

Political Satire through Memes: Content Analysis of Facebook Pages

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, memes have become the most crucial activity all over social media. Memes have become a new trend among youth. In communication and satire internet memes have grasped a lot of attention. Satire has become an essential tool in terms of controlling public opinions. Aim of this study is to analyze the memes on three populous political leaders (Imran Khan, Donald Trump and Narindar Modi) on Facebook pages. Four memes are selected of each politician using purposive sampling based on the likes and profile pictures that seem attractive. The reason to choose these politicians is the populous regime in three different countries. The results revealed that satire and taunts used in the memes against the elected politicians; the satire and the humor are used in a creative way to represent the situation and the circumstances politicians have created. These memes are creating new ways of political communication on social media and creating new political discourse.

Keywords: Memes, Satire, Facebook, Humor, Political Satire, Internet Communication.

Introduction

Present era is the age of internet and it has influence people's mode of living as it is incorporated as an essential element of their lives. Internet has made life easy by providing entertainment and information on a desk. People can share and express their ideas, emotions and perception without any limitation of boundaries with the whole world. Sharing on internet has given rise to internet memes and they have grabbed a lot of attention in communication and political satire especially youngsters creatively introduce and distribute them for entertainment purpose. Internet memes are considered as soft entertainment and users shared it on a lighter mood to communicate. In a meme creatively remixed text, illustration and images create a message in jokey way (Brown, 2022). Memes on internet are now one of the effective and creative communication way for political propaganda. Due to its easy creation and speedy dissemination these memes create new wave of political propaganda (Nieuburt, 2021).

Some people take no interest in politics but they get to recognize politicians and get insight of political happenings of the country. Content of the memes is essential factor in making it viral. The frames and tones of the memes define its popularity and people enjoy the criticism on a person regarding an issue in

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amusing manner (Shifman, 2014). Tone of the memes is the main focus as it plays effective part in altering and diverting the people perception and views about political figures. Tones of memes include Critical, mocking and descriptive tones (Townsend *et al.*, 2008). Anyone can openly comment and react to the memes including critiques, collectors, joiners or spectators. Here collectors mean such people who tag webpages on the post and joiners who interact when memes are shared on a platform. Similarly, spectators are the ones who do not react or add further on the post but view the content. Most of the women are included in this category as they consume the content they didn't create without any comment or activity (Li *et al.*, 2007).

Social Media and Memes

There are three different ways in which individuals involve themselves in content like memes and posts, first one is by consuming it, producing or generating the content, participating in the posts which means they directly involved in it by comments and react to them. Participation further includes two ways, first from user to user interaction and second one is the interrelation from user to content (Shao, 2009). The most crucial elements of the memes are humor and satire therefore humor is used by the people to share their ideas and opinions in the form of memes. It is to be noted that memes are a broader phenomenon as it not about the negative comments about celebrities or political figures but audience can openly highlight the political event and issues along with current political situations. Public opinions are directly influence and controlled by satire and sometimes memes spread misinformation as well.

Memes are created on websites such as memedump.com, memebase.com and knowyourmeme.com while they are shared by sharing apps like Facebook, twitter and Instagram etc. Creativity in the memes make them viral as people enjoy creative user generated content more than formal content which makes memes an influential tool on social media. This creativity involves the combination of familiar ideas, news and events skillfully to generate a new idea which is more amusing (Borden, 2010). This new idea is more impactful and entertaining. A large number of memes are created and distributed in few minutes each day over the internet.

Internet memes involve the use of images, GIFs or videos and people in a creative way. Single meme can develop the understanding and recognition of the back story when a user sees it. Undoubtedly meme is a self-created content but it involves remixing, copying and editing which means internet memes do not need credit.

Role of social media in diverting and altering trends of communication over the internet is very prominent. Political memes have become very common and their use on social media is playing an effective role in political discourse. During election campaigns use of such memes change the perspective of people about political parties. Metaphor is defined as the use of any symbol to represent any particular thing, political memes use metaphors which proves to be very effective tool to persuade audience to participate and involve themselves in political discussions.

