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## The development of digital culture in the United Kingdom: From blogging and social networks to online gaming and memes

**Abstract.** The relevance of the study was driven by the rapid development of digital technologies and the growing influence of digital culture on social, cultural, and communicative processes in modern society. The study of the transformation of online communication in the United Kingdom allows for a deeper understanding of global trends in the formation of new forms of cultural self-expression and social interaction. The aim of the study was to highlight the main stages of the formation of digital culture and its influence on social processes in the United Kingdom. An interdisciplinary approach was applied in the study, combining cultural, sociological, and media studies analysis to examine digital practices in British society. During the study, diverse information was collected regarding key aspects of digital culture, specifically blogging, social networks, online gaming, and memes. The process of change in communication and social interaction caused by the development of digital platforms was assessed, and it was investigated how the internet facilitated the formation of new cultural phenomena and approaches to self-expression in British society. In the course of the research, it was established that digital culture in the United Kingdom developed in several stages, beginning with blogging, which created a platform for independent self-expression and the discussion of important social topics. Subsequently, social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram transformed the digital space, opening opportunities for mass communication, content sharing, and the development of new forms of interaction. Online gaming and e-sports also became an important part of digital culture, forming powerful communities and influencing economic and cultural processes. Meme culture evolved from simple jokes to serious social and cultural markers that reflected the public sentiment and became a tool for expressing collective opinion. The work carried out revealed the significant influence of British digital culture on global cultural and social processes, confirming its importance as a tool for the formation and transformation of modern social consciousness.

**Keywords:** esports; media content; virtual self-expression; network interactions; online journals; virtual games; viral content

### INTRODUCTION

Digital culture influences social and cultural practices, changing communication, entertainment, and political discourse. The United Kingdom serves as an example of this transformation, yet the development of blogs, social networks, online games, and memes within the British context requires deeper study. The specifics of the national development of digital culture in the United Kingdom remain

insufficiently researched. With the growth of blogging, social networks, and online gaming, British digital culture has acquired both local and global features. Platforms such as Twitter, YouTube, and Instagram, which are popular worldwide, have found a particular place in the United Kingdom; however, local cultural contexts, political conditions, and social moods play a significant role in shaping

Article's History: Received: 18.01.2026; Revised: 16.03.2026; Accepted: 20.04.2026; Published: 26.05.2026

### Suggested Citation:

Zhumagali, Y. (2026). The development of digital culture in the United Kingdom: From blogging and social networks to online gaming and memes. *Interdisciplinary Cultural and Humanities Review*, 5(1), 41-51. doi: 10.59214/cultural/1.2026.41.

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content and interaction styles, which necessitates detailed analysis. It is important to understand how the British audience adapts global trends to its own social and cultural conditions, and how this affects the overall character of digital culture in the country.

The internet has significantly transformed the political and media spheres, changing forms of communication, social interaction, and power relations. One of the important issues is how the internet creates new opportunities for communication between citizens and the authorities. R. Schroeder (2018) researched how the internet has changed political communications and social structures, opening new opportunities for interaction, which contributed to a shift in traditional forms of social interaction. Another issue concerns the impact of digital technologies on social identity. The question arises as to how the integration of digital platforms into everyday life changes ways of self-identification and interaction with the surrounding world. D. Miller & D. Slater (2019) applied an ethnographic approach to investigate this issue, showing how digital platforms intertwine virtual and physical realities, creating new social practices.

The problem of political polarisation in the era of digital platforms is also a pressing issue. Social networks can contribute to the isolation of users within their own information "bubbles", which strengthens the polarisation of society. Research by E. Dubois (2018) demonstrated that although social networks can facilitate isolation, active political engagement and a diversity of information sources can mitigate this effect. The formation of new social ties through digital platforms also attracts scholarly interest. An important question is how the internet allows people to maintain connections regardless of geographical distance. L. Rainie & B. Wellman (2012) studied how the internet facilitates the formation of new communities that function independently of physical proximity. Economic inequality and exploitation, amplified by digital platforms, represent another key problem. The question arises as to how social media, despite providing communication opportunities, contribute to economic inequality and the control of user data. C. Fuchs (2021) investigated this issue through the prism of capitalism, showing that digital platforms often become instruments of exploitation by large companies. Digital technologies are also significantly changing interpersonal relationships, opening new opportunities for communication. The researcher N.K. Baym (2015) studied how digital platforms allow people to maintain strong social ties despite geographical limitations, and how this changes traditional models of communication. Young people actively use digital platforms to participate in social and political processes. The question arises as to how this affects their social engagement and their ability to influence societal change. H. Jenkins & I. Mizuko (2015) studied how digital platforms provide young people with new opportunities for content creation and the discussion of socially significant topics.

