

# The Characteristics of Fashion Memes on Social Media

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## Abstract

Recently, the spreading of various fashion content on social media such as Instagram and TikTok has developed into a phenomenon of rapid information sharing. The various fashion content being shared include users' personal opinions, trending humor, and social controversies that spread through the addition of phrases and editing of images. This is called a 'fashion meme', and just as human genes transmit biological information through replications, the sharing of memes delivers information through imitation and rapid modification. Meme sharing is creating a new cultural phenomenon formed by the development of technology and by generations who value fun and easy connections. Fashion-related memes appear in diverse forms on social media, and the process of content imitation and transfer has rapidly accelerated due to the combination of the essential nature of a meme which is imitated and reproduced and that of the fast-changing social media. This study conducted a case analysis to understand the characteristics of fashion memes on Instagram and TikTok. First, fashion memes that induce communication about outfits and looks, and memes that raise social issues related to fashion could be seen as two types of memes with different subjects. Second, there were three common characteristics of fashion memes on Instagram and TikTok, which were spontaneity of social media users caused by subjective sharing of fashion memes, topicality due to people's sharing of widely known fashion contents, and criticism in sharing personal opinions about fashion. Although the forms of fashion memes in both media were different, information on fashion was to be delivered, and users who shared it perceived fashion memes as a communication medium. This study aims to reveal the role of fashion memes as a cultural communication medium by analyzing the characteristics that are actively appearing in the field of fashion. This research is expected to contribute to the development of communication methods through the subject of fashion memes and social media users.

Key words : fashion memes, social media, TikTok, Instagram, meme sharing

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## I. Introduction

These days social media is utilized for productive purposes such as business, information sharing, and actively used to search for information (Geysler, 2022). Nowadays information sharing through social media is mainly done through short videos or images, and this concise form of content is drawing the attention of many users, as their attention spans have decreased over the days. Users are actively sharing the content posted on the social media platforms they are using, to communicate and form a consensus of culture through it (Froehlich, 2020). Due to the COVID-19 outbreak in 2019, people who are tired of social distancing at home have been connecting to the outside world online, resulting in the increased consumption of short and fun content. In 2021, various ‘memes’ such as ‘Muyaho,’ ‘GGANG,’ and ‘Rollin’ appeared among many Korean social media shared content, and users responded to the content that they considered interesting by creating and sharing the content to seek amusement (Kim, 2021b).

Social media that mainly produce short-form videos received attention due to the users seeking fun and easy content. Memes, which can be seen as components of short-form content, also began to spread. Memes are produced and shared in many different fields. Memes related to fashion tend to appear in various forms on social media. The essential nature of memes that intend to be delivered to other entities through imitation and duplication has combined with the characteristics of social media’s rapid information sharing, and accordingly, the imitation and transmission of fashion information also increased. As such, memes on social media serve as indicators to help to look at a phenomenon of online information sharing nowadays.

Until now, research has been conducted primarily on the intent and impact of social media, but studies analyzing fashion content focusing on its components like fashion memes appear to be scarce. The purpose of this study is to identify the characteristics of fashion memes on social media and to analyze their role as an information-sharing medium. In addition, as these memes are being developed and re-created into more diverse forms carrying complex yet intriguing information, this study focuses on newly formed meme trends within the fashion industry and how social media users on Instagram and TikTok communicate by utilizing memes. As the sharing of memes is typically done through the vast usage of social media, this topic is to be considered worth studying and is expected to provide a guideline for the fashion industries by analyzing different types of personalized fashion meme content that is reflecting the thoughts and trends of fashion consumers on social media. Therefore this study expects to identify the fast-changing trend of individual communication methods through the subject of fashion on social media.

## II. Literature Review

### 1. The Concept of Meme

The academic term ‘meme’ by Richard Dawkins, used in classical sociology, is defined in the Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary (“Meme,” n.d.) as ‘an element of culture that is believed to be transmitted through non-genetic methods such as imitation,’ which is also used synonymously with ‘cultural genes.’ Here, memes are individual replicators who replicate cultures, hoping to spread themselves just as genes

feel the need to replicate (Dawkins, 2016). Dawkins cited songs, ideas, catchphrases, and fashion as examples of the culture delivered by memes. However, there are some differences between genes and memes. For instance, there is a difference in the type and method of delivery and the approach to information. Memes are delivered horizontally through the social method of imitation, and there are differences in physical characteristics and their operation compared to genetics. Various academic research has interpreted the qualities and social, cultural implications of memes on the internet and social media. But there are only a few studies related to the subject of fashion content, especially on its physical characteristics, transmission intentions, and diffusion as sociological approaches are prioritized in this field of study. The case study about contemporary fashion memes by Kim (2020) was mostly analyzing fashion memes used by the current fashion industry, also Cho and Kim (2020) illustrated fashion designs that were considered meme-worthy, Yun and Park (2021) focused on the characteristics of fashion memes that appeared in Vetements based on Mikhail Bakhtin's Carnival theory.

British psychologist and scientific author Susan Blackmore (2000) also pointed out in *The Meme Machine* that human uniqueness comes from the ability to imitate. Copying someone can be seen as the act of receiving any information from that person, and this can be repeated and delivered to another (Shifman, 2013a). This continuous delivery is referred to as a meme. The meme Blackmore refers to takes a step further from Dawkins' concept of 'selfish genes', by saying that human brains, their consciousness, and ego were produced through memes. And in modern society, it is argued that the evolution of memes plays a more important role than the evolution of genes.