Political memes are Enlightened by the term expansion by simplification which implies that memes have such influencing power that change the impact of political fact and can engage people for the political discussion about any political issue within minutes. It is to mention that memes not just cover the political events but they are used to highlight worldwide issue however, it is political memes that are most viral and popular among the citizens on internet (Shifman, 2013).

Zodiac Tec meme is most famous and viral series of memes during the 2016 elections of USA where Ted Cruz was portrayed as the serial killer. During the public polling it was found that 40% of the participants believed that he is zodiac killer and their decision to vote was influenced due to such memes. Hence memes changed the views of voters. Memes are the source of news as during any political activity such as political campaign or elections thousands of mems are created and distributed in no time and people keep themselves updated because of them. In case of Pakistan, many memes were created on Nawaz Sharif and Imran Khan during the last election and from then the flow is unstoppable. Consequently, memes are the

tool to satire the political parties and other political issues through internet memes. This study focuses on the memes created on three prominent politicians Donald Trump, Imran Khan and Narendra Modi.

Humor and Satire through Memes

Internet memes are explained by two essential elements satire and humor. Use of humor is to criticize a particular person or highlight them in amusing way. Historical perspective of the memes involves the use of picture or graphics of famous comic books like Anti-Nazi comics, from then major political events like movement against China and Egypt used humor and satire to criticize and debate about the politicians and current political affairs (Hajizada, 2010). Human behavior is criticized by the use of satire which involves their talks, way of communication, personalities or events related to them which engage people to view certain content disdainfully. Therefore satire is the use of mockery in a funny and humorous way to highlight the issues by criticizing.

Political Satire through Memes

From past few years due to widespread use of internet and social media people are now more political aware than before. Political issues are depicted through memes and audience engage themselves in political discussions. Political satire through internet memes is now incorporated as important part of political discussions. Politics has become interesting and enjoyable through memes and they grab the attention of even those who are not interested in politics and persuade them to establish opinion about political issues. Due to powerful influencing ability of memes they are used to implement certain propaganda as well like in elections and election campaigns people's voting decision is influenced. Moreover, satirical TV shows and videos result in awareness and critically well informed and active audience which engage deeply in political discussions (Plevritis, 2013). Therefore satirical memes have stolen the show in the world of politics. The use of satire and humor in post related to politicians and politics is well documented.

Objectives of the Study

1. To study satirical memes on Facebook pages as communication tool of political matters.
2. To study the element of satire in political memes.

Literature Review

In a study Chen (2012) it was showed that internet memes are a medium through which audience engage and participate. Main focus of the study is to show the way by which memes have become a medium where anyone can create and distribute their opinions and creative ideas by sharing and keep them well aware of the issues. Basic purpose of creating political memes is not for campaign or popularity but it rather involves the participations of audience and provide the opportunity to ordinary people to raise their voice and share their views about political issues.

Moreover, memes involve use of different tones. In a study (Townsend *et al.*, 2008) different memes were analyzed according to the respective tone used. In this way tones like mocking, descriptive, devastating, dissatisfied and critical tones were differentiated. Descriptive tone depicted the present situation without representing the laughable candidates. In mocking tone system was criticized to show the flaws in the governing system. Indignant tones involved the demand to bring about urgent change while the devastating memes showed the need of people to come into action.

Another study reveals that internet memes create political discourse as internet memes promote political satire (Anushka 2017). It concludes that user-generated content has now become an influencing tool in today's advanced era of media for all forms of political consequences like political discourse, opinions and related concerns. Moreover, according to this study internet memes do not have considerable impact on the viewers in fact they are used for sharing satire and political engagement.

Another study focused on the relation of internet memes with human concerns. According to it memes become viral within minutes due to the actions of viewers and their choices. YouTube memes were analyzed and it was concluded that depending upon the interest and concerns shown by audience about any event or issue make the memes viral. Creators of the memes consider the content that is more amusing, enjoyable and relatable to the current issue hence consumption and actions of the audience decide the use of memes (Shifman, 2011).