The formation of teenage identity through social networks is another important issue. In the work of D. Boyd (2015), it was researched how teenagers use social networks for self-expression and the development of their identity, showing that social media play an important role in the process of self-discovery. S. Turkle (2016) investigated how smartphones and social networks undermine the

capacity for empathy and deep conversation, which affects the quality of communication. The mediatisation of reality through digital platforms also changes the perception of the world. N. Couldry & A. Hepp (2018) studied this issue, showing how digital platforms influence interaction and the perception of reality. The impact of the internet on children is also an important question. The historical development of social media and its impact on society was researched by J. Van Dijck (2013). She showed that social media have become an integral part of social life, although they have also contributed to the growth of commercialisation and control over personal data. Blogging, as a form of digital self-expression, is also an important topic. The author J. Dean (2010) researched how blogs facilitate identity formation, but also pointed out the influence of market forces on their development.

The aim of the study was to examine the development of digital culture in the United Kingdom, specifically blogging, social networks, online gaming, and memes. The objectives included an analysis of the formation of digital culture from the late 1990s, an assessment of the impact of digital platforms on social interaction and communication, as well as a study of the role of British digital culture in a global context. The research methodology was based on a chronological and thematic analysis of the stages of digital culture development in the United Kingdom. In the course of the study, methods of content analysis and comparative analysis were used to examine the emergence of blogs, social networks, online gaming, and meme culture, taking into account their influence on social interaction, national identity, and global cultural processes. Particular attention was paid to the analysis of British digital platforms and their contribution to the formation of global digital culture.

#### **HISTORICAL OVERVIEW: THE BEGINNING OF DIGITAL CULTURE IN THE UNITED KINGDOM**

The origins of blogging in the United Kingdom date back to the late 1990s, when the internet gradually began to enter the everyday lives of British people. Technological development and the accessibility of internet connections created favourable conditions for the emergence of new forms of self-expression in the online space. One such innovation was blogs, which offered the opportunity to publish personal thoughts, news, and reflections to a wide audience (Porter, 1997). In the early stages, blogs were primarily text-based diaries where authors shared their thoughts and experiences. This new phenomenon was perceived as an alternative to traditional media, where information was often presented in a standardised form. Blogs became a personal space for expression, free from editorial control, which attracted the attention of many Britons, especially the youth and the creative intelligentsia. Among the first British bloggers were journalists, writers, and other cultural figures who saw in this a new way of communicating with an audience.

One of the first influential British blogs was Belle de Jour: Diary of a London Call Girl. The blog, launched in 2003, became an online sensation due to its openness and unconventional content. The author, writing under a pseudonym, recounted her life as an escort, blurring the lines between the private and the public. The blog rapidly gained popularity and was eventually adapted into a

book and a television series. Belle de Jour symbolised the breaking of traditional taboos and demonstrated the power of blogging as a tool for discussing complex and controversial topics. Another important step in the development of British blogging was made by Plasticbag.org – a blog launched in 1999 by Tom Coates, one of the pioneers of British online journalism (Fig. 1). His blog focused on culture and technology, particularly innovations on the internet. This blog demonstrated that the internet is not only an entertainment space but also a platform for discussing serious topics. It also became an example of how blogging can transform into an important source of information and cultural analysis (Tepper, 2003).



**Figure 1.** A screenshot of the homepage of one of the UK's first blogs

**Source:** Plasticbag.org (n.d.)

Early blogging in the United Kingdom was closely linked to online journals. The first digital publications emerged, beginning to create an alternative to print media. One such early project was The Register, which began operating as early as 1994 as an online journal dedicated to technology and information technology. Initially, its focus was quite narrow, but over time the journal began to cover a wider range of topics, thereby gathering a large audience among professionals and enthusiasts. The influence of The Register on the development of blogging lay in the creation of a platform for expressing independent views and analysis, which encouraged others to launch their own projects.

Online journals, such as Spiked Online and OpenDemocracy, also played an important role in shaping British digital culture. These platforms combined a journalistic approach with the freethinking nature of blogging, creating a space for discussion and the critique of social and political issues. For example, OpenDemocracy, launched in 2001, actively used the internet as a means to promote democratic values and the critical assessment of global political events (Fig. 2). This journal became one of the first examples of how digital media can facilitate democratic dialogue on an international level, engaging bloggers and community activists from around the world (Melville, 2005).

