

Citation: Sultana, A., & Khalid, A. (2023). Unmasking Political Narratives: A Study of Political Memes in Pakistan. *Global Digital & Print Media Review*, VI(II), 334-353. [https://doi.org/10.31703/gdpmr.2023\(VI-II\).24](https://doi.org/10.31703/gdpmr.2023(VI-II).24)

- Vol. VI, No. II (Spring 2023)
- Pages: 334 – 353
- p- ISSN: 2788-4988
- e-ISSN: 2788-4945

▪ URL: [http://dx.doi.org/10.31703/gdpmr.2023\(VI-II\).24](http://dx.doi.org/10.31703/gdpmr.2023(VI-II).24) ▪ DOI: 10.31703/gdpmr.2023(VI-II).24



GDPMR
Global Digital & Print Media Review
www.gdpmr.com



Cite Us



Aneela Sultana *

Anum Khalid †

Unmasking Political Narratives: A Study of Political Memes in Pakistan

Abstract: *This study explores the complex world of political memes to understand their function as cultural agents. The study examines political memes' effects on intra-party and inter-party ideology, communication, and political perspective evolution. The study used a survey method, sending out professionally designed questionnaires to undergraduates and graduates at Quaid-e-Azam University, Arid Agriculture University, and other institutions, as well as to newly minted professionals. Data was carefully collected to ensure accuracy. The results show that political memes can stimulate several responses, with the most common being identity and belief strengthening. This research also reveals how political memes may either divide people or bring them together, testing the convictions of those willing to have their opinions examined.*

Key Words: Political Memes, Cultural Expression, Political Discourse, Identity, Belief Formation, Belief Transformation, Ideological Polarization

Corresponding Author: Aneela Sultana (Assistant Professor, Department of Anthropology, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad, Pakistan. Email: aneela@gau.edu.pk)

Introduction

With the widespread of memes as a form of communication on matters whether of political nature, economic, social, or military there is no second guessing that memes have become a form of communication. These memes are so finely interwoven in our daily lives that one can open Facebook for example and find an infinite amount of these memes addressing infinite topics. One can be part of a debate in an office or their house and find people referencing them.

Humor has long been used as a tool for

political commentary and satire. In the digital age, memes have become a popular form of political humor. Memes are images or videos that are shared online, often with humorous or satirical captions. They can be used to make light of political events, criticize politicians, or promote political causes (Mishra, [2022](#)).

The use of memes in political discourse has been the subject of much scholarly research. Some studies have found that political memes can be an effective way to raise awareness of political issues and encourage political participation. For example, a study by Guess et al. ([2020](#)) found that political memes

* Assistant Professor, Department of Anthropology, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad, Pakistan.

† MPhil Scholar, Department of Anthropology, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad, Pakistan.

were more likely to be shared by people who were already interested in politics, but they also found that memes could be effective in reaching people who were not previously interested in politics. Other studies have found that political memes can also be used to spread misinformation and polarize political discourse. For example, a study by Howard et al. (2018) found that political memes were often used by bots and other automated accounts to spread misinformation during the UK-EU referendum (Kasirye, 2019).

The content of a political meme, its target audience, and the context in which it is spread are all important elements in determining the meme's influence. An echo chamber is an online community where members only see and discuss content that confirms their preexisting opinions. Successful conversations and debates are more likely to occur when people spread memes in their more heterogeneous social networks (Valenzuela, 2013).

When seen through the lens of anthropology, political memes reveal much about the creators and consumers of this type of cultural expression. Social standards can either be upheld or questioned through the usage of memes. They can be used to bring people together or to divide them. Memes are often misunderstood because their meaning shifts depending on the audience and the medium through which it is disseminated.

This paper will explore the anthropological aspects of how humor and memes are used in the political sphere. It will examine the different ways in which political memes are created, circulated, and interpreted. The paper will also discuss the potential risks and benefits of using political memes.

In the realm of modern political communication, political memes have become quite a sensation. They find their way onto social media platforms, reaching a wide array of individuals. These memes serve as a creative outlet for expressing a whole spectrum of political viewpoints - whether it's

backing a candidate or voicing disagreement with a particular policy.

The power of political memes lies in their ability to persuade. They can nudge people towards embracing specific beliefs or actions, even rallying them to partake in political endeavors. However, it's important to tread carefully, as these memes also have a knack for spreading misleading information and fanning the flames of political divisions. To make informed choices, a healthy dose of skepticism and scrutiny is advised before hitting that 'share' button.

This research article embarks on an exploration of the profound realm of political memes, unraveling their intricate role as a potent vehicle for cultural expression that exerts a transformative influence on the tapestry of political discourse. These succinct yet visually compelling amalgamations of text and imagery wield a dual nature, functioning not only as conduits for heightening awareness of pertinent political issues but also as catalysts for igniting active political participation and dismantling established societal norms.

It is incumbent upon us, however, to acknowledge that within this dynamic landscape, memes bear the weight of a Janus-faced character - a capacity to both enlighten and mislead. They can be wielded as tools for the dissemination of misinformation, contributing to the already pervasive issue of distorted truths in the digital sphere, while concurrently acting as agents that amplify the polarity and discord within political conversations.

Given this intricate interplay, the crux of this article resides in the urgent need to fathom the multi-layered ramifications inherent in the utilization of political memes. It advocates for a judicious approach, emphasizing the critical necessity of subjecting meme content to rigorous scrutiny before facilitating its diffusion. By cultivating an astute awareness of the potential risks and benefits immanent in this visual medium, we can navigate the intricate terrain of political discourse with

sagacity, ensuring that the memes we share contribute constructively to the collective socio-political dialogue.