In a study concerning internet memes as an essential part in forming opinions showed that memes can be considered as the primary source of obtaining information. As a result of excessive use of memes about the news they are most circulating and viral source of information. Moreover, this study implies entertainment as effective tool in spreading information and news which help audience to remain well informed about their surrounding and matters of the state (Liisi, 2016).

Grabe and Bucy (2009) have shown that the voters' decision and be change by the use of visual framing in the memes. According to them as most of the people get information from online sources therefore it is important for them to know that visual framing can alter their opinions. Therefore, this study analyzed the media frames, images and visual memes. An interesting way of framing during campaigns is by showing the political candidate or any politician of the party in casual outlook visiting local areas like factories and interacting with needy associates to show their humbleness and sympathy by hugging them or showing affection to their kids.

Another study Vromen (2016) based upon the humor as a key factor among youth to express their sentiments regarding political situations. The informal and humorous content grab more attention and people can freely participate expressing their thoughts and interacting with others in this content. People enjoy and find it more realistic therefor humor is essential feature for political memes to be used on social media platforms.

On the other hand, Baumgartner (2013) showed that political humor can result in the negative image in the minds of audience. It focuses on the spillover effect in political memes. If a political figure is depicted in a humorous way it will develop the negative perception of other politicians as well. It shows that the memes can alter the opinion of people not only for the one depicted in the meme but for other figures who are not even present.

Research Questions

1. How satire is used for communicating political issues by internet memes?
2. How political memes on Facebook are tool for political satire?

Method

Research Design

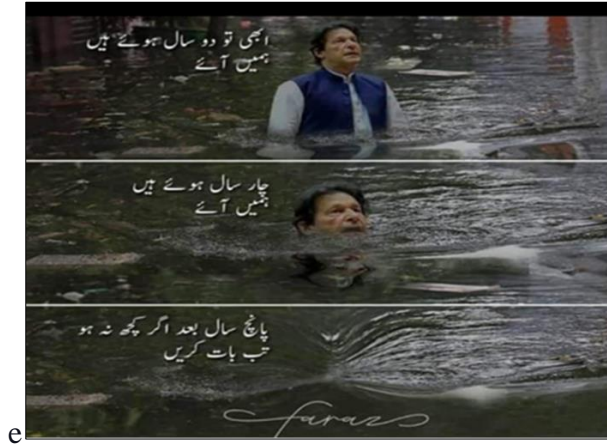
Qualitative research method is used in this study to examine the internet memes used for the politicians on Facebook pages for analyzing how satire, humor and taunts are used in the memes through content analysis. Text, Illustrations, images and content were analyzed.

Sample

To collect the data Facebook pages named "Pakistani Political memes", "Troll Modi". "India", "Anti-Trump Memes", "Memes by Karachiites" and "Imran Khan Memes" are selected as a sample from the time duration of 2017 to 2020. This time frame selected because selected politicians were in the government during this period. Imran Khan, the PM of Pakistan, Donald Trump, President of United States of America and Narendra Modi, the Prime minister of India. Sample includes 12 memes selected from 6 Facebook pages. Purposive sampling technique is used in this study. In this analysis text and photos created by meme pages are studied.

Data Presentation & Analysis

Imran Khan Memes



This meme features Imran Khan, Prime minister of Pakistan where he can be seen drowning. It comprises of three images, the first one shows Imran Khan who is half submerged in the water as his government has completed only two years. In second one he is about to drown as three years have passed and in the last images he is completely drowned after five years of the government. This meme represent the current situation of the country under Imran Khan's rule as it is getting worse with each passing year and it seems like after five years country will be demolished by the incompetency of the PTI government.

This image describes the deficiency of the government in an amusing way. Within just two years country is going into crisis the inflation rate is at its peak rapid hike in prices and fluctuating economy has made the life of a lay man miserable. When the government is questioned about the current downfall of the country they answer that government has passed only two years so they couldn't get any time to establish the country it will take five years to make it a stable state. This meme explain the precise output given by Imran Khan's government as they have done nothing to complete any progressive mega project for the state. In only two years people are facing various difficulties such as unemployment, poverty and inflation. It appears that after five year country will be demolished completely as the whole drowning of Imran Khan shows the complete drowning of the country.