An important factor in the success of early blogs and online journals in the United Kingdom was their flexibility and ability to cover a wide range of topics that traditionally fell outside the scope of mainstream media. Themes related to sexuality, politics, technology, culture, and personal experiences gained a platform for discussion. Blogs became an important socio-cultural phenomenon that not only expanded opportunities for self-expression but also

influenced the way audiences interacted with information (Marlow, 2004). In the context of the development of digital culture in the United Kingdom, blogging and online journals played a key role in the establishment of open forms of communication. They created opportunities for discussing topics that might previously have remained on the periphery of public attention. The emergence of the first British blogs and online journals laid the foundation for the subsequent evolution of digital culture, which later led to the flourish of social media. The appearance of the first social networks in the United Kingdom occurred in the early 2000s, when the internet became more accessible to broad segments of the population and digital communication began to spread rapidly. These social networks were unique for their time, as they allowed people to communicate and interact online through text, images, and music, which had not previously existed in traditional means of communication. Social platforms of this type began to change the approach to social interaction and gradually became an important element of British digital culture (Bryman & Hardy, 2009).

### History will not stop for Europe

In 2001, a series of profound changes were underway within the European Union. The same was true then as now: Europe needs a new argument.

Frank Vibert Susan Richards

17 May 2001



A euro in the night sky. Metropolico.org/Flickr. Some rights reserved. Europe needs a European argument.

**Figure 2.** One of the first articles published in the online journal OpenDemocracy

**Source:** OpenDemocracy (2001)

One of the first major social networks to appear in the United Kingdom was MySpace. Although MySpace was created in the USA, it quickly gained popularity in the British internet space due to its flexibility and the customisation of user pages (Fig. 3). MySpace allowed users to create profiles that contained not only text information but also music, photographs, and other multimedia elements. For Britons, this network became an important platform for self-expression, especially among young people and musicians.



**Figure 3.** MySpace social network logo

**Source:** Variety (2016)

MySpace significantly influenced the music industry in the United Kingdom, creating a platform for young performers who could independently publish their music and reach a large audience without the need to collaborate with record labels. Notably, the British musicians Arctic Monkeys gained immense popularity precisely through MySpace, where their tracks received significant resonance among users even before they signed a contract with a record label. This example demonstrates how social networks created new opportunities for the promotion of music and culture in the United Kingdom.

Another important social network that played a key role in the development of British digital culture was Bebo (Fig. 4). Founded in 2005, Bebo quickly became one of the most popular social networks in the United Kingdom and Ireland. This platform had similar functions to MySpace, yet it targeted a younger audience. Bebo allowed users to create profiles, communicate with friends, share photographs, and participate in various social groups.



**Figure 4.** Main page of the Bebo social network  
**Source:** Webdesignmuseum (2005)

One of the features of Bebo was the ability to create a “love triangle,” where users could select their three closest friends, which became a unique reflection of social status in the online space. This interactive element made the network popular among teenagers who sought to display their social connections on the internet. Furthermore, Bebo introduced a system of “blogs” that users could maintain on their profiles, which became a popular function among creative youth. Through this platform, blogging and social media began to intertwine, forming new ways of self-expression. However, Bebo was not just a platform for communication. It also played an important role in the development of cultural trends and internet content. British users actively created and distributed new forms of online entertainment, such as memes and videos, which served as a precursor to modern digital culture. Bebo also became an important launching pad for early internet stars who used the platform to promote their content and communicate with fans.

In addition to MySpace and Bebo, other less prominent platforms also existed in the United Kingdom which, although they did not achieve the same level of massive popularity as those mentioned above, contributed to the development of social networks. For instance, the platform

Friends Reunited, created in the UK in 1999, became one of the first social networks aimed at reconnecting former schoolmates. It quickly gained popularity among the British audience and, by 2005, had more than 15 million users. Although it was a more niche platform compared to MySpace or Bebo, its success demonstrated the British interest in social networking even before these platforms became a global phenomenon. In summary, it can be argued that the first social networks in the United Kingdom – such as MySpace, Bebo, and Friends Reunited – facilitated the formation of new models of social interaction and self-expression. They gave users the opportunity to create and promote content, find new friends, and collaborate in the digital space. These platforms laid the foundation for the further development of social media and became vital elements of the early digital culture of the United Kingdom.

