

Facebook Memes on Pakistan's Political Personalities: Exploring Visual and Textual Frames

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Abstract

This study analyzed the depiction of political personalities of Pakistan through 500 Facebook memes. Five famous politicians were selected for this research, including Imran Khan, Maryam Nawaz, Bilawal Bhutto, Nawaz Shareef, and Shafqat Mehmood. The Facebook memes were taken from the top-ranked ten memes' pages from November 2020 to January 2021. By applying framing theory, analysis is based on visual and textual frames, Personal Attacks, Satire, Morality, Incompetent leader, camera angles, shots, and emotions. The purposive sampling technique was used for the sampling procedure to gather trending Facebook memes on the selected politicians. The findings highlight how political personalities are represented in contemporary social media platforms and suggest that, among all the textual frames, Incompetent leader has secured the highest frequency than other competing frames. It was also observed that every political was framed with a particular viewpoint on Facebook memes. Through visual frames, it was depicted that through the Camera Angles, Eye-level angle (Negative) received more frequency than the other two angles, while in Shots, Medium shots (Neutral) received the highest frequency as compared other two shots and lastly, among Emotions, Sarcastic category secured the maximum frequency and thus, framing observed as an integral process in memes construction on political personalities. The study contributes towards the evolving literature of memes and the representation of political personalities on social media platforms. Thus, it allows for a detailed understanding of internet memes and their utilization, the frames they used for Political personalities, and how memes are becoming popular tools on digital media, typically in social media sites.

Keywords: Facebook memes, Political Personalities, social media, Content Analysis, Framing.

Introduction

The idea of "meme" was created by the effort of known biologist Richard Dawkins (1989). In Dawkinsian view, a meme is a tag provided to individual units of cultural dissemination as others imitate them. In the past, the meme was connected to a gene that passes through the convergence of genetic characteristics, but Dawkins, emphasizing that similar emergent rules that exist in biology also exist in culture, coined the concept any of a number of imitators that are transmitted by social repetition. The idea itself explains the emergence and flow of practices and concepts (Dawkins, 1989).

Internet memes are explained as discourse (Milner, 2012). The idea of the meme has become famous due to social media sites. Many occupations such as advertising and public relations have work on using memes to transmit information and catch the attention of their audiences. The information transmitted through the internet meme is used to build a perspective and for the publicity intention more than only providing the information (Bauckhage, 2011). The significance of internet memes is not merely regarded as a popular device of digital discourse, as memes are also utilized for trending advertising crusades (Williams, 2000), individual involvement and electronic manipulation crusades (Frisch & Agur, 2019), and within the political affairs (Seiffert- Brockmann, 2018). It describes that the memes are influential by nature and sometimes aid as a prism for knowing specific viewpoints within the digital platform (Shifman, 2013). Political satire is framing an issue, and usually, this could be seen as a "negative frame" (Xenos, Hess & Moy, 2006). However, it could be a path for developing politics interesting for those individuals who would generally think it was not an interesting subject (Jones, 2010; Baum, 2003). In internet memes, Framing appears by the core narrative and text of the full artifact containing both textual and semiotic components. Political internet memes are usually created to criticize political leaders in order to support or against their political ideologies. Also, it demonstrated infotainment in a humorous way (Nicolle Lamerichs, 2018).

According to (Blackmore, 1997 & 2000), internet memes shape behaviors, values, mindsets, and eventually actions and performance, yet their utilization in content, narratives has been addressed. These narratives are

