

CAPITAL UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE AND
TECHNOLOGY, ISLAMABAD



Role of Memes in Shaping Public Perception of Pakistani Political Leaders: A Linguistic Analysis

by

Saeeda Ibrahim

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment for the
degree of Master of Science

in the

Faculty of Management & Social Sciences

Department of English

2026

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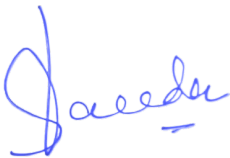
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Acknowledgement

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who have helped me in conducting this research on the Role of Memes in Shaping Public Perception of Pakistani Political Leaders: A Linguistic Analysis for my MS thesis. First of all, I would like to thank Almighty Allah for providing me countless blessings, guidance, and strength to carry out this research successfully.

I would like to thank my husband, Khalid Iqbal Mahr for his tremendous support and motivation in this academic endeavour. The understanding and motivation provided by him was quite helpful in completing this thesis successfully

I would like to extend my profound gratitude towards my supervisor Dr Muhammad Umar Farooq Head Department of English, CUST for his immense help, guidance and encouragement at all stages of this research. The academic assistance and suggestions given by him greatly helped me in conducting this research successfully. Moreover, I also want to thank my colleagues and fellow students for their great cooperation.

I would like to extend my special thanks to my class fellow, Kanwal Gulzar, for her continuous guidance, support, and assistance throughout this research.

Last but not least, I thank all those people who helped me in completing my MS thesis directly or indirectly.

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Abstract

The emergence of fast digital communication has facilitated the rise of political memes as an important form of political discourse through the use of social media. Political memes have a major role in developing opinions about political personalities in Pakistan. This research explores the role of memes in shaping public perception of political personalities through linguistic analysis. A mixed methodology was applied in the research, using an analysis of 15 political memes purposively selected from publicly accessible online source including social media platforms such as *Facebook* and *Instagram*, as well as *other publicly available websites*. The findings reveal that linguistic elements used in Pakistani political memes include: exaggeration, irony, sarcasm, metaphor, exaggeration, code-switching, and evaluative elements that help to develop either positive or negative images of political personalities.

The survey data show that the majority of respondents see political memes as an important instrument capable of influencing political views, but some respondents raise concerns about the possible distortion of political reality by political memes. The research demonstrates that political memes cannot be seen solely as a form of entertainment; rather, political memes represent an important form of political discourse and contribute to shaping public opinion in Pakistan.

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Abbreviations

CDA	Critical Discourse Analysis
PPP	Pakistan People's Party
PML-N	Pakistan Muslim League –N
PTI	Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

Social media websites are playing a very active part in inducing a change in the Pakistani political arena. In the intricate Pakistani political web, memes that are ubiquitous internet communication utility—have evolved to become the proverbial rule book through which public opinion is shaped. The visual and textual brevity of memes allows for swift dissemination of ideas and stories which conventional media tends to miss. Memes are a democratizing power in Pakistan, a nation with a vast and diversified internet population. They allow the citizens to participate in political conversations. As [Milner \(2016\)](#) asserts, internet memes, are recurring online "vernacular discourse" that are not only a source of humour but reflect and shape cultural comprehension. Memes serve as a key critique in the Pakistani context that examines and re-examines the statements, behaviour, and characteristics of politicians. This constructs their public perception and legitimacy ([Shoukat and Jokhiyo, 2025](#)). As per linguistic analysis to generate and subvert the political narratives, memes leverage complex rhetorical devices, such as satire, sarcasm, irony and hyperbole. Memes are able to bring out established connections and place politicians in specific context by strategically employing intertextuality by invoking historical happenings or general popular culture ([Jenkins, 2009](#)). The vocabulary of meme caption, i.e., the colloquial expressions, regional dialects,

or special lexical items employed in meme captions, may even target certain demographic groups or reinforce social divisions (Entman, 1993). By targeting a certain group, the approach communicates highly personalized political messages that influence the public opinions of certain groups and communities. The interaction between the word and image in memes plays an extremely important role in determining people's perceptions of politics. The union of visual component or text with a political leader's picture can evoke extreme feelings without the application of rational thinking. By the use of overblown pictures and computer imaging memes satirize politicians and warp their characters into crude negative caricatures (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006).

By combining linguistic and visual methods, the public image of a politician can be constructed resulting in influencing public opinion and determining election results. Castells (2015) state that memes are an effective tool in mobilizing online communities and frame political discussions through evoking passionate emotional responses like humour or indignation. The political understanding is affected by the interactive nature of memes. Ongoing sharing of memes creates a dynamic and evolving arena of political interpretation. This dynamic online culture allows contradictory stories and varied perception to propagate rapidly, thus undermining the settled stories of mainstream media and political leaders (Katz and Shifman, 2017). Social media growth in Pakistan has the potential to influence political discourse immensely. This can result in a more inclusive democratic style of political communication. Anderau and Barbarrusa (2024), stated that political memes have emerged as a significant way for expressing digital political discourses. The inclusion of both language and visuals makes it possible for memes to explain political matters, frame political figures and influence the ways people perceive political happenings.

1.2 Statement of Problem

Digital communication in the modern era has led to the transformation of political communication in Pakistan by providing innovative means of production and

dissemination of political information. Political memes are one of the most prominent forms of digital political discourse. The spread of political memes has led to the rise of political narratives based on memes in which political personalities are portrayed in terms of events, controversies, and, public statements without due regard for the political background. Thus, such a representation of political personalities involves an emphasis on entertainment rather than the actual politician and politics in question. There is a need for a systematic linguistic analysis to examine how the language of political memes creates meaning, conveys attitudes, and influences public perceptions of political leaders. Therefore, this study is designed to analyse the role of political memes' linguistic features in shaping perceptions of Pakistani political leaders.

1.3 Research Gap

Although memes are popularly used in Pakistan for sociopolitical critique, there is a dearth of substantial research examining the linguistic features being used in memes to develop a perception of political leaders. Most of the existing literature overlooks the extent to which linguistic features (including code switching, humour, satire, irony, exaggeration, metaphor, etc) creates public perceptions of Pakistani political leaders. This research fills this gap by utilizing Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model to conduct a detailed linguistic analysis of memes related to politics in Pakistan and their role in influencing perceptions of political figures.

1.4 Research Objectives

The current research study has been carried out to meet the following research objectives:

- i. To identify the linguistic features commonly employed in political memes targeting Pakistani political leaders.

- ii. To investigate how these linguistic devices contribute to the development of specific narratives and perspectives about these leaders.
- iii. To explore the broader understanding of how memes influence shaping political discourse in Pakistan.

To meet the research objectives, the following research questions were formulated:

1.5 Research Questions

- i. What specific linguistic features appear in Pakistani political memes that target Pakistani politicians?
- ii. How do these linguistic choices influence the public perception of political leaders?
- iii. How do these memes use language to either support or undermine against the main political narratives?

1.6 Delimitation of the Study

The study is delimited in order to keep the scope of the research manageable and to ensure in depth analysis.

Firstly, the research was confined to political memes available publicly on Facebook, Instagram and other publicly available websites as well as through personal social media circulation. All other social media networks such as X, WhatsApp, TikTok, and YouTube are not included in the research as they are beyond the scope of this study.

Secondly, the research on political memes is about selected political figures from the three main Pakistani political parties i.e. *Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP)*, *Pakistan Muslim League(N)* and *Pakistan Tehreek- e Insaf (PTI)*, having a considerable representation on social media.

1.7 Significance of the Study

This study contributes to the emerging field of digital political discourse by analysing how linguistic techniques shape the perception of Pakistani political leaders. This study also contributes to the existing literature on political communication by analysing the use of language for constructing political narratives and influencing public interpretation.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

2.1 Historical Evolution of Memes

Richard Dawkins first proposed the idea of memes in his 1976 book *The Selfish Gene*. He referred to memes as those cultural elements that spread because people copy or imitate them. Employing a biological metaphor, [Dawkins \(2006\)](#) suggested that memes, like genes, are capable of replication, variation, and selection within a cultural milieu. Although Dawkins did not foresee the eventual rise of the internet, it did lay the groundwork for subsequent writings about how culture is transmitted and changes within digital spaces. His focus on memetic evolution was thus a theoretical framework from which academics could start making sense of digital cultural phenomena, even if the actualities of online sharing, remixing, and participation were well beyond anything he had envisioned. As the internet grew during the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, scholars began to reconsider Dawkins' schema in light of online behaviour. Early internet culture demonstrated that digital memes are not fixed, self-contained units of culture but rather are fluid, participatory, and determined by the interactions of users. In this environment, [Shifman \(2013\)](#) provided a more sensitive definition, which described memes as groups of content created by users that obtain certain characteristics and then spread, rework, and imitate across networked communities. She didn't stick to just biology. Rather, she shifted topics to users' behaviour, platforms that

permit users to do that, and the overall participation of people in digital culture. This was a major milestone in the acceptance of meme studies as an independent discipline in the academic world.

This perspective has been strengthened by the growing academic interest in the participatory culture where digital memes are viewed as a type of collaborative cultural text. Similarly, [Jenkins et al. \(2016\)](#) has gone ahead to assert that trends in participatory media that led to the digital culture of today being characterized by the collective meaning-making process with the audience still being very much alive and not just passive consumers. Therefore, memes are not an artifact that should be spread as such, but a continuous process of re-interpreting, re-circulating, and re-designing. The view described above finds its wide reflection in the dynamics of the Pakistani social media, where political memes are an outcome of bottom-up participation. The populace is on the go during elections or political scandals, online disputes or, a time of national tension, and they post meme narratives that are easily distributed with the help of social media.

Before 2010, the clamour around memes was already quite obvious, as they played quite a crucial role in political and socio-cultural discussions. In a way, [Qazi et al. \(2022\)](#) pointed out that memes were no longer just digital artifacts that represented humour but had become a major factor in political communication, identity, and ideology through their contestation. Memes are said to engage in so-called "ambivalent internet" spaces, which are places where humour, critique, activism, and antagonism live together. The theoretical model also holds true for Pakistan, as public opinion by memes tapping Imran Khan, Nawaz Sharif, Bilawal Bhutto, and Maryam Nawaz are one of the chief factors. Facebook, X, Instagram, TikTok, and WhatsApp were among the social media apps that have become the most important platforms for political commentary to be expressed, discussed, and disseminated through memes.

The global analysis of memes offers essential insights into the progression of political memes in Pakistan. Dawkins' initial concept serves as a foundation, while [Shoukat and Jokhiyo \(2025\)](#) research illustrates how memes operate within today's participatory digital culture. [Jenkins et al. \(2016\)](#) emphasizes the influence

of users in crafting and interpreting meaning, and [Qazi et al. \(2022\)](#) investigate how memes function within broader social and political frameworks. By synthesizing these viewpoints, Pakistani political memes are not merely isolated or local occurrences but are part of a larger, global transformation in the way political discourse is created, disseminated, and understood online.

Back in the early 2000s and 2010s, researchers started digging into internet memes, realizing they were way more than just amusing images. For instance, [Kress and van Leeuwen \(2006\)](#) saw memes as a kind of digital insight, explaining how jokes, mashups, and copying things online help build communities. They pointed out that memes really work because people share a common understanding and cultural touchstones. You can totally see this in Pakistan, where political humour often leans on local dialects, private jokes, and cultural cues.

While online groups grew a great deal between 2005 and 2015, folks studying them began looking more at memes and stuff that spread like wildfire. Take [Milner \(2013\)](#) work, for example, where he looked at memes in communities like 4chan. He pointed out how using the same basic meme layouts made it simple for people to chime in together. Even though these examples were from Western cultures, Pakistan has also approved this style of humour. They've taken popular meme formats, like "Expectation vs. Reality" or "Distracted Boyfriend," and twisted them to talk about what's going on in the politics of their own country.

[Dynel \(2016\)](#) highlighted the multimodal nature of memes, showing how image captions and cultural symbols work together to convey meaning. This idea is especially clear in Pakistani political memes, where complex political messages are communicated through a combination of visual satire, code-switching between Urdu and English, Roman Urdu spellings, and regional expressions.

By the mid-2010s, [Shifman \(2014\)](#) had summarized these initial observations and suggested schemes in which memes were seen as being a subset of social communication. These structures have spread all over the world and have also penetrated Pakistan, where memes are no longer only used as entertainment, as criticism,

a divisive political tool, and the articulation of ideological ideas. 2.1 Change in Concept

[Morger \(2022\)](#) provided a new perspective on memes, as a means of discursive participation. Instead of viewing memes as mere funny pictures, he demonstrated how they enable individuals to have group discussions and influence the manner in which social and political matters are discussed on the Internet. Users share opinions through the cultural knowledge that is both entertaining and relatable.

Ideology is also concentrated in memes. They incorporate the political values, social norms, and criticisms into a combination of text and images. Their repetitiveness in the memes assist the dissemination of ideas as ideas are transmitted, developed, and imprinted into the general discourse ([Morger, 2022](#)). These are observable in the repetitive themes concerning some leaders, such as Imran Khan's U-turn, Nawaz Sharif Mujhe Kyun Nikala, or jokes about how Bilawal Bhutto uses language, all serve to propagate certain political discourses.

The means of meme creation have open access, therefore, create new opportunities to engage in political discourse among common citizens. Any individual can create and share comments without using traditional media. In a society such as Pakistan, where mainstream media tend to favour political interests, memes offer a platform of satire, criticism and even mobilization.

Political communities are also shaped by memes that assist them in shaping their identities. Memes are common among advocates of PPP PML-N, or PTI as they are trying to reinforce the feeling of belonging and construct shared storytelling. Political communities are also assisted by memes to form identities. The followers of PPP, PML-N, or PTI often apply memes in order to enhance the sense of belonging and create common accounts. These online forms reveal the formation and performance of ideological affiliation and group affiliation in the online culture.

Memes are multi-modal messages, a mixture of images and words to present complex messages. The multimodal theory presented by [Varis and Blommaert \(2015\)](#) reveals the interactions between images, fonts, and captions to give meaning.

Memes in Pakistan tend to take inspiration in semiotic attributes such as conventional attire, political demonstrations, historical allusions, or in local phrases, all of which are culturally relevant. [Wiggins and Bowers \(2015\)](#) suggested that memes can be referred to as reflections of micro-populations of meaning, where an individual can understand something due to the knowledge that is accessible to specific groups. These micro-populations are applied in Pakistani political memes of local scandals, slogans or political histories that the audience can immediately recognize. This understanding between them helps the comedy to fly and narrow down the criticism.

The communication of memes is also intertextual. [Highfield \(2016\)](#), revealed that political memes play a significant role in encouraging political expression, engagement, and participation on social media platforms. A great deal of the Pakistani memes consists of a remix of media clips, political speeches, or viral soundbites, depending on how well the audience knows about certain events, such as election campaigns, court decisions, parliamentary debates, etc.

Another important tool is framing, as [Ghilzai \(2025\)](#) puts it. Memes may emphasize some features of political leaders, portraying them as heroic, incompetent, hypocritical, and funny. These frames manipulate the perception of people towards politicians in a subtle way that affects opinions and sentiment of the people based on humour and satire.

2.1.1 The Political Context of the Memes

In Pakistan, political memes play a multi-functional role, which may be contradictory at times, they can be used to oppose authority or support it. [Halversen and Weeks \(2023\)](#) point out the importance of satire, in that it promotes political participation, through humour in breaking the official story. Memes are commonly used in Pakistan to mock political figures, corruption scandals or governance, which is a culturally recognizable and quite harmless method of criticizing authority.

Memes also offer some protection in terms of ambiguity in the case of political speech that is sensitive. According to [Udupa et al. \(2020\)](#), even in the semi-authoritarian environment, digital humour could be a form of dissent. Since Pakistan has a history of regulating the media, memes enable individuals to criticize them in an indirect manner, which is why commenting on them can be made available without necessarily having to challenge restrictions.

Meanwhile, memes may serve as a tactic of propaganda. [Bennett and Livingston \(2018\)](#) demonstrate the use of organized networks to control the online content in order to impact the opinion of the people. In Pakistani elections, proponents and organised online fan pages distribute memes to slander opponents or promote party messages, and this is similar to how digital political campaigns are run worldwide.

This principle of the duality of memes, which are satiric and propagandistic, makes them a powerful instrument of Pakistani politics. They determine the manner in which events are perceived, the ways in which leaders are perceived and they help to form political identities in the internet.

Memes have a major impact on political identity and the opinion of people across the world. It is what. [Knobel and Lankshear \(2007a\)](#) refers to as algorithmic populism, which demonstrates the role that online content plays in strengthening group identities. In Pakistan, this is evident in the way in which PTI, PML-N, and PPP supporters develop their own meme cultures empowering partisan views and a sense of belonging to their political organizations.

Memes have significantly influenced political campaigns and shaped public perceptions worldwide. Studies by [Highfield and Leaver \(2016\)](#) and [Highfield \(2016\)](#) demonstrate that political memes played a role in influencing political affiliations during the 2016 U.S. presidential election. A similar pattern has been observed in Pakistan, where memes circulated during the 2013 and 2018 general elections influenced voters' perceptions of political leaders, particularly regarding their competence, integrity, and trustworthiness. Memes are equally strong in non-Western environments. [van Dijk \(2018\)](#) points out their contribution to the discussions of

nationalism and national identity in India. Memes in Pakistan also play a similar role, as individuals are able to share their views regarding governance, civil-military ties, or social reforms. Such non-formal digital sites provide citizens with an opportunity to engage in political discussions outside the formal institutions.

Although the universal nature of memes is evidenced by their large-scale distribution in the world, local culture determines the meaning of the message. The memes in Pakistan have a particular sense because of the language selection: Urdu, Punjabi, Pashto, or Roman Urdu, as well as cultural allusions and historical background, which impact the overall opinion and attitude towards political regulations.

2.2 Digital Political Communication

Digital political communication can be use of digital technology and social platforms for creation, distribution, and circulation of political information and messages between political actors, media outlets, and citizens. The emergence of the Internet technologies and social media has revolutionized the concept of political communication by transforming it from one-sided political communication to a two-way process that allows people to take part in discussion and debate on political issues ([Darlius et al., 2024](#)).

In modern times, political communication has become highly dependent on digital media through which political campaigning, civic engagement, and rapid dissemination of multimedia takes place ([Billig, 2005](#)). Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, X (formerly Twitter), and YouTube have become major spaces for creating, sharing, and interpreting political information, significantly influencing public opinion and political communication.

