

# **MEME AS A TOOL OF SOCIAL AND POLITICAL COMMENTARY: DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF MEME IN PAKISTANI SOCIAL MEDIA**

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## **Abstract**

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*This research is based on the critical discourse analysis of memes in Pakistani social media to reveal the hidden meanings and messages behind them. It analyzes how memes can be used as a form of social and political commentary and how they reflect society. Memes are an interesting phenomenon in the modern digital world. A meme is a simple way to convey a particular message as a form of funny illustration and visualization. Some memes are intended just to be funny, while others have additional meaning or purpose. Memes are taken randomly from the internet and then analyzed using critical discourse analysis. Discourse is the use of language or a communicating image within a certain context for a specific purpose. The theoretical framework is multimodal. Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis is the systematic integration of linguistic and visual aids to contribute some particular socially perceived contextual meaning (Kress 2009). Through this research work, the readers will get critical ideas to recognize the hidden meanings and messages behind memes in this modern digital world. It also discusses the functions of memes in making or changing someone's perspectives. This research will also help the upcoming researchers to examine how memes reflect our society and how they are used as a tool engaged in civic discourse.*

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## **Introduction**

Today, the use of internet has become unavoidable in our daily lives. The Internet has made life fast and complicated. The internet helps us in many ways with facts and figures. There are numerous benefits of the internet, however, the use of the internet in daily life depends on personal requirements and the relevant goals. Social media are interactive technological platforms that enable the creation and sharing of information but also the sharing of pictures, videos, music, games, blogs, and many more. On the internet, meme is well-known as a picture with a word/word on it. It is to be noted that the media area of the meme's functioning is very wide, it is not only disseminated verbally but also visually, represented by a range of media and mass media: from posts on social networks from the state to individual media projects and media brands. A meme is an umbrella term that can include an idea, product, or process. And by interpreting hidden meanings beyond the memes, the audience/public in our netizens gradually develop the habit of critically analyzing things spread on social media and in real life. Therefore, globally, memes gain a unique and irreplaceable norm in digital culture. With time, the concept of memes has been modified with certain evolution in technology. The Internet has provided a fertile environment for the replication of memes to date. A meme presents an image with a text to deliver the maker's message. The maker can use the image that is already available on the website or the user can also upload another image according to his interests. The meme, thus, is a picture that consists of an image and a text which have inner deep meanings. To explore the meaning inside the memes, this research is conducted. This research tries to find answers of few questions: "How are the memes contextualized in Pakistani social media?" and "How are certain meanings hidden in memes in Pakistan Online?"

Discourse is any kind of text whether written or spoken or a visual description presented within a certain context. This research is conducted to explore the relationship between images, text, and meanings in connection with certain social and political implications. This study views memes beyond humor as mirroring universal emotions, giving social and cultural messages, and many more. Memes

have also affected digital environment. Many changes are being observed in digital communication. People who take watching news as boring subject get to know about a particular event through memes. Moreover, the language used in memes also create the image of an event or a person in mind of the viewers. That representation can be good, bad, unworthy or defective. Memes language also uses visualized elements to in communication system through which the audience understands visible signs. It is the study to explore the role of memes in the creation and development of the latest media discourses. It also specifies the tendencies concerning the meme use in mass media publications . This study views the internet meme not only as a joke but also as a propaganda tool. In Pakistan, sharing and creating memes is a hot trend, specifically having some political and media context. So, the present study will analyze the collection of viral memes in Pakistan in different contexts: social and political.

The objectives of this research paper are as follows:

- To analyze the language of memes in initiating social commentary in Pakistani society.
- To investigate the role of pictorial representation of memes for highlighting the social perspectives.
- To look over the stimulation of emotions in people due to memes going viral in Pakistan.
- To scrutinize the discursive elements of memes in making the public's attitude towards famous figures.

### **Review of Related Studies**

The word “memes” refer to imitation. This imitation can be of any event or a person's action. Word meme is originated etymologically from a Greek word “mime-ma” which means imitated. This term was introduced by a British biologist Richard Dawkins (1989) in his book “*The Selfish Gene.*” Effective communication through memes can take place if the reader and creator have shared cultural, contextual, social, and cognitive pieces of information (Velikovsky, 2014). These shared cognitive details help better interpretation of visuals as compared to text.