Blackmore also argued that to explain social culture, development, and evolution, it is important not to rely solely on genetic-based biological ideas, but to consider cultural replicators like memes. The concept of memes has been developed in comparison with genetics, but the replication from human's ability to imitate and the ability to acquire and deliver information can be a topic to focus on (Blackmore, 2000).

Memes have an essential characteristic of replicating and sharing information, and humans are evolving by fulfilling their desire to acquire, share, and communicate through information sharing using memes. It can be found through the transferring of a meme that it is not just a simple duplication process. Before the advent of digital media capable of interactive communication, humans have accepted information that is unilaterally transmitted through the media. However, with the emergence of platforms such as social media where users voluntarily produce and share information, memes are transferred in forms of content with personal opinions, humor, and controversy by adding phrases or editing images. Such altered content is also called a 'meme,' and just as human genes transmit biological information through replication, the transferring of memes plays a role in delivering culture through imitation and alteration (Bauckhage, 2011). The memetic content on social media enable users to imitate and create a more developed source of information to share with others. This could be seen as a social media communication behavior, to share more interesting information to communicate. The meme diffusion can be understood as an idea, practice, or object that is newly produced, and it could also be looked at as a type of innovation. In this study, the concept of a fashion meme can be interpreted as a

form of image and video that is being produced and shared on social media platforms such as Instagram and TikTok, and the content's subject is about fashion and fashion-related issues.

## 2. Social Media and Memes

Social media refers to platforms that enable interaction between users and allow content sharing through connections between its users (Froehlich, 2020). Social media that have recently attracted attention have the characteristics of being able to post, share, and communicate by sharing images and videos. The social media industry cited Instagram acquired by Meta and TikTok as the two main platforms that are leading the social media trend and emphasized the importance of voluntary participation of platform users in content production (Jung, 2021). The two platforms have environmental factors suitable for users to produce and spread content freely on their own.

TikTok is attracting attention as a platform for Generation Z to check out trending items and obtain information with the emergence of short-form challenge videos. TikTok is recognized as a platform that is capable of showing well-personalized content and is seen as a media enjoying new challenges (Lee, 2021). Instagram also developed Reels, a short-form video function for creating and sharing, to show the expansion of the platform by focusing on the sharing of interesting and fun content (Nam, 2021).

Meme culture through social media is becoming a new trend among users who enjoy fun and simple content. The two platforms above let users find the information they want in the form of images and videos, play an important role in communication with other users with similar interests, and enable sharing

by editing and uploading the content themselves (Cho et al., 2017). With the development of smartphones and digital technology, the use of social media is considered a social phenomenon, and the connection between users has increased rapidly. As a result of these changes, people can freely express themselves in unique ways through various content in a virtual space and can share to widespread the content they are interested in.

Internet meme was recognized as a term explaining new online communication methods in the 2010s. In other words, the concept of memes in the present era can be defined as a cultural symbol or social thought spreading among social media users, and mainly refers to pictures or photos re-posted by adding interesting captions, sometimes including individual opinions. This type of meme mainly spreads via mobiles and can be viewed as an information unit such as symbols, rules, icons, and forms that are reproduced by being delivered during the communication process (Castaño Diaz, 2013). Modern social media users who express individuality and communicate using social media, pay attention to new content like interesting images and videos. Accordingly, memes revealed on social media can be understood as a medium for spreading newly constructed images based on the original piece, and as the spreading of information through intentional alterations (Kim, 2020). Accordingly, memes that are now actively shared on social media may be used as terms to refer to an interesting material or to a medium in which content selected by a social media user is reproduced and shared through a deliberate alteration process (Solon, 2013).

The main characteristic of memes on social media is that in addition to the transferring caused by the duplication, content with an interesting topic is mainly

shared. This is because there is a prerequisite characteristic that the sharing of interesting information is possible only when many are aware of the background story of the occurrence in a meme, and the content therein. For this reason, it can be expected that users who understand and consume memes are familiar with accepting various information and are sensitive to trends being shared on social media. As mentioned in Dawkins' theory (Dawkins, 2016), memes want to replicate and spread themselves, but by combining them with social media, they can grasp the additional characteristics of the information being selectively delivered according to the topic or ripple effect of the content.

### 3. Memes on Instagram and TikTok

Instagram and TikTok are currently the leading social media platforms with a rising number of users, which are currently producing and consuming the most memes. First, some elements contribute to the popularity of Instagram memes in their formality, where memes do not take much time and effort to consume and understand compared to long video content like on YouTube.

On Instagram, users do not spend much time watching a single image or video and quickly scroll through to browse the content. As a result, the convenience and accessibility of memes make memes to be consumed quickly. The material of memes on Instagram follows a suggestive trend, and this easy-to-use content attracts constant attention from users. Memes are formed based on universally shared experiences, so they tend to encourage users to empathize and share them, such as humor and nostalgia (Mina, 2019). Instagram's users tag other users in comments,

share posts via direct message, and resonate with people who share them. This sharing increases the searchability of Instagram memes and accounts that are creating Instagram memes and increases the frequency of visits by users. Memes tend to encourage repetitive interactions, with one photo shared on social media with various captions (Yang, 2020).