Objectives of the Study

This research endeavors to delve into the labyrinthine realm of political memes, aiming to decipher their profound impact on the landscape of political discourse. With a compass guided by the articulated problem statement, the study sets forth a constellation of objectives:

- To conduct an in-depth exploration of the patterns and practices governing the utilization of political memes by individuals, unravelling the multifaceted ways in which they are harnessed for communication and expression.
- To examine the intricate nexus between exposure to political memes and the evolution of individuals' political beliefs, shedding light on the mechanisms through which these visual narratives influence belief formation and transformation.
- To explore the effect that political memes have on the ideological gaps that exist between various political factions and to conduct an empirical analysis of the role that political memes play as agents of polarization and possible convergence.

Literature Review

The literature on political memes is still relatively new, but several studies have been conducted in recent years. Some of the key findings from this research include:

Digital Genre Theory

In order to understand the nature, usefulness, and significance of digital genres, it is helpful to explore the literature surrounding the field of Digital Genre Theory, which has received a lot of attention in recent years. These styles cover a wide variety of writing formats created

for and transmitted via the internet. Social media posts, emails, blogs, and online reviews are all examples of what are known as "communicative behaviors formed by digital media and social contexts" (Xia, 2020). Digital genres serve personal, professional, and artistic purposes with varying degrees of formality and informality depending on the situation. Their value resides on how accurately they represent the standards of modern digital communication. Understanding the inner workings of digital genres is becoming increasingly important as we shift to conducting more of our social interactions online (Lomborg, 2011). Our digital discourse is shaped by a number of socio-cultural and technological transformations, and by this comprehension, we can gain insight into these larger trends (Xia, 2020). When applied to professional, cultural, and interpersonal interaction patterns, the concept of genre proves to be an invaluable analytical tool in the field of information studies (Andersen, 2008).

New Literacies, Genres, and Writing Practices

The ability of the Digital Genre Theory to shed light on the operation and significance of digital genres in modern communication is what makes it so important. Our digital communication patterns are reflected in these genres, and we can learn more about the broader societal, cultural, and technological trends that are influencing our interactions by looking at them. In information studies, the understanding of genre serves as an important analytical tool for making sense of complex communication landscapes, while the affordances of social tools can shape and improve writers' processes and, in turn, our comprehension of genre (Andersen, 2008). Separate from evolutionary biology, the field of memetics (which has its theoretical foundations in Richard Dawkins' hypothesis) investigates the genesis, transmission, and development of memes, which can be anything from thoughts to behaviors to

material objects. Understanding the birth and spread of political memes can be aided by this hypothesis. These memes may start out humorous, but they have the potential to become powerful tools for criticizing leaders and promoting causes. To emphasize their potential as vehicles for political communication at the grassroots level, my study shows that political memes often originate from regular individuals rather than established entities. This theory, which has its roots in the study of how political messages are made, disseminated, and understood, can help shed light on the ways in which political memes are used to do everything from increase public awareness of an issue to sway votes or shift opinions (Howard et al., [2018](#)).

Political Memes as Mirrors of Narrative, Power, And Public Sentiment

Kulkarni's ([2017](#)) acknowledgement of humor's power to express deep social and political commentary is indicative of the scholarly interest in the intersection of political communication, public perception, and the digital sphere. This is consistent with the usage of sarcasm and comedy in political memes, as seen in the examined content, which uncovered discrepancies between rhetoric and action (Rastogi & Kashyap, [2019](#)). In addition, Mahara and Mahmood's ([2021](#)) research into the visual-textual synergy in memes reveals the quick socio-political dissemination, reflecting society's beliefs. The narrative potential of memes about power relations is demonstrated by the compatibility of their techniques (Sheikh et al., [2022](#)). Besides, Nazeer and Ashfaq ([2023](#)) point out that the rapid digital propagation of memes encourages conversation, which is consistent with the effect seen in the studied memes (Qazi et al., [2022](#)). Like content analysis, which reveals hidden political narratives, public opinion, and government conflicts, literature emphasizes comedic text-visual interplay and virality. Despite the prevalence of false information, the study implies that memes

might be used as a teaching tool (Qazi et al., [2022](#)).

Methodology

Research Methodology

The goal of an exploratory study is to provide the framework for further investigation of a previously unexplored area by collecting and analyzing preliminary data to generate hypotheses, identify trends, and draw conclusions. This technique excels in situations where only limited context is available. In addition, this work uses an exploratory study approach to examine the interplay between political memes and public comprehension in the context of Pakistani political discourse. This research makes use of an exploratory study design to go deeply into a novel area with scant prior research, in order to uncover themes, sequences, and findings that can add to our understanding of the phenomenon under investigation.

Methods

Questionnaire

The study utilizes a well-constructed questionnaire-based poll to evaluate the general public's acquaintance with and reaction to political memes. Young professionals from a wide range of fields, as well as students from Quaid-e-Azam University in Islamabad and Arid Agriculture University in Rawalpindi, are included in the poll. Using this method, you can collect data from a large cross-section of your target population. Using a survey questionnaire ensures that the study considers the nuanced nature of human responses. It enables free expression and acknowledges the unique perspectives of everybody involved. Researchers can use surveys to look at patterns and subtle connections between political memes and public sentiment.

