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Cognitive Creativity in English-Language Social Media Memes in Morocco: A Multimodal Conceptual Blending Study



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Abstract

This study investigates cognitive creativity in English-language social media memes within Moroccan digital culture, focusing on how meaning is constructed through the interaction of visual, verbal, and cultural resources. Memes have emerged as influential forms of online communication, functioning not only as entertainment but also as sites of identity negotiation, social commentary, and cultural expression. The primary objective of this article is to examine how Moroccan meme creators employ multimodal conceptual blending to represent national identity, linguistic hybridity, historical memory, gender roles, migration experiences, and global positioning. Adopting a qualitative, descriptive-analytical research design, the study analyses a purposively selected corpus of twenty English-language memes collected from major social media platforms. The analysis is grounded in Conceptual Blending Theory and multimodal discourse analysis, allowing for systematic examination of how images, text, emotions, and shared cultural knowledge combine to produce humorous and meaningful interpretations. The findings reveal that cognitive creativity in Moroccan memes is achieved through patterned blending processes rather than random humour, with Morocco consistently conceptualised as a symbolic cognitive space associated with pride, resistance, hospitality, emotional belonging, and cultural negotiation. English serves as a global framing language, while Moroccan sociocultural knowledge anchors interpretation and accessibility. The study concludes that Moroccan English-language memes function as culturally embedded digital narratives that enable users to critique power, express collective identity, and engage with global audiences while remaining locally grounded, highlighting the importance of memes as sites of cognitive, cultural, and social meaning-making in contemporary digital discourse.

Keywords: Cognitive Creativity; Multimodal Discourse; Conceptual Blending; Moroccan Memes; Digital Culture

Introduction

Social media memes have emerged as a distinct form of digital communication in the English-speaking online environment, blending visual and verbal elements to convey meaning in ways that extend beyond traditional language use. In the Moroccan digital context, English-language memes circulate widely alongside Arabic, French, and Moroccan Darija, creating a multilingual and multicultural space for creative expression. As hybrid artefacts, memes function as a multimodal discourse where text and image interact, requiring users to engage in complex cognitive processes to interpret and generate meaning. This cognitive interplay represents a form of creative expression on social platforms, shaped by shared cultural knowledge, local social practices, and rapid circulation. Contemporary research recognises memes not merely as humorous content but as semiotic constructs that reflect, shape, and circulate social and cultural norms through creative linguistic and visual innovation (Arrobo-Agila et al., 2025; Ostanina-Olszewska & Majdzińska-Koczorowicz, 2024).

The theory of conceptual blending offers a valuable framework for understanding the mental operations underlying this creative process. Conceptual blending posits that new meaning arises when elements from separate mental spaces are integrated,

producing emergent structures that extend beyond their original components (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002; Wikipedia, 2025). In the context of English-language social media memes in Morocco, this integration frequently involves reconciling global meme templates with local cultural references, historical knowledge, and everyday social experiences. Such blending leads to novel interpretations and humorous effects that characterise cognitive creativity in Moroccan digital communication. Conceptual blending has been shown to play a central role in the generation of humour and metaphor, supporting the view that creative cognition drives the inventive potential of memes (Coulson, 2022; Nahi, 2025).

Across studies in cognitive linguistics, researchers have highlighted the multimodal nature of memes and the cognitive strategies that users employ to decode them. Memes rely on schematic meaning-making processes that engage users in interpreting fused visual and verbal cues, activating cognitive frames that facilitate understanding through analogy and metaphor (Majdzińska-Koczorowicz & Ostanina-Olszewska, 2024; Ostanina-Olszewska & Majdzińska-Koczorowicz, 2025). Within the Moroccan meme landscape, these processes are further enriched by shared sociocultural knowledge, including norms related to language mixing, family relations, national identity, and historical memory, which shape how meanings are constructed and interpreted.

In addition to blending theory, multimodal discourse analysis situates memes within broader communicative practices, stressing how linguistic creativity in memes functions socially and culturally. In Morocco, memes serve as a platform for social commentary, identity negotiation, and ideological positioning, allowing users to engage critically and humorously with issues such as tradition and modernity, gender roles, migration, and national belonging. Through shared engagement with English-language meme content, Moroccan digital communities co-construct meaning and reinforce collective perspectives (Noor & Arshad, 2024; Tassadiq et al., 2025).

Furthermore, cross-language and bilingual memes illustrate how English-language creativity in Morocco interacts with Arabic, French, and Darija to produce hybrid forms of expression that challenge conventional boundaries of meaning and interpretation. This multimodal and multilingual complexity underscores the dynamic nature of cognitive creativity, as Moroccan users mobilise diverse linguistic resources and cultural knowledge to generate novel communicative effects in global digital spaces (Cambridge Core, 2025).

The cognitive mechanisms at work in meme creation and interpretation reflect broader patterns of human creativity, including abstraction, analogy, and concept integration. These mechanisms contribute to the variability and innovation found in Moroccan meme culture, where global formats are locally adapted to express culturally specific meanings. Research on cognitive mechanisms and emergent grammatical or semantic features in memes further supports viewing these digital texts as sites of active meaning-making that depend on both linguistic and conceptual creativity (Diedrichsen, 2018).

Given the rapid evolution of digital communication, understanding cognitive creativity in English-language social media memes requires an integrated theoretical approach that accounts for multimodality, conceptual blending, and social engagement. Focusing on Morocco as a culturally rich and linguistically diverse context, this study aims to contribute to that understanding by exploring how meme creativity arises through multimodal conceptual integration and how Moroccan users employ interpretive strategies to construct meaning within English-language social

media memes.