Certain memes are popular and can reach Instagram as well as various social media through diverse sharing. Memes, especially those that spread like viruses, spread at a rapid rate, and evolve. Memes with specific themes have the characteristic that they primarily contain a particular content, but it has also been shown to have enough universality to encourage all users to empathize and share. Therefore, shareability and continuous interactivity form a meme culture and spread immersive memes.

Memes on TikTok are seen as contributors to creating a powerful social media culture (Galer, 2020). Memes at TikTok are used as economic value beyond a means of communication and are amplifying people's attention. When searching for keywords such as 'Creating Memes,' there are simple video creation apps for users, music downloading, and so on. With the advent of this video editing and content-sharing app, it has attracted attention without having to use various platforms to share memes.

In this way, as video making became active in TikTok, it changed the form of the pre-existing memes. TikTok formed a challenge culture, in which users become the main characters of short video memes (TikTok, 2021). The ways to participate in the challenges are very simple so the number of participants is increasing, and various kinds of challenges are being updated rapidly conveying the current trend. On TikTok, a meme can be explained with the keywords of 'video upload', 'imitation', and 'upgrade'. This is because first,

the video itself becomes a trending meme after its upload, then the element in the video goes through imitation for its creation, and finally, the video has evolved over the original video (Kim, 2020). Therefore, the context that memes in TikTok hold is similar, but it is an important characteristic to produce a unique video that reveals the individuality of the users. If the change in communication began through memes, TikTok is transforming the communication and media culture in various ways and is forming a field where it can be utilized more easily.

#### 4. Fashion and Social Media Memes

Fashion can be seen as a form of imitation, and social equalization (Simmel, 1957). Fashion is essentially a social and historical construct limited to a single social type and can be seen as a specific form of social change. Modern people use fashion to deliver messages, express themselves, and visually share their content using fashion-related photos or videos to exchange and produce information and issues (Kim, 2021a).

Memes to be discussed in this study refer to social media memes focused on fashion, and as discussed in previous studies, fashion memes can be viewed as fashion-related symbols or fashion images produced by users and shared through interaction (Kim, 2020). Fashion memes on social media are mainly being shared by converting fashion designs or various controversial materials into memes among fashion images or videos in various forms such as altered and edited images on Instagram or TikTok's short-form content.

For instance, Senator Bernie Sanders's fashion, which received attention at the inauguration ceremony

of U.S. President Joe Biden, was created into a meme. Bernie Sanders's outfit became controversial after a photo of him wearing an old jumper and mittens were reported (Miao, 2021). While all men attending the inauguration were formal in suits and coats, Sanders showed off his daily worn clothes, which the public said were 'grandfather fashion from the 80s' (Im, 2021). The humble look of Sanders's image gained explosive popularity and began to be reproduced with various interpretations, and goods depicting Sanders appeared in the Bernie Sanders campaign store. This case can be interpreted as a meme containing the value supported by the public composed of fun and satire.

There were also a few fashion meme content from three fashion brands that went viral. The Burberry #TBChallenge, was used to promote the new launch of the brand logo TB, and Burberry created a challenge with a hand motion that made the letters T and B, produced music and a dance that could be used in the challenge content(Figure 1). In the cases of Gucci and JW Anderson, these TikTok fashion meme challenges were brought up by the users of TikTok and gained the attention of the brand. To start with, a TikTok user started a challenge named "Gucci Model Challenge" which was a type of content that showed TikTokers dressing up in their clothes to look like a Gucci model(Figure 2). A soundtrack that gave instructions on the steps of completing an outfit was used as the main meme of the video. After this fashion meme became a trend, especially during fashion week, Gucci also posted a video using this meme. JW Anderson's knitted cardigan gained popularity due to a British Singer Harry Styles wearing it at a public event(Figure 3). The TikTok users started a trend of re-creating Harry Styles' colorful cardigan design as

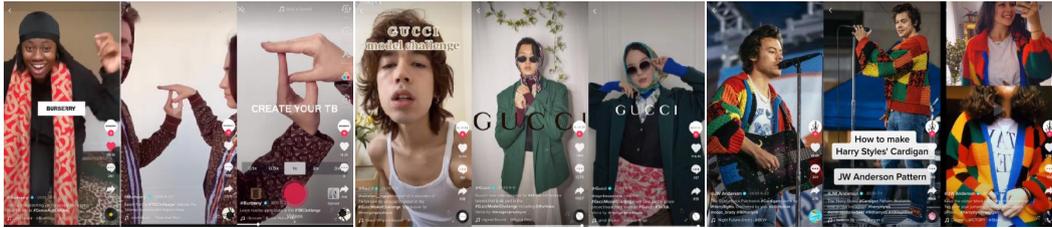


Figure 1. TB Challenge.  
From Burberry. (2020).  
<https://vt.tiktok.com>

Figure 2. Gucci Model Challenge.  
From Thvmxxs. (2020).  
<https://vt.tiktok.com>

Figure 3. How to make Harry Styles' Cardigan.  
From Jw\_anderson. (2020).  
<https://vt.tiktok.com>

a. DIY(Do It Yourself) challenge, and the challenge video of making this cardigan became a fashion meme in trend. Due to this massive trend, the designer of JW Anderson's sweater decided to share the pattern and sewing instructions on TikTok as a video content, which created the "Harry Styles Cardigan Challenge" a bigger trend by responding to the users(Schild, 2020).