Ryan M. Milner conducted a related study “The World Made Meme: Discourse and Identity in Participatory Media” in 2016. He applied a critical discourse analytic method to study cultural elements in meme analysis while exploring identities and political issues. One

more relevant work is by Brandon Eychaner in 2013 is “Memes and Humour: A Linguistic Analysis”. It is the analysis of humor and the integration between the cognitive models of humor and the study of meme humor. Some people see memes just as a source of humor and fun. Today the young generation has developed a kind of affection and obsession to memes without knowing the fact that memes can cause serious psychological issues. Even, memes creator also took it as fun and they troll others without taking into account the ethics. It can also affect someone's emotions can cause disturbance in her or his thinking capacity.

Discourse is a written or spoken text or visible description that is applied in a certain context for a certain goal. Discourse analysis is both a theory and a method (Rodgers, 2004). Max Horkheimer (1982) suggested social theory that shows how social spectacles are interconnected, to produce knowledge. Meme creators use the discourse to convey their ideologies or perspectives. They use different tactics and strategies which tell about their intentions of conveying their messages. Sometimes, they use words and pictures as a tool to troll even goodness in any action. In this way, they could change the viewpoint of people particularly today's youth.

### **Theoretical Framework and Research Methodology**

According to Shifman (2013) a meme acts as a unit for carrying artistic ideas, and symbols, that can be transferred from one mind to another through writing, speech, and gestures. At first, after searching memes on the internet using the keyword “best memes” in Pakistani social media. After all, memes have appeared in Google pictures, five memes are picked. Then the analysis has been done by using discourse analysis. In social networks the meme is being spread practically in all formats: –Verbal form —in text messages, headlines and leads to posts, captions to images and in the images, comments; –Audio —in texts of songs, speeches; –Video —video-memes, video clips to songs bumpers to stories by video bloggers, etc. (Zhuravska, 2022). The research focuses on discursive description of the meme in a certain social and political context of Pakistan.

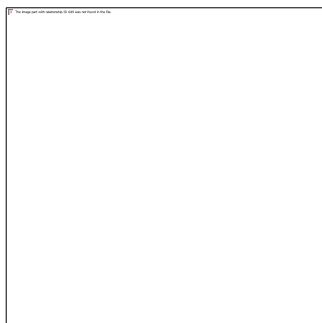
Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis is used as a guide in this research work. Machin (2007) multi-modal analysis is used for purpose of visual (optical) inspection. According to it, there are many concealed meanings beyond portrayal. The qualitative investigation is being made as it is the vital part of this research. In this research, it is

explored that a picture is more than it is shown. Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis is the systematic integration of linguistic and visual aids to contribute some particular socially perceived contextual meaning. It includes text, pictures, videos, and audio. It is a kind of discourse interpreted and communicated by more than one means of communication (Fairclough, 2001; Kress, 2009).

### **Data Analysis (Discussion)**

Centuries ago, cave paintings were used for communication and human beings have come a long way from that time to this era where language has been developing continuously. Old media time is when the printed work is the source of information whereas the new media time is where online media has developed. One of the fascinating phenomena which goes viral in social media is the digital culture of memes. An Internet meme is a concept or idea that is spread online, typically through social media or viral videos (Shifman, 2013). Memes can be funny, relatable, or thought-provoking, but they always have the potential to spark online discussion and debate as “the distinctiveness of online literature is the active participation of the readers or viewers”(Ahmad, 2020,126).While memes have been around long before the internet, they have only become widely popular in recent years. In the age of social media, anyone can create and share a meme, and they often go viral in a matter of hours. Internet meme has a sort of form, but the most widespread are GIF files and image macro (an image with superimposed text). Image macro memes are more across-the-board than the others due to the comfort of adaptation and understanding.

There are about 5 Memes that have been selected.The First one is:



In the famous Pakistani drama *Mere Paas Tum Ho*, the main character Danish slapped Shehwaar in an office meeting and the act of the slap became an overnight meme trend. If we look up at the context, it maybe every Pakistani mom slap their kids after listening to all the scenarios of their child doing something. It doesn't matter how many times they promise their child not to slap them, but they slap. This is the practical example of discourse which means to say something else and to do the opposite of what is said. Thus, pictures in memes grab the attention of people. Different tactics in memes change the attitude of public towards an event. Different humor creating pictures and color schemes are used to attract the attention of audience. The use of famous celebrities increase the impact on the observers.