Content Analysis

The study conducts a content analysis of representative examples of political memes to

identify recurrent ideas, attitudes, and argumentative frameworks. This method of analysis goes deep into the meat of political memes, picking up on nuanced visual narratives and textual juxtapositions that are characteristic of the political meme environment. Furthermore, the content analysis can be used to delve into the meanings behind political memes. Each meme is recognized for what it is: a distinct form of communication that adds to the ongoing political and social discourse. Meme analysis mirrors the intrinsic human tendency to decode and analyses visual and textual materials by revealing underlying concepts, shared interpretations, and symbolic representations.

Data Collection Process

Students at Quaid-e-Azam University and Arid Agriculture University, as well as recent graduates who are entering the job market, will be surveyed as part of the data collection process. For efficient and fast survey delivery, Google Sheets is used. To verify the validity of the data and spot outliers, we stopped collecting information after the first 10 submissions. After enough high-quality replies have been received, data collecting for the entire month of May 2023 will restart. Data quality and integrity are given the utmost care during the collection procedure. The veracity of the collected data is ensured by pausing data collection for a little while and carefully reviewing the initial responses. The researcher's dedication to getting reliable information is reflected in this method.

To gauge the public's comprehension and perception of memes in the political domain, a meticulously designed questionnaire-based survey was undertaken. This endeavor aimed to capture diverse perspectives from respondents within varying academic strata. The survey was strategically administered across different universities, including Quaid-e-Azam University in Islamabad and Arid Agriculture University in Rawalpindi, ensuring a broad spectrum of insights.

The humanistic spirit of this research is made clear by its use of a questionnaire and its appreciation of the variety of responses it generates. Understanding both similarities and distinctions amongst political memes is the goal of content analysis. The research, which is based on an amalgam of survey inquiry and content analysis, captures popular perception and meme nuances, linking personal experiences with broader sociopolitical discourse.

Results & Discussion

The respondents consisted of individuals primarily within the age range of 18 to 33, with a majority (63.3%) being males. It is important to note that the occupation column includes both specific occupations and general descriptions, such as student or unemployed. Some participants chose not to disclose their political inclination or occupation, indicating a level of privacy or hesitation in providing that information.

The data showcases a diverse range of political inclinations among the respondents, including affiliations with parties such as PTI, and PML N, and self-identification as apolitical or left-leaning. This reflects a variety of political orientations within the given sample.

Regarding occupations, the respondents represent a range of professional backgrounds, including military (Army), business (businessman), research (researcher), teaching (teacher), police officer, sales professional, accountant, and students pursuing various subjects like software development, anthropology, psychology, and public administration. The inclusion of diverse occupations provides insights into the varying perspectives and experiences of individuals with different professional backgrounds.

There is a notable representation of participants in the age range of 26 to 33, followed by individuals aged 18 to 25. This age distribution suggests a higher likelihood of participation from young and middle-aged

adults, potentially indicating their interest or engagement in political matters.

It is worth mentioning that some respondents chose not to disclose their political inclination or occupation, which could be due to personal preferences or concerns about privacy. These omissions may introduce some limitations in concluding the available data.

Feelings, Beliefs, and Identity

As per the data, 36.7% of the respondents said that they feel a moderate sense of identity while sharing political memes and 26.7% of the respondents said that they feel no sense of identity while viewing or sharing political memes. To triangulate this data the respondents were asked "if they felt that memes shaped their understanding of political identity?" Almost half (43.3%) of the respondents said that sharing political memes has no impact on the respondent's understanding of political memes, while 33% of the respondents said that 33.3% have said that political memes have helped them discover new aspects of their political identity.

Reinforcement of Existing Political Beliefs

The spread of political memes has the potential to solidify already-held beliefs. Allcott and Gentzkow (2017) underline the role of memes in the spread of false information on social media. According to Zhang and Gearhart (2022), it does not matter whether or not the data supports a person's views if the memes coincide with them. Nyhan and Reifler (2010) discovered that people, especially those who are very partisan, are more likely to accept confirming information, even if it is false, because of the need to maintain their existing beliefs.

Critically Examining Established Political Beliefs

Nevertheless, political memes can also be used to question conventional wisdom. Those

who self-identify as liberal on the political spectrum are more likely to experience this (30%). Those who are more receptive to new ideas and information are more likely to be swayed by political memes that run counter to their preconceived notions.

Someone's belief in a program they favor could be challenged, for instance, by a political meme that emphasizes the policy's drawbacks. They might learn something new or see things in a different light thanks to the meme and end up rethinking their position on the topic.

Political Polarization

Polarization in politics is another potential outcome of political memes. For the 20% of respondents who see political memes as a weapon to spread their own views and ridicule those of others, this is more likely to occur. Consequently, political division can be exacerbated by memes that aim to reinforce people's preexisting opinions by painting the other side in a negative light.

A political meme that mocks a politician from the other party, for instance, could cause supporters of that person to view the meme's author with hostility. As a result, it may become more challenging to find common ground and reach consensus among members of different political parties.

Discussions and Debates in Politics

Political memes, on the other hand, can spark serious debates and conversations about political issues. Respondents who see political memes as an opportunity to learn about diverse political ideas are more likely to have this experience (10%). Memes that show multiple points of view can help individuals see things from another person's perspective, even if they disagree with that person's position.

A political meme that poses a question about a divisive topic, for instance, may encourage dialogue between those with divergent points of view. This could help in developing a grasp of the subject and in gaining an appreciation for the various

perspectives on it.