As a result, these platforms have emerged as the primary context for digital political discourse, where political content, particularly political memes, is created, circulated, and transformed.

2.2.1 Digital Platforms

The past two decades have changed the discussion and experience of politics with the emergence of social media. Social media, such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and X (formerly Twitter), have turned into the focus of debate, the participation of citizens, and activism. Social media enables many-to-many communication unlike the traditional media that is used to convey information individually to a large number of viewers. Political content is made to be created, exchanged, and discussed in real time, avoiding all the traditional gatekeepers, whether this is newspapers, television, or any other format ([Highfield and Leaver, 2016](#)).

The visibility and mobilization opportunities have been created due to the development of these platforms. Digital spaces have become more important in political campaigns, civil society movements, and even protest networks to reach out to the audience. Activism is coordinated with the help of hashtags, viral videos, and interactive polls that disseminate messages and influence the opinion of people. Social media has been a significant factor in Pakistan in elections, political agitations, and controversies in the society forming a digital public where citizens are mostly the consumers, but also the refiners of information.

Social media is also able to disseminate political ideas very quickly, though in easily comprehensible and emotional formats. A study indicates that politically-related information spreads more rapidly when it is mixed with humour, satire, or visuality ([Shifman, 2013](#)). Consequently, conventional political communication (speeches, press releases, televised debates, etc.) is augmented or substituted by digital forms of communication which are participatory, visual and meme-driven.

With the emergence of social media, the concept of formal political messaging has been visibly replaced by the concept of meme-based communication. The use of political speech used to be based on well-written speeches, press releases, and editorial articles. Memes are nowadays used to comment, criticize, and persuade both politicians and citizens. Memes simplify the complicated political concepts into mentally stimulating and emotionally provocative content that goes viral on networks.

The use of memes is especially effective since it can be an effective tool of political messaging coupled with humour, irony, and symbolism. They tend to put the issue, a leader, or an event in a manner that appeals to the cultural background of the audiences or already held views ([Morger, 2022](#); [Iyengar et al., 2019](#)). Memes have gained a major role in political discussion in Pakistan, where users attack a party, point out policy shortcomings, or praise leadership qualities. This is indicative of democratization of political communication in which people are active creators of narratives rather than passive receivers.

The transition to the meme-based communication is also a reaction to the fast and short nature of the online media. Memes transform information in visual-linguistic units that are simple to process, interpret and communicate. Messages that do not conform to this rapid-paced environment face the risk of being sidelined and the memes can flourish since they are participatory, shareable, and culturally significant.

2.2.2 Memes as a Socio-Political Text

Internet memes have also shown importance as communicative objects that have revolutionized political discourse because they enable the coding and decoding of political messages with multiple meanings. It is argued that internet memes are more than images because they have become tools that enable political expression and participation and offer alternative avenues for political communication. According to [Shifman \(2013\)](#), internet memes have shown importance as cultural units because they have enabled imitations and remixing, which have enabled people to frame political events and make them meaningful online. According to [Morger \(2022\)](#), internet memes have enabled “vernacular creativity” because they have enabled people to challenge political discourses. To support the importance of internet memes, [Woolley and Howard \(2017\)](#) defines internet memes as units that enable linguistics because they have enabled meaning production through symbolic and cultural messages. According to [Khan \(2024a\)](#), internet memes have shown importance as symbolic resources because they have enabled

political message reconstruction and have enabled fusion and propagation of information and propaganda. According to broader research, internet memes have shown importance as tools that enable rapid political message diffusion because they have shown importance and efficacy in political contexts where there are limitations and challenges associated with political communications ([Safdar and Khan, 2025](#)).

Memes serve as socio-political texts by incorporating ideological narratives, humour and allusions which influence the way audiences perceive political events and identities. Critical discourse analyses reveal that memes create political sense using semiotic and rhetoric means including satire, irony, and caricature, which can be used to change the way people understand topics in politics ([AlAfnan, 2025](#)). Studies done on Pakistani political memes suggest that such digital objects may serve as a source of political protest and challenge, so that netizens may indirectly criticise leaders and mainstream discourse, particularly when there is censorship or political sensitivity. According to [AlAfnan \(2025\)](#), memes are increasingly influencing the political rhetoric of social media through reframing political rhetoric, increasing societal feelings, and participating in political activities within digital networks. These applications of memes underscore their contribution to the discussion of the people outside the traditional political media.

On top of its representation, political memes are involved in the formation of public opinion and affective polarization through strengthening group identities and emotional reactions. Empirical experiments indicate that memes have the potential to increase the rate of affective polarization through the simplification of political adversaries on the basis of the us versus them, which influences how users approach political information online. The academic research of Facebook political memes concludes that the political memes are not solely a manifestation of political attitudes but also have an effect on how a Facebook user interprets political actors and events, showing how memes can determine civic participation and political adherence. The further scientific research of 2024 presidential election in Indonesia also proves the provided point of view. [Dawkins \(1976\)](#) show that there are social media posts which use semiotic tools to construct a figure of a

candidate in the audience, uphold the ideological hint and emotional reactions with comparisons, symbols, and visual design. Such findings highlight the importance of treating memes as socio-political texts, which have a role to play in the process of producing and disseminating political meaning.

Memes as Multimodal Texts Multimodality of political memes is a characteristic of memes. Memes with visual signs (images, GIFs, symbols), linguistic features (text, captions, hashtags), and cultural references (political events, scandals, or local idioms) are combined to gain layered meaning using the framework by ([López-Paredes and Carrillo-Andrade, 2022](#)). This integration enables a quick delivery of complex messages, and at the same time, connect with the audiences at several levels. In Pakistan, the multimodality is manifested in memes, combining Roman Urdu, English, or regional language with photos of rallies, speeches, or viral content. These combinations are humorous and satirical and they make use of the collective cultural knowledge to facilitate knowledge. The memes are a form of cultural shorthand, which allows the audience to perceive the political commentary by symbols and social hints.

Political memes are also a novel type of participatory culture and digital citizenship. According to [Morger \(2022\)](#), the active involvement of everyday users in political discourse is possible only through memes, which is why they do not passively consume it. Citizens engage in mass discourse, express opposition and influence the perception of the community by producing, distributing or reworking memes. In Pakistan, memes have been used as an instrument of civic action which allows youth, an online community, or a grassroots movement to express their views, satirize leadership, or gain support. They are also a measure of increasing digital literacy, given that users have been moving through Mult modeled forms of communication to shape the public narratives. In this respect, memes can work as cultural objects and as the kind of participation in politics, bridging social, cultural, and political aspects of digital existence.

In his work, [Nissenbaum and Shifman \(2017\)](#) explored the use of populist traits in memes on the internet by using the Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) and multimodal discourse analysis theory in the context of German politics. He shows

that memes can convey populist messages via the interaction of visual and written features, especially through the creation of binary opposites between "the people" and "the elite," depiction of crises, and the use of provocative language. It is also noted that memes should be perceived as multimodal discourses whose meaning depends on the socio-political context.

2.3 Research on Political Memes

Scholarly interest in the study of political memes has grown substantially in the last decade as researchers have become aware of their significance in digital political communication and political discussion. Political memes have ceased being seen as amusing materials on the internet but are now described as multimodal texts, which convey political ideas, set political frames of mind, and form political identities in terms of linguistic and visual interaction ([Shoukat and Jokhiyo, 2025](#)). Researchers have already studied the topic of political memes from various angles, including discourse analysis, semiotics, multimodality, political communication, and media studies, emphasizing their significance in the field of political involvement and civic activism online ([Morger, 2022](#)). Additionally, it is known that political memes apply different rhetorical and linguistic devices, such as satire, irony, metaphor, hyperbole, intertextuality, and humour, in order to create political meanings, question dominant discourses, and engage the audience ([Anderau and Barbarrusa, 2024](#)). Nevertheless, despite the wide variety of scholarly papers on political memes from around the world, little attention has been paid to linguistic aspects of Pakistani political memes, which proves the necessity to investigate this issue.

2.3.1 Humour-based Political Communication

The use of humour as a key element in modern political communication has grown in importance, especially in the use of internet memes, which rely on satire, irony, and visual symbolism. Political memes serve as a form of political commentary that can be quickly condensed, enabling users to convey their views, mock rivals,

and appeal to emotions, which conventional political communications can often fail to do (Shoukat and Jokhiyo, 2025). In various political settings, memes involving humour have been at the forefront in influencing the people to participate in elections, referendums, and leadership discussions.

Memes were extensively applied in the U.S. presidential elections to mock candidates and strengthen partisan identities. Political memes are getting big during elections. Recent studies show that they use jokes and satire to turn politics into a show or a fight, more than a serious discussion about policies. Researchers say these memes are used to make fun of different sides, turning complicated election stories into simple, visual fights that people online get right away. A popular thing is to show politicians in boxing matches or brawls. This makes the election seem like a physical battle, which just makes “us versus them” thing even stronger. These memes were based on exaggeration and parody as they provoked specific emotions, including anger, amusement, or distrust, and were thus very easy to share (Safdar and Khan, 2025). It has been established that such character of humorous framing made the policy debate easier and pre framed personality-based choices, which was a cause of affective polarization (Billig, 2005).

Studies on Brexit also stress the importance of political communication in shaping public attitudes and voting intentions. Research on the Brexit referendum has demonstrated how affective reasoning, national symbolism and simplified slogans played an important role in mobilizing publics (Zeb et al., 2025). Academics argue that online discourse on Brexit reinforced binary framings and further exacerbated social divides, portraying immigration and sovereignty as cultural challenges (Khurshid et al., 2023). Such literature illustrates how political messaging in plebiscitarian politics has the potential to mobilize fear, appeals to identity, and misinformation so as to reconfigure democratic debate (Highfield and Leaver, 2016).

In India, political memes have been widely used to comment on election campaigns and major policy decisions. Memes have grown to be a popular means of sharing thoughts and making jokes when discussing Indian politics. Research shows that such pictures often focus on a leader’s looks to reflect the general view of the

people (Raza et al., 2025). Think about the memes which show Rahul Gandhi giving up while Narendra Modi is a superhero. By this means, humour is employed to ridicule those in higher authorities and influence public opinion. These pictures are not merely amusing. They allow people to participate in politics and express their opinions about leaders, abilities, and election winners (Khan et al., 2025). Some studies even say these memes acted like a kind of everyday political talk and helped people remember what happened (Raza et al., 2025).

The effectiveness of political memes is explained by the fact that they reach the heart and the mind. Shifman (2014) states that political events are familiarized and can be brought closer to the heart of a person through humour, satire, and visual exaggeration, increasing the likelihood of a person sharing this piece of information and internalizing the message. Political participation or debate can be provoked through the use of memes which may stimulate the evocation of emotions such as amusement, outrage or empathy. Indicatively, in the U.S., memes about scandals or mistakes by politicians were both humorous and also led to discussions and criticisms by people (Wodak, 2015). Memes with humour in India and Pakistan, use humour to attract followers, dissent, and partisan identity, can be useful in South Asia (van Dijk, 2018). These memes disseminate ideologically coloured stories that resonate with the feelings and political involvement of the citizens, through repetition and sharing. In brief, the memes are the thin slices of the complicated political concepts that take the shape of an emotional response, funny stories, and shareable content. They are highly viral and their virality has been known to reach wide audiences and humour increases attention and retention which demonstrates the combination of cognitive and emotional influence of political persuasion online.

2.3.2 Key Themes

Meme based political commentary puts emphasis on irony, sarcasm and parody. According to Morger (2022), memes are a type of such discursive participation so that users can criticize authority with creative tools without the use of official avenues. Irony emphasizes misunderstandings in leadership, policy failures or

scandals and presents critique in a way that is acceptable and even sharable by society. Meme satire has been employed in various places globally in order to oppose political elites. In the Brexit campaign and in the 2016 elections in the U.S. parody depicted leaders as being incompetent or out of touch (Benkler et al., 2018). South Asia is where parody and sarcasm enable citizens to express their dissatisfaction with politics and engage in civic discussions even in a tense setting (India and Pakistan) (van Dijk, 2018). Circulation of memes is also a mirror of mass opinion. The dissemination and involvement of political memes such as likes, shares, and reposts indicate the attitudes, acceptance, disapproval, or indifference of the society to a leader (Benkler et al., 2018).

Meme analytics in the U.S. election showed that Trump and Clinton were widely discussed in all other coverage than the media (Wodak, 2015). Memes in South Asia tend to become viral among a particular language or even culture, indicating the intensity of partisanship and grassroots action (van Dijk, 2018). Many political memes are created independently of the established media organizations, allowing for the creation of alternate discourses that question the established political discourse. As per Morger (2022), memes allow citizens to play an active role in the construction of the political discourse, whereas Shifman (2014) argues that users reinterpret and reframe political events, speeches, and scandals through participatory digital culture. In Pakistan, political memes commonly address issues such as corruption, nepotism, and media bias, offering counter-narratives that often spread more rapidly than conventional news. As a result, memes amplify public dissent, encourage alternative interpretations of political events, and contribute to the democratization of political communication in digital spaces.

2.3.3 Implications for Audience Perception

Memes are used to influence the perception of political leaders by the audience by framing them both visually and through words. According to Ghilzai (2025), framing focuses on some factors whilst deemphasizing others. Pakistan memes tend to use captions and ironic statements to focus on the perceived lapses of Imran Khan or corruption scandals of Nawaz Sharif to create a sense of ability and honesty. These messages are unforgettable and convincing through humour,

sarcasm, and exaggeration (Shifman, 2014; Morger, 2022). Ideological identities and in-group/out-group are also strengthened by memes. Knobel and Lankshear (2007a) refers to this as algorithmic populism in which social media upstream material that fits the beliefs held by the users forming echo chambers that reinforce partisan identity.

The communities of PTI, PML-N and PPP in Pakistan create memes which foster in-group unity, focus on the weaknesses of the opponent, and interpret political discourse through the use of language, culture, and symbolism. The same situation is observed in other locations, such as in the United States, India, and the Philippines, where memes are concentrated and work to construct political adversaries negatively (van Dijk, 2018).

By these means, memes impact the thought and feeling processes, affecting the political attitudes, strengthening the group identity, and bringing about polarization in the digital age.

2.4 Pakistani Context: Digital Politics and Meme Culture

Interest of scholars in the research of political memes increased greatly. The researchers started to realize the importance of these memes for political communication in the digital environment. Political memes stopped being amusing materials on the internet and began to be defined as multimodal texts. The topic of political memes has already been researched from different perspectives such as discourse analysis, semiotics, multimodality, political communication, and media studies, focusing on the importance of these memes in terms of political involvement and civic activism online (Morger, 2022).

In addition to this, political memes use various rhetoric and linguistic devices like satire, irony, metaphor, hyperbole, intertextuality, and humour to produce political meanings, subvert dominant discourses, and attract the audience (Anderau and Barbarrusa, 2024; Bennett and Livingston, 2018). However, a great number

of scholarly articles about political memes have little information about linguistic features of Pakistani political memes, which proves the need for such research.

2.4.1 Political Communication in Pakistan

In the last ten years, social media has become a major platform of digital activism and political participation in Pakistan. Social media such as *Facebook*, *Twitter* (*X*), and *Instagram* have turned into significant venues of discussion with ordinary citizens, especially young people, have access to sharing views, gather support, and criticize the establishment (Tafseer et al., 2025).

This is a reflection of the worldwide trend where people are able to communicate in a many-to-many atmosphere by social media bypassing the traditional media gatekeepers. It has been proposed that social media in Pakistan are not only concerning the passive consumption of content but also engagements. As an illustration, a study conducted by ResearchGate (2024) on Facebook memes of 2018-2023 revealed that women and men use visual and verbal memes to comment on corruption, military involvement, and political figures. Since the political culture in Pakistan is an intricate one (media repression, threat to reporters, surveillance over the internet), the meme culture is in many cases a safer medium of dissent. As it has been described by Khan (2024b) memes can be viewed as a subversive discourse, in which the young and the marginalized can bargain without actually challenging authority. Political involvement of memes in Pakistan is also intergenerational.

The youth in urban areas would especially engage humour and satire in memes to process political happenings, which leads to the expansion of a digital form of the public whereby it gets involved in institutions other than the official.

The presence of meme pages of such parties as PPP, PML-N, and PTI has become very influential. These archives put leaders, policies and controversies in context humorously, critically or favourably. The authors discussed 76 Facebook memes of top pages and discovered that the political figures of those parties are mentioned regularly (Tafseer et al., 2025).

Visual composition, emotional appeals, and framing help creators to tell incompetence, hypocrisy, or moral authority stories. The analysis of Facebook memes revealed some of the themes that were repeated like incompetent leader and personal attack especially to Imran Khan, Maryam Nawaz, and Bilawal Bhutto.

These meme pages serve as online opinion forums, with the audience not only consuming content but also creating content. They often exist as grassroots sentiment, created by users and not official parties, and echo chambers and counter publics. Memes do shape the popular consciousness even on an unofficial level, and lower-level politicians can sometimes be seen to react to or even promote such things, which is that there is no clear distinction between official and grassroots production.

2.4.2 Political Narratives of Pakistan's Major Political Parties

Political narratives are organized frameworks of ideologies and concepts through which political parties interpret events, policies, and ideologies to their audiences. The narratives are communicated using various means such as speeches, manifestoes, slogans, media campaigns and digital tools to influence public opinion and identity formation. The language used in politics has an essential role to play in the construction of the political narrative through the framing of issues, the assignment of blame, and the presentation of specific ideology ([Ghilzai, 2025](#)).

Among the major political parties in Pakistan, the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) stands for democracy, justice, and welfare, and hence, the famous slogan of this political party has been “Roti, Kapra aur Makana” ([Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz, 2024](#)). The focus of Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) is economic prosperity, good governance, and infrastructure ([Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf, 2024](#)).

On the other hand, PTI promotes institutional reform, accountability, corruption-free politics, and “Naya Pakistan ([Pal, 2018](#)). All these narratives of political parties have been conveyed through the party manifestos, party speeches, and online forums and these narratives often get reinterpreted by political memes. Therefore,

a thorough knowledge about these party narratives is essential to understand the linguistic aspects of political memes.