Therefore, the original fashion meme can be viewed as a fashion item, a style in fashion, and it also serves as an opportunity to draw attention to new items and styles through spreading. Fashion memes should be regarded as popular cultural content that shares characteristics through the process of the audiences' participation, not just spreading simple images (Shifman, 2013b), and play a role in inducing communication between information recipients.

Accordingly, this study aims to analyze the fashion memes revealed on social media as a 'social and cultural medium disseminating in the field of fashion' by looking at fashion meme content on two trending media, Instagram and TikTok. Then by classifying the fashion memes by their subjects and their characteristics, this study expects to identify how social media users nowadays are utilizing fashion memes as a communication medium.

### III. Methodology

This study was conducted on fashion memes within Instagram and TikTok, referencing highly exposed press releases related to fashion memes and trend analysis from fashion press media on Google ([www.google.com](http://www.google.com)). These two media were selected as the main mediums that represent the image and video forms of fashion memes revealed on social media, and the use of fashion memes by recipients and transmitters. And since they have different characteristics, the case studies of the two media were separately analyzed. The content from each social media were selected based on different types of information and selection methods. This was due to the two mediums representing different forms of fashion memes. The fashion meme content on Instagram were more accessible by selecting them through famous and most popular fashion meme-producing Instagram accounts, since the content could not be reached by searching hashtags or using filters. On the other hand, TikTok's fashion meme content were able to be reached due to the hashtag '#fashionchallenge' categorizing fashion memes. In addition, on TikTok, it was possible to filter the content with most likes from top to bottom, which enabled this study to select the most popular viewed content under the fashion challenge category.

Instagram is a medium for the spread of fashion memes in the form of images, and some accounts focused on producing and sharing fashion memes. Based on the international fashion magazine *Elle* (2021) and an Internet fashion press (Gordon, 2020), there were lists of ‘Most Delightful, Instagram Fashion Meme Accounts You Want to Follow’, and it was used to select five accounts with the highest number of followers of the account, to collect and analyze the fashion memes posts. From the five accounts, 50 most recent posts were viewed (updated Jan 12, 2022), and a total of 250 posts were analyzed based on this methodology. The methodology of analyzing the most recently posted content was used since this study intended to look at the most up-to-date and trending content that social media users are viewing.

TikTok is primarily a medium in which fashion memes in the form of videos are shared. So, it is possible to find dynamic fashion memes that provide visual and auditory information such as music and visual information with movement, rather than static memes that provide only visual data. TikTok was chosen as a source of media to be analyzed since it is known to be producing many viral memes in video form. This was an important factor since there had not been too many studies about TikTok’s short-form videos on the subject of fashion. TikTok’s fashion memes are primarily about fashion and can be found as ‘fashion challenges’, which are intended to spread the content produced about them. For TikTok’s case, a total of 300 videos with more than 2,000 views were selected, from the list of most liked videos (updated Jan 12, 2022) under the hashtag #fashionchallenge, which refers to fashion challenges. From the 300 selected videos, 254 posts created in English and Korean were analyzed due to interpretation.

## IV. Results

### 1. The Subjects of Fashion Memes

Two main types of fashion-related memes were actively shared on social media. First, there were memes about lookbooks and styled outfits that were based on fashion products or contained styling information and opinions about certain outfits. The second type of fashion meme contained social and current affairs related to fashion, some having the intention of exposing hidden sides of the fashion industry and raising awareness about problems that are occurring in the field of fashion. On Instagram and TikTok, most subjects about fashion memes appeared to share common characteristics, but some content were presented differently due to the dissimilar features of the two mediums.

#### 1) Fashion Memes about Styled Outfits and Looks

On Instagram and TikTok, fashion has been used as a topic for memes that were about designer pieces, celebrity outfits, and clothes from personal wardrobes. This allowed people to use clothes to convey messages, express themselves, and exchange and produce information and issues through content sharing using photos or videos related to fashion. These memes focused on certain clothing, and the main subject was mostly about the style and looks created by the clothing. In this context, style can be interpreted as a type of coordination shown through the usage of clothing. The coordination of clothes can be seen as a type of outfit, and these outfits contain fashion concepts, capturing styles and events. Clothing is a material object, and a raw material from which fashion is formed(Kawamura,



Figure 4. Met Gala Best Dressed.  
From Diet\_prada. (2021a).  
<https://www.instagram.com>



Figure 5. Met Gala Not Best Dressed.  
From Diet\_prada. (2021b).  
<https://www.instagram.com>



Figure 6. Who wore it better?  
Met Gala 2021.  
From Vodkaandstringcheese. (2021).  
<https://www.instagram.com>

2018), and clothing worked as a fundamental, to show the type of fashion that is being consumed, by being the subject of fashion memes on social media.

