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Inquiring About the Memeti Relationships with Societal Collapse

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores how information processing affects behavior and factors of societal collapse. An approach to further explore peoples' behaviors concerning collapse is explained. Metamemetics is an approach to understanding the way we think proposed by Diego Fontanive. Factors of collapse and how we relate to it are explained in different fields. Examples in the paper use the Internet as a place to study perception of processing information. A survey was made and given for observations about user behavior and expectations. Another example survey was given out to critically observe user behavior and expectations across different websites, tracing factors of the cognitive aspect of societal collapses, such as a decline in attention span. Exploring the application of this approach is recommended when studying reality and how we relate to it, and inquiries about systems and potential societal collapse.

Keywords: societal collapse, Memetics, critical thinking, user behavior, attention economy

INTRODUCTION

Ideas, thoughts, values, and expectations are embedded in society [1]. Memes consist of these ideas, thoughts, values, and expectations and are spread and replicated within society through memeplexes. Memeplexes consist of complexes of memes on the same or similar topics that are meant to garner support for the thoughts and information they were made to propagate. Memeplexes are like living organisms as they imitate, fecundate, replicate and propagate (Dawkins, 1979) by passing the information they carry in a way analogous to a pathogen like a virus for instance. The memetic information is therefore transferred from mind to mind or group to group, with eventual variations regarding its content but by preserving substantially the structure of the meme. A good example of this process is the evolution of the meme of ``spirituality``, which went throughout the centuries from animistic-spirituality to faith-based-spirituality to secular spirituality (p.c. with D.F., 2022).

Memeplexes are very rarely based on truths. They have the potential to negatively influence society and psychosocial trends\belief-based proclivities. The study of Metamemetics, proposed by Diego Fontanive, is an extension of memetics and refers to assessing the validity of memes and considering which are more harmful to society (Fontanive, 2019). The most harmful memeplexes are those that cause conflicts between societal groups, which ultimately lead to violence (e.g., radicalization, extreme conspiratorial thinking, cults and sects, polarization, and radical ideologies /isms).

When the use of the brain lacks sufficient reasoning power (e.g., the ability to understand, erase or positively manipulate memes), or when competing memes are conflicting, and people cannot

reach an agreement based on rational compromise, the conflict becomes irresolvable. This conflict can also lead to the emergence of severe anxiety\psychogenic issues (Leigh, 2011). States of mind characterized by tense confusion, neuroticism, excessive preoccupations, irrational self-doubts, etc., resulting from the emergence of "cognitive dissonance" (i.e., the holding of contradictory ideas and thought processes in the same mind), are analogous issues (personal communication with D. F., 2022). One psychological consequence that can stem from these issues is a drastic reduction in attention spans. The decrease in attentiveness leads to less understanding and ultimately can increase the unsupervised assimilation of the information we take in, whether the information is factual or not. Consequently, the less attentive we are, the more efficient it is for memes to kick in, consolidate, replicate, and therefore influence our reasoning and consequently our behaviors, such as excessively unregulated apophenic tendencies (p.c. with D.F., 2022).

Memetic interference refers to the replication and the increase of contagiousness of nonfactual and/or dangerous information via memeplexes and their corresponding effects on human behaviors could influence societal collapse. Causes of societal collapse vary depending on the situation, context, historical perspective, or modern perspective and include catastrophe, war, avoidable pandemic circumstances, famine, trouble in economics, etc.

Using the current concept (and information related to the fact of overpopulation) as an example, there is a collective sense that the population will get larger and larger in the future. In a video, Dr. Swan explained as fewer people are born and people are living longer it will become more difficult to support younger and older populations as maintaining civilization is helped by propagation (After Skool, 2022). This videoid an informed perspective and within the same momplex surrounding ideas about population. Unbiased perspectives could change how we think as parents and how we view and think about each other. This is based on a video about the topic of depopulation as opposed to the belief that overpopulation is more likely (yet there will be exponential growth in seniors disproportionate to younger generations. As an observation, it may make us less likely to display behaviors that are for the collective good of society and instead cause us to focus on what will benefit social and psychological interdependence and symbiotic growth.

Societal collapse is approached in multiple ways by different fields. Lucas Kemp suggests there are four key characteristics: socioeconomic complexity, the demolition of the government, loss of cultural identity, and rising violence (Kemp, 2019). For Jared Diamond, factors commonly associated with collapse are memetic: exploiting resources, having maladaptive attitudes toward being able to change, the decline in collaborative support, and attitudes toward managing climate change. Jonathan Cohen suggests psychological factors of societal collapse are fast thinking and self-destructive behaviors and behavioral economist, Tainter, says as innovation declines behavioral proclivity is increasingly irrational (Kemp, 2019 & Spinney, 2018). Finally, Philosopher Oswald Spengler indicates the cause of the collapse is a lack of abstract thinking or an anthropological decline in cognition (Kumar, 2014).