2.4.3 Studies in the Pakistani Context

The studies point to the contribution of social media to the political polarization in Pakistan and memes are central to it. [Gray et al. \(2009\)](#) examined Twitter data documentation in the period 2018-2022 and discovered that user interactions and echo chambers are based on ideological differences, supported by memes and retweets. The article by [Khan \(2024b\)](#) discusses memes produced in 2022-2024, whereby the authors to the memes mock political power, criticize it, and provide young people with a voice in a restricted media space. On the same note, [Tahir et al. \(2026\)](#) used the socio-cognitive theory developed by Van Dijk to evaluate the interpretation of Facebook memes by the youth, and they determined that memes contribute to the existence of ideological divisions, cognitive frames, and social identities as both a reflection and a force. Taken together, these studies highlight the importance of memes being the focus and not the margins of political communication, identity creation and polarization in Pakistan.

Political memes in Pakistan from a pragmatic perspective. Memes do not only entertain but also are used for sharing complex information through coded messages and cultural methods. Political memes can help in increasing political awareness and informal participation in politics on social media ([Anwar et al., 2024](#)). Comedy tends to be based on culturally charged phrases and word play [Jenkins \(2006\)](#) demonstrates how the combination of visual and textual elements can be used to provide subtle commentary on politics, and jokes can contain subversive elements. The combination of Urdu and English also represents the process of social interactions: English is able to ridicule the culture of Westernization of the elite, whereas the Roman Urdu or Urdu script is aimed at the grassroots level. The choice of language therefore takes part in the framing of authority, class and resistance.

Gendered and cultural interactions are manifested in political memes in Pakistan. The memes related to female leaders like Maryam Nawaz or Benazir Bhutto tend

to highlight femininity or family background or moral authority more frequently than the memes concerning male leaders ([Rastogi and Kashyap, 2019](#)). Meme content is also influenced by cultural factors that include: religion, territoriality, and status. [Pakistan Peoples Party \(2024\)](#) demonstrates that memes can be seen as multimodal texts that reveal various social and political realities. It can be stated that memes incorporate different modalities and are used for expressing certain meanings. In other words, memes can be viewed as a means of digital communication and even critique in modern society ([Noor & Arshad, 2024](#)). According to [Suleman and Saleem \(2024\)](#) memes strengthen tribalism and group identity in young people, targeting the attention of particular demographics and mirroring the social differences. These cultural and gendered factors prove that memes are not merely funny, but they are bargaining power, social. Conventions and the remembrance of the group. [Khan et al. \(2025\)](#) , carried out his study using multimodal critical discourse analysis approach; political memes in Pakistan employ discursive strategies like labelling, trivializing, and us-versus-them dichotomy. Such strategies lead to affective polarization since they create an emotional divide between the followers of different political actors.

Language used in Pakistani memes is characterized by the presence of sarcasm, irony, slang, and code-mixing. According to [Theocharis \(2015\)](#) , the use of code-mixing and an informal language style contributes to increased relatability of memes and at the same time reinforces their humour and resistance in political discourse. Likewise, [KhosraviNik \(2017\)](#) point out that pragmatic elements like implicature, indirect criticism, and humour in context make it possible to deliver political evaluation via memes.

These linguistic tools prove particularly efficient in terms of making complicated political matters easy to understand and perceive through the prism of memes about political figures.

There have been a number of studies on how the memes affect public perceptions of political leaders in Pakistan. According to [Sagala et al. \(2024\)](#), political memes have great effect on the cognitive, behavioural and social perception of the youth living in urban settings like Islamabad and Rawalpindi.

[Theocharis \(2015\)](#) also assert that Facebook political memes are involved in the construction of political discourse through the promotion of involvement and opinion formation regarding political parties and political leaders. The combined findings imply that memes act as unofficial but effective means of political socialization.

Moreover, [Knobel and Lankshear \(2007b\)](#) have analysed the contribution of political memes to the formation of political narratives in Pakistan using a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. Based on their research, memes have a substantial impact on public opinion and politics due to humour and emotions involved in them. Furthermore, it was found that different meme tactics are used by major political parties in Pakistan, whereas memes help in engaging the audience. At the same time [Khan et al. \(2025\)](#) argues that such resistance results in creating affective polarization where there is emotional division in political discourse.

Thus, we can see that the use of memes in such a way serves as the dual nature of political memes where they help in expressing politics and creating polarizations among different groups of people.

The analysed literature reveals that political memes in Pakistan have been extensively studied through the prism of practical approaches to discourses, discourse analysis and multimodality approaches. At the same time, it is possible to claim that there are not many research works which concentrate on how political leaders are depicted in memes via language constructions.

Thus, there is still room for linguistic and discourse analysis research on the problem in question.

2.5 Comparative Insights: Global vs. Pakistani Meme Cultures

Though memes have become a globally shared experience, the subject matter and the functions of memes are influenced by the cultural, social, and political

contexts in which they emerge. On the international stage, memes serve the purpose of entertainment, expression of opinion, and commentary on political and societal issues via humour and multimodal communication (Shoukat and Jokhiyo, 2025; Morger, 2022). In Pakistan, the meme culture has the same characteristics but differs in the way it employs numerous language varieties, switching between them and making cultural references as well as politically satirical content. Political memes from Pakistan often refer to the country's politics and public figures and reflect the social situation there (Anwar et al., 2024; Tafseer et al., 2025). Therefore, while globally used memes and memes in Pakistan perform the same communicative functions, there are certain linguistic and cultural peculiarities of the latter that deserve a separate study.

2.5.1 Differences in Meme Language, Humour Norms and Political Symbolism

International political memes are based on common internet terminologies, familiar humour and cultural icons that cut across the online community. They are also open-minded to present complicated ideological stances and also approachable and fun (Shifman, 2013). Memes in Western democracies have a tendency to mock political elites, policies, or campaigns in a manner that is both entertaining and compelling enough to engage in civic action and deal with the subject matter (Maly, 2019). Meme culture in Pakistan is based on these forms of the world but it incorporates them with local linguistic, religious, and political allusions. The memes often combine Urdu, Roman Urdu and English with visual metaphors related to the sociopolitical background of the country, such as an allusion to political dynasties, religion or historical events (Pakistan Peoples Party, 2024). Such a mix helps humour to have more meaning to the domestic viewers and makes political commentary more culturally and emotionally resonant. The standards of humour and the danger also vary. Memes in most contexts across the world are able to criticize institutions without fear of much reprisal. Critics of censorship, social backlash, or the law make creators in Pakistan use irony, coded language, and allusions to escape the censorship ban, the social backlash, and the ensuing

legal (Khan, 2024b). Gray et al. (2009) studies the workings of political memes as an ideology as well as humour during the 2025 conflict between Pakistan and India.

2.5.2 Impact of Literacy, Language Politics, and Censorship

Meme's production and understanding in Pakistan is largely informed by literacy and language politics. Many memes are a mix of Urdu, Roman Urdu and English, and, to interpret the humour and political satire, viewers have to be both linguistically and culturally literate (Anwar et al., 2024). The strategies of conveying the minor thoughts can be discovered in indirect speech, irony and intertextual references. Meme strategies are also added to by censorship and political sensitivity. Directly criticizing is a dangerous move, creators usually use the methods of satire, symbolism and coded humour to express the message without being caught (Khan, 2024b). The political ideas that are powerful but not confronted can be transmitted with the help of visual metaphors, historical references, and layered semiotics (Gray et al., 2009). Another impact of digital access and education on meme reach is also present. Complex humour and allusions to other texts are more likely to be received by the urban and literate population, and the rural or less literate audiences may respond less, which restricts the wide appeal of some meme formats (Pakistan Peoples Party, 2024; Khan, 2024b). Altogether, Pakistani memes are highly localized, whereas global memes are based on the common digital culture. They mix world humour and formulas with local languages, signs and political facts and thus become not only amusing, but also politically significant, as well as culturally relevant.

2.5.3 Absence of Critical Linguistic Perspective

Finally, not many studies have been conducted based on the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) or multimodal discourse analysis on Pakistani political memes. Majority of research is descriptive, in which it is not the power relations, ideology,

or linguistic strategies that are taken into consideration but rather content, circulation, or sociopolitical situation ([Pakistan Peoples Party, 2024](#); [Khan, 2024b](#)). The critical approach to linguistics can be used to establish how memes construct or challenge power, advance ideological frames, and construct images of leadership. The multimodal approach may separate the combination of images, descriptions, and cultural allusions into the realization of hidden criticism or political biases ([Gray et al., 2009](#)). Similarly, a syntax, Lexical innovation, and code-switching analysis would contribute to the insights into how language may be used to persuade, subvert, or comment socially ([Anwar et al., 2024](#)). These approaches are also informative on how citizens can negotiate power, identity, and political dialogue through humour and multimodal communication.

In conclusion, the above-discussed literature suggests that political memes have become an important aspect of digital political communication and have been widely studied concerning their connection to political participation, satire, and ideologically motivated discourse. It has also been researched how the linguistic and multimodal properties of memes can be seen in a political context. Still, there is a lack of academic works regarding the linguistic aspects of Pakistani political memes and the role of these memes in forming attitudes towards political leaders in Pakistan. Also, the use of the three-dimensional model of critical discourse analysis by Fairclough in relation to Pakistani political memes has not attracted enough scientific interest.

Chapter 3

Research Methodology

This chapter describes the research methodology employed in the study of linguistic analysis of the Pakistani political memes in shaping public opinion of political leaders. In order to ensure that the analysis was deep enough, the methodology included analysis of the memes on the basis of Norman Fairclough 's (1995) 3-Dimensional Model.

[Baqir et al. \(2023\)](#) argues that political memes cannot simply be seen as mere depictions of objective reality but should be perceived as discourses that aid in the construction of socio-political reality. In such a way, political meanings, identities, and ideologies represented in political memes are not seen as objective reality but rather come into being through the choices made in terms of language, symbols, and textual references in the digital environment. With the use of such an ontology, the study considered memes to be cultural symbols that influence the construction of perceptions of political figures and events in a constantly changing digital environment. Moreover, the data for the study was also gathered using a questionnaire that enabled the investigation of how social media users perceived the language use in political memes in Pakistan. In particular, the study looked into the participants' perception concerning language use in political memes, its influence on people's opinion and on the perception of political figures.

3.1 Research Design

A mixed method research design, which entails combining qualitative and quantitative approaches to research, was adopted in conducting this study to obtain a holistic perspective of the impact that memes have on the perceptions of politicians in Pakistan.

The application of both qualitative and quantitative research methods allowed for an examination of language features, and interpretation of memes, thus, enabling a deeper level of analysis.

In qualitative research, an emphasis was placed on the language of political memes. In particular, the linguistic analysis of political memes was based on the theoretical framework of Norman Fairclough's 3-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis.

Specifically, the use of language, humour, satire, metaphor, images and other techniques in the creation of political memes and the way they contribute to political meanings was explored. Moreover, discourses and sociopolitical practices associated with memes were taken into consideration.

Along with the qualitative discourse analysis of political memes, a quantitative methodology was applied to achieve greater comprehensiveness in analysing political memes. Data collected through a questionnaire was used to evaluate audience perception, interpretative behaviour, and audience reaction toward political memes.

By applying the quantitative analysis approach, the subjective data regarding audience perception and reactions was transformed into concrete and analysable facts. As part of ensuring the validity of the analysis, the proposed methodology incorporated both quantitative and qualitative components. Specifically, questionnaire results helped assessing the public response and audience perception toward memes, thus linking linguistic and visual strategies to concrete the data regarding public response.

3.2 Theoretical and Conceptual Frame work

This section presents the fundamental concepts for the formulation of an appropriate conceptual framework for the research.

3.2.1 Norman Fairclough's (1995) Three - Dimensional Model of Critical Discourse Analysis

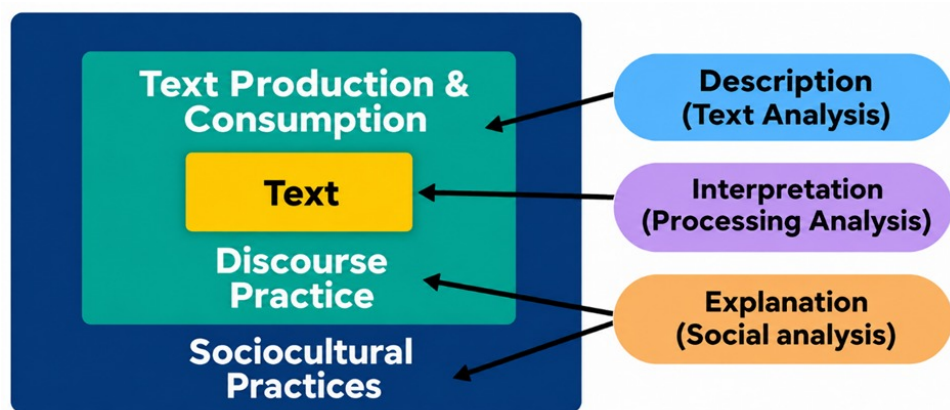


FIGURE 3.1: Three-Dimensional Model by Norman Fairclough (1995)

This research was based on the Three-Dimensional Model by [Baqir et al. \(2023\)](#), which served as the theoretical framework for studying the linguistic devices used in political memes in Pakistan. Based on the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach, this model provides an all-embracing methodology for the investigation of the interaction between language, discourse, and society. According to [Baqir et al. \(2023\)](#), language is not just a medium of communication but rather a social practice of constructing meanings, reproducing ideologies, and creating power relationships, which is why discourse is a reflection of social reality.

Political memes are another kind of digital political discourses where language is used tactically to convey political messages, criticise political leaders, and even change people's opinions regarding politics. As memes are quite often funny in their content, they still contain ideological messages that could affect people's perceptions of political figures and events. Therefore, Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model to analyse the use of linguistic strategies in Pakistani political memes.

According to Fairclough (1995), there are three interlinked aspects in which a discourse can be studied, namely, text, discursive practice, and social practice. This is helpful for understanding that discourse analysis goes well beyond the study of linguistic aspects of a particular text.

3.2.1.1 Text

The first dimension refers to the linguistic elements of a discourse. In other words, this dimension deals with the analysis of linguistic aspects that help to make meaning. According to Fairclough, linguistic choices cannot be random because people always make certain selections to reach their communication purposes and reflect certain ideological positions.

In the current research, text dimension was used for the identification and analysis of linguistic strategies employed in Pakistani political memes. Particular attention was given to metaphor, irony, sarcasm, exaggeration, evaluative lexicon, code-switching, and rhetorical question.

3.2.1.2 Discursive Practice

The second dimension, discursive practice, considers how the process of production, distribution, and interpretation of discourse takes place. The focus here is on the impact of creation, communication, and interpretation of the text within a certain context, besides the linguistic characteristics of the text. Discursive practice considers the connection between the producer of the text and the audience of this text.

This research employed the discursive practice dimension to understand how memes are created, transmitted, and interpreted via social media, and to study the application of various political discourses such as speeches, slogans, news, etc. for the purpose of meaning-making and understanding the audience's role in this process. Thus, its aim is to connect the linguistic aspects of political memes with their production, transmission, and interpretation to influence the perception of political leaders of Pakistan.

3.2.1.3 Sociocultural Practice

Social Practice dimension provides the link between discourse and its larger social, cultural and political context, whereby it demonstrates how the discourse is affected by existing ideologies, power relations, and social structures, and at the same time it contributes to their maintenance or change. Fairclough believes that discourse is intimately linked with society since it shapes and is shaped by social reality.

In the case of current research, the linguistic aspect of political memes was analysed through the prism of current political discussion in the country. Social Practice dimension helped in understanding how the linguistic features used in memes contribute to ideological representations, political criticism and perception of political figures by people.

The Three-Dimensional Model by Fairclough is ideal for this research due to the systematic way in which the relationship between language and political communication can be analysed through the framework. Through the model, it is possible to establish the linguistic strategies, interpret the communicative function of such strategies, and finally explain the ideology behind such strategies and their social significance. While some models only look at linguistic features, the current framework analyses language through its communicative and social dimensions.

In this study, the textual dimension was used to find out the linguistic strategies in Pakistani political memes, while the discursive practice dimension was used to interpret the way in which the strategies communicate political messages. Finally, the social practice dimension helped to understand how the messages are used to construct images of Pakistani political figures. The linguistic analysis findings are also backed up by the findings of the questionnaires.

3.3 Sampling and Sampling Techniques

The study employed purposive sampling to select the political memes for analysis. Purposive sampling is one of the non-probability sampling methods where

researchers purposefully choose the data that can help them achieve the research objective (Creswell and Creswell, 2018).

The political memes were chosen according to specific criteria to make sure that they were relevant to the research questions. Only the memes, that were relevant to the three major political parties and their leadership in Pakistan, had linguistic relevance to the studies and could be accessed through social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram were included in the study.

The present study considered the memes of three major political parties in Pakistan, i.e., the *Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP)*, *Pakistan Muslim League-N (PML-N)* *Pakistan Tehreek-e- Insaf, (PTI)*. These memes consist of language, humour, satire, and many other elements which have a significant impact on the perception of political leadership in Pakistan. The study covered political memes posted between January 2018 to 2024. This chosen period is the most significant for studying political memes of Pakistan due to the extensive increase in their production during this time period. The emergence of various social media websites such as Facebook, Twitter(X), Instagram, TikTok, and WhatsApp led to a rise in political content creation through memes. During these years, there was a development in political memes' language as it was becoming more imaginative, symbolic, satirical, and using humour, irony, intertextuality, and culturally recognizable language in order to talk about political events and figures.

To investigate the perception of the audience convenience sampling method was adopted for questionnaire administration. Respondents were chosen based on their accessibility and awareness of social media and political memes. Convenience sampling helped to get quick responses from respondents who were active social media users.

3.4 Data Collection

The data collection involved a strategic process aimed at ensuring the data was relevant and reliable to the study objectives. In terms of primary data collection, a questionnaire method was used, in which questions related to the linguistic aspects

of political memes, as well as audiences' perceptions of the use of political memes on social networking platforms, were asked. These included questions that covered elements such as word choice, use of humour/sarcasm, metaphors/symbols, visualization and exaggeration.

In terms of target populations, the respondents included undergraduate students of different BS programs. This is mainly because they spend much time on the internet browsing social networking sites where they get exposed to political messages and memes. In all, 104 data sets were gathered.