explained as an effective tool when continuously applied over time and when they "imitate" or transfer from one individual to another with more or less intact (Blackmore, 2000). Visual regarded as an effective tool for propagandizing the political viewpoints, as pictures are less threatening and can be circulated to a vast audience than the text (Milkman & Berger, 2012). Furthermore, visual frames have a huge influence on evolving emotions; that is another method that is utilized in internet memes to influence the truth (Joffe, 2008). The message is simpler disseminated through emotions, as emotions persuade individuals quicker than solely presenting concepts (Bem, Manstead & Frijda, 2000). Emotional Framing also plays a significant role in influencing political points of view (D'Ambrosio & Gross, 2004; Gross, 2008). Shahira Fahmy suggested the method of "visual gatekeeping" that includes controlling some visuals that are selected out from the tons of images based on their ability to represent an attractive narrative (Fahmay, 2005). Moreover, according to Resse, a community and its system are constructed by the consistent set of views that are transmitted, and it is explained as the "Visual Frames" of that society (Messaris, 2011). Sharia Fahmy, where she emphasizes some powerful visual devices like "Social semiotics," "indexicality," and "iconicity," which are utilized for Framing, describe the specialty of visuals. Visuals presented with the aid of these devices can efficiently transmit an ideology constructed for an individual, which can otherwise highlight a controversy if depicted in the text (Fahmy, 2010).

Facebook is regarded as one of the biggest digital tools based on the propagation of messages. Abraham Lincoln summarize it as "of the individuals, by the individuals, and for the individuals" (Shifman, 2014). Most meme studies are based on memetic circulation and transferability (Shifman & Thelwall, 2009; Bauckhage, 2011) and their involvement in the modification of the discourse (Jantke et al., 2012; Bowers & Wiggins, 2014); however, their framing consequence's part is yet to be expressed. Due to this limitation within the field of visual investigation study and connecting it towards the salience of detailed comprehension of contemporary interaction tools of the modern electronic world, the research aims to visually examine Facebook memes on trending political personalities of Pakistan. Utilizing a dual-modality method to explore both visual and textual Facebook memes, the research focuses on analyzing the overall representation of political personalities of Pakistan and find out the frames connected with these visuals.

Social media has a great impact on political discourse. As many studies have shown that social media has been widely used to spread information on political issues (Doris, 2014). In Pakistan, social media is extensively used for political propaganda, such as in the form of political memes on the Internet. This study aims to bridge the gap in visual examination of contemporary digital media instruments by combining a dual-modality method to examine the visual and textual depiction of Political personalities on Facebook memes. It investigates the representation of Pakistan political personalities on digital media to add to the political satire studies and identify frames connected with that representation on the Facebook memes. This study finds its roots in Framing, described as a "method in which some characteristic of the reality is selected and given more importance or emphasis so that the problem is explained, its reasons are identified, moral conclusions are proposed, and optimum way out and actions are suggested" (Entman, 2007).

Objectives

The study is designed to explore the following objectives.

- 1) To analyze the similarities and differences in the characterization of politicians on Facebook memes
- 2) To examine how memes on Facebook visually frame political personalities

Research Questions

1. How are the political personalities framed on Facebook memes?

To answer the question, the researcher investigates the selected frames to identify how political personalities are framed through Facebook memes. The idea of meme connected to narrative networks. These networks build from stories that aid in developing a particular identity within a community. Rondfeld and Arquilla (2001) describe that internet memes are utilized to transmit falsehood, misrepresentation, or sometimes specific viewpoints regarding famous figures, and even deception towards a larger audience.

2. What are the similarities and differences in the characterization of politicians on Facebook memes?

To find the answer to this question, the researcher investigates, do political personalities receive specific characterization on Facebook memes and

identifies which political personality was most trending on Facebook memes in the selected time period. The emergence of the Internet predicted that it would create formerly disregarded elements and opinions more observable with a broader public (Schafer & Gerhards, 2010). Whereas scholars still debate that this prominence originates with specific frames. Meanwhile, digital technologies blur the differentiation among individual frames and media frames (Quin, 2015).

3. In terms of camera angles, shots, and emotions, how are the politicians visually framed on Facebook memes?

To find the answer to this question, the researcher uses a set of visual variables that are adopted from the past visual analysis studies (Fahmy, 2004 & Bowe, 2019). These variables include in order to examine the visual Framing of political personalities on Facebook memes, like **Emotions** (happy, sad, and sarcastic), **Camera angles** (high angle viewed as neutral, the low angle is considered to be positive and eye level angle perceived as negative) and **Shots** (long shot viewed as negative, a medium shot perceived as neutral and close-up shot regarded positive shot (Berger, 1981).