In this meme of Imran Khan two photos are edited together to make the comparison. In the first one a man with empty pockets symbolizes "the art" while other picture of smiling present Imran Khan as "the artist". It means that Imran Khan is the artist who created the art of empty pockets implying that he is the reason behind poverty.

Unemployment and inflation are the most prominent issues faced by the people of Pakistan under PTI's government. Prices of food items have skyrocketed and they are not in the reach of poor anymore. Basic commodities such as sugar, flour, rice, gas and electricity are giving nightmares to people. Inefficient policies and negligence of the government officials are deteriorating the living standards of life. Salaries seem insufficient to meet the rapid rise in prices it is creating a sense of depression and frustration among people. It has become difficult to complete a month with single salary as a result poverty is increasing day by day. Moreover, due to unemployment poverty is increasing. It has become difficult to find any good job highly qualified people are compelled to work on daily wages to make the dead ends meet. On the other hand most of them have even lost their previous jobs. So the pockets are now empty and Imran Khan's the one to cause poverty.



Imran Khan is criticized in this meme once again. In this photo Imran Khan can be seen walking confidently through a grocery store. The reason behind this checking is mentioned to check if anything is selling at low price so that he can increase the price of that item as well.

Like other two memes the topic of inflation in the country is highlighted by using satire. The first budget of the country passed under PTI government has increased the prices of everything including basic food items as well like flour, rice, oil, sugar etc. It has affected the lower class of the country the most as such items are now out of their reach and they cannot afford to fulfill their basic needs. Lives of poor are now miserable under this new government. People are blaming Imran Khan as he is the Prime Minister of the country and instead of bringing prosperity and relief to the poor as he promised before coming into government has disappointed Pakistanis. It has become difficult to find anything at cheap prices and satirically Imran Khan is personally checking if there is something of low price which seems unacceptable under his rule so he must increase the price. Tax rates have increased making it impossible for common man to pay. The country is facing severe financial crisis under Imran Khan's government and everyone is paying the price of an incompetent government.



In this meme Imran Khan can be seen receiving a check from the chairperson of Edhi center. It is well known fact that Edhi foundation is a charity foundation which gets fund from all over the world to help poor and needy people. However, instead of offering charity the leader of the nation is getting the check of 1 crore from Edhi center. This shows the quality of over Prime Minister who now needs funds from almost everywhere to run a country.

It is common knowledge that after becoming the PM Imran Khan has been collecting loans and funds to start mega projects for the country as he claims that there are not enough deposit in national treasury to run the country. Therefore, he is seen collecting money and in this meme he is accepting a check from Edhi foundation which is a charity foundation in itself. During the pandemic period the chairperson of Edhi Foundation represent a check of 1 crore to the Prime minister to help poor people. It has now become a source of mockery and satire for the creators. Imran Khan has started that he is not receiving funds from anywhere but then he has taken a U-turn on his statement as he can be seen collecting funds from international monetary funds. A record for acquiring external debt has been set by PTI government which is an alarming situation for the country. It has become a source of entertainment and Imran Khan is mocked for collecting and making money from people.

Donald Trump Memes



It is a meme featuring Donald Trump where his caricature character is used. He can be seen bounded and continuously repeating single phrase “I won” as he denies the win of Joe Biden in the new presidential election of America.

In the USA’s presidential election of 2020 Donald Trump and Joe Biden were the potential opponents. Polling results showed more votes for Joe Biden making him the new President of USA. On the other hand Donald Trump find it hard to accept because he was sure of his victory even the vote difference was not much. He has openly challenges the voting process as he believed that votes casted by mail has resulted in the fraud. He is refusing to accept his loss because he believed that he has more support than Biden and is asking for recounting of votes. However, after three recounting Joe Biden’s votes were more than him which proves his accusations to be false. However, he still lives in the denial and imagines his victory.



In the above shown meme a teenager boy represents the character of Donald Trump. Here the expressions of the boy has be used to humor the racist nature of Donald trump. His expressions seem strangled with veins on his neck protruding out due to holding breath for a long time. His expression mirrors Donald trump if he does not say anything racist for 8 minutes straight.