The questionnaire was administered using an online method in order to make it easy for the respondents to participate. Data obtained from each question was carefully compiled and analysed by converting it into frequencies and percentages and then used it to construct a set of merged bar charts.

Alongside the survey data, 15 political memes that fit the objectives of the research were obtained from the period 2018 to 2024. Political memes were collected using purposive sampling from Facebook and Instagram pages that were accessible to the public, such as Thugs of Pakistan, Pakistan Memes Masti, Memes Walay Baba, Pakistani memes Funny, Na-Maloom Afraad, and Sarcasmistan.

Furthermore, political memes were also collected from the Instagram page Pak-politics, memes of Pakistan, Opinion. Orbit that was publicly available on Instagram. Other memes were collected from personal social media networks. As memes on the Internet tend to be recreated and disseminated across various platforms, sometimes it was not possible to ascertain the original author or source of these memes. Thus, the current study considered the memes to be publicly available digital texts and analysed their linguistic and discursive features rather than their authorship.

3.5 Ethical Consideration

The study adhered to ethical guidelines, ensuring the validity of the research process. Memes used in the course of analysis were obtained from public social

media websites and utilized solely for educational purposes. There was no use of any confidential data or personal information in this regard. Neither creators nor distributors of political memes, under examination, were personally identified. The analysis focused strictly on linguistic features of the political memes without compromising their context.

Ethical practices were followed throughout the process of administering the survey. Participation in the study was strictly on a voluntary basis and all participants gave their informed consent before answering any questions. The objectives of the survey were communicated clearly to the participants and they were assured that no personal gain would be derived from the information collected.

In addition, all sources of information have been properly cited, and the rules of academic honesty and integrity have been strictly adhered in order to avoid plagiarism.

3.6 Research Tools and Procedure

In the current study, two research instruments were used to collect the data. First, political memes were used as the main source of qualitative data that was purposely collected from the publicly available pages on social media sites such as *Facebook, Instagram as well as publicly available websites and through personal social media circulation*. The memes functioned as the textual and visual evidence for the analysis.

Moreover, a well-structured questionnaire was employed for collecting quantitative information concerning the respondents' views about Pakistani political leaders and their opinion regarding the impact of political memes. This questionnaire comprised close-ended questions based on the five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. In particular, the survey tool was formulated with the aim of collecting relevant information concerning the participants' exposure to the political memes and their interpretation of the message conveyed through them and the degree of impact of such information on their perceptions of political leaders.

Chapter 4

Data Analysis

This part of the study presents an analysis and interpretation of the collected data to examine the linguistic features of political memes, along with their influence on audiences' perception of political leaders. A mixed method approach involving both quantitative data analysis using the audience responses as well as qualitative analysis of selected memes using the three-dimensional model by Fairclough was used.

Quantitative data from the questionnaire was analysed using descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages and presented through bar graphs. This allowed for a better understanding of how respondents perceive the linguistic characteristics of political memes.

Moreover, qualitative analysis of the political memes was done using Norman Fairclough's 3 D model. The focus of the analysis was on the textual features, the discursive practices that go with them, and the socio-cultural context in which they are produced and perceived. Triangulation of data from the questionnaire was done in order to have valid analysis and in relation to the research questions. The data analysis was separated into two key parts: the linguistic analysis of selected political memes and the analysis of questionnaire data.

4.1 Content Analysis of Political Memes

This part presents the linguistic analysis of 15 selected political memes in order to analyse how meaning is created and expressed through linguistic choices such as metaphor, irony, sarcasm, exaggeration, code switching. Political memes, which are representative examples of common themes in political discourse, were taken from social media platform such as *Facebook and Instagram publicly available websites, and through personal social media circulation*. Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model of Critical Discourse Analysis was used for the analysis at three distinct but connected levels – namely, textual level, level of discursive practice, and socio-cultural levels. Firstly, the textual level implies paying special attention to lexical choice and captions as well as slogans in the analysed memes. Secondly, the level of discursive practice shifts to find out how such political memes were created and consumed by different users. Thirdly, the socio-cultural level implies discussing ideological and political context surrounding such memes.

The following section presents the linguistic analysis of the selected Pakistani political memes. Each meme is analysed to identify the linguistic strategies to examine how these strategies contribute to the construction of political meanings and to shape the perceptions of Pakistani political leaders.

4.1.1 Meme 1



FIGURE 4.1: Meme 1

This meme shows a close-up face of Asif Ali Zardari, President of Pakistan and co-chairman of Pakistan People's Party (PPP), who is known by his shrewd political tactics in political discussions.

4.1.1.1 Textual Analysis

Text: "Agar Naya Pakistan ban gaya ho to purana wala baich doon?"

English Translation: "If the new Pakistan has been established, should I sell the old one?"

In this meme, a rhetorical question along with irony is being employed as a political satire on the popular slogan "Naya Pakistan" which became strongly associated with PTI and Imran Khan. The key contrast created through lexis is between "Naya" and "Purana", which form an antithesis in the sense that "new" refers to political reforms and change whereas "old" represents the conventional political structure which is linked with dynastic politics. Through a mere contrast between "new" and "old", the promise of political reform has been mocked in the meme.

The term "baich doon" ("Should I sell it?") is used as a business metaphor, in which Pakistan is seen as something that could be sold or bought. The use of this metaphor through sarcasm implies the way the country's politicians see it as their own property, thus supporting the existing discourses on corruption and elite politics.

Furthermore, the meme makes extensive use of irony, since the literal meaning of the meme is about getting rid of the old Pakistan in order to bring in the new one; however, the implied meaning refers to political slogans through pointing out the disparity between what politicians promise and what really happens. The use of the phrase "selling a whole country" is an example of hyperbole – an intentional exaggeration designed to heighten both the comedy and political critique contained within the meme.

The meme also creates its meaning through intertextuality, because the meme implies that its audience is familiar with the political slogan "Naya Pakistan" and

promises of change that it entails. Without the existing political knowledge, the majority of satirical message would not make sense at all.

4.1.1.2 Discursive Practices

The aspect related to discursive practice addresses the process involved in production, circulation and interpretation of the meme.

In this case, the political meme derives its origin from the Pakistani political digital culture whereby social media sites are used as a forum for making political commentary, critique, and ideological competition. The memes become popularized as a way of voicing dissatisfaction against the political class, government officials, and even the political system in place through satirical humour.

The intertextual nature of the meme is revealed by its reference to the “New Pakistan” slogan that has commonly been used in Pakistani political discourse to refer to promises of political and socio-economic changes.

The meaning of the meme is further defined by its interpretation by the audience. People who are dissatisfied with the existing political systems might see the meme as proof of how the ruling political elite still maintains control in spite of all the reforms.

Fans of the opposing political parties could interpret the meme as an instrument of political satire and ideology. Thus, the meme acquires the meaning of being an element of the broader political discourse conflict.

The meme also shows features characteristic of the culture of participation in the digital world, in which the citizens participate in politics through creating memes. The comedic nature of the meme helps increase its popularity.

4.1.1.3 Sociocultural Practices

The practice dimension refers to how the meme ties into sociopolitical and ideological elements of Pakistani society. The political leaders have been made into opportunists who are strategically flexible in their behaviour. They are shown

to be representatives of the same power elites who always had the upper hand. By using satire, the meme opposes political discourse which suggests any kind of transformation or reform.

On the ideological level, the meme depicts political cynicism within Pakistan. Political cynicism refers to scepticism towards political promises of electoral slogans which are often used in order to create illusions of change when in reality nothing much is happening structurally.

Additionally, the meme shows the way digital discourse works as a form of resistance. Increasingly, social media memes become alternative modes of communication where citizens question authority, point out inconsistencies, and engage in meaning-making processes on a political level.

In the case of the sociopolitical conditions prevailing in Pakistan, such memes help form public consciousness by affecting perceptions about political leaders and state propaganda.

Moreover, the meme is indicative of the way political satire becomes normalized in sociocultural conditions. It allows people to voice their discontent against the political establishment while reaffirming certain perceptions about leaders and governance in the process.

4.1.1.4 Public Perception Constructed Through the Meme

This meme makes people view Asif Ali Zardari as a clever entrepreneur rather than a credible political figure. Through the association of the terms “selling” and “Pakistan” with Zardari’s image, the meme plays on the former political figure’s history in the media as an expert at making deals and securing his interests, which was often referred to in public media circles as “Mr. 10%.” All in all, the meme makes people think of Zardari as a person who is only interested in using Pakistan to his own advantage, without caring about ideals or national changes.

4.1.2 Meme 2



لندن کے ڈاکٹر آخر کار اس نتیجے پر پہنچ گئے ہیں
کہ میاں صاحب دوائی کھانے سے نہیں بلکہ
ملک کھانے سے ہی ٹھیک ہوں گے 😊

FIGURE 4.2: Meme 2

In this meme Nawaz Sharif is wearing white clothes and a Sindhi cap. He seems exhilarated.

4.1.2.1 Textual Analysis

Text: "London ke doctor is nateeje par pohanchay hain ke Mian Sahib dawai khanay se nahin, balkay mulk khanay se hi theek hon ge."

English Translation:

"Doctors in London have concluded that Mian Sahib will not recover by taking medicine; rather, he will recover only by 'eating' (exploiting) the country."

The lexical items used in the meme range from the common Urdu words to some politically significant ones such as "London," "doctor," "dawai" (medicine), and "mulk" (country). These lexical items have an ideological connotation. The noun "London" has become a symbol of Nawaz Sharif's prolonged stay abroad for the purposes of receiving medical treatment and is often used in Pakistani political language to cast doubt on the legality of the same.

It is this contrast between “dawai” and “mulk” that forms the core linguistic technique used by the meme. Though the phrase “dawai khana” means taking medication, “mulk khana” refers to the corrupt use of national resources. Mulk khana” is metaphorical in nature instead of being literal. The term stands for corruption, political exploitation, and misuse of state resources. With the substitution of the term “medicine” for “country” in the meme, the idea that Nawaz Sharif has recovered suggests that Nawaz Sharif’s true source of recovery is political power and access to state resources rather than medical treatment.

Irony is the key figure of speech in the meme. It pretends to be a statement of a professional medical diagnosis but is in reality a political accusation. The usual remedy for getting cured, medicine, becomes ironic because the cure is political exploitation. Irony creates humour but at the same time makes the politician ridiculous. Sarcasm in this caption comes from the use of an exaggerated diagnosis made by doctors. Instead of directly calling Nawaz Sharif a corrupt politician, the meme implies that his “treatment” would be taking political power.

This meme is an indirect reference to a chain of events that have been occurring in the political context involving the medical care of Nawaz Sharif in London, his departure from Pakistan, his corrupt government, and ultimately his political rise. These allusions are subtle and need to be understood by the viewers through their political understanding.

The smiling picture of Nawaz Sharif reinforces the message conveyed through text. His healthy look contradicts the implied need for medical attention, hence providing visual proof of his satirized claims.

4.1.2.2 Discursive Practices

This meme is an example of participatory political communication on Pakistani social media. It uses an existing public photograph in combination with a made-up quote, thus turning the news photograph into a political satire. Production practices are characteristic of the practices that define meme culture on the Internet, in which people use text-image combinations to discuss current issues.

The discourse is Interdiscursive in nature, incorporating elements of medicine, politics, and humour. Through the appropriation of the discursive means of healthcare discourse ("London doctors have concluded"), the fictional criticism acquires the semblance of the factual truth. Interdiscursivity allows political criticism to be delivered through entertainment.

Interpretation by the audience is dependent on one's ideological stance. Those who dislike Nawaz Sharif can interpret the meme as an uncovering of corruption and political expediency; his supporters can disregard it as biased propaganda. Whatever one's political preferences may be, knowledge of current political events is required to understand the joke.

4.1.2.3 Sociocultural Practice

In the context of social practice, the meme becomes a representation of larger distrust towards Pakistan's political elite.

The meme utilizes an existing discourse according to which politicians are viewed in terms of corruption and self-interest. The term "mulk khana" echoes the ideology that political power is wielded for personal gain and not for the benefit of the citizenry.

Moreover, the meme shows how the nature of political participation has been changed by social media. Instead of formal political debate, the citizens utilize humour and metaphors to challenge the political leadership's decisions. Digital memes become spaces in which political authority is challenged by everyday language.

The meme is not only a funny picture but also a kind of ideological discourse. The politician, Nawaz Sharif, becomes a figure who needs to be treated using state resources and not by a doctor. Social media reproduces the idea of a politician's dependence on his own corrupt practices.

4.1.2.4 Public Perception Constructed Through the Meme

This meme characterizes Nawaz Sharif as an individual who is selfish and corrupt and who considers his own health less important than the attainment of political power. By utilizing humour, irony, and the idiom "mulk khana," the meme prompts people to doubt the authenticity of his medical condition.

4.1.3 Meme 3

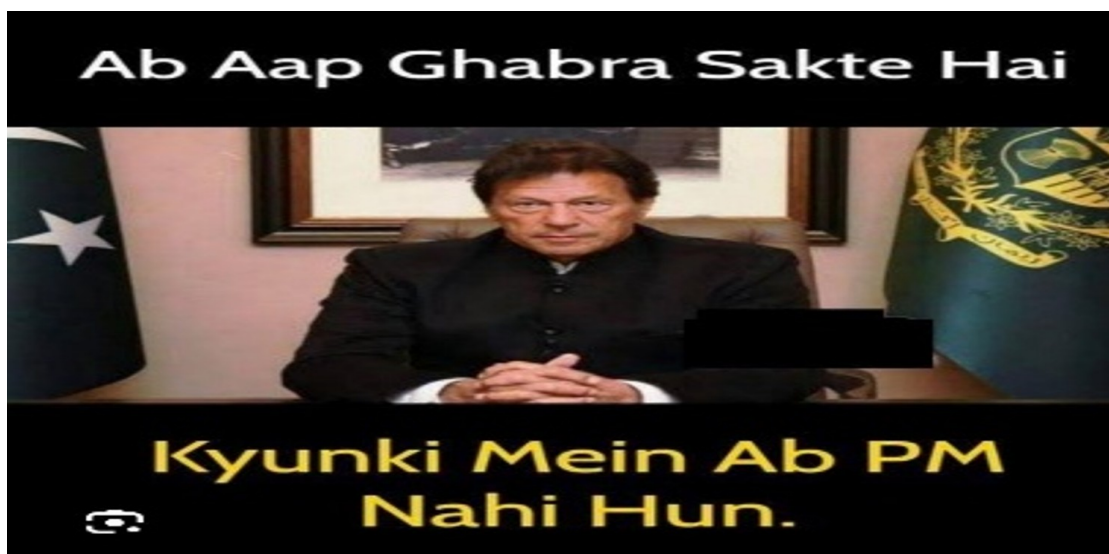


FIGURE 4.3: Meme 3

The political meme features former Prime Minister Imran Khan under the captions, "Ab Aap Ghabra Sakte Hai" and "Kyunki Mein Ab PM Nahi Hun." The meme can be studied for analysis on how language and imagery have been used to portray political leaders.

4.1.3.1 Textual Analysis

Text: "Ab Aap Ghabra Sakte Hai Kyunki Mein ab PM Nahin Hun"

The meme uses the caption "Ab Aap Ghabra Sakte Hai Kyunki Mein Ab PM Nahi Hun" ("Now you can panic because I am not the PM anymore"), which is placed over the official picture of Imran Khan sitting in front of the Pakistani flag with national emblem in the background.

The meme uses conversational Urdu along with the English abbreviation "PM," thus illustrating the code-switching phenomenon in the Pakistani social media language. The English used in the phrase is part of the official political language, while Urdu is used for the popular appeal of the message. Intertextuality is one of the important linguistic features of the meme, where the phrase "Ab Aap Ghabra Sakte Hai" is a parody of Imran Khan's slogan "Aap ne ghabrana nahi hai."

Irony is the primary form of rhetoric used in the meme as it contrasts the repeated assurance given by Imran Khan during his term in office with the implication that people will panic since he is out of office.

Sarcasm has been used to question his leadership in an indirect way. The use of "Mein" and "Aap" in the meme personalizes the message and creates interaction with the audience through the conversational approach.

The use of presupposition in the meme involves the assumption of the reader knowing the slogan of Imran Khan as well as knowing the fact that he is not the Prime Minister anymore. "Ab" has been repeatedly used in the meme and emphasizes the political changes in terms of leadership and office.

The imagery used in the meme has been that of Imran Khan and the national symbols, which show his authority, yet the humorous caption contradicts the imagery, creating multimodal irony. Parody has been used in the meme through the transformation of the political slogan.

4.1.3.2 Discursive Practices

On the discursive practices level, the meme is indicative of the process of production and consumption of political discourse via social media in Pakistan. It requires the knowledge of speeches delivered by Imran Khan in the past.

The significance of the meme is derived from its intertextual aspect because it refers to an existing political discourse that is well established in the minds of people. It is possible to argue that social media users will interpret the meme in accordance with their political inclinations. For instance, the supporters will use

it as evidence indicating that the nation has become instable since he was taken out of power, whereas his opponents can perceive it as a satire on his political rhetoric.

4.1.3.3 Sociocultural Practice

In terms of social practices, the meme illustrates the current trends of political instability and polarization that exist within Pakistan at present. It shows how memes are increasingly used by citizens in creating narratives about politics and their own perceptions of the leaders. Moreover, this specific meme depicts leadership as personality-dependent.

Accordingly, national stability depends on a specific political person. Thus, there is support for charismatic leadership in the case of Pakistan. Nevertheless, this meme is used to illustrate how humour and satire operate as tools for political commentary and ideological battles within digital culture. In doing so, political leaders are not only depicted as policy makers. They are also portrayed as cultural references whose words become part of the political discourse.

4.1.3.4 Public Perception Constructed Through the Meme

In terms of social practices, the meme illustrates the current trends of political instability and polarization that exist within Pakistan at present. It shows how memes are increasingly used by citizens in creating narratives about politics and their own perceptions of the leaders. Moreover, this specific meme depicts leadership as personality-dependent.