### EVOLUTION OF DIGITAL CULTURE: FROM BLOGS TO SOCIAL NETWORKS

The transition from personal blogs to mass social platforms became an important milestone in the evolution of digital culture in the United Kingdom. While blogs initially allowed individual users to express their own thoughts and reflections in the online space, the new platforms of the early 2000s shifted the emphasis to interaction, instant communication, and multi-user connections. This transition not only transformed the way users interacted with information but also opened the door to new forms of self-expression, where the number of followers, likes, and reactions became important elements of social status. While blogs offered a platform for extended self-expression, the emergence of platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram led to changes in the form and format of content that users created and consumed. One of the first major steps in this direction was the launch of Facebook in 2004, which quickly became a global phenomenon, including in the United Kingdom. Facebook expanded the opportunities for communication, allowing users not only to share their thoughts but also to instantly interact with the content of others. Britons quickly adapted to this platform, especially among the youth, who began using it to maintain social ties and exchange news.

One of the main features of Facebook was the integration of many functions that previously existed separately: blogs, forums, photo albums, and even events. This made the platform universal for users who wished to quickly publish information and interact with a wide audience. Facebook also facilitated the development of a new culture where short and instant messages began to replace long blogs. For many British users, this was the first step in the transition from personal blogs to broader, more interactive communication (Castillo de Mesa *et al.*, 2020). Twitter, which appeared in 2006, offered an even more radical change in the communication format. If previously blogs allowed for the publication of long texts, Twitter focused on short messages – initially limited to 140 characters. This platform quickly became popular among Britons, especially among journalists, politicians, and public figures. Through Twitter, users could instantly express their thoughts on current events, making the platform one of the main tools for political discussions and social movements. The unique opportunity to receive real-time feedback created new

possibilities for influence and participation in social processes, which was previously restricted only to journalistic circles and print media.

Instagram, which appeared in 2010, further changed the approach to self-expression by focusing attention on visual content. Users could quickly share photographs and short videos reflecting their lifestyle, travel, fashion, and other aspects of daily reality. Instagram became especially popular in the United Kingdom among young people and influencers, who used the platform to promote personal brands and create visual content. For British culture, this meant a transition from a text-centric internet space to a visually-oriented one, where images and videos began to dominate. It is important to note that with the emergence of platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, not only the ways of interaction changed, but also the users' expectations regarding content. They were now required to create short, clear, and often entertaining content more quickly and effectively. Social networks also facilitated the rapid dissemination of information and the creation of trends that could be born in one part of the world and quickly reach the British audience, influencing its culture and habits. Thus, the transition from personal blogs to mass platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram not only transformed the digital culture of the United Kingdom but also influenced the way people communicated, consumed information, and interacted with it. These platforms shifted the emphasis from individual expression to collective participation, where not only personal thoughts but also the ability to attract the attention of a large audience in a short time became important.

British users, from the very dawn of digital culture in the 90s, have played a key role in shaping and spreading global trends in social media. The emergence of platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram created an opportunity for them to step onto the global stage, where they could participate in discussions that transcend national borders. Britain became home to many influencers, bloggers, public figures, musicians, and activists who influenced global culture through their online platforms. This influence was particularly noticeable in political, social, and cultural issues that became objects of active discussion worldwide (Graham & Dutton, 2019). One of the main characteristics of British participation in social media was its active use for social movements and political campaigns. Twitter, with its capacity for instant reaction and wide dissemination of information, became a key tool for British politicians, journalists, and social activists. Political leaders, such as Boris Johnson, actively used this platform to mobilise their supporters and spread political ideas, especially during significant political events such as Brexit.

Social networks have transformed into a space where citizens can directly participate in political discussions, express their opinions, and become active participants in national and global changes. Furthermore, social media became a tool for supporting global social movements that found resonance in the United Kingdom. For example, although Greta Thunberg is a Swedish activist, the British audience became one of the key forces supporting the movement for environmental change. In networks such as Twitter and Instagram, British users actively disseminated messages about the importance of fighting climate change,

organised protests, and supported global environmental initiatives. This clearly demonstrates how social media can become a platform for transnational movements, uniting users from different countries around common goals.

The music industry in the United Kingdom has also been significantly influenced by social media, where platforms such as Twitter and Instagram have become an integral part of marketing strategies for British musicians. The band One Direction, created as a result of the television show *The X Factor*, used these platforms to build a global fan base during the initial stages of their career. Through active interaction with fans via Twitter and Instagram, One Direction managed to create a unique connection with their audience, which allowed to achieve international success. It is important to note that their approach to communicating with fans became a model for many other musicians around the world, and the British music scene, through social media, gained significant popularity in a global context (Lyons, 2020). Social media also facilitated the spread of viral content, particularly memes, which became an important part of global digital culture. British users actively participated in the creation and distribution of memes that not only reflected local political and social realities but also quickly became part of the global online discourse. One striking example is memes related to Brexit, which became popular far beyond the borders of the United Kingdom. These memes often combined humor with criticism of political events, making complex political issues more accessible to a wider audience (Kinane, 2021).