Donald trump has always been criticized about his speech and policies which highlighted as racism. He is often referred as a racist president and it has destroyed his presidency as well because America has people of many races. He has openly fueled nativism and racism in America during his tenure but he denies such accusations and claims to be the least racist person in American history. He appears to talk so much about racism that it seems difficult for him to not talk about it for even 8 minutes straight. It has become so normal and important like breathing therefore if he is not allowed to talk about it for short period of time it becomes difficult for him to hold it in anymore. Donald trump has promoted racism.



Donald trump appears to point out at his own reflection with disdain in the mirror and thinks that it's the television which is representing him as a selfish "self-centered", leader of low intellect "low IQ" and outspoken "Bigoted loudmouth". While someone in the background is reassuring him that it's the mirror a TV which shows his lack of brains in itself as he speaks before he thinks properly and imagines and accuse anyone without thinking first.

After the USA election of 2020 Donald Trump faced great loss which was unexpected for him and he denied the victory of Joe Biden. Following his loss and false accusation American media portrayed him as a self-centered outspoken and low IQ person who speaks before he thinks. Many false news regarding his behavior circulated the media and media showed his incompetency and lack of discipline in his personality as cause of loss in 2020 elections. He was trolled on social media and many memes surfaced and went viral. However, such portrayal did not affect him and he kept on shouting and blaming media.

As he remained in the news after the elections and saw himself on the TV on daily basis therefore when he saw his own image he thought it to be the TV again. This meme points out this situation perfectly.



In the meme shown above, a beggar can be seen begging for the money in the name of trump as Trump has large amount of taxes to pay. Beggar gives his money to trump as he thinks that he needs it more than him but the trump's hunger for money is too much to be fulfilled.

Donald trump is known for his mental approach as a business man many of the American analyst believe that he took country as a business as well. During the tenure of Donald trump as president he took a lot of loans from other countries for the betterment of America. He set the record of obtaining external loans during his government. During pandemic situation American economy fluctuated and he acquired more debts but no improvement were observed. It seem that he took those loans for his interest rather than for country. This meme represent the satire of Trump's financial appetite.

Narendra Modi Memes



This meme features Narendra Modi, the Prime Minister of India in which he is addressing about the dream he saw about "Akhand Bharat" means the United India. For this reason he goes to other countries to convince them to unite with India and those tour are expensive in this regard.

Current situation of India under Modi's rule is not the perfect one. They have increased poverty, inflation and one of the most prominent factor is extremism. They have encouraged Hindu Muslim conflicts to divert the attention of people from state matters to something else. He has taken debts for country which he uses for his own interest. He is criticized about his luxurious life style by using the resources of the country and expensive tours abroad. When the issue was raised, he replied that he wants to see United India and, in this regard, he has to visit other countries. The concept of United India is an old concept where India must not have been parted which Hindu's hold on to. He uses that excuse to cover his corruption and waste to money.



This meme is the most viral and used meme many other versions are created in this format. According to Modi a book must not be judged by its cover in fact if you book any judge everything you do will be covered for you.

Narendra Modi was thought to be the best Prime Minister of India due his promises and commitment with the people before elections. However, after his victory and coming into government he focused on his personal interests. He appeared to be a great leader on outside but he seem selfish and corrupt from inside. People has judged him by his appearance and were mistaken. He has made many mistakes and implemented wrong policies for which he must be accountable but all his wrong doings are covered because he has the judges of the country in his pocket. This meme mocks Modi and his reputation among citizens who now believe that they were mistaken by choosing him.



Narendra Modi appears to be proud of himself as he has made the equality possible by making the prices of petrol and diesel equal. For years petrol and diesel have been sold with different prices. His act of removing discrimination from the society is mocked in this meme.

Modi's government has increased inflation. Prices are now out of reach of poor people. It has become difficult to fulfill the basic needs especially after the pandemic taxes are on everything. The hike in the prices of petrol and diesel have frustrated the citizens. The price of petrol was increased from 71 to 80 while diesel from 60 to 80. Prices of both fuels are now equal. It is common observation that price of diesel is always lower than petrol but now the difference is removed by Modi's government. this situation is mocked in this meme.