For example in <Figure 4> and <Figure 5>, using the haute couture pieces from the Met Gala, an annual costume benefit held by the Metropolitan Museum of Art (Friedman, 2021), fashion memes were made in the form of images and texts that wanted to judge if the celebrities had a good matching look with the costumes of each designer (Diet\_prada, 2021a). The image about the Met Gala costume in <Figure 6> asked for opinions of peers about the colorful designer piece by including the phrase ‘Who wore it better?’, and an image of a bowl of colorful cereal was added beside the celebrity’s

photo which recalls the costume. The phrase was suggesting an idea to the peers about the type of style that appeared at the Met Gala in a funny yet criticizing way. These fashion memes were made based on press images that had already become an issue, with texts projecting opinions of the meme creators and their peers. Fashion memes have the nature to be shared through a variety of media, so a lot of the content were asking for the public’s opinion on the outfits of the celebrities.

Fashion memes on TikTok included information about the style of outfits, using specific brands, or fashion products that can be distinguished by a particular style, and a self-look book challenge that



Figure 7. Fifteen Days of Outfits Based On Emojis.  
From Kaycrome. (2020b).  
<https://vt.tiktok.com>

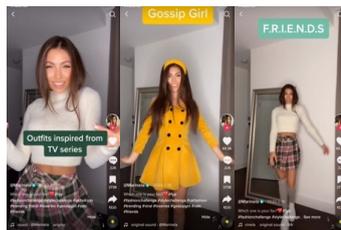


Figure 8. Which one is you fav?  
From Marinelabezer. (2020).  
<https://vt.tiktok.com>



Figure 9. In my dreams I'm doing this right now.  
From J Hey\_reilly. (2022).  
<https://www.instagram.com>

provided contextual styling methods, such as what to wear when shopping, and how to style a look when at home. Among the memes that convey information about fashion and style, it has also been revealed in a variety of subjects. For instance, a TikTok creator started a fashion meme about emojis, named ‘Fifteen Days of Outfits Based On Emojis’ (Kaycrome, 2020b). The creator selected the topic herself to use the colors, shapes, and meanings of the emojis and used the elements to organize and style fashion looks. The challenge revealed the characteristics of using creative material with one’s individuality and was also possible to find a purpose of exploring playfulness by sharing self-made memes about fashion(Figure 7).

In addition, there was another type of challenge titled ‘#InspiredOutfits’, which is inspired by famous TV shows or movies (Marinelabezer, 2020). In this case, a style challenge mimicked and reinterpreted outfits from the famous American TV series *Gossip Girl*(Figure 8). This fashion challenge deals primarily with content that is becoming a hot topic on social media and presents new styles with the creator’s individuality, and communication through comments and feedback from other users and on the platform to obtain new references.

There were also pop art forms that the public can humorously consume, as well as memes that combine images and phrases with intuitive humorous captions on the Instagram account. The creator posted images that intend to fuse fashion and art, and digital pop graphic styles were being used through fashion brand logos of Fendi, Gucci, and Louis Vuitton(Hey\_reilly, 2022). In this pop art-style meme, its creators repeatedly used fashion designs and trendy elements to create an altered image of an interesting style. The Queen of England’s image was used as a meme to bring up a

public response, rather than having a satirical intention to showcase digital art and produce fashion-related memes in a pop art form that is part of the creator’s ongoing project(Figure 9).

## 2) Fashion Memes Conveying Social Issues

On Instagram, some posts projected current issues in the fashion world onto fashion memes, expressing them in the same style as press articles. However, fashion memes differed from articles since they contained the direct opinions of the meme creators, and the images were created in simple forms so that the phrases and texts added to them would spread quickly, rather than sharing the exact duplicated content.

Among Instagram posts, there was content that conveyed critical opinions on the production of an Advent Calendar produced by fashion brand Chanel (Diet\_prada, 2021b). Consumers were complaining about its bad practicality compared to the high price, and the product not containing expected items. The content was made in a similar form that looks like an Internet article with phrases such as ‘Chanel Roasted on TikTok for \$825 Advent Calendar Containing Stickers and Dustbags,’ specifically describing the excessive pricing of luxury fashion brands and the expected value of consumers’ products(Figure 10).

In addition, there were accounts on Instagram that produced memes to deal with social issues and intended to raise awareness of social issues through this influence. For example, an Instagram account about fashion models showed the dark side of the model industry, posting images with criticism phrases and satirical images about the absurd reality experienced by models in the fashion industry. It tried to send out awareness about the fashion model industry by using



Figure 10. Chanel Roasted on TikTok for \$825 Advent Calendar Containing Stickers and Dustbags. From Diet\_prada. (2021c). <https://www.instagram.com>

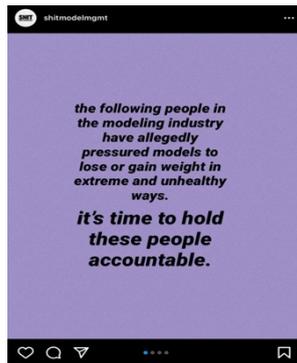


Figure 11. Exposing people who have pressured models to lose or gain weight in extreme and unhealthy ways. From Shitmodelgmt. (2021a). <https://www.instagram.com>



Figure 12. What to know before going out with promoters. From Shitmodelgmt. (2021b). <https://www.instagram.com>

long texts made into images. In this case, there was an intention to compress the texts into an image and to share the related information in a simple form. <Figure 11>, <Figure 12>, and <Figure 13> shows content of the meme that shows direct messages with the phrases 'exposing people who have pressured models to lose or gain weight in extreme and unhealthy ways' (Shitmodelgmt, 2021a), 'mentioning some advice when going out with promoter for a night out, and to look out for the dangerous event that could happen to models' (Shitmodelgmt, 2021b), and 'exposing the fact that there are male photographers that only shoot women in bikinis or nude' (Shitmodelgmt, 2021c).

