
| H4 | Meme Quality → Behavioral Response (mediat.) | .383 | .365 | .091 | 4.185 | <.001 | Accept |

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Hypothesis 1 is supported. The path coefficient for the relationship between Stimulus and Organism constructs was β=.577, *t*=5.183, *p*<.001. This finding indicates that the qualities of meme-based content digital marketing (viz., content appeal, emotional trigger, and relevance) have a highly statistically significant positive influence on consumers' internal organismic states (viz., cognitive processing, emotional reaction, and brand perception).

Hypothesis 2 is not supported. The direct path coefficient from Stimulus construct to Response was β=.135, *t*=1.269, *p*=.205. This suggests that the influence of meme stimulus qualities on behavioral responses (viz., shareability, engagement, and purchase intention) is not statistically significant.

Hypothesis 3 is supported. The path coefficient for the relationship between Organism and Response constructs was β=.663, *t*=5.741, *p*<.001. This provides strong evidence that consumers' internal organismic states have highly statistically positive significant influence on their behavioral responses in the context of meme-based content.

Hypothesis 4 is supported. The Internal State mediates the relationship between Meme Quality and Behavioral Response. The path coefficient for the indirect effect was $\beta_{mediat.}$=.383, *t*=4.185, *p*<.001. This highly statistically positive significant influence confirms the mediating role of the Organism construct. The meme stimulus influences consumers' internal states, and these internal states significantly drive their behavioral responses.

Overall, the final model summarizes construct-to-construct and indicator-to-construct interactions, as shown in Figure 2.

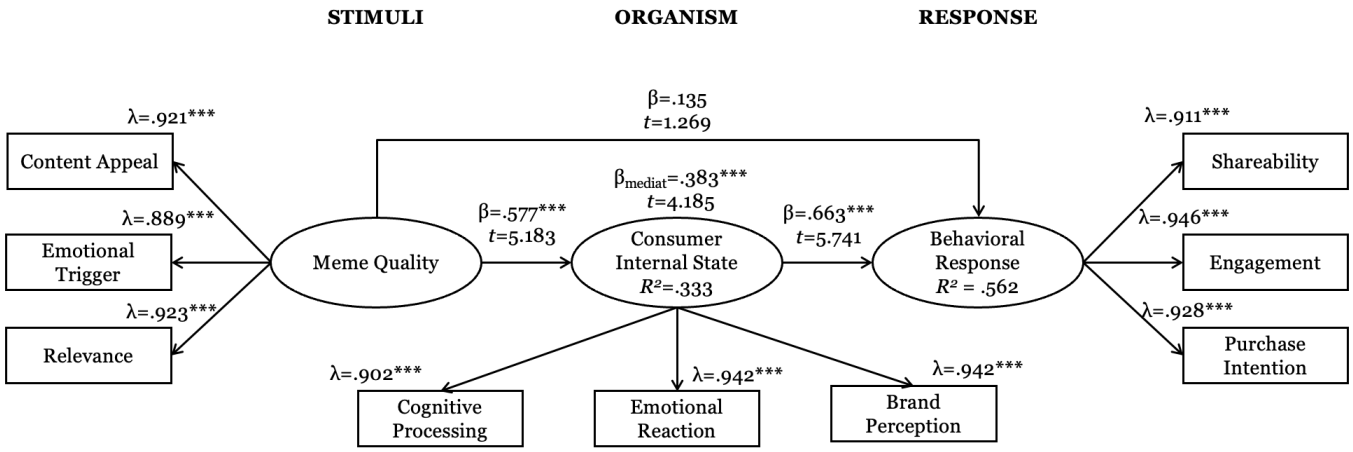


***Figure 2.*** *Final Model*
*Source:* Author
***p<.001

## DISCUSSION

This study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of meme-based content digital marketing through the lens of the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) model. By examining how meme qualities influence consumers' internal states, which in turn affect their behavioral responses. Also, it aimed to provide valuable insights into the underlying psychological mechanisms. The results of the PLS-SEM analysis offer strong support for the applicability of the SOR model in explaining consumer responses to this contemporary form of digital content marketing.

The findings provide compelling evidence for the hypothesized relationships of the constructs in the context of meme-based content digital marketing. Consistent with H1, the analysis revealed a significant positive relationship between Meme Quality and Internal State. This indicates that the perceived content appeal, emotional triggering capability, and relevance of a meme are crucial in influencing consumers' internal states, including how they process the meme cognitively, their emotional reactions to it, and their resulting perception of the associated brand. This finding aligns with existing literature emphasizing the value of engaging, emotionally resonant, and relevant content in digital marketing for capturing attention and influencing consumer thinking. For meme marketing specifically, it

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underscores that the effectiveness begins with crafting meme content that resonates profoundly with the target audience on these fundamental levels.

Interestingly, H2 or the direct path from Meme Quality to Behavioral Response was found to be not significant. This suggests that, in the context of meme-based content digital marketing, the meme's qualities do not directly lead to behavioral responses in a simple, unmediated fashion. Instead, their influence appears to be indirect, working through the consumer's internal states. This finding highlights the complexity of consumer response in digital environments and supports the notion that the Organism component of the SOR model is not merely a passive recipient but an active processor that translates external stimuli into behavioral outcomes.

Meanwhile, supporting H3, the study found a significant positive relationship between Internal State and Behavioral Response. This demonstrates that the internal states being produced by the meme content, such as how consumers think about it, feel about it, and perceive the associated brand, are strong predictors of their subsequent behaviors, namely shareability, engagement, and purchase intention. This outcome is a foundation of the SOR model, affirming that the organism's internal processing is a critical determinant of behavioral responses. In the digital realm, this means that simply exposing consumers to a meme is not sufficient; the meme must successfully elicit favorable cognitive and emotional responses and build positive brand perceptions for desired actions like sharing or purchasing to occur.