Memetic interference refers to thought patterns that are harmful or disrupt critical thinking as a result of psychological conditioning. It consists of memes interfering, like a mental virus that

could influence societal collapse. Thus, the objective of data collected in a survey is to explore memetic interference and its cognitive outcomes regarding user behavior within the context of societal collapse. To achieve this, factors of cognitive decline will be considered, such as speed of attention, declines in passion, and symptoms of mental disorders.

RESULTS

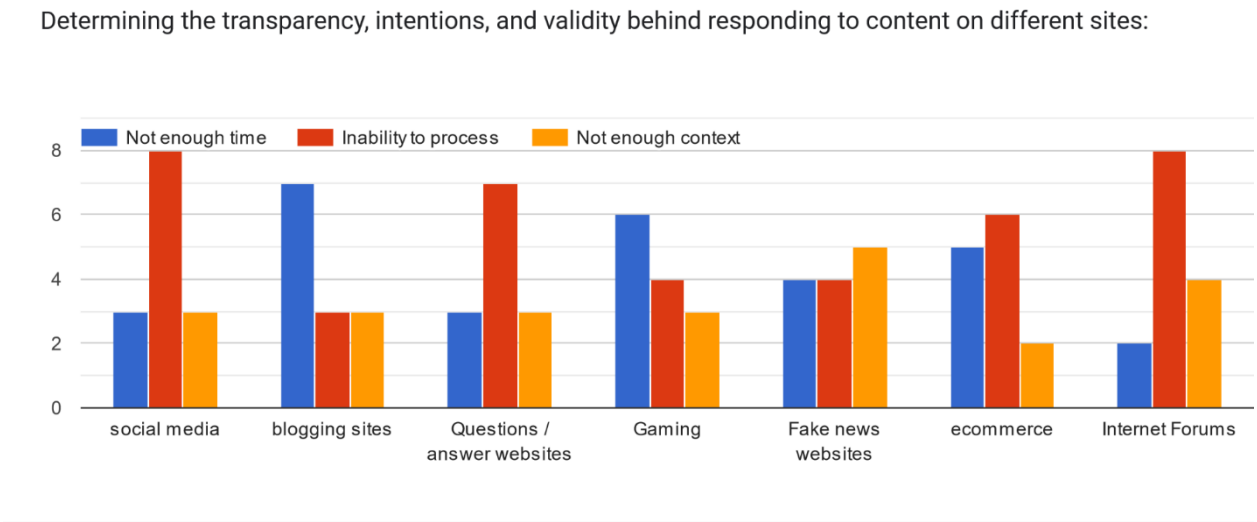


Figure 1: determining transparency, intent, and validity in responses to content.

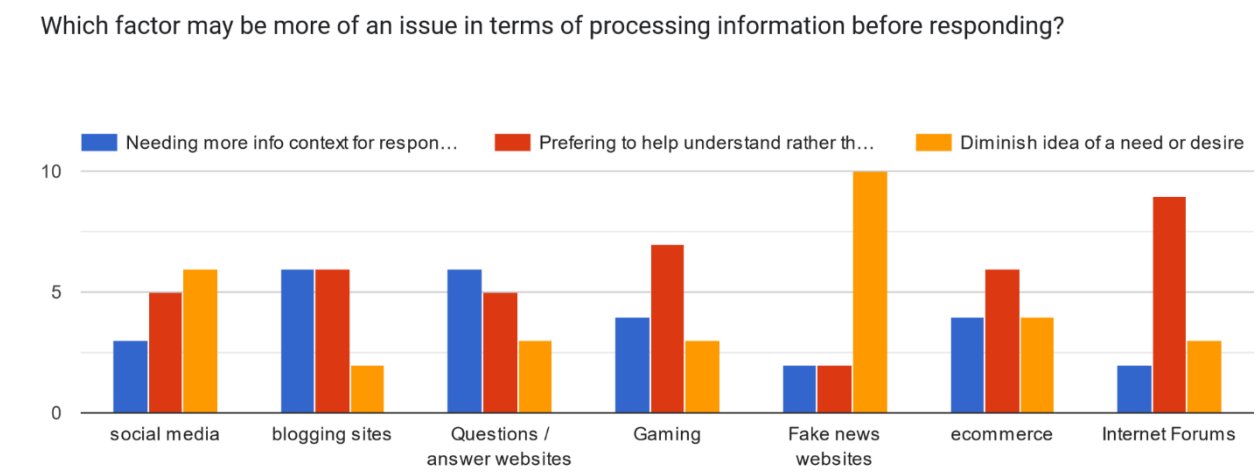


Figure 2: Factors of information processing and organization.