Content Analysis of Memes

The selection of memes for analysis was thoughtfully guided by a multifaceted approach, designed to capture the diverse essence of political discourse within contemporary social media platforms. The utilization of Facebook groups emerged as a central strategy in this endeavour, acknowledging the dynamic nature of these digital spaces as repositories of political expression. These groups, meticulously cultivated by distinct political factions, presented an invaluable repository of memes - a testament to the vitality of this visual medium as a communicative channel.

This selection process, underscored by the ethos of inclusivity and comprehensiveness,

recognized the pronounced influence wielded by two pivotal political entities - PTI and PMLN. By deliberately encompassing memes from both these prominent groups, the study sought to navigate the intricate landscape of political opinions and affiliations, ensuring a holistic examination of diverse perspectives.

The underpinning humanistic stance of this approach is evident in its recognition of the rich tapestry of voices within these digital enclaves. It honors the multiplicity of viewpoints present within these political groups, each encapsulated in the succinct yet impactful form of a meme. Thus, the selected memes embody not only visual narratives but also the collective pulse of the platforms from which they were harvested, thereby reflecting the intersection of individual expression and broader political discourse.

Meme 1

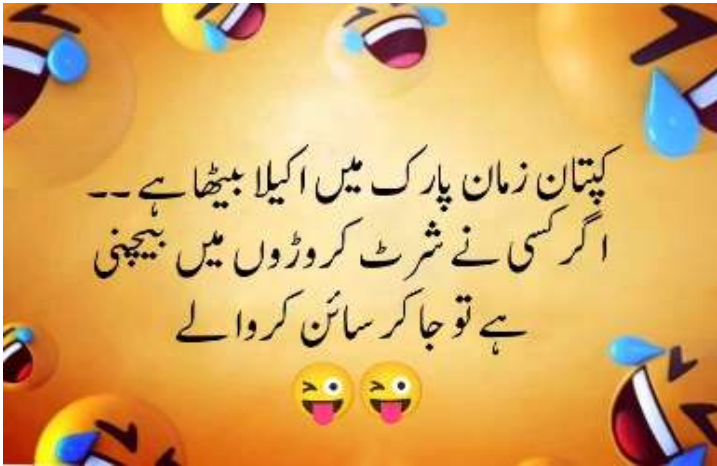


Table 1

Category	Code	Description
Target audience	General public	The meme is targeted at the general public.
Target audience	Political party opponents	The meme is targeted at opponents of a particular political party.
Political message	Negative	The meme has a negative message about a political party or candidate.
Tone	Humorous	The meme is humorous in tone.
Tone	Satirical	The meme is satirical in tone.

Category	Code	Description
Use of humor	Yes	The meme uses humor to convey its message.
Use of text	Yes	The meme uses text to convey its message.
Source of the meme	Facebook	The meme originated on social media.
Spread of the meme	Widespread	The meme has been widely shared.

This table provides an analysis of a political meme targeting both the general public and opponents of a PTI political party. The meme aims to convey a negative political message and employs a humorous and satirical tone to engage its audience. The meme effectively utilizes humor as a means of communication, employing various comedic elements to enhance its message. Moreover, the use of text within the meme serves as a crucial tool for conveying the intended message to the audience.

Originating on Facebook, the meme has gained significant traction and has been widely shared across various social media platforms, resulting in its widespread dissemination and exposure to a broad audience. By combining the elements of targeted audience, political message, tone, use of humor and text, as well as the meme's source and spread, this comprehensive analysis provides a nuanced understanding of the meme's impact and significance within the political discourse. Besides, this meme aligns with literature, showcasing humor's role in conveying complex commentary, mirroring power dynamics and public sentiment (Mahara & Mahmood, 2021).

The meme features an image of a solitary Imran Khan, which could be seen as a symbol of his emotional distance from his position as leader. Khan's shirt-signing anecdote is a metaphor for the value of side projects among pressing political duties. By making light of the sale of the signed shirt, the author mocks the way in which celebrity culture has become more important than politics. Combining humor with critical introspection, this meme portrays the cultural and socioeconomic background of Pakistan, including the public's

view of politicians and the influence of celebrity culture.

The comments on such memes are hilarious and creative at the same time. Have a look at the comment written below

This comment appears to be written in Urdu. Here is a content analysis of the comment:

Ek Youthia Hijam ki dukhan pa gya cutting krwane naji na remote to hath lgya to youthia ghabra ka bola ka yar khabran na layen

Overall, the comment appears to describe a lighthearted situation where a youth visits a barber shop, and the barber accidentally touches a remote control, causing the youth to become anxious and request not to receive any bad news. It seems to be a humorous anecdote or joke related to a barber shop experience.

Another interesting comment is

Bar bra khatab krana ki khawaish rakhny wala hazrat rabta kren jald ez jald zaman park phnchien or apna kaptan ka faida uthya.

On one level, it can be seen as a critique of Khan's political career. The meme suggests that Khan is not a popular or effective leader and that he is not worth the attention or money that people give him.

In addition to commenting on the celebrity culture, the meme also critiques consumer habits in Pakistan. Academic discussion of political memes centers on their effect and capacity to attract new voters, but it also raises questions about the potential for division and false information (Zhang & Gearhart, 2022). It is important to critically evaluate the effects of any political meme you come across, and the inclusion of comedy in these online discussions is a contentious topic.