Crucially for H4, the study found a significant positive mediating effect of Internal State on the influence of Meme Quality on Behavioral Response. This is a central finding that confirms the mediating role of the Organism construct. Meme qualities influence consumers' internal states, and it is these internal states that significantly drive their behavioral responses. This mediated relationship provides a clear psychological pathway explaining how meme-based content digital marketing can be effective. The ability of a meme to be appealing, emotionally triggering, and relevant enough to positively impact cognitive processing, emotional reactions, and brand perception is what ultimately leads to consumers sharing, engaging with, and intending to purchase from the brand, rather than simply being exposed to it. This aligns with the theoretical underpinnings of the SOR model, emphasizing the critical role of internal state's indicators in mediating the stimulus-response relationship.

## CONCLUSIONS

This study successfully determined the effectiveness of meme-based content digital marketing by applying the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) model within the context of social media users. The findings give strong empirical support for the proposed theoretical framework, which explains how consumers react to meme-based marketing stimuli in this specific digital environment. The results clearly demonstrate that the perceived qualities of meme content, specifically its appeal, emotional triggering capacity, and relevance, significantly influence consumers' internal psychological states, encompassing their cognitive processing, emotional reactions, and brand perceptions. Furthermore, these internal states were found to be powerful predictors of consumers' behavioral responses, including their likelihood to share the meme, engage with the content or brand, and their intention to make a purchase.

A key finding of this research is the significant mediating role of the Organism construct. While the direct link between meme qualities and behavioral responses was not statistically significant, the indirect effect, channeled through consumers' internal states, was highly significant. This underscores that the effectiveness of meme-based content digital marketing is not a simple direct effect of the stimulus itself but is critically dependent on how the meme is processed and the internal reactions it elicits within the consumer. Theoretically, this study validates the applicability of the SOR model in understanding consumer behavior in the context of contemporary digital marketing formats like internet memes, extending the model's reach into informal and culturally driven online content. Practically, the findings offer valuable guidance for marketers targeting audiences, emphasizing that success in meme marketing hinges on creating content that effectively resonates with the target audience on a cognitive and emotional level to cultivate positive brand perceptions, which in turn drive desired actions.

Ultimately, meme-based content digital marketing is an effective strategy, operating primarily by shaping consumers' internal states. By focusing on creating memes that are appealing, emotionally engaging, and relevant, marketers can positively influence how consumers think and feel, ultimately leading to increased shareability, engagement, and

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purchase intention among social media users. This research provides a foundational understanding of these dynamics, paving the way for more strategic and impactful meme marketing efforts.

## IMPLICATIONS

### Theoretical Implications

This study makes several theoretical contributions. Firstly, it successfully applies and validates the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) model in the nascent and rapidly evolving domain of meme-based content digital marketing. While the SOR model has been applied in various digital marketing contexts, its specific application to understanding the effectiveness of internet memes as marketing stimuli provides a novel theoretical extension. This study demonstrates that even with informal and culturally distinctive digital content, such as memes, the basic ideas of environmental psychology, as encapsulated by the SOR model, are still applicable to understanding consumer behavior. Secondly, the study provides a comprehensive understanding of the mechanism through which meme marketing influences consumers. By identifying the significant indirect effect mediated by the Organism construct, the research demonstrates that meme effectiveness is not a direct stimulus-response effect. Instead, it is a more complex process where the meme qualities first influence internal consumer states, which are the primary drivers of behavioral responses. This emphasizes the importance of the consumer's internal thinking as an active mediator and contributes to a more nuanced theoretical understanding of how specific features of digital content translate into consumer action. Finally, by operationalizing the Stimulus with variables like content appeal, emotional trigger, and relevance, and the Organism with cognitive processing, emotional reaction, and brand perception within the SOR framework, this study provides a testable model for future research on viral and shareable content. It highlights which specific content qualities are theoretically linked to internal consumer states that drive online behaviors like sharing and engagement.

### Practical Implications

The findings of this study offer valuable insights for marketing practitioners utilizing or planning to utilize meme-based content digital marketing. The significant influence of the Meme Quality on the Internal State underscores the critical importance of carefully crafting meme content. Marketers should invest time and resources in creating memes that are not only humorous or trending but are genuinely appealing, capable of triggering desired emotions and highly relevant to their specific target audience. Simply repurposing popular memes without considering these factors may not be effective. The meme's content itself is the initial key to unlocking favorable internal responses. Furthermore, the strong relationship between the Organism and Response constructs highlights that the consumer's internal thinking is the primary driver of desired marketing outcomes. Marketers should aim to create meme campaigns that foster (1) positive cognitive processing by ensuring the meme's message is clear and understandable, (2) favorable emotional reactions by using the meme to evoke amusement or positive feelings towards the brand, and (3) enhanced brand perception by making the meme relatable or likeable. Monitoring consumer sentiment and reactions to meme content can provide valuable feedback on whether the desired organismic states are being achieved. The non-significant direct effect from Meme Quality to Behavioral Response, coupled with the significant indirect effect, suggests that a meme's impact is not immediate or automatic. Marketers should know that memes serve as a trigger for internal processing and emotional responses, which lead to behavioral outcomes. Therefore, success in meme marketing is less about brute-force exposure and more about the quality of the internal consumer experience the meme generates. Strategies should focus on optimizing the meme's ability to positively influence how consumers think and feel about the brand through the meme content itself. Through that, consumers would likely share the meme content to their friends or on social media, increase their interest in engaging with the brand's future contents, and consider purchasing from the brand where the meme is associated.

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