DISCUSSION

The survey achieved one objective in memetic factors interfering with a factor of societal collapse mentioned by Tainter, which is cognitive decline. The internet can provide a tangible medium to study behaviors online (TreeTVN2KNeed to Know, 2020). Thus, a survey was created to collect observations about web users and emotional regulation. Applying

Metamemetics to observing internet user behavior can help look at an example of memetic interference resulting in an area of societal collapse, such as the decline in some cognitive tools. Those can be attention, deductive thinking, analysis, etc. In a survey conducted in this paper, user behavior is observed by respondents' critical analysis of Internet users' behavior. Details of the survey can be found in Figure 1.

A sample survey was conducted about factors of user behavior. This was an example to elaborate on the factor of societal collapse. Memetic interference can be traced in website usage. One of the questions focused on a website's intentions versus a user's overall expectations. Certain expectations may be implicit. Respondents were asked to view an element that would have associated consequences if they were to disregard or not understand the intent of the information when using it for their purposes. For example, internet forums have been shut down due to irrelevant behavior and trolling, such as question/answer sites connected to Yahoo. (Similarly, illegal downloads may have prohibited access or activation of sites).

This is a sample survey that is suggested to be expanded on if copied in future research. The responses were done in social media groups and private messages, with the survey respondents deciding to answer based on the goal of their survey being answered. Some bias is inevitable and because only 20 respondents were recorded. From analysis, however, the answers were clear and used critical thinking.

One question on the survey was about examples of interactions to the gap between reality and interpretation of it. Seventy-seven percent of respondents asked about the ways that intentions should be understood and that understanding a user's expectations could prevent entropic behaviors. Moreover, 66% of respondents felt it was important to use fair measurements when making decisions or discussing something.

A counteraction could include identifying and distinguishing the intent of a site from the intent of users (66%). This includes their perceptions about it, which can influence algorithms related to pulling up the page as a search result. Another would be to understand the content before sharing the intonation. A third counteraction is deducting irrelevant and unfair measurements and comparative behaviors when sharing information (73%). A linguistic example. If, in English, words like 'excellent' are perceived as more significant than a word like 'okay,' this interferes with emotions and judgment

The second question listed ways and about aspects of how AI could be applied to help improve the critical thinking of users.40% of respondents said deductive thinking with policymaking. 73% listed that increased attentiveness and introspection are crucial. 53% application of metacognition by identifying our limits as we make decisions and interact (including ignorance and denial of ignorance). 53% listed appropriate use of censorship which could lessen the disproportion of unnecessary and invalid information flow and educate errors. Related concerns are memetic stupidity and induced ignorance and polarizing behaviors online. 60% identify when bias interferes with input, yet humans should do this separately. The interface between human reasoning and AI should be primarily aimed at bettering users' reasoning skills. The main purpose is to stimulate more awareness regarding biases and conditioned

selective reasoning. This priority can consequently refine the algorithms used to sustain AI's systems. Human\AI interaction should be mainly capable of implementing deductive thinking skills. This would help immensely with biases, polarization, and radicalization reduction both in real and digital life (pc with D.F., 2022).

The third and fourth questions regarded the information being processed. In figure 1, an observation was how users determine transparency, intentions, and validity behind the content they respond to. Different sites had different results for factors that may impact information processing. Responses were asked about factors of emotional dysregulation occurring while users process information and respond to it and others online. Factors that were considered in this sample were inability to process, not having time to process, or not having enough context for an accurate analysis, if there is any.

In figure 2, an observation was inferring gaining information processing. Factors that could help emotional regulation strategies include needing more information, preferring to understand, and idea need or desire.

The second set of factors in dysregulation include the need for more information to develop a response, assisting in people's understanding and a diminishing sense of desire regarding types of websites. The types of websites where these factors were analyzed included social media, blogging, Q&A, gaming, fake news, e-commerce, and Internet forums. Tools like code.org and self-guided coding courses can contribute to applying these factors to processing information on sites where AI needs more regulation.