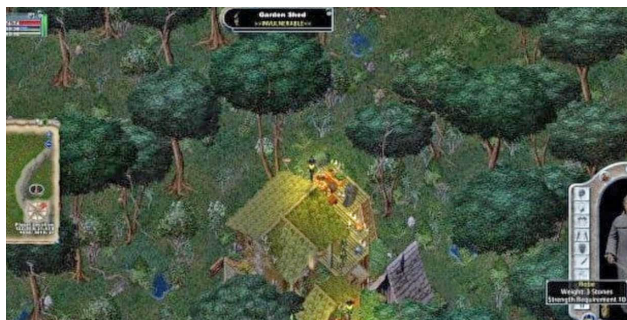
Beyond politics, British users have also influenced world trends in fashion, design, and other cultural spheres through social networks. British bloggers, particularly on Instagram, have had a significant impact on global fashion trends. They created content that became popular among millions of users worldwide, setting new standards for style and lifestyle. Their influence on the global fashion industry confirms the importance of social media in shaping modern cultural trends. Overall, the influence of British users on world trends in social media has been extremely significant. They have not only shaped trends in politics, culture, and social issues but also set new standards for communication and self-expression in the online space. Through the active participation of British users in global discussions, social media has become a key tool in forming new cultural and social norms that continue to influence digital culture around the world.

### ONLINE GAMING IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

The online gaming industry in the United Kingdom has a rich history dating back to the 1980s, when computer games began to gain popularity through the development of home computers such as the ZX Spectrum and Commodore 64. However, the real breakthrough in this field occurred in the late 1990s and early 2000s with the emergence of high-speed internet and technologies that allowed users to interact in real time through online games. The United Kingdom quickly became one of the leading countries in this industry, developing both local and global gaming platforms.

The first significant steps in the development of online games in the United Kingdom were taken by the company Jagex, which in 2001 launched the legendary MMORPG

(massively multiplayer online role-playing game) RuneScape. RuneScape became one of the most popular online games in the world, gaining millions of users due to its open-world structure, character progression system, and the ability to communicate with other players (Fig. 5). This game not only opened new horizons for British developers but also set new standards for the industry, making the United Kingdom an important centre for the development of online games (Tsang, 2021).



**Figure 5.** A screenshot from the game RuneScape  
**Source:** MMORPG.GG (2021)

Jagex continues to remain an important company in the industry, and RuneScape – one of the most successful online games in history. The success of this game inspired many other British developers who began creating their own projects in the sphere of online gaming. For example, Codemasters, known for its racing simulators, actively integrated online functionality into its games, allowing players to compete with each other via the internet. As a result, British developers were able to maintain significant positions within the online gaming industry, influencing the global market. One of the important stages in the development of online games in the United Kingdom was also the creation of games for consoles with the possibility of multiplayer play via the internet. In particular, the Fable game series, created by the company Lionhead Studios under the leadership of the famous British developer Peter Molyneux, became an important video game with a multiplayer mode that allowed the British studio to win international recognition. Through the integration of the multiplayer element via Xbox Live, the Fable series became an example of how console games can successfully implement online functions while maintaining their storyline and atmosphere (Gonçalves *et al.*, 2023).

The online gaming industry in the United Kingdom has also flourished through the development of esports. One of the most important events in this direction was the creation of the British esports league, ESL UK Premiership, which gathered the best players from various online games, such as Counter-Strike: Global Offensive and League of Legends. The league quickly gained popularity among both players and spectators, creating a platform for promoting esports within the United Kingdom and beyond. British developers have also actively integrated mobile games into the online space. One of the companies that achieved success in this area was King, known for its game Candy Crush Saga, which integrated social functions and a multiplayer mode through Facebook and other platforms (Fig. 6). Although

it was primarily a mobile game, its social elements made it part of a broader online gaming culture where players could interact with each other through resource sharing, competing for rankings, and inviting friends to the game.



**Figure 6.** One of the interfaces  
of the game Candy Crush Saga  
**Source:** Candy Crush Saga (n.d.)

The development of online games in the United Kingdom was made possible by support from the government and investments in the industry. State programs provided financial support to young developers and also facilitated the development of technical infrastructure, which allowed for the creation of high-speed internet and servers for online games. This made the United Kingdom an important centre for the online gaming industry, attracting international companies and talented developers. In general, the early development of the online gaming industry in the United Kingdom is characterised by the growing influence of British studios on the global market, the active implementation of innovations in the field of multiplayer games, and the creation of conditions for the promotion of esports. This confirms that the United Kingdom continues to remain one of the leading players on the international online gaming arena. Gaming has become an integral part of British digital culture, shaping not only the individual experience of players but also creating powerful online communities that have transformed into centres of socialisation, cultural exchange, and economic development. This process included not only the active participation of players in the games themselves but also the creation of forums, streaming platforms, social networks, and esports events that became the basis for the formation of a unique digital culture in the United Kingdom (Mateos-Garcia *et al.*, 2014).