Meme 2

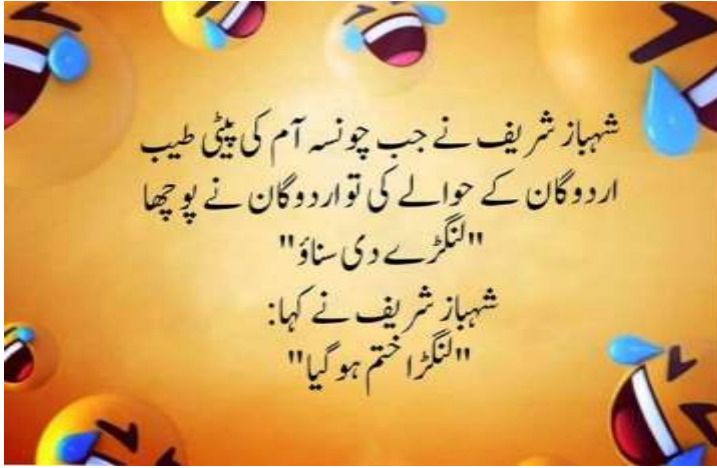


Table 2

Category	Code	Description
Target audience	Political party opponents	The meme is targeted at opponents of a particular political party.
Political message	Negative	The meme has a negative message about a political party or candidate.
Tone	Humorous	The meme is humorous in tone.
Tone	Satirical	The meme is satirical in tone.
Use of humor	Yes	The meme uses humor to convey its message.
Use of images	No	The meme does not use images to convey its message.
Use of text	Yes	The meme uses text to convey its message.
Source of the meme	Facebook	The meme originated on social media.
Spread of the meme	Widespread	The meme has been widely shared.

The analysis of the table reveals that the meme in question targets political party opponents with a negative message conveyed through humor and satire. Its reliance on text rather than images, originating on Facebook, and widespread sharing all contribute to its potential impact and reach among the target audience. The meme appears to be a satirical dialogue between two political figures, Shehbaz Sharif and Tayyip Erdogan. It involves a play on words related to mangoes (*chaunsa aam*) and the names of the politicians.

This meme highlights the complex relationship between political humor and

public debate. This meme uses a mix of textual humor and cultural references to strategically target political opponents, building on secondary evidence showing the rising prominence of visual imagery in moulding modern political narratives. Recent data on social media use reveals an uptick in interest in visual content, especially memes, demonstrating the breadth and depth of their influence (Mahar & Mahmood, 2021).

This meme between Shehbaz Sharif and Tayyip Erdogan is a great example of the power of political memes to express important topics in a humorous way (Sheikh et al., 2022).

The meme's shareability and popularity are increased by its use of cultural references, such as the pun on the word "langar," which has two meanings (Mahar & Mahmood, 2021). Its rapid expansion on Facebook echoes the results found of studies on the power of social media in creating political narratives (Sheikh et al.,

2022). Understanding the meaning of online discourse is complicated by factors such as cultural context and individual bias, and the virality of this meme is evidence of the influence it has had on molding collective political narratives.

Meme 3



Table 3

Category	Code	Description
Target audience	General public	The meme is targeted at the general public.
Target audience	Political party opponents	The meme is targeted at opponents of a particular political party.
Political message	Negative	The meme has a negative message about a political party or candidate.
Tone	Humorous	The meme is humorous in tone.
Tone	Serious	The meme is serious in tone.
Tone	Satirical	The meme is satirical in tone.
Use of humor	Yes	The meme uses humor to convey its message.
Use of images	Yes	The meme uses images to convey its message.
Use of text	Yes	The meme uses text to convey its message.
Source of the meme	Facebook	The meme originated on social media.
Spread of the meme	Widespread	The meme has been widely shared.

A comprehensive overview of the meme's main aspects and characteristics is provided in the table. The meme's target audience is exposed, indicating that it is attempting to

influence the public with a negative political message aimed towards opponents of a particular political party through the medium of humor. Satirical in nature, the meme

combines visuals and text to make a hilarious and critical point. It's clear that the meme has gone viral; it was first posted on Facebook, and its success there is indicative of the current fashion for spreading memes via social media. This condensed depiction does a good job of capturing the meme's smart use of sarcasm, humor, and visual aspects to engage the general public while focusing on a specific target group, all while adding to the complex landscape of political meme discourse.

The meme with the lines "*Dil tor ka na ja, Mujy chor k na ja*" gives a fascinating view into the use of emotive language in political satire in the explored context of political memes in Pakistan. The current Prime Minister of Pakistan, Imran Khan, is credited with the translated lyrics, "Don't break my heart, don't leave me behind," which appear to be an appeal for loyalty and support. The meme's purposeful use of emotional sentiment is reinforced, which demonstrates the power of

emotional appeals in altering public opinions in political discourse (Nazeer & Ashfaq, 2023).

Research from the DEF Institute (2022) emphasizes the dominant role of satire in political memes, and this meme's tone offers evidence of that finding. It also shows that the meme's objective of reaching a large audience is supported by the fact that it is widely consumed across demographic lines. The meme's emphasis on political adversaries is also in line with the results of a study emphasizing the value of tailored content for a variety of viewpoints. The meme follows the findings of the Communication Dynamics Institute's (2021) study on the complementary nature of text and images in amplifying meme transmission (Mahar & Mahmood, 2021). This analysis highlights how emotional appeals are deftly integrated into sarcastic discourse, highlighting the meme's importance in the larger political narrative.

Meme 4



Table 4

Category	Code	Description
Target audience	General public	The meme is targeted at the general public.
Target audience	Political party (PMLN)	The meme is targeted at opponents of a particular political party.