Fashion stylists also share fragmentary images about the types of beauty in this society that are popularly consumed. For these cases, the memes were online shared images altered by adding phrases about a particular situation. For instance, in <Figure 14>, the caption 'Styling is fun' is added to an image that looks like it used tape and clips to make alterations on an outfit, and this image expresses the hardships of stylists by the combination of image and text (Stressedstylist, 2019). As such, the content of the

situational difficulties experienced by having a job as a stylist in each image are revealed through edited images, and the addition of a phrase enables a contextual understanding of the image from the stylist's perspective. By looking at these cases, it could be concluded that memes were designed to be easily viewed and delivered to the public by Instagram in the form of a single image conveying a message.

One of TikTok's fashion videos with the highest number of views was about the inclusion of various body sizes (Denisemmercedes, 2020). In the content, there are two women of relatively different body sizes wearing the same style of clothing, introducing clothing products offered in various sizes, and delivering messages on the inclusion of many different body sizes in this world (Figure 15). This content lightly criticizes the production of fixed designs and sizes of fashion products and can be seen as a challenge initiated to change this perception using fashion items and styling different looks to show that every body size can be stylish.

There have also been cases where the content provided tips on purchasing used fashion products



Figure 13. Signs that a modeling agency is a scam.  
From Shitmodelgmt. (2021c).  
<https://www.instagram.com>



Figure 14. Styling is Fun.  
From Stressedstylist. (2019).  
<https://www.instagram.com>

and attempts to style used fashion products over a specific period. This particular challenge began with the growing public interest in second-hand products and the increasing number of thrift stores, and the increasing number of people who wished to consume fashion in an ethical way (Kaycrome, 2020a). This challenge wanted to change the negative perception of used products and continued to create challenge videos that showed the creator's style through 'thrifted' and purchasing unique and inexpensive products in used stores. This challenge was designed by an individual and is characterized by disclosing second-hand clothes purchases through thrifting, sharing information, showing the process by creating a style look book, and freely revealing interest in fashion(Figure 16).

Subsequently, there was also a fashion challenge

that could be enjoyed while staying at home during the COVID-19 situation. As the name 'Pillows Challenge' suggests, the challenge emphasized the fact that people should spend time at home by wearing a simply created fashion item using pillows and belts that everyone has at home (Instacassii, 2020). It projects the intention of an activity anyone can try in the prolonged pandemic situation, and it accompanies a message that everyone can still have a great-looking, fun daily life by wearing fashion made at home(Figure 17). It can be understood that the challenge involved fun through fashion items using materials at home and included the intention to share awareness of the COVID-19 situation through a participation method that can only be practiced at home. This meme delivered information on a social phenomenon in a

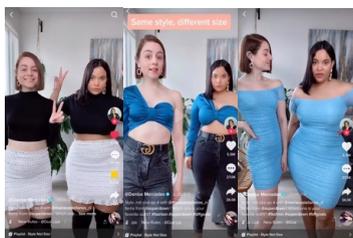


Figure 15. Same style, different size.  
From Denisse Mercedes. (2020).  
<https://vt.tiktok.com>



Figure 16. Thirty Days of Thrifted Outfits.  
From Kaycrome. (2021a).  
<https://vt.tiktok.com>

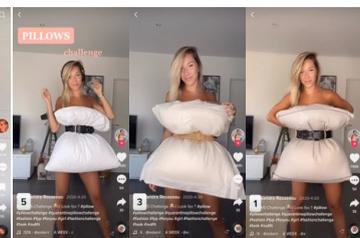


Figure 17. Pillows Challenge.  
From Instacassii. (2020).  
<https://vt.tiktok.com>

simple and fun way with an approach that anyone can withstand the COVID-19 situation fashionably.

## 2. Characteristics of Fashion Memes

There were some characteristics of memes on Instagram and TikTok that appeared common, but some parts differed due to the different features of the platforms and the type of content being shared. A common characteristic that could be found on both platforms was that those who create, share, and embrace fashion memes have sought to convey a message, and they recognize fashion memes as a medium for implicit communication. The main characteristics of fashion memes were spontaneity due to the spontaneous sharing of information, topicality according to the transferring of materials that received public attention, and criticism that conveyed critique related to fashion.

### 1) Spontaneity in Fashion Meme Sharing

Fashion memes become a hot topic due to spontaneous sharing among social media users and the memes spread in the form of adding personal opinions and controversial elements of transmitters through the editing of phrases, rather than transferring information received on social media to the original state (Solon, 2013). The sharing of memes on Instagram and TikTok is based on imitation, but it is forming a new type of information through voluntary alterations by the social media users with environmental factors suitable for users to directly create and share the content (Nam, 2021). Due to the active sharing of social media users and fashion meme creators, there have been cases in which original content has once again attracted attention and caused a trend, adversely

affecting the fashion industry. This direction of transfer can be seen as something that occurs when users voluntarily share the content and opinions on fashion brand-related issues, such as Chanel's sale of Advent Calendars. Since fashion memes are voluntarily selected and shared, the transmitters actively participate in sharing the memes, and this sometimes has a more powerful ramification than any other commercial content. In addition, the direction and the ripple effect of spreading fashion memes may vary depending on the degree of public participation.