Significance of the Study

This study holds significance at theoretical, methodological, and socio-cultural levels by advancing understanding of how cognitive creativity operates in English-language social media memes in Morocco. At the theoretical level, it contributes to cognitive linguistics by extending conceptual blending theory to contemporary digital discourse situated within a Moroccan context. Although conceptual blending has been widely applied to metaphor, humour, and narrative, its systematic application to multimodal memes produced and interpreted within a specific cultural setting, such as Morocco, remains limited. By focusing on how visual and verbal elements are integrated in meme construction and interpretation, the study deepens insight into the cognitive mechanisms that underlie creative meaning-making in culturally grounded online environments.

Methodologically, the study is significant because it adopts a multimodal analytical framework that bridges cognitive linguistics and multimodal discourse analysis while being applied to Moroccan English-language meme data. Social media memes are inherently multimodal, yet many linguistic studies still privilege textual analysis or overlook local cultural specificity. By treating images, typography, linguistic choices, and cultural references as interconnected semiotic resources, this research offers a more context-sensitive model for analysing digital texts. The methodological approach demonstrates how conceptual integration operates across modes and within a culturally specific setting, thereby informing future research on internet discourse, humour studies, and digital semiotics, particularly in non-Western contexts.

From a socio-cultural perspective, the study highlights the role of English-language memes in Morocco as sites of social commentary, identity construction, and cultural negotiation. In a multilingual society where English interacts with Arabic, French, and Moroccan Darija, memes become powerful tools for expressing attitudes, ideologies, and collective experiences. Understanding the cognitive creativity embedded in Moroccan memes helps explain how users negotiate tradition, modernity, globalisation, and national identity through humour and visual-verbal creativity, especially among younger and digitally active communities.

Finally, the study has pedagogical relevance for fields such as applied linguistics, media studies, and digital literacy in the Moroccan and broader Global South context. By revealing how creativity and cognition interact in everyday online communication, the research supports the inclusion of memes as analytical and instructional resources in language education. This encourages learners to develop critical awareness of multimodal texts and strengthens their ability to engage thoughtfully with English-language digital content shaped by local cultural realities.

Research Objectives

To examine how cognitive creativity is realised in English-language social media memes in Morocco through the interaction of visual and verbal elements.

To identify and analyse the conceptual blending mechanisms involved in the construction and interpretation of meaning in multimodal Moroccan memes.

To explore the role of Moroccan cultural knowledge, multilingual practices, and contextual cues in shaping creative meaning-making in English-language social media memes

Research Questions

How is cognitive creativity manifested in English-language social media memes produced and circulated in Morocco through multimodal interaction between text and image?

What types of conceptual blends are employed in Moroccan English-language memes to generate humorous, ironic, or critical meanings?

How do the Moroccan cultural context, shared background knowledge, and multilingual practices influence the interpretation of conceptual blends in English-language social media memes?

Literature Review

The expansion of social media platforms has transformed everyday communication practices, giving rise to new digital genres that combine linguistic, visual, and cultural resources. Among these genres, social media memes have gained scholarly attention as complex multimodal texts that convey humour, criticism, and social commentary through concise and highly creative forms. Memes are no longer regarded as trivial online artefacts; instead, they are increasingly understood as culturally embedded communicative units that reflect collective cognition and shared meaning-making processes (Shifman, 2014). In countries such as Morocco, where digital communication is shaped by multilingualism and global media exposure, memes play a significant role in negotiating cultural meanings within English-dominated online spaces. Their widespread circulation in English across global platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, X, and Reddit highlights the role of English as a dominant digital lingua franca while interacting with local cultural frameworks (Crystal, 2011). Early research on internet memes focused primarily on their cultural transmission and virality. Drawing on Dawkins' original notion of memes as cultural replicators, scholars examined how digital memes spread, mutate, and stabilise within online communities (Blackmore, 1999). This line of inquiry established the memetic nature of online humour and symbolic communication, but it paid limited attention to the cognitive processes underlying meme comprehension. Subsequent studies shifted toward discourse-oriented perspectives, recognising memes as meaningful texts that perform social functions such as stance-taking, identity construction, and ideological positioning (Milner, 2016). These approaches are particularly relevant in the Moroccan context, where memes often reflect negotiations between local values, global trends, and generational identities.

From a linguistic standpoint, memes are inherently multimodal, integrating written language with images, typography, layout, and sometimes audio or animation. Multimodality theory emphasises that meaning is produced through the interaction of multiple semiotic modes rather than language alone (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001). In meme discourse, the visual component often carries implicit meaning, while the textual element guides interpretation, creating a layered meaning structure that requires active cognitive engagement from viewers (Bateman et al., 2017). For Moroccan users engaging with English-language memes, this process often involves navigating visual cues that resonate with local cultural experiences while interpreting English text shaped by global digital norms.

Within cognitive linguistics, creativity is understood as a fundamental property of human cognition rather than a marginal or artistic phenomenon. Cognitive creativity emerges when individuals combine existing knowledge structures in novel ways to produce new meanings (Boden, 2004). In digital contexts, memes represent a fertile

site for such creative cognition, as they rely on the recombination of familiar images, phrases, and cultural references into new conceptual configurations. In Morocco's digitally connected youth culture, meme creation and interpretation exemplify everyday creativity, drawing simultaneously on local social realities and transnational cultural references. Researchers argue that meme creators and interpreters engage in rapid, routine creativity that reflects broader cognitive mechanisms of analogy, metaphor, and conceptual integration (Veale, 2012).

Conceptual blending theory provides a particularly useful framework for analysing these mechanisms. According to Fauconnier and Turner (2002), meaning construction often involves the integration of elements from multiple mental spaces into a blended space that contains emergent structure. This theory has been applied to diverse domains such as metaphor, humour, advertising, and visual art, demonstrating its explanatory power in creative meaning-making. In English-language memes circulating in Morocco, conceptual blending allows users to integrate elements from global popular culture with locally meaningful social situations, producing humorous or critical interpretations that resonate within specific cultural contexts (Coulson, 2001).