The daily amount of information that an average western person processes today are equal to what an average person in the Middle Ages used to process in a lifetime). For instance, today an average individual living in the West processes about 49 to 70 GB daily or circa 70,000 thoughts per day (p.c. with D.F., 2022). This enormous information overload also means that an average individual is exposed to multiple daily variations in their sense of identity and personality, depending on the type of information and external influences the individual encounters daily. Information overload can even occur, largely via platforms on the Internet. This information overload, if not supervised with appropriate thinking skills, can be a form of memetic interference and lead to an increase in mental disorders, cognitive confusion, and general neuroticism (p.c. with D.F., 2022).

To explore memetic interferences as they relate to societal collapse, we can consider the change from superficial to monological behavior in online platforms such as YouTube. At a young age, a person has fun or acts stupid on the internet. They then grow up and want to change, to be liked, and to have their previous identities forgotten or forgiven. When they return under a different identity or identities and are ultimately recognized and associated with the past, these individuals feel ruined. This can lead to them attacking and defending themselves.

The average social media user seems to prefer to engage in silly behavior (e.g., trolling, mocking, and silliness) especially when the user is young. Over time, they gradually associate themselves with certain political beliefs or group preferences, thus becoming absorbed into groupthink

dynamics. When this happens, groupthink dynamics supersede the individual. These groupthink dynamics include the attitude to preserve ``harmony`` in a group where individuals belong at the cost of avoiding constructive criticism, even when it is necessary. In this way, general agreeableness is prioritized within the group, which can be called ``memetic agreeableness``. However, at the personal level, this behavior can backfire causing self-resentment or existential crises. At the collective level, memetic agreeableness, especially when fueled digitally, can lead to the proliferation of coping mechanisms such as conspiratorial thinking, such as the example of far-right extremism, and radicalization (p.c. with D. F., 2022).

To tackle boredom, one might make connections with irrational things or beliefs because of external influences and become a part of these groupthink dynamics. 'Making use of this boredom' can be a memetic trick. Specifically, memes may attempt to appear as something useful and relevant. Because of boredom you may mistakenly associate with the meme and outwardly do so on a public platform (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Instagram). Then, because you yearn for a new identity (a new self) separate from the irrational things or beliefs you have acquired when bored, you attempt to 'disappear'. The idea of reinventing yourself is exhausting because, unless the source is deleted, the memory is there and the audience can still cling to it. This can lead to a feeling of being trapped within the group and, because of the anxiety-related issues this results in, can lead to dangerous ideologies that could negatively influence the person and, because this same process is being experienced by a large proportion of our population and society.

FURTHER DISCUSSION

A final example of memetic behavior interfering with societal collapse is losing knowledge about what we familiarize ourselves with over our lifetime. Belief systems that may result include such forms of uncertainty as millenarianism, fear of the world ending, postmodernism, and polarization. Regarding memetic interference in the context of managing responses to societal collapse, some inquiries could be made. The following questions could be implemented in future studies regarding memetic replication in the context of societal collapse. Why and how do users exhaust themselves with a desire to be creators if the goal is to be recognized and accepted? Another thing to inquire about is the speed and accuracy of responses, such as presumptions about a blog post but not reading it thoroughly or engaging with it. One way to counteract polarized memes might be to look at different perspectives. Historical, etymological origins might also be traced through a tool like Google Books Ngram Viewer - for memes like love, evil, and freedom. Cross-cultural analysis can highlight the need to understand our cultural and institutionalized conditioning better so we can combat the potential consequences of not inquiring about how people associate with ideas, internally and interpersonally, historically and currently.

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GLOSSARY

Attention Economy

Management of attentiveness as users absorb and process information. (Mathew Crawford)

Groupthink
Beliefs are shared among people to keep a system. Yet this can be troublesome in extreme situation and where violence caused by other toe is when people disagree.

Memes
Replicators of culture and information (coined by Richard Dawkins in his book, published, m 1976, called The Selfish Gene.

Memeplex
A group of memes, like cultures, ideologies, and belief systems.

Memetic Interference
The replication and the increase of contagiousness of nonfactual and/or dangerous information via memeplexes and their corresponding effects on human behaviors could influence societal collapse.

Memetic Stupidity
The behavioral tendency of extreme confusion of place between the idea of what we want and how things really are.

Memetic Trick
Meanings are confused with observation about how things are actually.

Metamemetics
Diego Fontanive's adaptation of Memetics, studying the viral memes and violence caused by devotion to them. "It also involves the decoding of the premises behind the meaning of the meaning to understand whether the premises are valid or not" (Fontanive, 2020).

Multilogical Thinking
This involves different ways of understanding, such as lateral, analytical, dynamic, negative, and critical. Models of awareness are created through these examples of thinking (from Glossary on criticalthinking.org).

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