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4.1.4 Meme 4

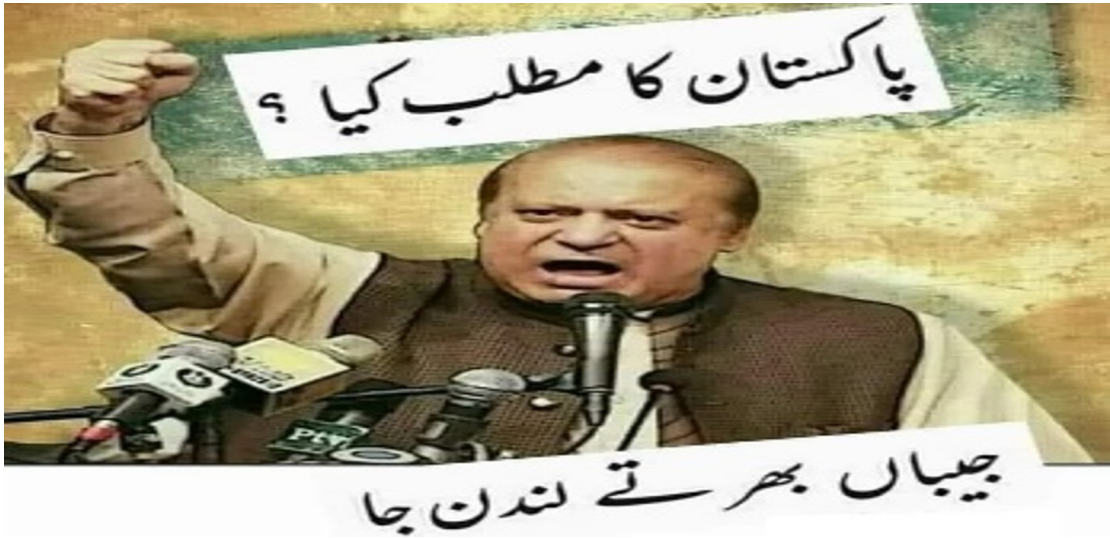


FIGURE 4.4: Meme 4

This meme shows Nawaz Sharief addressing at a press conference. He is shown with a strong assertive gesture.

4.1.4.1 Textual Analysis

Text: “Pakistan Ka Matlab Kya , Jaiban Bhar Te London Ja”

The image shows Nawaz Sharif speaking to the public, captioned as ”Pakistan Ka Matlab Kya? Jaiban Bhar Te London Ja” (”What is the meaning of Pakistan? Fill your pockets and then go to London”). The text is a parody of the famous slogan ”Pakistan Ka Matlab Kya? La Ilaha Illallah” where the traditional response to the slogan is replaced with a parody statement. Intertextuality has been used here to make the original slogan about the country serve a political purpose, thereby parodying being an important linguistic technique.

The meme uses conversational Urdu which is influenced by Punjabi along with the English proper noun ”London.” This is a case of code-switching typical for digital discourse in Pakistan. The use of lexis ”jaiban bhar” (fill your pockets) and ”London” is ideologically meaningful as the phrase ”jaiban bhar” is an idiom meaning

corruption, self-enrichment, and misappropriation of public funds whereas "London" refers to Nawaz Sharif's long stays in that city which symbolize his political exile.

The meme even makes use of irony and sarcasm through its implication that the real aim of political leadership is self-enrichment and then fleeing to London. It does not state an accusation directly but makes a satirical statement indirectly through the use of humour. The caption makes use of presupposition since it presupposes that the viewers know about Nawaz Sharif's charges of corruption, legal battles, and long stay in London.

The picture itself acts as a reinforcement of the written message. Nawaz Sharif is seen raising his fist to the audience in the picture and this is the symbol of confidence and patriotism among others. However, the satirical caption acts against the authority of the image thereby making both the picture and the caption multimodal irony.

4.1.4.2 Discursive Practice

Shifting focus to the discourse practice level, it can be seen how the meme is constructed by a complex layer of "intertextuality," meaning that texts always involve some degree of historical discourse in the way they are produced, consumed, and interpreted.

In particular, the manipulation with the religious nationalist slogan forces the consumer to go through a period of significant cognitive dissonance, actively shifting from one discourse of respect towards a spiritual-political figure to another discourse accusing the leader of being responsible for the system of corruption in the country.

Moreover, the inclusion of the word "London" serves as a powerful political symbol in today's media discourse of Pakistan. Given that the Sharif family is known for owning expensive property in the Aven field area of London, which was thoroughly investigated in the court proceedings and journalism, the city has been turned into a metaphor for capital flight and political exile from Pakistan.

4.1.4.3 Sociocultural Practice

From the perspective of social practices, this particular form of digital discourse is a product of, as well as an active contributor to, the overarching ideological conflicts, power relations, and socio-political polarities that exist within Pakistani society.

In this case, the artifact works as a vehicle for the hegemonic populism that casts traditional political families not as rightful representatives, but as exploitative rulers with colonialist tendencies who exploit the resources of the country while keeping themselves safe from physical and monetary harms overseas.

With its critical message delivered in a straightforward vernacular language of the common people rather than the refined English or the formal Urdu language, this image serves as a means to strip off the façade of a refined governance system.

It offers the linguistic basis for contesting the hegemonic ideology and for repossessing the state's narrative from an alleged parasitic ruling elite. The image does more than just entertain the viewers on the internet. It operates ideologically by further fuelling the popular cynicism that is rooted in a fundamental disillusionment about the meaning of the state itself.

4.1.4.4 Public Perception Constructed Through the Meme

When the image of Nawaz Sharif is paired with the term “London,” the meme immediately brings to mind the luxury residences owned by his family overseas as well as the numerous corruption cases.

This pairing of concepts allows one to identify Nawaz Sharif as an extremely corrupt and dishonest ruler who only puts on an act of loving his country in public and regards it solely as a source of income.

4.1.5 Meme 5

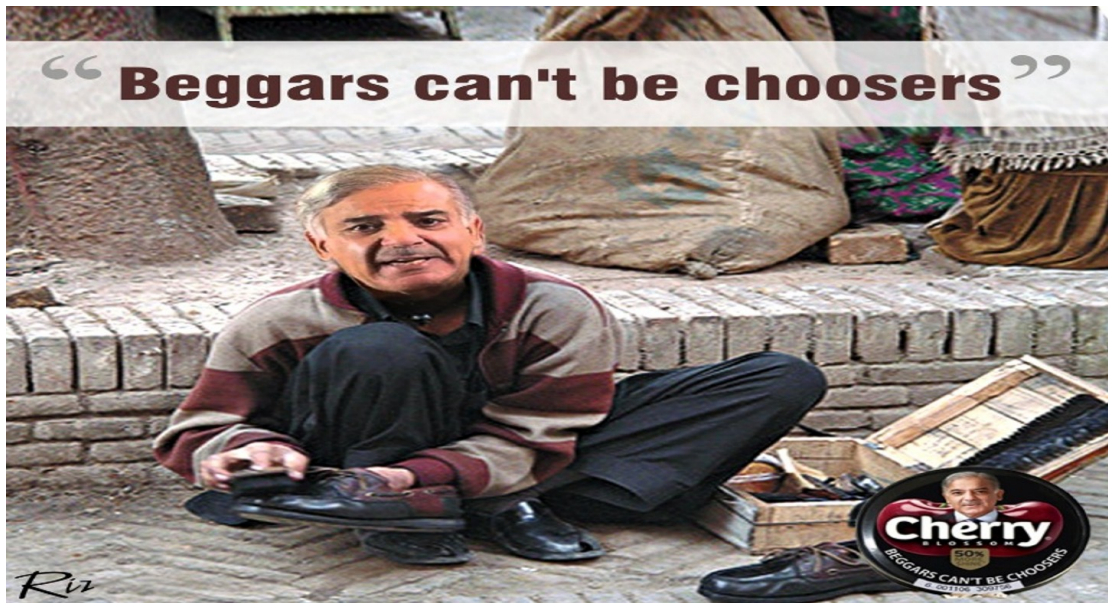


FIGURE 4.5: Meme 5

The meme shows Shehbaz Sharif with the text “Beggars can’t be choosers,” applying an old saying in order to make fun of his government’s economic strategy and dependency on foreign financial aid.¹

4.1.5.1 Textual Analysis

Text: “Beggars can’t be choosers”

The meme uses an English proverb “Beggars can’t be choosers,” and pairs it with an edited image of Shehbaz Sharif in the role of a beggar cleaning shoes on the streets. As such, the proverb, which is widely used to mean that those who are desperate have no choice of what they will receive, is being used to make fun of the economic policies of the Pakistani government and the need for help from abroad.

Metaphor is one of the linguistic techniques present in the meme. Specifically, the term “beggar” does not have to be taken literally but symbolizes Pakistan’s dependence on loans and the help of international bodies such as the IMF. In this sense, Shehbaz Sharif has no financial and political independence, and his country needs external help rather of governing itself financially.

Irony is another device used in the meme. The representation of the prime minister as a beggar rather than someone associated with authority, dignity, and sovereignty is a clear contradiction.

Such irony lies in the fact that even though the person occupies the most significant executive post in the country, he is still shown as being weak and dependent on others financially.

Intertextuality is another technique used in the proverb. It refers to using cultural knowledge to achieve a certain purpose. In this case, the political message is delivered with the help of the well-known English idiom. This makes it easier to convey the complicated political idea in just four words. Thus, the existing cultural expression was reused to create satire.

The linguistic choices made are quite elementary but at the same time evaluative. The use of such concepts as "beggar" and "chooser" implies opposite meanings. The first word is highly negative as it indicates helplessness, poverty, and dependence, whereas the second one gives the notion of the right to choose something freely. When saying "Beggars can't be choosers," the text deprives the government of its rights and agency.

4.1.5.2 Discursive Practice

The meme is created by social media users by combining the well-known English proverb with an edited image of Shehbaz Sharif in order to send out a political criticism message in a witty manner.

The application of the well-known proverb enables immediate identification of the meaning of the message, and complex economic matters can be conveyed through an easily understandable message.

The meme is distributed widely on internet and is interpreted by users with different political views. The discourse of the meme is based on the audience's knowledge of Pakistan's economic crisis, the IMF negotiations, and foreign loan issues.

4.1.5.3 Sociocultural Practice

The meme is an embodiment of the socio-economic and political reality of Pakistan with regard to the economic crisis, the rising level of inflation and the country's reliance on financial institutions from abroad such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

It is also based on the general dissatisfaction with rising prices, foreign debts and borrowing from the government that has lately come to the forefront of political debate.

The use of the meme as a means for expressing political views and criticizing the leaders of the country is also linked to the practice of digital political participation, where internet users rely on humor, satire and intertextuality for making political statements.

Therefore, the meme contributes to the formation of an ideology that the need for external financial help of the government is an indicator of poor leadership and inadequate economic governance.

4.1.5.4 Public Perception Constructed Through the Meme

The meme creates the image of Shehbaz Sharif as a leader whose economy is weak and politically dependent, lacking the power to make autonomous decisions.

It does so by merging the popular saying of "Beggars can't be choosers" with the humiliating visual representation of his leadership as a beggar that is unable to defend Pakistan's economic independence from foreign financial institutions.

The humorous way in which the criticism has been made, using the saying mentioned above, makes it both memorable and convincing for the audience to associate the economic problems of the country with bad leadership.

4.1.6 Meme 6

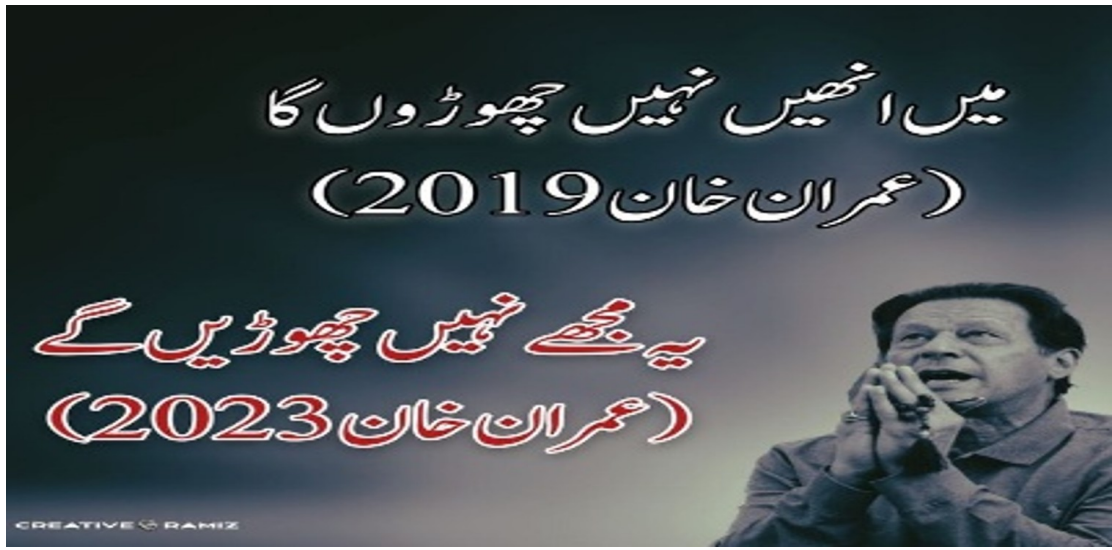


FIGURE 4.6: Meme 6

This image is an indication of the significant change in political rhetoric of ex-Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan. It indicates the significant change in political rhetoric of ex-Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan. It shows the contrast between two famous quotes attributed to Mr. Imran Khan, who has become a very popular politician in Pakistan.

4.1.6.1 Textual Analysis

Text: “Main Inhain Naheen Chorun Ga, Yeh Mujhe Naheen Chorain Ge”

The meme draws a comparison between two quotes that have been attributed to Imran Khan at different political times: "یہ مجھے نہیں چھوڑیں گے" (I will not spare them) and "میں انہیں نہیں چھوڑوں گا" (They will not spare me). The arrangement of the two contrasting quotes in the meme is an attempt to present a story of political change from a period when he was confident to one when he felt vulnerable.

The meme makes use of contrast in which the positions of the subject and the object in the two clauses are reversed, such that "I will not spare them" is changed to "They will not spare me." This reversal creates irony in which a political leader who once had enough power to demonstrate authority has been transformed into

a person who is afraid of political adversaries. The use of presupposition can be seen in this text since the meme is based on the assumption that the audience knows the political circumstances of Imran Khan following his ouster from power. Framing is used in this meme in presenting only these two statements in order to portray the decline of political power.

4.1.6.2 Discursive Practice

Regarding the discursive practice dimension of the meme, it shows the way in which the politics discourse is shaped, distributed, and understood in digital media. In this context, it appears that the meme would be created by opponents of Imran Khan or even critics of his previous political discourse. Through a comparison of his statements made at different times, the meme makes people think that there is something ironic about what takes place in politics.

Through social media sites like Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, and Twitter/X, such memes are easily disseminated. The meme requires a shared political knowledge on the part of its audience since people will have to know political events in Pakistan between 2019 and 2023. In terms of audience interpretation, it is possible that his political supporters may take it as victimization in politics whereas political opponents may consider it to be hypocrisy.

4.1.6.3 Sociocultural Practice

At the social practice level, the meme reflects conflicts and political instability in the context of the politics of Pakistan. In the first place, the meme creates the idea that the political figures of Pakistan are characterized by the changeability of their positions, from power to vulnerability due to the political alliances and institutional relations. Secondly, the meme contributes to the creation of the perception that the power in the country is temporary. At the ideological level, the meme criticizes the statements of political leaders and reveals a contradiction between them and actual realities. The main feature of the meme is that it forms the image of Imran Khan as a politician who lost his positions in terms of political

power. Besides, at this level, the meme is also determined by the frustrations in society about the cyclicity of politics in Pakistan.

4.1.6.4 Public Perception Constructed Through the Meme

This meme contributes in the formation of Imran Khan as a political personality, who has changed over time, with regard to the political power of the leader. The meme in 2019 represents Imran Khan as an assertive, powerful, and authoritative person. His assertive language can be considered as dominance over other political leaders.

In contrast, in the second part, Imran Khan appears to be a weak politician who faces problems, being a target for various political attacks. This combination of two statements of the same person helps in understanding his transformation in politics. First, it is necessary to note that the meme plays a role in political awareness by using ironical language. The transition of Imran Khan from an assertive and influential politician into a helpless person can help to increase sympathy towards him among his followers. While the critics may view it as proof of failed leadership or political hypocrisy.

4.1.7 Meme 7



FIGURE 4.7: Meme 7

The meme shows Shehbaz Sharif with a trophy, accompanied by the caption, “کرپشن کا ورلڈ کپ ہمیشہ ہمارے خاندان کے پاس ہی رہے گا۔“ “Corruption World Cup will always be with our family”. This satire is made through the use of humour, irony, and metaphors on the corruption charges that have been brought against the Sharif family.

4.1.7.1 Textual Analysis

Text: “کرپشن کا ورلڈ کپ ہمیشہ ہمارے خاندان کے پاس ہی رہے گا۔“

Translation

Corruption World Cup will always be with our family

This meme contains an edited picture of Shehbaz Sharif who is holding a trophy similar to the ICC Cricket World Cup Trophy along with the following caption written below, “کرپشن کا ورلڈ کپ ہمیشہ ہمارے خاندان کے پاس ہی رہے گا۔“ (“The Corruption World Cup will always remain with our family”). Metaphor, irony, hyperbole, and presupposition are some of the rhetorical devices used in this political statement.

First of all, a metaphorical use of “Corruption World Cup” plays a central role here. While the ICC Cricket World Cup is a prestigious award for those teams that demonstrate exceptional skills in the game, in this case, the World Cup Trophy represents political corruption. The use of a metaphor means that the Sharif family members are considered to be winners of the corrupted competition.

Another device is the word “ہمیشہ” (always), which is an example of hyperbole. This absoluteness implies that this particular family is always associated with corruption.

Irony too is another technique used in the meme. Winning the world cup usually becomes a reason of pride and celebration. On the contrary, this meme uses this negative aspect and makes fun of winning by showing corruption as the event worth celebrating in this case. In doing so, the meme makes fun of the political family.

Presupposition is another language-based element of the meme. The meme makes certain assumptions that people accept the fact that Sharif family was corrupt without presenting any argument or giving proof for their assumptions.

By using the inclusive possession term "ہمارے خاندان" meaning "our family", the meme makes the accusation more personal. Corruption is shown as something hereditary and not just something done by individuals. The lexical choice used in the meme is very simple and emotional.