Humour studies have consistently shown that incongruity and its resolution play a central role in comedic effects. In cognitive terms, incongruity arises when expectations derived from one mental space clash with elements from another, prompting the viewer to resolve the mismatch through conceptual integration (Attardo, 2017). Memes frequently exploit this mechanism by juxtaposing unexpected images and captions. In Moroccan meme discourse, such incongruities often emerge from contrasts between traditional norms and modern lifestyles, global stereotypes and local realities, or formal English expressions and informal social situations, all of which demand active cognitive engagement from viewers.

Research on visual humour further demonstrates that images alone rarely produce humour without contextual or linguistic support. Instead, humour emerges from the interaction between visual cues and verbal framing, which together guide interpretation (El Refaie, 2003). In English-language memes used by Moroccan social media users, captions often anchor images by directing attention to culturally relevant conceptual mappings, while images provide experiential grounding. This reciprocal relationship aligns with cognitive theories that emphasise embodied and context-dependent meaning construction (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999).

Multimodal metaphor theory has also been influential in meme studies. Scholars argue that many memes function as visual or multimodal metaphors, where abstract concepts such as stress, politics, or social expectations are represented through concrete imagery (Forceville, 2009). In the Moroccan context, such metaphors often rely on shared cultural experiences, social norms, or widely recognised public discourses, making them accessible to local audiences while still allowing creative reinterpretation. Conceptual blending extends this analysis by accounting for cases where multiple metaphors and frames interact simultaneously, producing layered and emergent meanings (Forceville & Urios-Aparisi, 2009).

Recent empirical studies have applied conceptual blending directly to meme analysis. For example, Dancygier and Vandelanotte (2017) demonstrate how image macro memes rely on viewpoint blending and narrative compression to convey complex social messages in minimal space. Their work shows that meme interpretation involves reconstructing implicit narratives and aligning them with the viewer's own experiences. Such findings are relevant for understanding Moroccan English-language

memes, where interpretation often depends on aligning global meme templates with local social narratives. Similarly, Coulson and Oakley (2005) illustrate how blending accounts for the creative integration of visual and textual cues in humorous discourse. The role of culture and shared knowledge is central to understanding cognitive creativity in memes. Memes often presuppose familiarity with current events, popular culture, or social norms, making their interpretation contingent on community membership (Dynel, 2016). English-language memes in Morocco circulate within a multilingual environment shaped by Arabic, French, and Darija, leading to culturally specific interpretations despite the use of a global language. Research on global meme circulation suggests that while English provides a common linguistic medium, local cultural frameworks continue to shape cognitive engagement with meme content (Pérez-Sobrinho, 2017).

Social semiotic approaches emphasise that memes function as resources for social positioning and ideological expression. Research has shown that memes are frequently used to comment on political events, gender roles, and social inequalities, often through satire and parody (Wiggins & Bowers, 2015). In Morocco, English-language memes serve as subtle yet powerful tools for social commentary, enabling users to negotiate sensitive issues through humour and symbolic representation. These communicative functions are achieved through creative blending of symbolic elements, reinforcing the idea that cognitive creativity is inseparable from social meaning-making.

Digital discourse studies further highlight the participatory nature of meme culture. Unlike traditional media texts, memes are constantly remixed and recontextualised by users, resulting in chains of creative reinterpretation (Burgess, 2008). In Moroccan online communities, this participatory remixing reflects collective creativity, where meanings evolve as memes are adapted to local concerns and experiences. Each iteration involves new conceptual blends, demonstrating how creativity operates as a distributed cognitive process rather than an individual act (Hutchins, 2014).

Advances in multimodal corpus analysis and computational linguistics have begun to explore memes at scale. Researchers using machine learning and multimodal annotation frameworks show that meme interpretation depends on cross-modal semantic alignment, supporting cognitive linguistic claims about integrated meaning construction (Zhang et al., 2022). While such approaches offer valuable insights, there remains a need for qualitative, context-sensitive analysis that accounts for cultural specificity, particularly in under-researched contexts such as Morocco.

Educational research has also recognised the cognitive and creative potential of memes. Studies suggest that meme-based activities can enhance critical thinking, visual literacy, and engagement in language learning contexts by encouraging students to analyse and produce multimodal texts (Heath, 2018). In the Moroccan English language education context, understanding how memes function cognitively and culturally can support more relevant and engaging pedagogical practices that reflect students' digital realities.

Despite growing interest in meme studies, several gaps remain in the literature. Many studies focus on social or political functions of memes without explicitly theorising the cognitive mechanisms that enable their creativity. Others apply multimodal analysis but stop short of linking semiotic patterns to cognitive processes. While conceptual blending has been applied sporadically, there is a lack of systematic research examining cognitive creativity in English-language memes within specific cultural contexts, such as Morocco.

Moreover, existing research often treats creativity as an assumed quality of memes rather than an analytically defined construct. Cognitive creativity, as conceptualised in cognitive linguistics, involves specific operations such as integration, compression, and emergence, which can be empirically examined through close multimodal analysis (Turner, 2014). Applying this framework to English-language social media memes in Morocco allows for a more precise understanding of how creativity is enacted, interpreted, and culturally grounded in digital discourse.

In summary, the literature demonstrates that social media memes are complex multimodal artefacts that rely on cognitive creativity for their production and interpretation. Research in cognitive linguistics, multimodality, humour studies, and digital discourse provides valuable insights into visual-verbal meaning construction. However, there remains a clear need for studies that systematically combine multimodal analysis with conceptual blending theory while attending to cultural specificity. Addressing this gap, the present study examines how cognitive creativity operates in English-language social media memes in Morocco, contributing to a deeper understanding of digital creativity in a multilingual and culturally dynamic context.

Research Methodology

Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative, descriptive-analytical research design grounded in cognitive linguistics and multimodal discourse analysis. The qualitative approach is appropriate because the study aims to explore how cognitive creativity is constructed and interpreted in English-language social media memes circulating in Morocco, rather than to measure frequency or statistical patterns. The research is theory-driven, drawing primarily on Conceptual Blending Theory and multimodality to examine meaning construction across visual and verbal modes within a specific cultural context.