Literature Review

Meme

The initial idea of the meme was given by evolutionary biologist "Richard Dawkins" in his book named "The Selfish Gene" in 1976. Moreover, in deeper look, it was identified that this term obtained from the Ancient Greek word "μίμημα (mimeme)" that explains as "anything which is imitated" and it mainly involved any social system that can transmit from an individual to another by the imitating or duplicating from a slogan and complex ideas (Piata, 2016).

Functions of Internet Memes

One of the methods in which memes can be categorized is depended on their functions. Thus, categorized, they present the intentions of their makers. Satire is one of their core feature and function but is also viewed as the only feature of the internet meme, whereas the aim of the message which is communicated might have various meanings. Merely, as memes have a humorous and straightforward structure, memes are aided as an intermediate and visual discourse instrument for serving multiple

objectives, so it is not rare to find internet memes in the political discourse and propaganda

Explaining Internet Meme

Later, with the progression in technology and social media prominently changing the interactions patterns with introducing contemporary informal exercises, memes began to increase in explaining, and the concept of "Internet Memes" was derived. According to Richard Dawkins's description, three categories of flourishing memes are Fecundity, longevity, and copy- Fidelity. Consequently, to comprehend the internet memes, it is significant to expand Dawkin's meme concept. The first category, Fecundity, is typified by a swift duplication. The second category, longevity explained as the sustainable duplication pattern on a long-standing foundation. The last category revealed as the powerful concept remaining integral regardless of numerous differences. The meme is regarded as holding gene and virus-like belongings that extend from the individual to the individual and manipulates the mind. The original concept of the meme is ambiguous and also flashes discussion about its significance and explanation (Lankshear&Knobel, 2005).

Character of Internet Memes

Zohar Kampf, Noam Gal &Limor Shifman (2016) enlighten the internet memes as the cluster of sharing common traits of the substance, stance, and appearance that are developed, spread, and altered by many users through social media platforms (Shifman, 2013). The Internet and its multiple sites give perfect surroundings for a large-scale meme circulation as these memes can spread both rapidly and correctly over the Internet (Fleylighen, 1996).

Internet Memes as Visual Rhetoric

Elements of culture mostly join to work as a symbolic artifact with a specific meaning and perspective within that culture (Pedersen, 2008). Furthermore, memes are developed out of assumption and imitation in a sharing media culture. Memes may be explained as representational communication by viewing them through the lens of visual communication that examines images as influential messages. Visual communication evolved on the traditional rhetoric theory of verbal

communication (Foss, 2004) and recognized that such rhetorical images to be developed by people to develop meaning (Foss, 2004). Generally, rhetoric is "created to be public, dependent and contextual" (Kenney, 2002).

Internet Memes and Political Satire

There has been much evidence where satire, as well as humor, used as a tool of political remarks. It has been described as a subculture and extensively used in various political movements. A study by George (2012) explained that this tool had been utilized for political discussion. Political memes are described as the combination of politics with pop culture. A study on political memes suggested that people utilize political memes in order to participate in public discussions regarding ongoing political events (Milner, 2013; Shifman, 2014). The research on the memes is significant because political satire has two important social purposes (Nilssen, 1990). First, memes explain politicians in describing the political ideas, highlighting rifts, and disarming opponents. Second, it provides a political argument to articulate their censure. Researchers have identified the manipulation of the internet memes in various contexts, specifically their ability to change the public view and to support social movements (Hristova, 2014; Harlow, 2013; Dare & Sci, 2014).

Method

Quantitative Content Analysis

This study incorporates quantitative research methodology, using quantitative content analysis as the research instrument to understand the Framing of trending political personalities of Pakistan on Facebook memes. To examines memes on Facebook, (LeBoeuf; 2007, Tella, 2018 and Semetko&Valkenburg; 2002) textual themes incorporated with a model represented by ShahiraFahmay for a visual and textual frame analysis.

Coding unit

For this research, five popular politicians were selected, and the reason behind their selection is typically based on their popularity on the Facebook memes on the selective time period. Political leaders chosen for this study are named below:

Imran Khan, Bilawal Bhutto, Maryam Nawaz, Nawaz Shareef, and Shafqat Mehmood.