4.1.7.2 Discursive Practice

This meme comes from the digital political culture of Pakistan, where people use humour and satire in order to make comments on political matters. The creation of this meme relies on the widespread public narratives connected with the allegations of corruption against the Sharif family that are associated with the Panama Papers scandal, accountability cases, and media discussions.

The use of imagery in combination with short textual messages allows for a fast spread of the meme on various platforms like Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and X. Humour enhances the meme's ability to be easily spread and, at the same time, helps to emphasize political narratives within the online community. Interpretation of this meme is based on one's knowledge of political situation in Pakistan and allegations of corruption.

Another feature of this meme is its intertextuality since it contains two different types of discourses that are represented in globalized symbols of the Cricket World Cup.

4.1.7.3 Sociocultural Practice

At the social level, the meme symbolizes ideological conflict regarding governance, accountability, and legitimacy in Pakistani politics. The meme reflects how corruption is framed in the public discourse as one of the major characteristics of dynastic politics and political elites in the country.

Through framing corruption as something inherited from generation to generation, the meme supports the ideology according to which political power in Pakistan belongs to influential families. The meme might be seen as an ideological tool that increases the public mistrust towards the political elite and, at the same time, legitimizes the anti-corruption narratives of other political parties.

This meme is an example of how humour works as an ideological persuasive technique. Not using any arguments based on facts, the meme turns a complicated political issue into a visual and easy-to-understand joke. Through this process, the meme forms public opinions regarding Sharif family as corrupt.

4.1.7.4 Public Perception Constructed Through the Meme

The meme creates a public image of the Sharif family as corrupt and dynastic for the future. The meme shows Shehbaz Sharif holding the imaginary “Corruption World Cup” and this shows that the corruption is an ongoing process and it becomes part of the tradition of the family. Through humour and satire, the negative stereotype has been further strengthened by the audience.

4.1.8 Meme 8

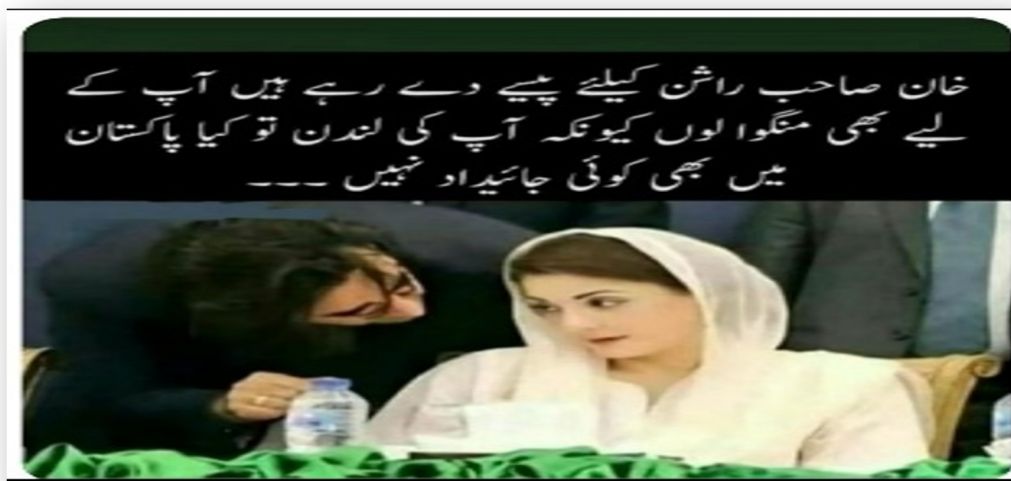


FIGURE 4.8: Meme 8

This meme shows Mariam Nawaz, a political female leader in a public event. There is another well-known political leader, Bilawal Bhutto leaning to talk to her privately.

4.1.8.1 Textual Analysis

Text: Khan Sahib Rahan Key Lye Paise de Raha Hain AAP ke Lye Bhi Mangwa Lun Kiyunk Aap ki London to Kya Pakistan main Bhi Koi Jaidad Naheen He

At the textual level, the statement is built on sarcasm, intertextual political rivalry, and exaggerated financial comparison. The language is informal Urdu, typical of meme discourse, which immediately reduces institutional seriousness and replaces it with conversational mockery.

One of the main elements is sarcasm and irony, which is achieved through the juxtaposition of respectful salutation "Khan sahib" with the insulting and mocking content. Hence, sarcasm and irony create tension between politeness of the salutation and ridiculing and insulting nature of what is said. Hyperbole is another important element of the statement since it involves the usage of exaggerated descriptions, for example, references to both extreme wealth and poverty. In particular, when one says that a political figure may own nothing, neither in Pakistan, nor in other countries, such statements are not meant as facts but are an emotional exaggeration to strengthen the evaluative aspect of the text.

4.1.8.2 Discursive Practice

This kind of discourse is very common in Asian meme politics. People like Bilawal Bhutto and Maryam Nawaz are often made fun of in a shareable way. These jokes are shared a lot on Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp and Instagram. On these platforms people usually talk about politics in an emotional way. They want to get a reaction from others and be shared quickly.

For someone to understand this joke they need to know a lot about politics. They have to know that Bilawal Bhutto is a leader of the PPP and Maryam Nawaz is a deal in the PML-N. They also have to be aware of what people are talking about

in public like how some families have too much power and money. If people do not know these things the joke will not be as funny.

How people understand this joke depends on what they believe in. People who do not like the government might think it is a way to point out the problems with politics and how some people have too much money. People who like Bilawal Bhutto or Maryam Nawaz might think it is a mean joke or just propaganda. This shows that jokes, about politics can be understood in ways depending on what people believe in and who they support.

4.1.8.3 Sociocultural Practice

On the social level, the meme represents a deeper ideological structure in Pakistani political discourse related to dynastic politics, economic inequality, and elite legitimacy. The meme rests on commonly held beliefs regarding political power being centralized among the elites who belong to certain influential families, determining public assessments and discussion of leaders.

The mention of "London" and "jaidad" refers to the social narrative wherein political elites are seen as keeping their wealth and property abroad while simultaneously positioning themselves as spokesmen for common people. Such an ideological structure is based on populism, as political legitimacy is assessed not by the effectiveness of actions or results but rather personal sincerity, economic clarity, and social roots.

Satire plays an important role in creating the social function of the meme. This meme provides a legitimate platform to discuss controversial political topics without engaging in open conflict. In other words, the joke allows making statements on political topics but does not create confrontations because of its nature. Thus, the use of irony and satire helps maintain political discourse but avoid direct discussions. Such an approach can be seen in line with Fairclough's perspective on discourse as the means of reflecting and reproducing social relations.

4.1.8.4 Public Perception Constructed Through the Meme

In this narrative, the use of sarcasm to make the politician a symbol of aristocratic politics and financial strength shows that the image is created more based on the social class she belongs to rather than being a politician per se. The use of humour leads people to think about the politician as one of those belonging to the dynasty of politicians and brought up with all the luxuries available to the rich and therefore far from being one of the common citizens. As a result, the use of sarcasm makes the person viewing the meme think that Maryam Nawaz is someone who is financially strong, which shows the political status she possesses is just an inherited property rather than her good political conduct.

4.1.9 Meme 9



FIGURE 4.9: Meme 9

This particular meme contains an image where Maryam Nawaz and Nawaz Sharif embrace each other. This meme makes light of certain allegations made against political figures of fleeing from the nation amid political and legal turmoil.

4.1.9.1 Textual Analysis

Text: “Chalte Hain Dabe Paon Koi Jaag Na Jaye Airport Pe Nazar Rakhna Koi Bhaag Na Jaye” (Let’s move quietly so no one wakes up. Keep an eye on the

airport so no one runs away.)

The meme contains an image of Maryam Nawaz hugging Nawaz Sharif along with the following caption: چلتے ہیں دبے پاؤں کہ کوئی جاگ نہ جائے ایئرپورٹ پر نظر رکھنا کوئی بھاگ نہ جائے۔ The former part of the caption is derived from a poetic phrase with the meaning "we walk quietly so that no one wakes up," whereas the latter part, "keep an eye on the airport so that no one runs away," provides a political twist to it. The combination of poetry with a sarcastic comment about politics has turned an everyday expression into a political criticism of the past events in the life of Nawaz Sharif when he used to leave the country due to legal and political pressures.

Intertextuality is the main device used in the given meme in which a poetic text is borrowed and then re-contextualized in the form of a sarcastic political statement. The alteration of the text turns it into a humorous expression where the romantic/reflective sense of the poem becomes a political message. Maryam Nawaz embracing her brother Nawaz Sharif creates an image of family support and unity between members. Nawaz Sharif is also seen in the centre of the picture attracting the audience's attention towards him as the main character in the political situation.

Yet another distinct characteristic of the language used in the meme is sarcasm, which is used in the phrase ایئرپورٹ پر نظر رکھنا ("Keep an eye on the airport"), it does not imply any kind of threat or warning, but rather refers to sarcasm concerning the possibility of Nawaz Sharif fleeing Pakistan yet again. The humour is generated depending on whether the viewers understand the implicit meaning of the comment. The irony is present in the meme in the form of juxtaposition of the friendly image in the picture of people embracing each other and being reunited with the betrayal implied by the comment and the possible running away of the person.

Besides, the use of symbols and metaphors can be observed in the meme. In particular, the airport is a metaphor for the attempt of the politician to escape from the problems and become an exile. Moreover, the comment کوئی بھاگ نہ جائے can be regarded as a symbol of political escape as well.

4.1.9.2 Discursive Practice

This meme came from social media, where users frequently turn political events into funny content. Creators tap into public knowledge of the Sharifs' past and legal issues.

The humour relies on people remembering specific events, such as when Nawaz Sharif headed to London. One gets the joke if one is familiar with that storyline, otherwise, it's pretty confusing.

Depending on whom you ask, the meme carries different meanings. Opponents claim it shows bias and avoids accountability, while supporters say it's just fair jibes at their rivals. So, your take on it depends on which team you back.

4.1.9.3 Sociocultural Practice

The meme shows that important politicians think they are above the law because of who they are. This means they think they can get out of trouble just because they are important. That is pretty scary.

Then there is the part about the airport in the meme. It suggests that people think rich and powerful people get treatment when they travel. This fits with the idea that regular people are Treated differently than rich and powerful families.

Also, the meme shows Maryam Nawaz and Nawaz Sharif together which makes it clear that a lot of people think politics is a family business. This brings up the question of whether leaders chosen because they are good, at their job or just because of their family.

4.1.9.4 Public Perception Constructed Through the Meme

The meme shows Nawaz Sharif as a rich politician tied up with stories of exile and special treatment. It also casts Maryam Nawaz as part of his well-known political clan. Using humour, the meme strengthens doubt about top politicians, pushing folks to see political clout as just about privilege and being answerable for actions.

4.1.10 Meme 10



FIGURE 4.10: Meme 10

The meme in this image includes various pictures showing the Chairman of the PPP in funny expressions, where he looks extremely joyful and laughing in a poster called "FUNNY MOMENTS". The main phrase in Urdu language, written on the black background says,

"ہر بات کو منفی نہیں لینا، چاہیے بجلی اگر بار بار جارہی ہے تو بار بار آ بھی رہی ہے۔ بلاول زرداری"

("One should not take everything negatively. If the electricity is going out repeatedly, then it is also coming back repeatedly. – Bilawal Zardari"). This quote is very sarcastic and funny, and its author is ridiculing himself with a popular statement which made no sense at all concerning the infrastructure issues.

4.1.10.1 Textual Analysis

Text: "ہر بات کو منفی نہیں لینا، چاہیے بجلی اگر بار بار جارہی ہے تو بار بار آ بھی رہی ہے۔ بلاول زرداری"

(One should not take everything negatively. If the electricity is going out repeatedly, then it is also coming back repeatedly. - Bilawal Zardari).

In the meme, several pictures of Bilawal Bhutto Zardari smiling in an open-air meeting have been used alongside the caption,

"ہر بات کو منفی نہیں لینا، چاہیے بجلی اگر بار بار جا رہی ہے تو بار بار آ بھی رہی ہے۔ بلاول زرداری"

("One should not take everything negatively. If electricity keeps going, it also keeps coming back.") The statement trivializes the problem of power cuts in a comical way.

The use of smiling expressions of Bilawal along with the caption ridicules the politicians who try to understate the sufferings of the common masses rather than providing any solution.

The irony and sarcasm have been used in the meme. The irony lies in the fact that the statement looks like optimism on the face of it but it is actually criticizing the government's failure in addressing the electricity shortage. Moreover, the idea of taking the power outages in a positive light is deliberately exaggerated for humour in order to contrast the seriousness of the problem with its comical explanation.

One more element of linguistics in the image is the concept of presupposition, as the text makes certain assumptions that many power cuts are typical and that people are unhappy about this situation. Such presuppositions can be regarded as a form of common knowledge and enable readers to easily grasp the idea of satire.

Framing is another strategy applied in the meme, as the reaction of the government is seen as indifferent and distant to the problems of ordinary people, and viewers are supposed to find political leaders inefficient and unfeeling.

The meme text is written using simple colloquial language that is used in Urdu. One more strategy used by the author is the repetition of "بار بار" ("again and again"), which highlights the repetitive character of blackouts. Finally, the text is structured according to the principle of cause and effect and presents a faulty line of reasoning that adds irony to the message.

4.1.10.2 Discursive Practice

The meme production, which is an example of the discursive practice approach, takes place in Pakistan's vibrant digital political subculture, created by an entertainment/satire account called "fasadi_phupho" (as evident from the header of the image). Decoding the meme by the audience is significantly dependent on intertextuality and their knowledge about how this individual has made political speeches before, especially the highly popularized meme able quote of Bilawal Bhutto Zardari in a situation of flood calamity: "Jab baarish aata hai to paani aata hai" ("When it rains, water comes").

By applying the very same rhetorical scheme but replacing the nouns in the quote with the electricity issue mentioned in the text ("jab current aata hai to current chalta hai"), the meme evokes previous humour and critique towards it. By placing a tag "FUNNY MOMENTS" as part of this meme, the audience is guided in consuming political speech not in its original meaning but as pop culture entertainment.

4.1.10.3 Sociocultural Practice

At the level of social practice, the meme addresses deeper socio-political tensions and disappointments in Pakistan, including the issues of energy shortages (load shedding) and inflation. Using an example of politicians' optimism regarding these matters, the meme mocks the incompetence and insensitivity associated with these politicians' families.

It serves as a means of coping with the actual anger toward inadequate infrastructure and turns it into a form of mockery and humour. In this way, it strengthens the political identity that is created among youth as a reaction to political elites and their authority. It makes the politician appear less like a statesman and more like a clown, thus altering the political relationship between the people and their leaders through the use of new media platforms.

4.1.10.4 Public Perception Constructed Through the Meme

The meme portrays Bilawal Bhutto Zardari in an extremely negative light through the use of irony, tautology, and by using visuals in a clever manner. The leader is depicted as someone lacking intellect, being incapable of making sound reasoning, and ignoring the serious problems of governance. This kind of depiction reinforces the image of hereditary leaders being born in rich families and thus unable to solve difficult problems faced by their countries. Therefore, this particular meme has both temporary and constant effects on the image of the politician.

4.1.11 Meme 11

Law graduate pic with the man who has broken all the laws.



FIGURE 4.11: Meme 11

The meme helps to create an image of the political leader. Through the use of humour and irony along with the use of intertextuality, the meme creates a unique image of the political leader. This paper looks at the textual elements in the meme, discourse used in the creation of the meme, and the social and ideological context in which people perceive political leaders.

4.1.11.1 Textual Analysis

Text: “Law Graduate Pic with the man who has broken all the laws”

At the level of the text, the meme creates the meaning by contrasting two very similar identities, namely, that of a young law graduate and of the ex-Prime Minister of Pakistan, Nawaz Sharif, whose grandson this person depicted on the meme is. This kinship relationship is yet another element contributing to the creation of meanings, as the title of the meme not only contrasts professional identity and political identity but also personal connection and political competence.

Firstly, the term “law graduate” evokes certain positive associations regarding education, legality, lawfulness, and professionalism. The young man presented here can be identified as a person connected with the sphere of law. In turn, the phrase “the man who has broken all the laws” is quite evaluative and has a negative connotation. It suggests that Nawaz Sharif is guilty of breaking all the laws. Moreover, the phrase uses hyperbole as an instrument of emphasizing the statement by using such term as “all the laws.”

However, the irony grows further in terms of the familial connection. The picture portrays the grandson, the symbol of legality, next to his grandfather who appears to be described as the law-breaker linguistically. Here, is the idea of the contrast of reputation, where one can be asked to compare the lawfulness of the person’s life and actions of his relative who allegedly breaks the law. The irony is evident through the unexpected juxtaposition of two relatives with such different reputations.

4.1.11.2 Discursive Practice

In terms of discursive practices, the meme relies on political narratives and debates concerning legal disputes involving Nawaz Sharif, his disqualification from the position he holds, and his supposed conflict with the judicial process, notably the well-known event of his invasion of the court. The understanding of the meaning of the meme is based on the viewers’ prior knowledge about the events and the context of the discourse regarding Nawaz Sharif’s alleged involvement in corruption and law-breaking.

Using humour, irony, and satire, the meme propagates an already established narrative about Nawaz Sharif on social media platforms.

The use of humour makes it easier for viewers to grasp, disseminate, and circulate a rather intricate set of political and legal issues in just a few images and words. Thus, the meme serves both as entertainment and a means of reproducing an interpretation of Nawaz Sharif's political identity.

4.1.11.3 Sociocultural Practice

From the perspective of social practice, the meme itself represents the larger struggle of ideologies and polarized politics in the country of Pakistan. It adds to the construction of Nawaz Sharif as a dishonest and undisciplined politician, thus affecting the image of him as a leader.

Through repeated representation of the political personalities through humour and satire, the meme influences the opinion of the viewers and reinforces their perception about the political figure.

Therefore, it can be seen from the meme that through the development of digital culture and participatory media, citizens are provided with an opportunity to challenge, criticize, and re-imagine the image of political leaders.

4.1.11.4 Public Perception Constructed Through the Meme

The meme will undoubtedly generate a negative image about Nawaz Sharif because it will paint the picture of a leader who does not follow the law and constitutions. Using satire, the meme will reinforce all the allegations made against Nawaz Sharif.

This will lead to the public seeing leader as unreliable and hence generating political bias toward him. Conversely, his fans might see things differently in relation to how he is portrayed on the internet.