Theoretical Framework

The analysis is informed by Conceptual Blending Theory (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002), which explains how meaning emerges through the integration of multiple mental spaces. Within this framework, memes are viewed as blended spaces where textual input, visual input, and contextual knowledge interact to produce emergent meaning. To account for the interaction of semiotic modes, the study also draws on multimodal discourse analysis, particularly the social semiotic model, which views images and language as complementary resources for meaning-making. Together, these frameworks allow for a systematic examination of cognitive creativity as an outcome of multimodal conceptual integration in Moroccan English-language digital discourse.

Data Selection and Corpus

The data for this study consists of 20 English-language social media memes collected from widely used platforms in Morocco, including Facebook, Instagram, X (formerly Twitter), and Reddit. A purposive sampling technique was employed to select memes that clearly exhibit multimodal interaction between text and image and demonstrate creative meaning-making within the Moroccan digital context. Memes were selected based on the following criteria:

The meme contains English-language textual elements.

The meme combines visual and verbal components in a meaningful way.

The meme relies on humour, irony, satire, or social commentary.

The meme reflects recognisable cultural, social, or contextual references relevant to Moroccan audiences.

A total of 20 memes were selected to allow for in-depth qualitative analysis while maintaining analytical depth and interpretive clarity. Duplicate memes and purely image-based or text-only posts were excluded to ensure consistency in multimodal analysis.

Data Collection Procedure

Memes were collected manually over a defined period by browsing publicly accessible Moroccan social media pages, groups, and discussion threads where English-language meme content is actively shared. Screenshots of selected memes were taken and stored in a digital archive. Each meme was assigned a unique identification code for reference during analysis. To preserve the communicative context, accompanying captions, hashtags, and visible engagement cues were noted where relevant, although the primary focus remained on the meme itself as a multimodal text.

Analytical Procedure

The analysis was conducted in multiple stages to ensure systematic interpretation.

In the first stage, each meme was subjected to multimodal analysis, identifying visual elements such as images, facial expressions, symbols, and layout, alongside verbal elements including captions, font style, lexical choices, and syntactic structures. This stage established how different semiotic modes contribute individually and collectively to meaning construction.

In the second stage, conceptual blending analysis was applied. For each meme, the following components were identified:

Input Space 1: the visual domain

Input Space 2: the verbal or conceptual domain

Generic Space: the shared schematic structure

Blended Space: the emergent meaning produced through integration

This step revealed how cognitive creativity emerges through the integration of disparate domains, leading to humorous, ironic, or critical interpretations within Moroccan social and cultural contexts.

In the third stage, contextual and cultural knowledge was considered, focusing on how shared background information, social assumptions, and cultural norms specific to Morocco influence meme interpretation. This stage was essential for understanding why particular blends are accessible, meaningful, and effective for Moroccan audiences engaging with English-language meme content.

Validity and Trustworthiness

To enhance analytical rigour, the study followed established principles of qualitative trustworthiness. Theoretical triangulation was achieved by integrating insights from conceptual blending theory and multimodal discourse analysis. Thick description and illustrative examples were used to ensure transparency and analytical credibility. Reflexivity was maintained by acknowledging the researcher's interpretive role in meaning construction, particularly in relation to cultural familiarity with Moroccan digital discourse and meme conventions.

Ethical Considerations

All memes analysed in this study were sourced from publicly accessible social media spaces. No private accounts or restricted content were included. Usernames, profile images, and identifiable personal information were excluded to maintain anonymity. The study adheres to ethical guidelines for digital discourse research by treating memes as cultural artefacts rather than personal expressions.

Data Analysis

Figure 1



Historical Conquest and National Pride

Description and Multimodal Elements

This meme juxtaposes multiple national flags with a reaction image of a surprised facial expression. The textual component refers to historical periods of conquest, contrasting Morocco with European powers. The Moroccan flag is visually foregrounded, signalling national identity and historical endurance.

Conceptual Blending Analysis

Input Space 1 (Historical Knowledge): Colonial histories and military conquests by European nations.

Input Space 2 (National Identity): Morocco's historical resistance and sovereignty.

Generic Space: Power, conquest, and national survival.

Blended Space: Morocco is framed as a nation that resisted prolonged domination, producing a humorous yet pride-driven interpretation.

Cognitive Creativity and Cultural Meaning

The meme creatively compresses complex historical narratives into a humorous comparison. Cognitive creativity emerges through ironic contrast, relying on the audience's shared knowledge of Moroccan history and colonial discourse. Humour is used to reinforce national pride rather than historical accuracy.

Figure 2



Border Politics and Immigration Discourse **Description and Multimodal Elements**

This meme contrasts two scenarios involving border guards, one referencing Spain and another Turkey. Facial expressions and exaggerated captions frame Morocco as overlooked or selectively visible in migration narratives.

Conceptual Blending Analysis

Input Space 1 (Contemporary Politics): Border security and immigration in Europe.

Input Space 2 (Cultural Perception): Moroccan and regional identities within migration discourse.

Generic Space: Surveillance, inclusion, and exclusion.

Blended Space: Humour emerges from selective visibility, suggesting geopolitical bias.

Cognitive Creativity and Cultural Meaning

The meme uses satire to critique political double standards. Cognitive creativity lies in mapping serious geopolitical issues onto exaggerated comic frames, allowing Moroccan viewers to reinterpret global politics through localised humour.

Figure 3



Gibraltar and Territorial Humour

Description and Multimodal Elements

This meme combines an emotional reaction image with flags of Spain, Morocco, and the UK. The textual element plays on territorial disputes, especially Gibraltar.

Conceptual Blending Analysis

Input Space 1 (Geopolitics): Gibraltar as a contested territory.