One of the key components of gaming's influence on digital culture is the formation of communities – digital spaces where players can communicate, discuss games, and interact outside the games themselves. In the United Kingdom, such communities began to appear as early as the beginning of the 2000s, when online games such as RuneScape gained immense popularity. These communities became platforms for exchanging knowledge, tips on game progression, and creating new social ties between players. It is important to note that these communities were not

limited exclusively to gaming issues – they also became places for discussing social, cultural, and political topics, confirming the broad influence of gaming on the digital culture of Great Britain. Over time, with the emergence of platforms such as Discord and Twitch, British communities became even more organised and structured. Discord, being the primary platform for voice and text communication, allowed players to create separate servers where they could discuss gaming strategies, exchange experiences, and organise esports competitions. Twitch, for its part, became an important element of British digital culture, where popular streamers not only broadcasted their gaming sessions but also actively interacted with the audience, forming strong social ties (Stavropoulos *et al.*, 2017).

One of the most influential aspects of the development of the British gaming community was the growth of esports. Esports in the United Kingdom gained particular popularity in the early 2010s through games such as League of Legends, Counter-Strike: Global Offensive, and Dota 2. British esports organisations, such as ESL UK, actively organised tournaments and leagues where the best players competed against each other. One of the most famous teams became Fnatic, which gained international recognition through victories in many prestigious tournaments. This success of British esports players confirms not only the development of esports but also its integration into British digital culture. Esports also facilitated the development of new forms of interaction between players and the audience. Tournaments gathered thousands of spectators in arenas and millions online. Platforms like Twitch and YouTube allowed viewers not only to follow matches but also to interact with participants through chats and comments. This created a unique format of digital sport, where spectators became part of an interactive community rather than just passive observers. Such a format of interaction contributed to the popularisation of esports among the younger generation of Britons, who saw it not only as entertainment but also as a career opportunity. One of the greatest achievements of British esports was hosting major international tournaments on UK territory. For example, in 2018, a major Counter-Strike: Global Offensive tournament was held in London, gathering the best teams from around the world. This event demonstrated that the United Kingdom has become an important centre for the development of global esports and a place where gaming is not just entertainment, but a professional activity (UK esports: Challenges and future opportunities, 2023).

Gaming and esports in the United Kingdom have had a significant impact on the economy. In recent years, the gaming and esports market has continued to grow, bringing significant revenue to the country. British companies have actively invested in the development of esports infrastructure, and the government has supported this sector through various funding programs. Thus, the influence of gaming on British digital culture has been immense, encompassing both social aspects through the formation of communities and the development of esports, which has become an important part of the entertainment industry in the United Kingdom. Gaming has created new forms of communication, interaction, and professional activity, making it one of the core elements of the country's modern digital culture.

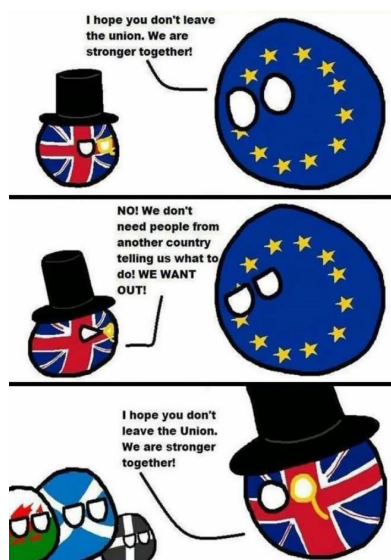
## MEME CULTURE IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

Memes in the United Kingdom have undergone a significant transformation, from modest internet jokes to complex cultural symbols that deeply reflect the moods of society. Initially, British memes were mostly local jokes that circulated within narrow internet communities. They were characterised by simple, often unassuming humor that was understood only by those who were closely familiar with specific aspects of British culture. Early memes emerged on forums and in the first social networks, such as Bebo and MySpace, where users began to experiment with graphic elements and short text messages. These memes were usually based on photographs or simple illustrations to which ironic or sarcastic captions were added. For example, photographs of British politicians of that time were often turned into objects of satirical ridicule, reflecting complex political realities in the form of accessible humor. At that time, memes had a more limited distribution due to a smaller number of internet users and insufficiently developed social networks. Despite this, even in the early stages, these internet jokes began to form an important part of the cultural consciousness of Britons. One of the key features of British memes was their dry humor and sense of the absurd, which is deeply rooted in British culture, particularly in literature and cinema (Shifman, 2013).