The fashion memes on TikTok appeared to be providing an even more abundant environment of editing and sharing personal opinions about fashion, with users creating their own challenges and sharing them. For instance, the challenge of thrift shopping for 30 days was a self-made challenge by the creator to encourage the use of second-hand clothes. This challenge went on for 30 days, elevating its number of views, meaning that the content gained more interest from other users as the challenge proceeded. The same creator also shows her creativity by creating a challenge called "Fifteen days of outfits based on emojis" (Kaycrome, 2020b), showing the fact that fashion meme sharing through TikTok not only brings users' creativeness to the fashion meme content but also stimulates development in different types of fashion content.

### 2) Topicality in the Material of Fashion Memes

Fashion memes are intended to produce media content that the audience will voluntarily edit and process to convey new meanings and individual thoughts (Jung, 2021). These content primarily aimed at communicating through opinions about popular fashion images, and it was noticeable that the audience

accepted this activity as a new type of communication culture.

Fashion memes discussing the Met Gala's haute couture creations and celebrity outfits included phrases that encouraged users to voluntarily share images of the event and encouraged other users to comment on it (Fashionassistants, 2021). In addition to the image of the Met Gala costumes that are already topical, there were secondary alterations and horizontal information transmission among the users. These fashion memes generate greater interest and repercussions than the original image by processing fashion-related materials that have already become a hot topic. And users can voluntarily alter a piece of information into a fashion-related meme and use it as a medium for sharing various opinions. However, since there were a variety of fashion memes and their subjects, there were also types of information that individuals produced and shared themselves. Social media users used fashion memes as a communication medium and used them for a variety of opinion-sharing purposes. This is possible due to the social media platforms enabling interaction and allowing unlimited content sharing (Froehlich, 2020). Through image editing using playful sources, 'funny images' were created and information about fashion styling tips was shared as fun elements. If this type of information was actively shared, the subject also acquired attention afterward.

The Pillows Challenge in a similar sense provided a type of meme that could be participated, and re-created by anyone. The point of this fashion meme was that anyone is able to have fun at home, be safe during COVID-19 by using pillows at home, and be fashionable at the same time. The act of participating in a challenge during the pandemic and communicating with others through this challenge led to users creating

many different types of fashion content using this fashion meme topic. Not only did this challenge was selected by many users as a popular meme to participate in, but it had helped many social media users to focus on staying at home during the pandemic to keep themselves safe, and to be able to feel safe together by sharing the meme with others.

### 3) Criticism in Fashion Memes

Fashion memes were created based on containing satirical content related to fashion and spreading various information through contextual forms. This can be seen as a characteristic because memes are used as a medium for sharing various opinions (Castaño Diaz, 2013), especially since expressions of individual opinions are freely expressed in the meme itself. The critical fashion memes found on social media mainly dealt with content that is related to the industrial aspect of fashion. There were social media accounts that produced and shared only critical information through fashion memes, further highlighting the critical nature of the meme-producing accounts.

There were two types of memes with critical consciousness. First, there was a type that directly shared satirical images and phrases, and the other wanted to change stereotypes about fashion through methods developed by individuals. First, the type of direct transferring was shared as a fashion meme with critical phrases and satirical images of the absurd realities experienced by models in the fashion industry, which showed an intention to convey the text of what was happening in the fashion model industry. Fashion memes produced by fashion stylists also intended to share real-life situations by editing images that expressed the stylist's grievances. This shows that the image itself is a fashion meme content

designed to criticize the fashion industry and that due to its simple formation, it is optimized for more implicit and rapid transmission.

On the other hand, to convey messages about the inclusion of various body sizes, the fashion memes tried to send out social messages by using individual creativity in different types of content rather than a direct criticism of words (Denisemmercedes, 2020). Individual creativity in this context refers to editing skills and designs that were applied to the video clips. To be specific, TikTok provides various types of editing tools and AI-generated filters, providing content creators an environment to explore their creativity and content-creating skills, thus helping to convey messages that creators may want. Rather than using long writings throughout the content, it was based on singing along to fun music and dancing to TikTok dances that the content creators chose to utilize in the video. The social message of inclusion of different body types was shown through the creator's own designed phrases and the usage of the fashion look book challenge meme, showing two women dressed in differently sized clothing in the same design, dancing to the music. This attempted to indirectly express critical opinions on the fashion industry, and the characteristics of individual creativity and challenge were added to the sharing process, which also led to the active participation of other users. In addition, it was created so that anyone could enjoy and was spreading social messages about fashion by utilizing the characteristics of the platform to freely express one self's ideas.

## V. Conclusion

While the spontaneity and criticality of fashion

memes have all been shown to be different forms of fashion on Instagram and TikTok, the commonalities are that they drive public empathy and sharing through individuality.