Input Space 2 (Everyday Emotion): Overreaction and mock outrage.

Generic Space: Ownership and conflict.

Blended Space: Territorial politics are reimagined as personal drama.

Cognitive Creativity and Cultural Meaning

By humanising geopolitical conflict, the meme reduces complex international relations into relatable emotional scenarios. The creativity stems from blending macro-level politics with micro-level emotional reactions familiar in meme culture.

Figure 4



Moroccan Linguistic Culture and Daily Life

Description and Multimodal Elements

This meme features a cat image paired with English transliterations of Moroccan Arabic expressions such as “Yallah.” The red background and Moroccan flag colours visually anchor the meme in Moroccan culture.

Conceptual Blending Analysis

Input Space 1 (Language Practice): Moroccan Arabic expressions used in daily speech.

Input Space 2 (Time Pressure): Urgency and lateness in everyday life.

Generic Space: Communication and immediacy.

Blended Space: Humour arises from exaggerated repetition of culturally familiar expressions.

Cognitive Creativity and Cultural Meaning

The meme creatively blends linguistic habits with humour, making Moroccan speech patterns accessible to English-speaking audiences. Cognitive creativity is evident in code-switching and transliteration, reflecting bilingual digital identity.

Figure 5



“Moroccoconut” and Cultural Playfulness

Description and Multimodal Elements

This meme visually lists global powers and culminates in the humorous invention of “Moroccoconut,” blending the Moroccan flag with a coconut image.

Conceptual Blending Analysis

Input Space 1 (Global Nations): Recognisable country symbols and names.

Input Space 2 (Lexical Creativity): Wordplay and visual punning.

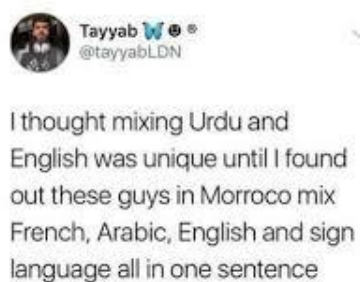
Generic Space: Naming and identity.

Blended Space: Morocco is humorously rebranded as a playful hybrid entity.

Cognitive Creativity and Cultural Meaning

This meme showcases high cognitive creativity through lexical blending and visual metaphor. It reflects Moroccan meme culture’s tendency toward self-irony and playful engagement with global identity narratives.

Figure 6



Multilingual Mixing as Cultural Identity

Description and Multimodal Elements

The meme presents a tweet commenting on the practice of mixing Urdu and English,

followed by a humorous realisation that Moroccans combine French, Arabic, English, and sign language in a single sentence. The absence of images shifts emphasis to linguistic creativity.

Conceptual Blending Analysis

Input Space 1 (Code-switching): Multilingual speech practices.

Input Space 2 (Moroccan Sociolinguistics): Everyday mixing of Darija, French, English, and gestures.

Generic Space: Language as a communicative resource.

Blended Space: Moroccan multilingualism is humorously framed as extreme linguistic creativity.

Cognitive Creativity and Cultural Meaning

Creativity arises through exaggeration and comparison. The meme relies on shared knowledge of Moroccan linguistic hybridity, presenting it as both humorous and culturally distinctive.

Figure 7



Indirect Expression of Affection

Description and Multimodal Elements

This meme contrasts the English phrase "I love you" with a Moroccan Arabic expression implying care and familiarity. The visual design reinforces cultural contrast.

Conceptual Blending Analysis

Input Space 1 (Direct Emotional Expression): Explicit verbal affection.

Input Space 2 (Moroccan Pragmatics): Indirect, context-based expressions of emotion.

Generic Space: Emotional communication.

Blended Space: Love is conceptualised as concern and presence rather than verbal declaration.

Cognitive Creativity and Cultural Meaning

The meme creatively reframes affection through cultural pragmatics. Cognitive creativity lies in blending emotional concepts with culturally specific communicative norms.

Figure 8

Meeting a Moroccan Guy in
the UK 🇲🇴 🇬🇧



Moroccan Identity Abroad

Description and Multimodal Elements

A selfie-style image labelled “Meeting a Moroccan Guy in the UK” combines the Moroccan and British flags. The visual signals diasporic identity.

Conceptual Blending Analysis

Input Space 1 (Migration): Living abroad.

Input Space 2 (National Identity): Strong Moroccan self-identification.

Generic Space: Personal identity.

Blended Space: Moroccan identity persists regardless of location.

Cognitive Creativity and Cultural Meaning

Humour emerges from identity compression. The meme creatively blends geography with cultural belonging, reinforcing national identity as emotionally anchored rather than spatial.

Figure 9



Moroccan Fathers and Digital Literacy

Description and Multimodal Elements

This meme uses a reaction image of a middle-aged man struggling with a smartphone, paired with the caption about Moroccan fathers receiving text messages.

Conceptual Blending Analysis

Input Space 1 (Technology): Smartphone use.

Input Space 2 (Generational Roles): Older Moroccan fathers.

Generic Space: Communication.

Blended Space: Generational humour about technological unfamiliarity.

Cognitive Creativity and Cultural Meaning

The meme relies on stereotype-based humour that resonates culturally. Creativity arises from blending traditional authority figures with modern digital contexts.

Figure 10



Historical Authority and Resistance

Description and Multimodal Elements

This meme juxtaposes a colonial-era soldier with a Moroccan figure and captions referencing authority and prohibition. The imagery evokes historical confrontation.

Conceptual Blending Analysis

Input Space 1 (Colonial Power): Control and restriction.

Input Space 2 (Moroccan Resistance): Defiance and sovereignty.