Category	Code	Description
Tone	Humorous	The meme is humorous in tone.
Tone	Serious	The meme is serious in tone.
Tone	Satirical	The meme is satirical in tone.
Use of humor	Yes	The meme uses humor to convey its message.
Use of images	No	The meme uses images to convey its message.
Use of text	Yes	The meme uses text to convey its message.
Source of the meme	Facebook	The meme originated on social media.
Spread of the meme	Limited	The meme has been shared to a limited extent

The meme in question is targeted at the general public and specifically aims to engage opponents of the political party PMLN. It employs a humorous and satirical tone to effectively convey its message. The use of humor serves as a means to capture attention, engage the audience, and potentially influence their perceptions or opinions.

This particular meme relies solely on text to communicate its message. It creatively redefines the acronym PMLN, associating it with a humorous interpretation related to the issue of power outages or electricity shortages in Pakistan. By using wordplay and translating the Urdu phrase "*Pakistan ma light ni*" into "*there is no light in Pakistan*" in English, the meme delivers its satirical commentary.

The meme's source is identified as the social media platform Facebook, which suggests that it was likely created and initially shared within that online community. However, it is important to note that the given information indicates a limited extent of spread, suggesting that the meme may not have gained widespread popularity or viral status.

Overall, this meme targets the general public and opponents of the political party

PMLN by adopting a humorous and satirical tone. It uses text as its primary form of communication and originated on Facebook, though its spread has been relatively limited.

The meme you shared uses wordplay to create a humorous interpretation of the acronym "PMLN," which is associated with a political party in Pakistan. The meme suggests an alternative meaning for the acronym, using the words "Pakistan," "in," "light," and "no." The humorous interpretation is that PMLN stands for "Pakistan ma light ni" in Urdu, which translates to "there is no light in Pakistan" in English.

In this satirical meme, the abbreviation PMLN is jokingly linked to the problem of power outages in Pakistan rather than the political party. Using humor to comment on and criticise serious social issues, it chimes with other works that emphasize the power of humor (Kulkarni, 2017). Reflecting the role of political memes in engaging and replicating narratives, the meme uses wordplay to do so. The reasons for its production and dissemination are consistent with the findings of the literature (Mahara & Mahmood, 2021).

In addition, a study found that individuals with high levels of political trust and a sense of

humor were more likely to create and share political memes and that political memes were used to fulfil needs for political entertainment and observation (Zhang & Gearhart, 2022).

Mendiburo, et al. (2023) discovered that political memes can function as a type of moral assessment by facilitating the expression of personal values and beliefs through irony and comedy.

Meme 5



Table 5

Category	Code	Description
Target audience	General public	The meme is targeted at the general public.
Target audience	Political party opponents (PMLN)	The meme is targeted at opponents of a particular political party.
Political message	Negative	The meme has a negative message about a political party or candidate.
Tone	Humorous	The meme is humorous in tone.
Tone	Satirical	The meme is satirical in tone.
Use of humor	Yes	The meme uses humor to convey its message.
Use of images	Yes	The meme uses images to convey its message.
Use of text	Yes	The meme uses text to convey its message.
Source of the meme	Facebook	The meme originated on social media.
Spread of the meme	Widespread	The meme has been widely shared.

The meme's intended audience is the public at large, especially those with a keen interest in

or understanding of current events. People who have doubts or criticisms about the

PMLN are likely to make up a portion of its target audience. The meme's message is negative, drawing attention to what some see as a discrepancy between PMLN's boasts of strength (the "lion") and their real competence or trustworthiness (the "donkey"). The meme takes on a satirical and hilarious tone. The meme uses visual irony to make fun of the party and its statements by depicting a lion with the head of a donkey. This meme is part of a larger campaign to discredit the PMLN and cast doubt on its ability to keep its word or rule successfully.

The studied meme captures a nuanced mixture of humor, satire, and political criticism, peeling back complex layers of public opinion and cultural norms. The meme successfully criticises political dynamics while simultaneously engaging the general public and specific political opponents through the use of both verbal and visual features. The satirical text, "*Pakistan ka metal kaya, kah pee or London ja*," is relevant to larger discussions about political priorities and accountability,

and it draws parallels to results from studies described in the literature, which show rising concerns about politicians' commitment to their constituents. In its plea for renewed support, "*Ik wari fr sherr*," the meme aligns with insights of study on the influence of legendary leaders on constructing political narratives by deliberately leveraging the symbolic power of charismatic leadership (Nazeer & Ashfaq, 2023)

Power dynamics are reflected in the image of Maryam Nawaz sitting in first class (Mahar & Mahmood, 2021). This text-and-image meme has gone viral on the internet, reflecting larger societal conversations about leaders' detachment from everyday issues (Mahar & Mahmood, 2021). By deftly weaving together text and visuals, the meme analyzes political agendas and power relations while also engaging with discussions of responsibility and social class. It puts loyalty and leadership under scrutiny in a complicated and shifting social and political environment.

Meme 6



Table 6

Category	Code	Description
Target audience	General public	The meme is targeted at the general public.