PM Narendra Modi is having a meal and he seems to be enjoying it. The meme is about the expensive tours of Modi where it is asked that which dal is Modi's favorite and satirically it is replied that tour dal is his favorite.

Narendra Modi enjoys travelling abroad and it is evident from his repetitive and expensive trips. It is believed that instead of improving the situation of the state he is more interested in high cost trips. He has taken debts from many countries and now he is wasting that on visiting other countries. It has affected India's economy. He is about to become the second Prime Minister of India to have visited most foreign nations. This situation is criticized in this meme where it is mentioned that Modi enjoys Tour dal the most even more than serving his country.

Discussion

Data analysis of political memes based upon three famous politicians Imran Khan, Donald Trump and Narendra Modi. This study focuses upon the use of satire in political memes that in which ways humor can be used to satirize the political figures and current political issues of the country. Through the data disclosed it is formulated that social media users are influenced by satirical memes to a great extent. The data under investigation has shown that the opinions and perception of the audience is determined by these memes because viewers enjoy humorous and user-generated entertaining content with more interest than any formal and to the point content. In this study the focus was how satire is used in internet memes and how the current challenging events of the country are transformed into humor. Previous findings and literature were kept under consideration while conducting the research.

The social media platform chosen for this study is Facebook. Among other apps Facebook is the social media platform with most users where people can share and interact with each other anytime and anywhere. In this way a meme is made viral in no time by sharing. In this study the new Facebook trend which involves the like a comment or mentioning friend or family in the comments has altered the meme sharing trend as well.

Memes of Imran Khan are selected according to the country's current situation; he has destroyed the country's economy and raised the prices and taxes. The memes are chosen based on most viral memes that people can relate to and share by adding their own opinions about the current government and the country's situation. The Facebook page Pakistani Political memes and other memes pages are with the profile picture of Imran Khan attracting the audience; memes gave hype to most of his talks.

Narendra Modi memes are chosen from different memes pages like Troll Modi and Modi memes. These names already attract the users and openly say this page is about trolling Modi Sarkar, with the profile pictures of Modi. The memes are about how he has destroyed the country, the most viral memes of Modi are also about corruption, and how he is not letting go of his seat even all the country is against him.

The third Politician is Donald Trump, the most trolled politician on the internet; the audience remembers Donald Trump with memes. The Facebook page found attractive while selecting the memes is Trump memes page, with a profile picture of Donald Trump with a close look focusing on his blonde hair. Americans hate Donald Trump, the satire in the memes explains why. Currently, Trump memes are on hype, and each of the memes shared about trump are already viral. Trump loses the elections from Joe Biden, and his loss is on fire in the world of memes.

Politicians are trolled on social media; satire is used to troll the politicians, whatever they do either as a politician or in personal life. Memes instantly make a post taunting about their action (Anushka 2017). Memes have the power to defame or raise the image of the person.

On the other hand, memes have become the most fun platform, where at least youth is aware of what is happening in our country. Mostly memes are right, but sometimes some things get too hype, it can also make a biased opinion about one party. Meme creators know how to make the memes that people will enjoy the most. Some meme images are constant; the audience easily recognizes the meme faces. Some images and situations are for a few days. In the current situation memes about any topic can be created and distributed. Everything can be transformed into memes to challenging situations even more bearable and viewers do not get bore from them. Politicians and politics is among the most view and hot topics where people enjoy the most (Kasirye, 2020). People can reflect their anger or frustration through memes and interact with other by reacting to them. One mem is enough to develop the whole back ground story of the image.

Conclusion

The study analyzed the element of satire used in internet memes about politics and politicians. Aim of the study is to investigate the way in which satire is used in political memes and the manner in which politicians and their behavior is portrayed in humorous and satirical way. Importance of the internet memes on internet and use on social media is highlighted by the study. Memes are the source of update and news for viewers as they get to know about political issues through them. In fact memes spread awareness among people regarding political matters of the state in satirical and amusing manner and persuade them to participate. In the research satire is analyzed in the memes created on politicians and it highlight the situations in which satire is used in the memes.

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Conflict of Interest


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