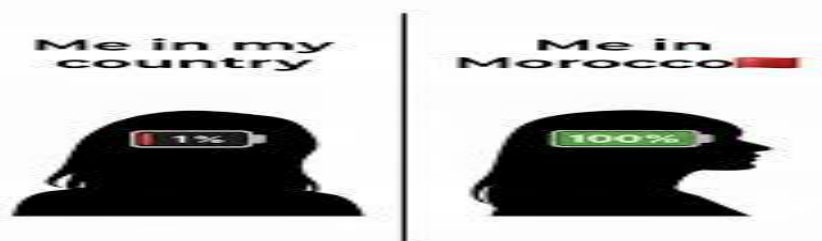
Generic Space: Authority and power struggle.

Blended Space: Historical resistance framed through humour.

Cognitive Creativity and Cultural Meaning

The meme compresses historical memory into visual satire. Creativity emerges through the temporal blending of past conflict with present-day humour.

Figure 11



Emotional Intensity and Belonging

Description and Multimodal Elements

This split-image meme contrasts emotional engagement outside Morocco with heightened emotion within Morocco, using percentage icons and silhouettes.

Conceptual Blending Analysis

Input Space 1 (Emotional State): Emotional detachment.

Input Space 2 (Cultural Belonging): Emotional intensity at home.

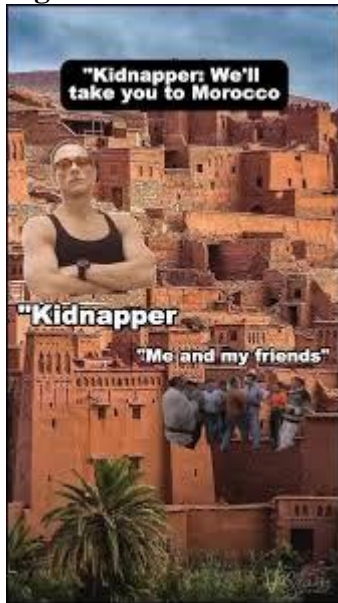
Generic Space: Emotional engagement.

Blended Space: Morocco as a site of emotional completeness

Cognitive Creativity and Cultural Meaning

The meme creatively visualises emotional belonging. Cognitive creativity lies in quantifying emotional attachment to cultural space.

Figure 12



Reframing Threat into Hospitality

Description and Multimodal Elements

The meme contrasts a threatening statement about being taken to Morocco with an image of Moroccan friends and hospitality.

Conceptual Blending Analysis

Input Space 1 (Threat): Kidnapping narrative.

Input Space 2 (Hospitality): Friendship and warmth.

Generic Space: Social interaction.

Blended Space: Morocco reframed as welcoming rather than dangerous.

Cognitive Creativity and Cultural Meaning

Creativity arises through the reversal of stereotypes. The meme relies on cultural self-awareness and humour to challenge negative representations.

Figure 13



Gender Roles, Masculinity, and Cultural Tension

Description and Multimodal Elements

This meme is structured as a sequence of illustrated panels featuring a traditionally dressed Moroccan male figure interacting with different scenarios. The recurring character creates narrative continuity. The final panels highlight the phrase “Paying her own stuff, accompanied by visible discomfort or shock in the male character’s reaction. The visual style resembles minimalist comic memes, relying on facial expressions, body posture, and short captions to convey meaning.

The use of English text combined with culturally recognisable attire and expressions situates the meme within a global meme format while anchoring it firmly in Moroccan social norms.

Conceptual Blending Analysis

Input Space 1 (Traditional Gender Norms):

Cultural expectations in Moroccan society where men are often associated with financial responsibility and provider roles.

Input Space 2 (Modern Gender Practices):

Contemporary ideas of female financial independence and shared economic responsibility

Generic Space:

Gender relations and economic roles within romantic or social interactions

Blended Space:

A humorous cultural clash where modern practices disrupt traditional expectations, producing discomfort and comic surprise

The emergent meaning in the blended space is not simply about money, but about shifting power dynamics and cultural negotiation between tradition and modernity.

Figure 14



"When you come back from Morocco with 20 new outfits, clear skin, a crispy new tan, and 15 pounds less"

Multimodal Description

The meme combines a photographic image of a confident individual standing at an airport with English text describing physical and lifestyle transformation after visiting Morocco. The airport backdrop symbolises travel and return, while the text lists exaggerated positive outcomes.

Conceptual Blending Analysis

Input Space 1 (Travel Experience): Visiting Morocco as a holiday destination.

Input Space 2 (Self-Improvement Narrative): Transformation linked to health, fashion, and well-being.

Blended Space: Morocco is conceptualised as a space of renewal, beauty, and lifestyle enhancement.

Cognitive Creativity and Cultural Meaning

The meme creatively blends tourism discourse with self-care ideology, constructing Morocco as a transformative environment. Humour arises from exaggeration, while culturally it reinforces Morocco's global image as aesthetically rich, fashionable, and rejuvenating.

Figure 15



“When my friend tells me that he doesn’t want to go to Morocco”

Multimodal Description

A still image of a shocked child character is paired with text expressing disbelief. The emotional facial expression intensifies the reaction to the verbal content.

Conceptual Blending Analysis

Input Space 1 (Personal Preference): Refusal to visit Morocco.

Input Space 2 (Emotional Reaction Schema): Shock and incomprehension.

Blended Space: Not wanting to visit Morocco is framed as irrational **or absurd**.

Cognitive Creativity and Cultural Meaning

The humour relies on emotional exaggeration. Cognitively, the meme blends national pride with interpersonal judgment, positioning Morocco as a universally desirable destination whose rejection violates shared expectations.

Figure 16



Cultural Compliments, Language, and Everyday Moroccan Expression

Multimodal Description

This meme features a solid green background associated with Moroccan national symbolism and includes the Moroccan flag icon at the top. The English text reads: “In Morocco, we don’t say ‘Nice haircut!’ we say ‘Daba 3ad OuJhek ban’ and I think that’s beautiful.” The meme uses a popular global meme template that contrasts a

standard English expression with a culturally specific alternative, combining humour with cultural explanation. The use of Latinized Moroccan Arabic (Darija) alongside English positions the meme within a bilingual digital space.