4.1.12 Meme 12



FIGURE 4.12: Meme 12

It is a satire of both politics as well as internet memes that can be considered as having two types of satires. The satire includes the image of Nawaz Sharif who was once the Prime Minister of Pakistan and is sitting inside the cockpit of a fighter jet dressed up in a flight suit. At the top of this picture, there is a text written as "Wing Commander 'Abhi-London'" that is having dual meanings as this text relates to Wing Commander Abhinandan Varthaman, who was captured by Pakistani forces and later returned to India as a peace gesture.

4.1.12.1 Textual Analysis

Text: Wing Commander "Abhi- London"

Textually, the meme includes the phrase "Wing Commander 'Abhi-London'" and a manipulated image showing Nawaz Sharif in the dress of a fighter pilot. The expression "Abhi-London" refers to the widely used expression "Abhi Tea is Fantastic," which was coined after the arrest and release of Abhinandan Varthaman, who is a pilot of the Indian Air Force. The term "Abhi-London" was formed using the name of Abhinandan. In this way, the meme makes a funny reference between Nawaz Sharif and his repeated visits to London. The choice of the lexical item "Wing Commander" creates imagery associated with military discipline,

patriotism, courage, and dedication to one's country. Nevertheless, such positive associations are distorted due to sarcasm inherent in the word "Abhi-London."

Irony, parody, and intertextuality constitute the major linguistic techniques used in the meme. The placement of quotation marks on "Abhi-London" serves to stress the ironic connotation of the term, implying the intention to mock and not to appreciate the word choice. Besides, there is incongruity created by the contrast between military clothing and civilian politician, serving as another source of humour in the picture. Furthermore, symbolism is used by means of the pilot uniform, symbolizing courage and patriotism towards the motherland; however, the text contradicts those values, associating the politician with London but not Pakistan.

4.1.12.2 Discursive Practice

At the level of discursive practice, the interpretation of this meme is reliant upon the prior knowledge of the audience regarding the events that have taken place previously. For example, it is necessary for an individual to be familiar with the Indo-Pak conflict that took place in 2019, as well as with the popular saying about the "Abhi tea is fantastic". In addition, information about Nawaz Sharif living in London due to being treated as well as facing various controversies should be known by the viewers in order for them to understand the meaning conveyed through this meme.

The production and circulation of memes can be made possible through various websites in which individuals consume and share politically oriented content regularly. By using memes repeatedly, anti-Nawaz discourses may be reproduced since memes are used to make complex political situations look funny to people and become easily understandable. This allows the viewer to perceive criticism that is hidden between the lines. Therefore, memes are considered to be a tool for participation in political communication and commentary on events taking place in politics.

Moreover, this meme exemplifies the interdiscursivity of contemporary media discourse. It brings together elements of military discourse, political discourse, and the world of internet memes to produce a completely new meaning. With the aid of the popular cultural context and the nationalist discourse, the meme's effectiveness is heightened.

4.1.12.3 Sociocultural Practice

In practice, the meme demonstrates ideological opposition and political differences in Pakistan. Indeed, the meme is a form of discourse that attacks Nawaz Sharif's patriotic views, his leadership abilities, and loyalty towards the people. Through the use of repetition and addressing the political figure as "London," the meme portrays a distant politician both geographically and ideologically from his subjects. Such discourse undermines political authority by deepening already present divisions within partisan groups.

The meme demonstrates the impact of modern technology on contemporary politics. In particular, social networking sites have transformed ordinary individuals into creators of political discourse as opposed to merely consuming it. Thanks to humour and satire, everyday Internet users are able to undermine existing discourses. Consequently, memes represent ideological artifacts.

Through the lens of critical discourse analysis, the meme represents how language and visual elements can construct and reinforce social meanings and power dynamics. This meme proves that in the age of the digital revolution, political communication has been relying more heavily on symbolic and humorous ways of articulation that inform public opinion about political personalities.

4.1.12.4 Political Narrative

The meme would create a negative impression of Nawaz Sharif among the audience since it creates an image of him as a distant leader who cares very little about the matters of the country but focuses all his attention on London. Using satire and intertextuality, this meme perpetuates the narratives that cast doubt

on the patriotism, authenticity, and dedication of Nawaz Sharif to his country. Nevertheless, the supporters of Nawaz Sharif would most probably perceive the meme as politically biased propaganda and disregard its meaning altogether.

4.1.13 Meme 13



FIGURE 4.13: Meme 13

In the meme, there is an image of the former President of Pakistan, Asif Ali Zardari, together with the caption: "He is the only politician in the world who starts his campaign after the election." This statement is funny and sarcastic since it is meant to show that the politician is still politically active even after the completion of the electoral process. Through this meme, certain perceptions regarding the politician have been developed through satire.

4.1.13.1 Textual Analysis

Text: "Ye dunya ka wahid politician he jo Election k bad campaign shru krta he"

At the textual level, the meme employs language that is deliberately constructed in simple, colloquial, Romanised Urdu. This allows the meme to reach out to wider circles of social media users while also increasing relatability. The use of informal language means that it does not employ an academic or a formal tone,

allowing for the message being conveyed to be presented in a more natural manner as opposed to formal language.

The phrase "Wahid politician" can be described as an example of hyperbole, in which exaggeration is employed as a means of emphasis as opposed to literal language. By describing a political personage as "the only politician," the phrase indirectly implies that there is something unique about their political conduct. This kind of exaggeration aims at persuasion through exaggeration for humorous reasons.

The utilization of smiley ":)" has a crucial pragmatic purpose. First of all, this emoticon serves as means to tone down the harsh criticism that the person has. This sign allows interpreting the phrase in a manner of a joke rather than a threatening and critical statement. Thus, in this case, a digital punctuation mark helps in emotional regulation by serving as paralinguistic means.

In terms of lexis, the usage of colloquial and evaluative vocabulary prevails in the construction of the meme. In this way, words in the phrase are selected not due to descriptive qualities but because they are able to serve as part of rhetoric. As a result, it creates a specific register of the satirical text and prevents the use of any official political terminology.

The visual element, especially the image of Asif Ali Zardari smiling, adds another layer of meaning. The facial expression can be interpreted in multiple ways, but within the meme context it is in line with the humorous tone of the text. This visual-textual alignment strengthens the overall message, as the image does not merely illustrate the text but actively participates in constructing meaning.

4.1.13.2 Discursive Practice

In terms of discursive practices, the production and interpretation of the meme occur in the context of Pakistan's deeply divided politics, especially considering the political crisis following the fall of the government led by Imran Khan in 2022. The decoding of the meme requires knowledge of the background in terms of the political situation that preceded the vote of no confidence against Imran Khan

and consequently the creation of a coalition government. At that time, Asif Ali Zardari emerged as an important figure in politics and the accused negotiator for the support of the politicians in question. This became a hot topic on TV talk shows and social media.

In doing so, the meme references the narratives and public opinion already developed about the nature of Zardari's political strategies. "Starting a campaign after elections" refers to the continuous political involvement of Zardari and his continued attempts to build political power. Therefore, it can be concluded that the meme references the narratives that gained popularity through the internet discourse after the downfall of the Imran Khan government, where Zardari is mentioned as one of the influential political figures who were working on building coalitions. The use of roman Urdu and informal language in the meme references the way in which people communicate on social media in Pakistan.

4.1.13.3 Sociocultural Practice

On a sociopolitical level, the meme can be seen as an example of socio-political beliefs, which exhibit cynicism and lack of trust toward political figures. In showing Asif Ali Zardari as a politician who runs after elections, the meme is essentially demonstrating that he is too focused on politics and constant power plays.

Through humour, the meme helps construct the identity of politicians as well as strengthens the stereotypes that the public has regarding these people. Memes help simplify the complicated reality of politics through simplified but emotionally appealing messages. Finally, the meme provides an example of how digital media is used as an ideological battlefield in Pakistan.

4.1.13.4 Public Perception Constructed Through the Meme

The meme is used as a means of discourse in order to create an image of Asif Ali Zardari. With the use of irony, exaggeration, and humour, it portrays him as a politician who is always out campaigning for his political career. This continuous

circulation of the meme can serve to reinforce the existing perceptions and stereotypes associated with political leaders. Thus, the meme does not only serve to entertain people but also to shape their opinions about politics and ideologies as well.

4.1.14 Meme 14



FIGURE 4.14: Meme 14

The meme is made up of four images where the phrases **لوگوں کا چاند** (People's Moon) and **میرا چاند** (My Moon) have been used along with an image of the crescent moon and a picture of Imran Khan. The meme makes use of humour and symbolism by using the moon to represent beauty, admiration, and affection in Urdu culture, thus portraying Imran Khan as a person who is adored and admired.

4.1.14.1 Textual Analysis

Text: "Logon Ka Chand Mera Chand" (People's Moon My Moon)

In the textuality dimension, the meme relies on very basic and strongly symbolic linguistic and visual resources in order to establish a positive identity for Imran Khan. The word **لوگوں** ("people"), and the phrase **میرا چاند** ("my moon") have relational and emotional connotations, which indicate a strong sense of belonging and

personal relationship to Imran Khan. In Urdu culture, the word چاند means moon, and the word usually connotes beauty, admiration, hope, and affection. Using the word چاند in metaphorical language makes Imran Khan beautiful, lovable, and adored.

The use of the four panels also enhances the representation in this regard. As already indicated, the picture of the crescent moon used in the first panel works as a symbolic sign that further reiterates the use of the metaphor. The second and third panels contain a smiling image of Imran Khan, thus adding more positive meanings to his character. Furthermore, the use of possessive pronouns like میرا (My) also shows how emotionally attached the leader is to his people. The meme takes advantage of its brevity and symbols through the language without going into any details about what is being illustrated. Using linguistic devices such as imagery, metaphor, and symbol makes the representation of the meme favourable to Imran Khan and captures his supporters' hearts.

4.1.14.2 Discursive Practice

According to discursive practices, the meme is created and distributed via the political context of digital culture in Pakistan. In particular, social media platforms act as significant channels where political statements and discussions occur in Pakistan. The target audience consists of people familiar with the political situation in the country, including the use of a lion in relation to PML-N and the popularity of Imran Khan among his fans. Thus, familiarity with politics becomes the basis for understanding the humour and symbolism of the meme. The meaning of the meme is created due to the connection between textual and visual features. Specifically, a combination of words and pictures makes it possible to form a multimodal discourse that can be quickly digested by social media users. Moreover, its brief and amusing content reflects common communication practices on social media.

Additionally, this meme exhibits intertextuality by referencing already existing political narratives about Imran Khan and his political foes. Specifically, it draws from the prevailing discourse about Imran Khan as a political leader supported

by the masses with deep emotional commitment, whereas other political rivals are lacking such emotional connection with the masses. Again, these political meanings are not created in a vacuum but are already existing political discourses and perceptions. Moreover, this meme is also funny and hence qualifies for virality on social media. Since it uses humour in political commentaries, the meme makes the audience want to participate actively by sharing and commenting. Thus, it is also a communicative tool for the reproduction and dissemination of political meanings.

4.1.14.3 Sociocultural Practice

The meme in the context of social practice is reflective of political polarization and the emergence of personality politics in contemporary Pakistan's digital realm. The meme constructs an image of Imran Khan as a leader who has gained widespread popularity among his followers as he enjoys immense love and admiration from the masses. Thus, this meme contributes to the formation of political discourse based on emotions towards political leaders, and not their policies or achievements.

Furthermore, the meme excludes other political actors by presenting a dichotomy between the concept of popular legitimacy and political opposition to a political figure such as Imran Khan. In this manner, the political discourse in question is simplified by presenting it through a lens of symbolic opposition in which political legitimacy arises out of emotions rather than institutions and democracies.

4.1.14.4 Public Perception Constructed Through the Meme

The meme contributes towards the depiction of the political personality Imran Khan as it utilizes language, symbols, and imagery to create a highly favourable emotional interpretation of the political personality. As the political personality is associated with "moon," cultural interpretations of moon being highly attractive and beautiful contribute towards creating an emotionally charged image where the political personality comes out as someone who is greatly admired and beloved. The textual elements of the meme alongside the image reinforce the image as a

highly emotionally engaging and positive one where emotions of familiarity, popularity, and admiration for the leader emerge. In the case of Pakistani digital politics, where common knowledge about politics exists among individuals, it becomes easy for audiences to interpret the political personality as someone who is loved and adored by many. The humour attached with the meme further helps in creating these positive impressions of the political personality.

4.1.15 Meme 15



FIGURE 4.15: Meme 15

The meme uses humour and satire to make political statements about Imran Khan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

4.1.15.1 Textual Analysis

Text: Agar Aaj murshad bahir hote to KPK ki yeh mushkil ghari bhi OLX pe laga dete.

Translation:

If Murshad were out today, he would have even put Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's current difficult situation up for sale on OLX.

On the textual level, the meme consists of colloquial Urdu language with metaphorical language of modern era. The word 'Murshad' is a term used as a respectful term referring to wisdom and guidance, which in an online environment becomes humorous or ironic. The term "mushkil ghari" is an evaluation of the political situation. It describes a political situation as unstable or difficult, hence the use of such term makes the text easy to understand for those familiar with the Internet-based languages.

The meme achieves its ironic and satirical effect by the use of a metaphor relating to OLX. OLX refers to a platform where one may buy or sell products. Therefore, the metaphor involves selling of a 'difficult time' in OLX. In this case, the metaphor changes from politics to commercialization. Thus, political problems are reduced to mere commodities in the market. The irony comes when politics is compared with commercialization since a difficult political situation is not something you may choose to get rid of by selling. The combination of political terms and commerce terms creates an amusing effect, highlighting dissatisfaction with politics.

Furthermore, by mentioning Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the political discourse is embedded in a known geopolitical framework. Mentioning a real-world political location helps the audience correlate the memes with the current political situation, thus making it socially contextualized. A simple structure, along with metaphors and the use of colloquial language, shows features of digital discourse, in which political reality is compressed into one-liners. Through the use of irony and metaphor, combined with the use of colloquial language, the meme expresses the political dissatisfaction in a way that amuses the viewers.

4.1.15.2 Discursive Practice

His particular meme is created and spread through the digital participatory culture, where the users participate in interpreting the political realities through jokes, sarcasm, and intertextuality. In contrast to traditional texts, the memes receive meaning from culturally shared knowledge of both creator and recipients who participate in producing, manipulating, and sharing memes actively. In this

case, the use of "Murshad" shows the meme creator's awareness of the meme culture and creates intimacy between the creator and the viewers of his/her creation. This culturally charged word helps viewers understand that there is ironic tone of this message.

Interpretation of the meme is highly dependent on the cultural knowledge about the OLX website and people's perception of it as a platform for buying and selling second-hand products. Thus, the joke becomes possible only because of cultural knowledge of the website that represents some cultural schema, namely commodification. It can be said that the joke lies in transferring political problems to the sphere of online shopping through the website. The choice of such intertextuality helps understand and interpret the meme correctly because of commonly known cultural schema activated by the meme creator.

4.1.15.3 Sociocultural Practice

On the social level, the meme is connected with greater ideological contradictions regarding governance, the relationship between state institutions and the population, and the emergence of neoliberal reason in political language. With the help of the idea of a "political crisis" being a product that is for sale, the assessment of governance moves from the field of democratic evaluation to market-based thinking and consumer culture. Political problems become unwanted goods that can be simply thrown away, and such an approach shows how political issues became associated with economic and commercial concepts. Political performance starts being estimated in terms of efficiency and use rather than in terms of its institutional and democratic legitimacy.

The meme is also an example of the current trend of digital political communication, which is characterized by the tendency to view political leaders as well as the state as a whole through the prism of satire and mockery. In other words, political reality is being transformed into the humorous images of political leaders as incompetent managers who do not achieve desirable results. Thus, the meme serves as symbolic resistance in the contemporary digital era.

4.1.15.4 Public Perception Constructed Through the Meme

This perception of Imran Khan's political leadership in the meme is established through the use of humour and metaphor that takes authority beyond respectability and formality into familiarity and criticism. As opposed to establishing himself as a political leader in the usual manner, Imran Khan is presented indirectly by means of a digital satirical commentary in which politics itself becomes something that could be traded for other things. The rhetorical move in this case helps viewers see Imran Khan not from the perspective of political leadership but based on its performance and results. Through this approach, the meme becomes one way to create a perception of political leadership that is ripe for criticism and mockery.

As evident from the analysis of the selected political memes, meaning is created using strategic manipulation of linguistic elements rather than using direct communication. In the selected memes, the elements of irony, sarcasm, metaphor, exaggeration, presupposition, framing, intertextuality, contrast, repetition, and the use of colloquialism have been used to criticize the political figures, challenge their credibility, and reinterpret the political occurrences. Through the linguistic elements, the complicated political situations have been made simple and humorous to understand and share on the social media platform.

Moreover, the memes employ substantial socio-political knowledge by presupposing that the audience is aware of the socio-political past of Pakistan, its economic troubles, corruption allegations, energy crises, politics, and rivalry. Selective framing and evaluative lexis used in the construction of these memes result in overwhelmingly negative representations of Pakistani political leaders like Nawaz Sharif, Maryam Nawaz, Shehbaz Sharif, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, and Imran Khan. These memes are not simply amusing for the audiences but are powerful means of discourse that are able to form people's views, support certain ideologies, and influence political opinions. Consequently, the results of this analysis are consistent with Fairclough's (1995) claim about the strong relation between language and power relations and ideology.

4.2 Quantitative Analysis of Students' Questionnaire

This section presents the quantitative analysis of the data collected through the questionnaire designed in line with Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model. The responses were examined using frequencies and percentages and were presented through merged bar graphs for clearer comparison. The analysis focuses on respondents' perceptions of political memes, particularly how linguistic, discursive and social features contribute to meaning-making and interpretation.

4.2.1 Demographic Profile of Sampling

The demographic profile of the respondents helps to understand what the respondents are like and how they use media. The data reveals that most of 86 respondents were between 19- and 21-years age group. A meagre proportion 15 were between 22- and 24-years age group. Only 2 Respondents were older than 25 years old which is just.

Thus, the study shows that mostly the population was undergraduates who actively use social media and are interested in politics. Moreover, with respect to the gender distribution of participants, there were 69 (68%) males and 35 (35%) females. The greater number of males among the participants denotes that the sample comprised mostly males. However, the involvement of female students brings about gender diversity and ensures that the perceptions are collected from both groups.