Unit of analysis: Visual – textual Facebook memes

The unit of analysis of this study is based on the image-text Facebook memes and not included the video memes.

Time duration

For this study, three months of the timeline are selected from November 2020 to January 2021 to study the selected frames from the Facebook memes on Pakistan's political personalities.

Sampling and data gathering

For this research, Purposive sampling was used to gather trending political memes on five selective politicians. Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling technique. In this type of sampling, the researcher chooses the participants as per his/her own judgment, keeping back in mind the purpose of the study. A total of 500 memes were selected for this study. For this study, Facebook was selected because it is considered one of the most famous social media sites among the others (Huberman & wilkinson, 2007; stutzman, 2006; Educuse, 2006). It also provides a search bar function that is relay on keywords. Ten Facebook pages were identified that matched with the research criteria. Moreover, these memes pages were mainly based on socio-political memes.

Pilot study

A pilot study was conducted to identify the availability of political memes on the selected Facebook pages. At first, for this study, ten politicians were selected: Imran Khan, Nawaz Sharif, Maryam Nawaz, Asif Ali Zardari, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, Sheikh Rasheed, Usman Buzdar, Fawad Chaudhry, Molana Fazal Rahman, and Zartaj Gul with three months of the time period. However, after conducting this analysis, the researcher identified two leading issues: "time period" and "selected politicians." As within the selected time period, not all 10 politicians have political memes,

and most of the political memes were inspired by similar or repetitive events.

Coding of Memes

1. **Personal Attacks:** It explains the use of humor, to let down an individual either it's about their appearance, attributes, or personality (LeBoeuf; 2007).

Due to mutual exclusiveness, this theme has a sub- category

2. **Satire:** The satire that is created to disgrace an individual to make them feel self-pity, embarrassed or illiterate. (LeBoeuf; 2007).
3. **Morality:** It refers to the utilization of humor to highlight the wordings of an individual. (Tella, 2018).
4. **Incompetent leaders:** It involves humor that suggests an individual is incapable of conveying important information knowledgeable viewpoints and do not have the potential to find the necessary solution. (Semetko&Valkenburg, 2002).
5. **Emotions:** Here, the connection with the audience was coded with emotion underlined in the visuals, where each Facebook meme was coded as (sad, happy, and sarcastic) (Bowe; 2019, Fahmy 2019).
6. **Camera angles:** The camera angles define where Facebook memes were coded as high, low, and eye-level angles. When the subject is displayed at a high angle, it is observed by viewers as neutral. In contrast, angle above the eye level is considered as the negative and low angle is perceived as positive (Coleman, 2010).
7. **Shots:** A long shot presenting full subject matter is viewed as negative, a medium shot, from the waist up perceived as neutral, while the close-up shot regarded including head and shoulder considered to be the positive shot (Berger, 1981).

Findings and Discussion

Frequency analysis is done on SPSS to inquire about the Framing of political personalities on Facebook memes.

Themes on Facebook Memes

Themes	Frequency	Percent
Personal Attacks	138	27.6
Satire	124	24.8
Morality	71	14.2
Incompetent leader	161	32.2
Total	500	100.0

Table shows that among the selected themes for the study, the Incompetent Leader theme has secured the highest frequency of $f=161$ and a percentage of 32.2% compared to the other competing themes. The second highest theme was the Personal Attacks ($f=138$, $\%=27.6$) followed by Satire ($f=124$, $\%=25.6$). The least used theme in the collected data came out to be Morality having the frequency of ($f=71$, $\%=14.2$).

Cross tabulation is operated between the political personalities chosen for the study and frames used to examine the similarities and differences in the characterization of politicians on Facebook memes.