Conceptual Blending Analysis

Input Space 1 (Global Compliment Norms):

Common English expressions of praise, such as complimenting someone's appearance directly and politely

Input Space 2 (Moroccan Linguistic Culture):

Every day, Moroccan Darija expressions that convey meaning indirectly, often with humour, exaggeration, or affectionate bluntness

Generic Space:

Social interaction and verbal expression of approval or recognition

Blended Space:

A humorous reinterpretation of compliments where Moroccan indirectness and expressive language replace direct praise, framing cultural difference as creativity rather than rudeness

Cognitive Creativity and Cultural Meaning

Cognitive creativity in this meme emerges through linguistic contrast and pragmatic blending. By mapping a culturally specific Darija expression onto a universal communicative function, the meme highlights how Moroccan speech practices prioritise relational closeness and expressive humour over literal politeness. The humour relies on shared cultural knowledge of Darija pragmatics and challenges English-centric norms of communication. At a cultural level, the meme affirms Moroccan linguistic identity and reframes everyday speech as culturally rich and aesthetically meaningful, reinforcing pride in local expression while remaining accessible to a global English-speaking audience.

Figure 17



“Arabs to Moroccans before and after World Cup 2022”

Multimodal Description

The meme uses a popular “before/after” template with contrasting images of approval and disapproval, referencing linguistic identity and football pride.

Conceptual Blending Analysis

Input Space 1 (Linguistic Difference): Darija vs. Standard Arabic.

Input Space 2 (Sports Nationalism): World Cup success.

Blended Space: Football success redefines linguistic and regional belonging.

Cognitive Creativity and Cultural Meaning

The meme creatively blends language politics with sports identity. Humour arises from sudden ideological reversal, highlighting how Moroccan success temporarily reshapes Arab solidarity and perception.

Figure 18



“What if I told you my leather jacket is from Morocco?”

Multimodal Description

A well-known cinematic image of a serious male figure is paired with text emphasising the Moroccan origin of a fashion item.

Conceptual Blending Analysis

Input Space 1 (Luxury and Style): Leather jacket as a fashion symbol.

Input Space 2 (National Craft Identity): Moroccan leather tradition.

Blended Space: Moroccan craftsmanship equals global **luxury**.

Cognitive Creativity and Cultural Meaning

The meme elevates Moroccan artisanal identity through global pop culture framing. The humour is subtle, relying on prestige association rather than overt comedy.

Figure 19



“Morocco helped India after the earthquake” (Comparative nationalism meme)

Multimodal Description

The meme uses screenshots and expressive faces alongside English and Urdu/Hindi

text, referencing disaster relief and international aid.

Conceptual Blending Analysis

Input Space 1 (Humanitarian Aid): Morocco's international assistance.

Input Space 2 (National Pride and Comparison): South Asian geopolitical discourse.

Blended Space: Morocco as morally superior and globally responsible

Cognitive Creativity and Cultural Meaning

Creativity emerges through cross-national comparison. The meme constructs Morocco as ethical and generous, reinforcing positive national identity through moral evaluation.

Figure 20



“Morocco first / Proud to be from Morocco”

Multimodal Description

Cartoon-style characters hold Moroccan flags, with contrasting emotional reactions between pride and distress.

Conceptual Blending Analysis

Input Space 1 (National Pride): Love for homeland.

Input Space 2 (Migration Anxiety): Fear of return or loss of comfort.

Blended Space: Morocco as both cherished identity and contested reality

Cognitive Creativity and Cultural Meaning

The meme blends patriotism with irony, reflecting diasporic tension. Humour allows simultaneous expression of loyalty and critique, a key feature of Moroccan meme culture.

Findings

The qualitative analysis of twenty English-language social media memes demonstrates that cognitive creativity in Moroccan meme culture is primarily realised through multimodal conceptual blending, where visual elements, textual cues, cultural knowledge, and emotional schemas interact to produce compressed, humorous

meanings. Across the dataset, memes consistently rely on shared Moroccan sociocultural knowledge, including history, language practices, national identity, hospitality norms, migration experiences, and global positioning.

A dominant finding is that Morocco is repeatedly conceptualised as a symbolic cognitive space rather than merely a geographic location. In memes related to history and geopolitics (Images 1, 3, 10), Morocco is framed as a site of resistance, endurance, and sovereignty. These memes compress complex historical narratives, such as colonial encounters and territorial disputes, into humorous visual-textual blends that foreground national pride while softening political tension through satire. Cognitive creativity here emerges through temporal compression, blending past conflicts with present-day meme humour.

Memes addressing politics, borders, and global perception (Images 2, 12, Meme 6) reveal how humour is used to critique geopolitical bias and negative stereotypes. Through conceptual reversal, Morocco is reframed from a marginalised or threatening space into one of hospitality, moral responsibility, and ethical global citizenship. These blends depend on irony and stereotype inversion, allowing Moroccan users to reclaim narrative authority in global discourse.

Another significant finding concerns linguistic and communicative creativity (Images 4, 6, 7, Meme 16). Memes highlighting Moroccan multilingualism, pragmatic norms, and culturally specific complimenting practices show that language itself becomes a central site of humour and identity construction. Meme 16, in particular, blends global English compliment conventions with Moroccan Darija pragmatics, reframing indirect, expressive local speech as culturally rich rather than impolite. Code-switching, transliteration, and pragmatic contrast are cognitively blended with English meme templates, producing humour that reflects Morocco's hybrid linguistic reality. English functions as a global framing language, while Darija and cultural pragmatics provide semantic and emotional grounding.

Memes focusing on gender roles and social expectations (Meme 13, Meme 3) highlight how cognitive creativity is used to negotiate cultural tension between tradition and modernity. Meme 13, in particular, blends traditional masculine provider norms with contemporary practices of female financial independence, producing humour through visible discomfort and surprise. Rather than presenting a direct critique, the meme uses incongruity and narrative sequencing to reflect ongoing cultural negotiation around masculinity, power, and economic roles within Moroccan society.