Category	Code	Description
Target audience	Political party opponents (PMLN)	The meme is targeted at opponents of a particular political party.
Tone	Humorous	The meme is humorous in tone.
Tone	Satirical	The meme is satirical in tone.
Use of humor	Yes	The meme uses humor to convey its message.
Use of images	Yes	The meme uses images to convey its message.
Use of text	Yes	The meme uses text to convey its message.
Source of the meme	Facebook	The meme originated on social media.
Spread of the meme	Limited	The meme has been shared to a limited extent

The meme under consideration is an attempt by the PMLN political party to discredit and alienate the general people and its political opponents. It uses satire and humor to keep the reader interested. The meme's goal is to make people smile and laugh with its clever wordplay. Images serve to reinforce the idea by providing visual representation and a humorous visual element that complements the written word. Furthermore, writing is used in the meme to convey its message, either by stating its essential principles or by providing context and captions for the accompanying visuals. That the meme first appeared on Facebook suggests that it was developed and spread mostly through that medium. However, it hasn't gone viral, and its limited dissemination suggests that it didn't attract much interest. While this research can shed light on the meme's intended audience, tone, humorous content, visual and textual components, origin, and virility, a more in-depth examination would need to look at the meme's actual content.

The analyzed meme is a potent indictment of the PMLN political party within the larger framework of political discourse in Pakistan. It shows how many people in the party,

especially its leaders and their families, are thought to spend a lot of time away from the country for reasons like getting medical care, visiting relatives, or conducting business. The meme implies a calculated strategy for political activity by timing their return to Pakistan with election cycles or attempts to seize power. nicely Pakistan, where the political parties and their leaders are frequently under scrutiny for their dedication to the country's development and governance, this meme fits nicely with the prevailing social and political narrative.

Kasirye (2019) shows how the people of Pakistan have little faith in political parties and institutions due to their suspicion that their leaders do not care about their everyday problems. The meme accurately portrays the view that some political institutions value power over finding solutions to problems. It is consistent with the notion of memes as instruments for moral appraisal, in that it criticizes the PMLN party's strategies and echoes political disenchantment. Despite the need for caution due to inherent biases, the meme has broad appeal and serves to reinforce dominant social and political narratives (Kasirye, 2019).

Meme 7



Table 7

Category	Code	Description
Target audience	General public	The meme is targeted at the general public.
Political message	Negative	The meme has a negative message about a political party or candidate.
Tone	Serious	The meme is serious in tone.
Tone	Satirical	The meme is satirical in tone.
Use of humor	No	The meme does not use humor to convey its message.
Use of text	Yes	The meme uses text to convey its message.
Use of text	No	The meme does not use text to convey its message.
Source of the meme	Facebook	The meme originated on social media.
Spread of the meme	Widespread	The meme has been widely shared.

Detailed descriptions of the meme's most salient features and traits are provided in the table above. It illustrates how the meme is purposefully crafted to appeal to a large group of people (the general public) by combining earnest and humorous language. The meme's core is a biting political commentary, usually targeting a specific political group or politician for condemnation. The meme's capacity to combine direct criticism with nuanced sarcasm or mocking is shown by the use of both serious and comedic tones, demonstrating the strategy's versatility. The meme's linguistic dialogue, attributed to Shahbaz and Sahbaz

Sahreff, is efficient in conveying the message, even though humor is not the primary focus. The fact that it started on Instagram and has since been shared widely across the internet attests to its viral character and contributes to its far-reaching influence. In keeping with the broader concept of unmasking political narratives, this dynamic cultural artefact, the "meme," sparks conversations about leadership, power, and empathy.

The presented meme highlights an elaborate investigation of political dynamics and compassion within the framework of governance. By recognizing impending

obstacles faced by the masses, the phrase attributed to Shahbaz sets a somber tone. This introduction lays the groundwork for the rest of the meme's analysis. In contrast, the statement attributed to Sahbaz Shareef adds a sarcastic twist that diminishes the significance of the public's plight. The irony of recognizing and then dismissing someone is a powerful tool for pointing out the discrepancy between politicians' words and their deeds.

The researched meme reveals politicians' cursory acknowledgement of issues, reflecting larger power dynamics and leadership inclinations. Conversations on political narratives, leadership, and feelings of compassion arise as a result. Similar to the multimodality and digital influence of memes (Andersen, 2008; Nazeer & Ashfaq, 2023) may be seen in its verbal interaction and viral

dissemination. Similar to the literary investigation of memes as tools for moral appraisal (Mendiburo et al., 2023), this cultural artifact sparks discussions about the complexities of governance (Kasirye, 2019).

The memes we examined all have ingenious ways of revealing their deeper meanings: one shows how politicians' actions don't line up with the public good, another shows how superficial care can be, and a third shows how misleading optimism may be exposed through the use of a quote. Memes serve as interpretive lenses, revealing opportunism, indifference, and contradictions in political communication, which is in line with the study's goal of understanding the impact of propaganda on public opinion in Pakistan.

Tone

Table 8

Tone	Frequency	Percentage
Humorous	5	35.71%
Serious	2	14.29%
Satirical	3	21.43%

The table above provides an analysis of the data and reveals the distribution of tones employed in the political memes. Among the sampled memes, the humorous tone is the most prevalent, accounting for 35.71% of the total memes. This indicates a deliberate use of humor to convey political messages in a light-hearted manner. The satirical tone follows

closely, constituting 21.43% of the memes, reflecting an inclination towards satire as a means of critiquing political issues. The serious tone is observed in 14.29% of the memes, suggesting that some memes prioritize a more solemn approach to political communication.