The material of the fashion meme is mainly made into a new information medium by processing content that is already considered topical. The material was highly understood by the public, such as the designer's fashion work, the celebrity costumes of the event, and famous TV shows and movies. These fashion memes have become a topic that can encourage the public to share and communicate vigorously. On the contrary, social media users also had the powerful ability to use fashion memes as a communication medium to grant an afterthought of topicality. This was different from the spontaneous information adoption of users, but it was found to be a reverse directional transferring where eventually the original content attracted attention. The direction of meme sharing can all be found to have been caused by the voluntary information sharing phenomenon of fashion meme transmitters, and they can meet the characteristics of social media and have powerful ramifications. There were also a variety of perspectives shared about fashion, as fashion memes are voluntarily selected and shared. There have been fashion memes that used fashion as a material to convey critical content. Critical fashion memes were also directly conveyed in the form of implicit images but depending on the nature of the medium in which voluntary content could be produced, they were also found to be made in unique forms, especially by creative content creators.

Social media users produced and shared fashion memes by mixing various materials by imitating the semantic and visible morphological aspects of the original information. In addition to the existing

traditional elements, memes appear to strongly reveal the characteristics of the rapid and stimulating spread of trends through individual creativity transformation and can be seen as a trendy communication tool for fashion brands, consumers, and social media users. In addition, it can be recognized that ‘fashion memes’ have been reborn as a cultural factor that can enrich the fashion field by various content produced according to the purpose and spontaneity of participants rather than simply a medium of information sharing to identify trends.

On the other hand, due to the meme’s characteristic of relentless sharing and developing into many different forms through social media, there were implications of locating the original content of a certain fashion meme and identifying the original intention of a meme. This also indicates the fact that characterizing fashion memes’ through looking into the process of fashion meme sharing is difficult due to the lack of identification of steps on its development. Also, the content on social media are vulnerable to non-stoppable recreation and sharing, which could evoke the problem of wrongful information being shared online. This means that although it shows the creativity within many different types of content produced by social media users, there are content produced with biased opinions shared through social media that could create discussions about the validity of information created by various anonymous users. Following these implications, there is a need for future analysis of fashion memes’ characteristics reflecting on the fashion meme creators’ intentions of creating and sharing a fashion meme content through the process of developing a meme with the subject of fashion.

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## 소셜 미디어에 나타난 패션 밈의 특성

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### 요약

최근 인스타그램, 틱톡과 같은 소셜 미디어에서 다양한 패션 콘텐츠가 확산되면서 이는 하나의 빠른 정보 공유의 현상으로 발전하고 있다. 공유되는 콘텐츠에는 문구의 추가 혹은 이미지의 편집을 통해 전파자의 개인적인 견해나 유행하는 재미요소 및 사회적 논란의 요소가 가미된 형태의 콘텐츠가 확산되고 있다. 이를 ‘패션 밈’이라고 하는데, 인간의 유전자가 복제를 통해 생물학적 정보를 전달하듯, 밈의 전파는 모방 및 빠른 변형을 통해 정보를 전달한다. 밈의 공유는 새로운 기술과 재미있고 간편한 소통을 중시하는 세대가 만나 새로운 문화현상을 만들어내고 있다. 특히 패션 관련 밈은 다양한 형태로 등장하며, 밈의 모방과 복제를 거쳐 또 다른 개체에게 전달되는 본질적인 성질과 소셜 미디어의 빠른 전파 특성이 결합함으로써 패션 정보의 모방과 전파가 급속화 되었다. 이에 따라 본 연구에서는 인스타그램과 틱톡에 드러난 패션 밈의 특성을 파악하기 위한 사례분석을 진행한 결과, 먼저 인스타그램과 틱톡의 패션 밈을 주제에 따라 크게 두 가지로 분류해 볼 수 있었으며 패션 그 자체에 대한 소통을 유도하는 의복에 대한 밈, 그리고 패션과 관련한 사회적 문제를 전달하고 있는 패션 밈이 존재했다. 두 번째로 인스타그램과 틱톡의 패션 밈에서 공통으로 드러난 세 가지 특성에는, 소셜 미디어 사용자들의 주체적인 패션 밈 공유로 인한 자발성, 인기 있는 패션 콘텐츠를 다수가 공유함에 따라 드러나는 화제성, 그리고 패션에 대한 개인적인 의견 공유로 인한 비판성이 있었다. 두 매체의 패션 밈 형태는 달랐지만, 모두 패션에 대한 정보 전달이 이루어진 것을 확인할 수 있었으며, 패션 밈의 공유자들은 패션 밈을 하나의 소통 매개체로 인식하고 있는 것을 알 수 있었다. 본 연구에서는 패션 분야에서 활발하게 등장하고 있는 패션 밈의 양상과 특성을 파악하여 패션 밈의 문화적 매개체로서의 역할을 밝히는 것에 목적을 두고 있다. 또한, 밈이 뉴 미디어매체와 밈의 전파에 익숙해진 소셜 미디어 사용자들을 통해 새롭게 변화하고 있음에 따라, 패션 산업계 및 패션을 통한 개인의 소통 방식의 발전과 관련하여 연구할 가치가 있을 것으로 판단된다.

주제어 : 패션 밈, 소셜 미디어, 틱톡, 인스타그램, 밈 공유