The second meme is about announcement of closure of educational institutes. Federal Education Minister's announcement became a meme when he announced the closure of schools and colleges because of the ongoing pandemic in 2020.



It is a funny meme but it also presents the dark side of our education system. As we all know today education sectors care a lot about money. Our education system is just taking money and filling their pockets instead of sincerely educating their students. Today schools give more importance to money instead of providing knowledge. It verifies that “Language is embodiment of traditions, standards and beliefs of a particular society”(Ilyas et al,2020,871).In

fact, people are addicted to memes for creating the environment of fun. They took them as source of joy or humor and whenever they saw it on internet, they share with others. Memes are source of fun for public when they are depressed.

The third meme is based on political scenerion of Pakistan where there is race of power among three major parties: PTI,PPP and PMLN.The PTI is led byImran Khan, PPP is controlled by Asif Ali Zardari and PMLN is under control of Nawaz Shareef.



#AzadiMarch #TrainToChina #DDLJ, August 2014.

In this meme, we can see Ex-president Asif Ali Zardari standing on a train pointing his hands toward ex-prime minister Nawaz Sharif. It looks like he is giving his hands to help him to get on the train. It is a worthwhile reminder of how Asif Ali Zardari was one and the only civilian to have completed five years of governance, despite pressures similar to the one Nawaz Sharif had faced. It reminds me of an article “Blend of Ethics, Politics and Stylistics in Trauma Narrative”(Ahmad et al.,2021) where the political views are presented via stylistics and in these memes the politics is highlighted via visual description of images and linguistic aspects of the communicating image with embeded discourse in it.

The next meme highlights a serious social fact of our today’s youth who are too much busy in romance and love from the very early age.





This meme shows a man with a serious face. This man uses sarcasm about a 10-year old girl crying for her boyfriend. This meme highlights a point that a girl at 10 is too young to cry over a boy. We can also say that today social media has greatly influenced the minds of children and youth they can hardly sense anything else which is not about relationships or love. Today's youth are too young to carry or worry about all these things and remind about "the priorities of language choices of Pakistani youth"(Asia et al ,2020,2870) .This kind of memes are a good source to educate the young generation to be more practical and directional in their lives.

The fifth meme brings to limelight another serious social fact of our today's politics where the people are made fool before elections by the politicians and after the elections they even refuse to recognise the common people.It is a perfect example of political discourse in current social milieu.



In this meme, we can see a lion licking a deer. this meme tells



us about the truth of society and politicians. it is a reality that before elections candidates fully take care of their voters. They try a lot to lure their voters. they even try to take care of them as their mother. But after the elections, they change their behavior from mother to stepmother. And the heaven that they promise to their voters suddenly changes into hell. They eat them up just like in this image a lion eats deer after licking her up. It reminds me an observation:“Contextual information is quite essential” (Afzaal et al., 2020,122). Thus it can be stated that memes are usually constructed on photography. Photoshop is an assemblage of an edited photo in which writing something funny creates a comic effect. Internet memes on political events occur when politicians oppose the ideologies and do the opposite of what has been said before. (Kuipers, 2002). Thus it can be understood that the use of such memes is not only for comic relief but a guiding tool too.

### **Conclusion:**

Based on the outcome of the research, we can say that memes from the internet are not only used for spreading humor but also present other useful ideas. There are additional things and messages attached with memes. The other meanings are found besides comedy in humor-based memes. Memes guide us to be nice and well behaved in a social network to promote a peaceful society. There are also memes that are sarcastic and tell us about human behaviour and political trends. Thus, it depends on the intention of the maker whether he wants to disperse positive thoughts or negative ones through memes. Moreover, based on the findings it is clear that some memes contain misinformation and misguide the reader. Hence by using or making memes, people can express their feeling, thoughts, and their purposes explicitly to other people on the internet. The discursive language used in memes persuade people and effect their way of thinking or way of looking at aspects of life through a particular ideology. The famous memes from produced locally tell us about the routine way of life. They make us laugh at things we have all experienced in life while growing up. These memes have a wild range of variety starting from the silly things our parents do to the problems and tribulations of desi relationships and courtship.

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