Cross tabulation between Political personalities and Themes

Politicians	Themes				Total
	Personal Attacks	Satire	Morality	Incompetent Leader	
Imran Khan	52 (37.7%)	23 (18.5%)	4 (5.2%)	100 (62.1%)	179 (35.8%)
Maryam Nawaz	13 (9.4%)	10 (8.1%)	27 (35.1%)	23 (31.5%)	73 (14.6%)
Bilawal Bhutto	40 (29.0%)	6 (4.8%)	10 (13.0%)	18 (11.2%)	74 (14.8%)
Nawaz Sharif	8 (5.8%)	18 (14.5%)	31 (40.3%)	8 (5.0%)	65 (13.0%)
Shafqat Mehmood	25 (18.1%)	67 (54.0%)	5 (6.5%)	12 (7.5%)	109 (21.8%)
Total	138	124	77	161	500

This table shows that when it comes to analyzing similarities and differences in the characterization of politicians, it was found that for Imran Khan, the Incompetent Leader theme was prominently used on Facebook memes with a Total value of 100 out of 179 (62.1%). Moreover, for Maryam Nawaz, the Morality theme was prominently used with a Total value of 27 out of 73 (35.1%). Additionally, for Bilawal Bhutto, Personal Attacks was prominently used with a Total value of 40 out of 74 (29.0 %). Also, for Nawaz Sharif, the Morality theme was prominently used with (Total value 31 out of 65 (40.3 %)). Lastly, for Shafqat Mehmood, the Satire theme was prominently used in the collected data of the Facebook memes. Total value 67 out of 109 (54.0%).

It also shows that among the selected political personalities, on Imran Khan highest frequency $f= 179$ and a percentage of 35.8% of Facebook memes were identified. The second highest frequency and a percentage of Facebook memes were on Shafqat Mehmood ($f=109$, $\%= 21.8$). While on Bilawal Bhutto ($f=74$, $\%=14.8$) and Maryam Nawaz ($f=73$, $\%=14.6$). The least Facebook memes in the collected data were identified on Nawaz Sharif with having the frequency and percentage of ($f=65$, $\%=13.0$). In table, the sample of visual framing variables undergoes a frequency test on SPSS to examine how the politicians visually framed through Facebook Memes.

Frequency and Percentages of Visual Framing Variables in memes (N=500)

Visual Framing Variables	Frequency	P e r c e n t
Camera Angle		

High angle (Neutral)	138	27.6
Eye level angle (Negative)	353	70.6
Low angle (Positive)	9	1.8
Total	500	100

Shots		
Long shot (Negative)	139	27.8
Medium Shot (Neutral)	319	63.8
Close Up shot (Positive)	42	8.4
Total	500	100
Emotions		
Happy	4	8
Sad	8	1.6
Sarcastic	488	97.6
Total	500	100

In terms of camera angles, shots, and emotions how the politicians are visually framed on Facebook memes. Results found that visual Framing used for political personalities on Facebook memes. Among Camera angles, Eye level angle (Negative) has secured the highest frequency of f=353 and percentage of 70.6% in political memes on Facebook. The second used angle is High angle (Neutral) (f=13, %= 27.6). The least used angle in the collected data came out be Low angle (Positive) having frequency of (f=9, %=1.8). Moreover, in Shots, medium shot has showed the highest frequency of f= 319 and percentage of 63.8% in political memes on Facebook. The second highest shot was long shots (f=139, %= 27.8). The least used shots on Facebook memes came out be close up shot having frequency of (f=42, %=8.4). Additionally, in Emotions, sarcastic has showed the highest frequency of f= 488 and percentage of 97.6% in political memes on Facebook. The second used emotion was sad (f=8

%=1.6). The least showed emotion on Facebook memes came out as happy, having a frequency of (f=4, %=8).

Conclusion

This study examined the visual and textual frames on Facebook memes on Pakistan's political personalities to explore the visual- textual depiction of politicians in social media platforms (Facebook). Studies have explained that contemporary media technologies can be viewed as a catalyst to reshape Pakistan's politics and democratic progression by providing new tools of public discourse and participation in politics (Kugelman, 2012; Ejaz, 2013). After reviewing the extensive literature and setting a definite theoretical framework, it was concluded that Facebook memes, specifically on politics, played an essential role in constructing and developing frames. Every political leader has framed with a particular perspective on Facebook memes. In this manner, it is concluded that Framing is an integral process in memes construction on political personalities.

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