Memes focused on identity, migration, and diaspora (Images 8, 11, Meme 7) reveal that Moroccan identity is conceptualised as emotionally persistent across spatial boundaries. These memes blend geographic displacement with cultural belonging, constructing Morocco as a source of emotional intensity, authenticity, and completeness. Cognitive creativity here lies in identity compression, where national belonging is condensed into visual markers such as flags, emotional scales, and reaction images.

Generational and social-role humour (Image 9, Meme 3) demonstrates how cognitive creativity also emerges from blending traditional Moroccan authority figures with modern contexts such as smartphones, digital communication, and evolving gender norms. These memes rely on affectionate stereotyping rather than ridicule, allowing users to negotiate cultural change without overt conflict.

Tourism, fashion, and craftsmanship memes (Memes 1 and 5) construct Morocco as a transformative and prestigious space, blending travel discourse with self-improvement

narratives and global luxury imagery. These memes reinforce positive national branding through exaggeration and pop culture framing, showing how cognitive creativity can function as soft cultural promotion.

Finally, sports-related and pan-Arab discourse memes (Meme 4) illustrate how contextual events, such as the World Cup, trigger rapid conceptual reconfigurations of linguistic and regional identity. Football success becomes a blending mechanism that temporarily overrides linguistic and cultural divisions, highlighting the fluidity of collective identity in meme discourse.

Overall, the findings confirm that cognitive creativity in Moroccan English-language memes is not random or purely aesthetic, but systematically grounded in culturally shared conceptual structures. Humour operates as a cognitive and social strategy that enables Moroccan users to negotiate identity, critique power, express pride, and engage globally while remaining locally anchored.

Table 1
Cognitive Creativity and Conceptual Blending in Moroccan English-Language Memes (N = 20)

Meme No.	Theme	Dominant Input Spaces	Blended Meaning	Type of Cognitive Creativity
1	Historical Conquest and Pride	Colonial history and sovereignty	Morocco as a resilient nation	Ironic historical compression
2	Border Politics	Immigration control and visibility	Critique of geopolitical bias	Satirical exaggeration
3	Territorial Humor	Gibraltar politics and emotion	Politics framed as personal drama	Emotional humanization
4	Linguistic Culture	Darija usage and urgency	Cultural speech habits	Code-switching humor
5	Lexical Playfulness	Nation names and wordplay	“Moroccoconut” identity	Lexical blending
6	Multilingual Identity	Code-switching and sociolinguistics	Extreme linguistic hybridity	Comparative exaggeration
7	Emotional Expression	Direct vs. indirect affection	Culturally grounded love	Pragmatic reframing
8	Diaspora Identity	Migration and nationalism	Portable Moroccan identity	Identity compression
9	Generational Humor	Technology and fatherhood	Affectionate stereotype	Role incongruity
10	Historical Resistance	Colonial authority and defiance	Resistance through satire	Temporal blending
11	Emotional Belonging	Detachment and home	Morocco is the emotional core	Quantification metaphor
12	Hospitality Reframing	Threat and friendship	Reversal of stereotypes	Conceptual inversion
13	Gender Roles	Traditional	Negotiation of	Incongruity-

	and Masculinity	provision and independence	cultural tension	based humor
14	Tourism Transformation	Travel and self-improvement	Morocco as a renewal space	Hyperbolic exaggeration
15	National Desire	Refusal and shock	Morocco is an obvious choice	Emotional amplification
16	Cultural Compliments and Language	English praise norms and Darija pragmatics	Indirect expression as cultural richness	Pragmatic contrast blending
17	Sports and Identity	Darija debates and football pride	Reclaimed Arab belonging	Contextual re-blending
18	Craft and Prestige	Fashion and leather heritage	Moroccan luxury identity	Pop culture alignment
19	Humanitarian Pride	Aid discourse and nationalism	Moral superiority	Comparative framing
20	Diasporic Irony	Patriotism and migration anxiety	Love–critique duality	Irony blending

Note. The table summarises the dominant conceptual blends and forms of cognitive creativity identified in twenty English-language Moroccan social media memes. Meme numbering corresponds to the analytical sequence used in the Findings section.

Conclusion

This study examined twenty English-language social media memes to explore how cognitive creativity operates within Moroccan digital culture through multimodal conceptual blending. The analysis demonstrates that Moroccan memes are not merely humorous artefacts but culturally dense communicative acts that integrate visual cues, linguistic choices, historical memory, political awareness, and everyday social experience. Across the dataset, humour emerges from the strategic blending of global meme formats with locally grounded knowledge, allowing Moroccan users to articulate national pride, critique geopolitical narratives, negotiate identity, and reflect social change. English functions as a global framing language that enhances circulation and accessibility, while Moroccan cultural schemas provide the core meaning-making resources. Together, these elements show that cognitive creativity in Moroccan meme culture is systematic, socially embedded, and deeply connected to shared cultural understanding rather than spontaneous or purely aesthetic play.

The findings also reveal that Moroccan memes function as a flexible space for negotiating cultural tension, particularly in areas such as gender roles, migration, multilingualism, and generational change. By compressing complex social debates into brief visual-textual blends, memes allow users to engage sensitive issues without direct confrontation. This highlights the role of humour as a cognitive and social strategy that enables reflection, resistance, and reinterpretation within digital discourse. Future research could expand this work by analysing larger multilingual datasets, including Arabic and French-language memes, to capture a broader spectrum of Moroccan digital expression. Further studies may also adopt comparative approaches, examining how cognitive creativity operates across different cultural contexts, or investigate audience reception to understand how these memes are interpreted by local and global viewers. Such directions would deepen understanding of memes as powerful sites of cultural cognition, identity construction, and social commentary in contemporary digital communication.

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