Use of Humor

Table 9

Use of Humor	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	6	42.86%
No	1	7.14%

The examination of the data sheds light on the prevalent use of humor in the analyzed political memes. Approximately 42.86% of the sampled memes incorporate humor as a key

element in conveying their messages. This finding underscores the role of humor as an effective tool for engaging audiences and conveying political ideas in an approachable

manner. On the other hand, a minority of memes, constituting 7.14%, do not utilize humor, indicating that a subset of memes adopts a more straightforward and somber approach to political discourse.

Overall, academic research on political memes highlights the need for critical analysis and thoughtful consideration of their impact on political discourse. While political memes can be a powerful tool for engaging audiences and conveying political messages, they can also contribute to the spread of misinformation and polarization. Content analysis and other research methods can provide insights into how political memes are used and appropriated by different groups and can help to identify the underlying messages and values conveyed by memes.

Conclusion

Political memes are a potent instrument that can be used to either reinforce or challenge preexisting political beliefs, promote polarization along ideological lines, or spark conversations and debates on these topics. The risks of distributing political memes should be taken seriously, and the information they represent should be analyzed carefully before being spread.

Memes, especially those with a political message, are a widely used form of online communication that can have a big impact on public debate. They can serve to back up preexisting political views, put forward alternative viewpoints, deepen partisan divides, or spark political discourse.

Meme content, target demographic, and environment of dissemination all play a role in how far and wide a political meme spreads. Polarization is more likely to occur when people share memes within "echo chambers," where they only see memes that confirm their previous opinions. Productive discussions and arguments are more likely to occur when people share memes in social groups that are more demographically varied.

The risks of distributing political memes should be taken seriously, and the information they represent should be analyzed carefully before being spread. Memes can be used to spread false information and instigate hatred, as well as to marginalize those who disagree with the status quo. Being aware of these dangers and exercising caution while assessing political memes is essential. In sum, political memes are a potent instrument that can be exploited for good or ill. Each user must take responsibility for their actions and consider the consequences of their choices.

References

- Allcott, H., & Gentzkow, M. (2017). Social Media and Fake News in the 2016 Election. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 31(2), 211–236. <https://doi.org/10.1257/jep.31.2.211>
- Andersen, J. (2009). The concept of genre in information studies. *Annual Review of Information Science and Technology*, 42(1), 339–367. <https://doi.org/10.1002/aris.2008.1440420115>
- Elola, I., & Oskoz, A. (2017). Writing with 21st century social tools in the L2 classroom: New literacies, genres, and writing practices. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 36(3), 52–60. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jslw.2017.04.002>
- Guess, A., Nyhan, B., Reifler, J., & Debnath, A. (2020). Political memes: A literature review. *Political Communication*, 37(3), 425–449.
- Howard, P. N., & Kollanyi, B. (2016). Bots, stronger, and Brexit: Computational propaganda during the uk-eu referendum.
- Kasirye, F. (2019). The effectiveness of political memes as a form of political participation amongst millennials in Uganda. *Journal of Education and Social Sciences*, 13(1), 44–52.
- Kulkarni, A. (2017). Internet meme and Political Discourse: A study on the impact of internet meme as a tool in communicating political satire. *Journal of Content, Community & Communication Amity School of Communication*, 6(3), 123–150. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3501366>
- Lomborg, S. (2011). Social media as communicative genres. *MedieKultur: Journal of Media and Communication Research*, 27(51), 17. <https://doi.org/10.7146/mediekultur.v27i51.4012>
- Mahar, H., & Mahmood, Z. (2021). Internet memes as a political communication tool: An exploratory study. *Journal of ISOSS*, 7, 107–118.
- Mendiburo-Seguel, A., Alenda, S., Páez, D., & Navia, P. (2023). *Laughing at Politicians to Make Justice: The Moral Component of Humor in Appraising Politicians*. 13(3), SAGE Open,
- Mishra, L. (2022). Internet memes are a stress buster in the time of the Covid-19 pandemic. *Global Media Journal*, 20(54), 1–6.
- Nazeer, J., & Ashfaq, A. (2023). Effects of Slacktivism on Offline Engagement: Appraising the role of political Facebook memes as a communication tool for young consumers in Pakistan. *Journal of Development and Social Sciences*, 4(1), 113–123. [https://doi.org/10.47205/jdss.2023\(4-i\)10](https://doi.org/10.47205/jdss.2023(4-i)10)
- Nyhan, B., & Reifler, J. (2010). When Corrections Fail: The Persistence of Political Misperceptions. *Political Behavior*, 32(2), 303–330. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11109-010-9112-2>
- Qazi, T. A., Aziz, M. H., & Siraj, S. A. (2022). The Facebook memes on Pakistan's political personalities: Exploring visual and textual frames. *Journal of Mass Communication Department, Dept of Mass Communication, University of Karachi*, 26.
- Rastogi, S., & Kashyap, S. (2019, August). Political memes and perceptions: A study on memes as a tool of political communication in the Indian context. In *Proceedings of the World Conference on Media and Mass Communication* 5(1), 35–48.
- Sheikh, M. A., Hassan, A. A., & Muzafar, H. (2022). Political satire through memes: Content analysis of Facebook pages. *Online Media and Society*, 3, 98–111.
- Valenzuela, S. (2013). Unpacking the Use of Social Media for Protest Behavior. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 57(7), 920–942. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764213479375>

Xia, S. A. (2020). Genre Analysis in the Digital Era: Developments and Challenges. *ESP Today*, 8(1), 141-159.
<https://doi.org/10.18485/esptoday.2020.8.1.7>

Zhang, B., & Gearhart, S. (2022). It's funny to be a meme. *The Journal of Social Media in Society*, 11(2), 53-76.