As F. Sobande (2019) notes, over time, memes began to reach broader audiences, moving beyond narrow internet communities and becoming part of national and even global culture. Owing to technological development and the growing popularity of platforms such as Twitter and Facebook, memes ceased to be exclusively internet jokes and began to play a more serious role in public discourse. Political events, such as the referendum on the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the European Union, created new opportunities for memes. Spreading through the internet, they became a tool for commenting on important social and political events, creating a space for criticism and humorous reflection on complex issues. As social media developed, memes began to play a more significant role in the public life of British people. Platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram created new opportunities for the rapid spread of memes among a large audience. These platforms also contributed to the globalisation of British memes, making them part of international digital culture. One of the most famous examples is Brexit memes, which spread online during and after the referendum. These memes often reflected conflicting sentiments in society, using humor to ridicule complex political situations. British memes play an important role in shaping both national and international identity, becoming a kind of reflection of social moods and cultural characteristics of the country. They are used as a way of communication that helps to satirise political, social, and cultural phenomena. Due to their flexibility, British memes can simultaneously reflect local realities and influence the global context (Galita & Bonta, 2022).

One of the striking examples of this process is memes related to politics. For example, Brexit memes became not just comic images or videos, but a tool reflecting deep political divisions in British society (Fig. 7). These memes highlighted various aspects of life during the political crisis, while simultaneously contributing to the formation of

a collective national identity through humor and self-irony. They also became part of international online discourse, turning into a cultural marker of British politics that is understood and used around the world (Kinane, 2021).



**Figure 7.** One of the numerous Brexit memes

Source: Google Photo

Another aspect lies in how British memes reflect national stereotypes. Memes that poke fun at typical British traits, such as restraint, a love for tea, or British politeness, are often used as a means of self-identification within the country (Fig. 8). At the same time, these memes gain popularity on the international stage, where they help create an image of the United Kingdom as a nation with unique cultural traits.



**Figure 8.** The Spiffing Brit – a meme personification of the traditional image of a Briton

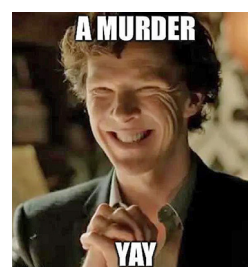
Source: Google Photo

On an international level, British memes also serve as a tool for cultural diplomacy. Due to the globalisation of the internet, British humor, style, and social commentary are becoming part of international culture. For example, memes related to popular British series such as Doctor Who (Fig. 9) or Sherlock (Fig. 10) have gained global distribution and become part of international pop culture. They transform British cultural products into symbols associated with British identity all over the world.



**Figure 9.** A meme made from frames of the series Doctor Who

Source: Google Photo



**Figure 10.** A meme from frames of the series Sherlock Holmes

Source: Bookbub (2020)

Memes help Britons comprehend their own identity in the modern world and, at the same time, serve as an important cultural tool that promotes the popularisation of British culture on the international stage. They make British identity more accessible to an international audience, whilst simultaneously influencing global trends. Nowadays, memes in the UK have become an integral part not only of digital culture but also of the country's wider contemporary culture. They have gone beyond mere jokes to become an important means of expressing public opinion, emotions and ideology. British memes cover a vast range of topics, from politics to pop culture, making them a universal tool for communication in the digital space. Their influence is not limited solely to humour – they act as a kind of social mirror through which society expresses its emotions, experiences and thoughts regarding events taking place in the country.

Political memes have become an especially powerful means of expressing collective moods. For example, events related to Brexit, the royal family, or recent political scandals do not escape the attention of British internet users. Through memes, people manifest their disappointment, hopes, irony, and even sarcasm toward political leaders or government decisions. As a result, memes become not only a form of entertainment but also a means of expressing civic engagement. Furthermore, British memes often poke fun at national stereotypes that are part of the national consciousness. For example, the love of tea, the weather, or famous British manners are constantly used in memes that satirise these aspects. However, they also emphasise

the cultural identity of the British, allowing the nation to laugh together at its own traditions, whilst strengthening a sense of community. Memes also play an important role in shaping pop-cultural trends. Popular TV shows, musicians and films often become the subject of viral content that spreads rapidly online. As a result, British memes take on not only national but also international significance, influencing global internet trends and shaping a certain image of British culture around the world. Memes are becoming much more than just funny images with captions. They are transforming into symbols that reflect social and cultural phenomena, becoming an important part of British identity in the digital media age.

## CONCLUSIONS

In the course of the study, it was established that the development of digital culture in the United Kingdom encompassed numerous spheres of public life, from media to social interaction and entertainment. From blogs to modern social media platforms, British people have actively shaped the digital landscape, opening up new avenues for self-expression and public discussion. The formation of digital culture became a multifaceted process in which each stage of technological development added new elements to online communication and interaction. Blogs, which appeared in the late 1990s, changed the format of publications, giving users the opportunity to freely express their opinions outside the limits of traditional media. They created an alternative space where authors could freely share experiences and reflections, which stimulated the emergence of new forms of journalism and creativity. This format ensured freedom of speech and contributed to the further democratisation of the information space. At the beginning of the 2000s, social networks radically changed the nature of interaction on the internet. They became a powerful tool for information exchange, self-expression, and socialisation, integrating text, images, and music into a single whole. Through these platforms, British users were able to develop their creativity, overcome barriers between consumers and content creators, and participate actively in global processes. Social networks became not

only a method of communication but also an important factor in the development of professional activity in the online environment.

The gaming industry has also influenced modern British culture. Online games have created powerful communities where players do not just interact in the game but also form strong social ties, discuss strategies, and collectively create new digital experiences. The growth of esports has contributed to the development of new professional opportunities and significant economic growth in this sphere. Gaming has become an integral part of digital culture, influencing the way many Britons communicate, work, and relax. Memes, which were initially a simple form of internet humor, have transformed into an important tool for expressing public moods and collective opinion. They have become a way of ironically interpreting political, social, and cultural phenomena, establishing themselves as an element of national identity. Through memes, Britons can collectively react to current events, using them as a means of social commentary and communication. Over time, they began to influence not only the national discourse but also international digital culture. The digital culture of the United Kingdom continues to evolve, reflecting social, political, and technological changes. Britons remain active participants in global digital processes, contributing to the formation of new trends and communication styles that define the modern digital environment. Further research could focus on the impact of digital culture on various social groups, as well as on exploring less-studied aspects such as the dark web, online disinformation, and the role of digital culture among the ethnic and linguistic communities of the United Kingdom.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

None.

## FUNDING

None.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

None.

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**Розвиток інтернет-культури у Великій Британії:  
від блогінгу та соціальних мереж до онлайн-геймінгу та мемів**

**Анотація.** Актуальність дослідження зумовлена стрімким розвитком цифрових технологій та зростаючим впливом інтернет-культури на соціальні, культурні та комунікативні процеси у сучасному суспільстві. Вивчення трансформації онлайн-комунікації у Великій Британії дозволяє глибше зрозуміти глобальні тенденції формування нових форм культурного самовираження та суспільної взаємодії. Метою дослідження було висвітлення основних етапів формування інтернет-культури та її впливу на суспільні процеси у Великій Британії. У дослідженні застосовано міждисциплінарний підхід, що поєднував культурологічний, соціологічний та медіазнавчий аналіз для вивчення цифрових практик у британському суспільстві. В ході дослідження було зібрано різноманітну інформацію про ключові аспекти інтернет-культури, зокрема блогінг, соціальні мережі, онлайн-геймінг та мему. Оцінювався процес змін у спілкуванні та соціальній взаємодії, викликаний розвитком цифрових платформ, а також досліджувалося, як інтернет сприяв формуванню нових культурних феноменів і підходів до самовираження в британському суспільстві. В ході дослідження було встановлено, що інтернет-культура у Великій Британії розвивалася в кілька етапів, починаючи з блогінгу, який створив платформу для незалежного самовираження та обговорення важливих соціальних тем. Надалі соціальні мережі, такі як Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, трансформували цифровий простір, відкривши можливості для масової комунікації, обміну контентом та розвитку нових форм взаємодії. Онлайн-ігри та кіберспорт також стали важливою частиною інтернет-культури, формуючи потужні спільноти та впливаючи на економічні й культурні процеси. Мем-культура еволюціонувала від простих жартів до серйозних соціальних та культурних маркерів, які відображали настрої суспільства і стали інструментом для висловлення колективної думки. Проведена робота виявила значний вплив британської інтернет-культури на глобальні культурні та соціальні процеси, підтвердивши її важливість як інструмента для формування і трансформації сучасної суспільної свідомості

**Ключові слова:** кіберспорт; медіа-контент; віртуальне самовираження; мережеві взаємодії; інтернет-журнали; віртуальні ігри; вірусний контент