4.2.2 BS Program Semesters

In addition, the data suggests that the participants belonged to various semesters. The highest number of students was from the first semester, which includes 49 (47.6%) respondents. Second is the second semester, including 28 (27.2%) students. The sixth semester included 19 (18.4%) students.

The participation rate of students belonging to third, fourth, and fifth semesters was quite less than others. Moreover, there was only one participant from the eighth semester. There were no participants from the seventh semester. Therefore, it can be concluded that the sample involved students who have taken admission to universities recently.

4.2.3 Most Used Social Media Platforms

The responses show that 82 (79.6%) respondents use Instagram. TikTok is used by 10 (9.7%) students. Facebook and Twitter(X) have 5(4.9%) users. Only one user (1%) uses Reddit.

These findings suggest that Instagram is the most popular platform among students. Instagram is a highly used source of political memes and related discussions that students consume and share. The lower use of Facebook, Twitter and Reddit shows that these platforms have less influence on how students engage online.

4.2.4 Preferred Political Party

The questionnaire had an optional question about which party the respondents preferred. The responses showed that people from different parties took part, it means the results are not biased towards one ideology. This way the views from people associated with different parties were obtained.

Since political memes often create images of leaders and parties, it was made sure participants came from different political backgrounds for balanced views.

It's also important to note that respondents from small parties also participated, it shows the diversity of Pakistani politics. Some respondents did not want to share their party affiliation, which's okay since the question was optional. However, having a mix of party preferences, among respondents made the research more credible.

4.2.5 Quantitative Analysis of Items of Students' Questionnaire in Line with Fairclough's 3-Dimensional Model

4.2.5.1 Textual Analysis (Dimension-1)

This dimension highlights findings from the respondents about the different textual items, including words, humor, metaphors, images, language, and exaggeration.

i. Item I

I believe that the use of word choices (such as "selected," "imported," and "youth-ia") in political memes help me understand the hidden message.

As per the data, 44% of the sample considered the use of word choices in memes helps in understanding the hidden message while 23% of them strongly believed in its significance. At the same time, 29% respondents took a neutral stance while 2% strongly disagreed.

ii. Item II

In my point of view, the use of humour, sarcasm, and irony (i.e., putting an amusing caption, making fun of the blunder made by the political leader while speaking in public, or just saying the absolute opposite of what is right) is quite an apparent feature in political memes.

In relation to use of humor, sarcasm and irony as an apparent feature of political memes 64% of sample believed that humor and sarcasm are an important textual element of political memes, but 30% were neutral about this claim. Only few expressed their disagreement.

iii. Item III

I don't think that memes depict topics like corruption, justice, or governance through metaphors (ladla, imported) and symbolic language (Panama Papers, Calibri Font) . From the response to metaphor, a more diverse response pattern

can be noted. While 30% and 13% agreed and strongly agreed respectively, the highest percentage of respondents was neutral (36%). In addition, 19% disagreed, while 5% strongly disagreed.

iv. Item IV

I think my interpretation of political memes is influenced by visual components, including settings, colours, symbols, and facial expressions.

The results indicate that the visual influence on meme interpretation received the highest proportion of neutral responses (44%), followed by agreement (29%) and strong agreement (20%). Only a small percentage of respondents expressed disagreement.

v. Item V

I am of the view that my understanding of political statements is not influenced by the language and imagery employed in political memes.

From the results, it is evident that there was a diverse opinion on the role played by imagery and language in the interpretation of political messages. The highest proportion, which was 22%, agreed with the claim, while 19% strongly agreed with it. However, a larger portion (38%) did not have any opinion about the claim. Additionally, there were people who disagreed with the claim, and their number was 21% and 3% strongly disagreed.

vi. Item VI

I believe political memes frequently exaggerate or distort facts to convey a stronger message.

The statement about distortion and exaggeration of the facts by political memes garnered the maximum degree of agreement among all the statements. The most prevalent views were that memes often exaggerate or distort facts, which was shared by 57% of those polled, with another 18% strongly agreeing with this view. Neutral answers amounted to 17%, whereas 3% strongly disagreed and 8% disagreed.

4.2.6 Consolidated Textual Analysis of the Items of Students' Questionnaire

Based on the textual analysis results, it is possible to state that the participants demonstrate clear awareness of the linguistic techniques utilized in political memes. Exaggeration, humor, irony and word choice appear to be the most prominent aspects, thus suggesting that the audiences are most sensitive to the textual techniques responsible for meaning construction and persuasion.

In addition, metaphors, visuals, and language as a whole receive low scores. It is likely that audiences have no problem identifying explicit textual techniques but find it hard to realize that there are many other implicit methods of constructing meaning. Neutral responses in the list of techniques further suggest that there are some techniques that are used to construct meaning without being noticed by the audience.

Thus, findings reveal that meaning construction in political memes is based on various combinations of overt and covert linguistic techniques. The textual techniques that have been identified are not simply tools that transfer information from one point to another but play an active role in meaning construction.

The results obtained from textual analysis are depicted in the Fig. 4.16

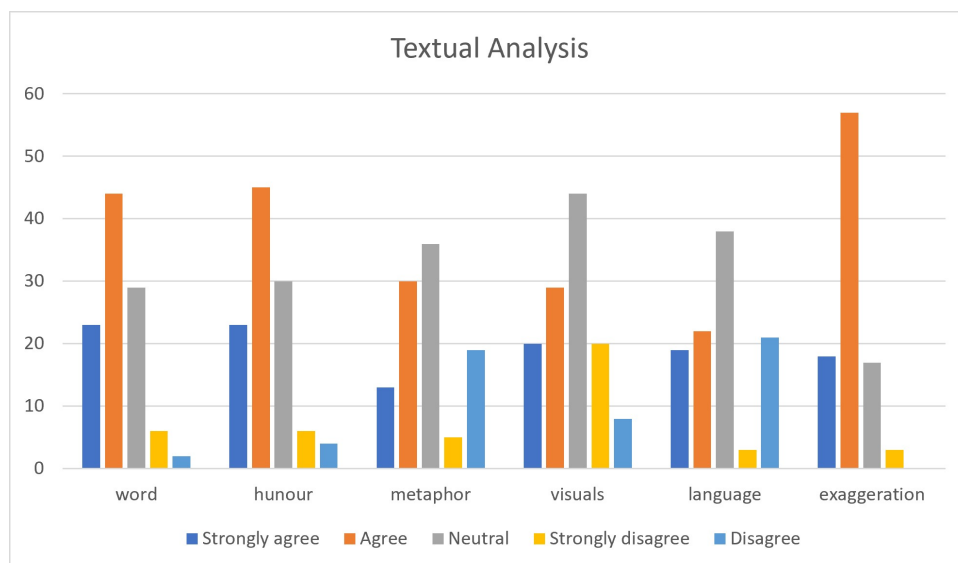


FIGURE 4.16: Textual Analysis

4.2.7 Discursive Practice (Dimension-2)

i. Item I

I think political memes contain tags, slogans, or catchphrases such as "Tabdeeli Aa Nahi Rahi," "Tabdeeli Aa Gayi Hai," "Vote Ko Izzat Do."

The result shows that a vast majority of the respondents indicated that political memes carry tags and slogans. The percentage that indicated Agree is 56%, while those who strongly agreed were at 32%. Only a small number of the respondents were neutral about this statement (11%), while 4% indicated Disagree.

ii. Item II

I perceive that memes usually refer to political speeches, events, and news.

The data shows that a combined 59% of respondents expressed overall agreement that there are discernible references to political speeches and events. Whereas 30% remained neutral and 11

Here the opposite trend can be seen in responses. Most of the participants strongly disagree with this claim: Strongly Disagree, 43%; Neutral, 15%; Agree, 15%; Strongly Agree

iii. Item III

I am of the view that a clear knowledge of the references in memes helps me interpreting their meaning better. There is a strong consensus among respondents regarding a clear knowledge of the references in memes that helps interpreting meaning. A combined 67% of participants expressed agreement (47% Agree, 20% Strongly Agree). Conversely, a neutral stance was maintained by 26% of the sample, while only a small minority (7%) did not share this view.

iv. Item IV

I don't think that political memes circulate from one social media platform to another. Responding to political memes circulate from one social media platform

to another, a resounding 61% of participants expressed overall disagreement (42% strongly disagree, 19% disagree) with this claim. Of the remaining sample, neutral stances and affirmative agreements were 16% and 23%.

v. Item V

I think political memes do not require any previous knowledge or background context to understand them. The responses show an extremely divided sample, though the momentum leans heavily away from affirmative consensus. A combined 28% of participants expressed agreement (18% Agree, 10% Strongly Agree) with the statement. In contrast, the remaining majority of the sample is split between a significant neutral block at 28% and a commanding 34% who strongly disagree.”

vi. Item VI

I observed that political memes combine multiple sources (images, speeches, news) into a single meme with a new meaning. There is a substantial majority of people who Agree (85%) to the statement that political memes combine multiple sources (images, speeches, news) into a single meme with a new meaning.

Neutral responses account for 20%, while disagreement remains very low.

4.2.8 Consolidated Analysis of the Discursive Practices Items of Students’ Questionnaire

The results suggest that the participants possess high awareness of the mechanisms of the creation and legitimization of discourse in political meme discourse. High consensus on slogans, citations, and multiple sources shows the awareness of the process of creating discourse. Similarly, the rejection of isolated circulation and context-free interpretation highlights respondents’ understanding of discourse as a dynamic process involving distribution across platforms and active audience engagement. In line with Fairclough’s discursive practices dimension, the results reveal that media messages are viewed not as static texts but as products of ongoing processes of production, circulation, interpretation, and reproduction within

society. The results obtained from discursive practices are depicted in the Fig. 4.17.

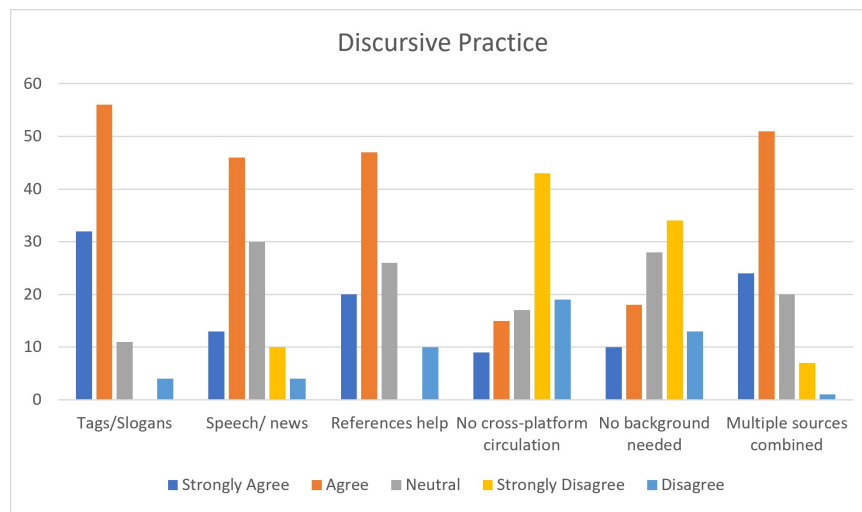


FIGURE 4.17: Discursive Analysis

4.2.9 Sociocultural I Practice (Dimension-3)

This dimension highlights findings from the respondents concerning the sociocultural practices.

i. Item I

I understand that political memes contribute to socio-political discussions (such as corruption, dynastic politics, and election rigging) regarding socio-political concerns in Pakistan.

As observed from political memes contribute to socio-political discussions, most respondents 56% overall agreed that media discourse plays a role in public discourse. While 29% remained neutral. Very few disagreed.

ii. Item II

I think memes on topics such as corruption, justice, and accountability influence how I perceive politicians. A number of the respondents 54% agreed to the extent that political perception on sociopolitical issues in Pakistan is affected by the memes. However, 33% of the respondents remained neutral while some disagreed.

iii. Item III

I believe that repeatedly told narratives about a certain topic in memes, influence my judgment of political personalities and leadership qualities.

A high percentage of respondents (55%) overall agreed that memes on topics such as corruption, justice, and accountability influence public opinion. While neutral responses constituted 33% of answers received, disagreement was relatively lower.

iv. Item IV

I believe that repeatedly told narratives about a certain topic in memes, influence my judgment of political personalities and leadership qualities.

Mixed trend appears in the responses to memes are not influenced by certain political ideologies or biases., The majority remained neutral (39%), then agree (36%), and finally 29% disagreed with that specific ideologies and biases shape discourse.

v. Item V

In my opinion, political memes only entertain me; they do not have any impact on my political attitude. The results suggest that 54% responded were overall agreed to that political memes only entertain they do not have any impact on my political attitude. On the other hand, 23% of the respondents disagreed, while 26% gave neutral responses.

vi. Item VI

I understand that political memes help in critically examining political power and authority. It is also apparent that 41% overall agreed that political memes help in critically examining political power and authority. A number of respondents were neutral (38%) while only 24% disagreed.

4.2.10 Consolidated Analysis of the Sociopolitical Practices Items of Students; Questionnaire

From the overall findings, it can be seen that respondents understand that political memes have a greater influence on the formation of political perceptions and

collective knowledge. A high degree of agreement in relation to the function of political memes in facilitating public debate, repetition of narratives, and forming opinions about political individuals is an indication of the knowledge of the role of memes creating social reality.

In addition, the respondents understand that discourse of memes influences the spread of beliefs, values, and ideologies in society. The results reveal that respondents also have some awareness of the relationship between memes and ideology. In line with Fairclough's social practice dimension, the results suggest that political memes operate not only as a digital communicative form but also as a social force that shapes how individuals interpret political institutions, social issues, and power relations within society.

The results obtained from sociocultural practices are depicted in the Fig. 4.18.

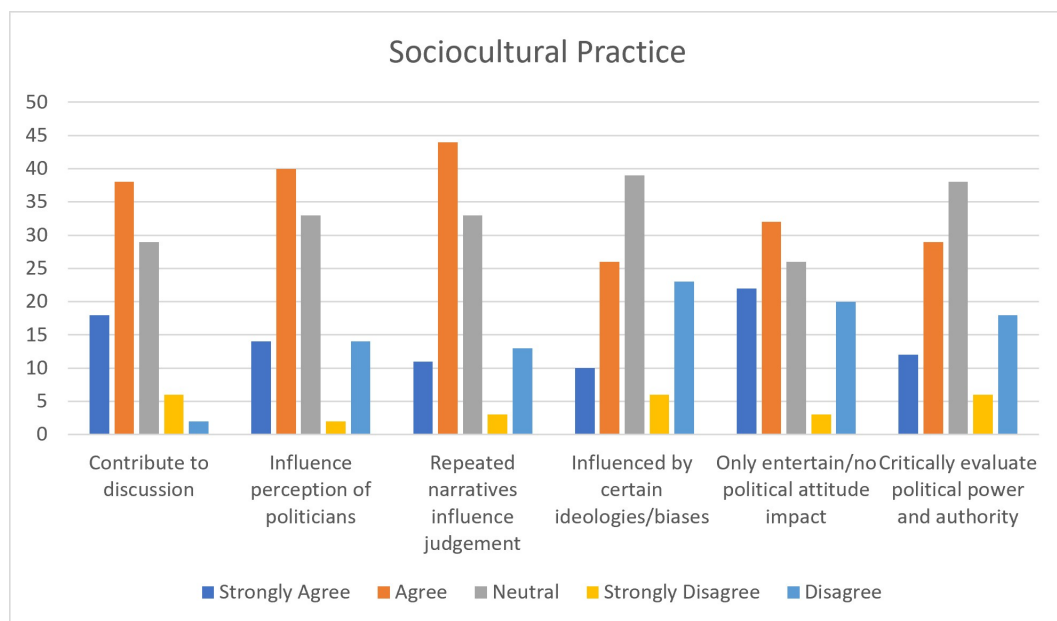


FIGURE 4.18: Sociocultural Analysis

4.3 Thematic Analysis of Open-ended Questions of Students' Questionnaire

The thematic analysis examines students' responses to the open-ended questionnaire items to identify recurring themes and patterns. The responses provide

deeper insights into students' perceptions of the of Pakistani political memes, complementing the quantitative findings with qualitative evidence.

4.3.1 Question-1

How do political memes impact the youngsters' perceptions of political leaders and politics?

The open-ended responses were analysed using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis approach. The process began with repeated reading of the collected data of 104 respondents to the question "*how do political memes impact the youngsters' perceptions of political leaders and politics?*" The repeated reading of the data helped to develop familiarity with the content and to gain an overall understanding of respondents' views. In the subsequent step, initial codes were produced by considering those words, concepts, and ideas that were linked to the research purpose. The codes produced were further categorized by grouping the patterns that were alike. Then, themes were established based on how the codes interacted with one another to form patterns in the data. Finally, the themes identified were critically reviewed to make sure that they were representative of the data collected and had coherence in respect to the research questions. Each theme was defined and named appropriately in order to provide an explanation of the findings with respect to the purpose of the study.

The following themes surfaced during the analysis of the above open-ended question.

4.3.1.1 Theme 1: Political Awareness and Engagement

One of the most common themes emerging from the responses was the use of political memes as a means to increase political consciousness among young people. The respondents opined that memes help in making politics more interesting through their humorous representations of politics. They pointed out that in many instances, memes work as a starting point for political discussions and inform youngsters about political events going on around the world.

This implies that political memes are an alternative means of political communication.

4.3.1.2 Theme 2: Simplification of Complex Political Issues

Theme number two related to the simplification of political knowledge. Respondents repeatedly mentioned that memes simplify complex political issues in terms of brief and clear messages. In this regard, while this quality facilitates fast circulation of the information, respondents suggested that such messages lack nuance.

In general, the study has revealed that memes make it possible for people to comprehend difficult ideas, but at the same time, they contribute to the formation of oversimplified views on politics.

4.3.1.3 Theme 3: Shaping Perceptions of Political Leaders

Some of the participants noted that political memes affect the reputation and image of political leaders. The consistent use of positive or negative memes is believed to lead to perceptions of political leaders, especially on their competence and reliability.

It was agreed by some of the participants that memes may be used to humanize political leaders or even ridicule them for their actions hence forming their political identity.

4.3.1.4 Theme 4: Biases and Misinformation

Another common theme was biases and misinformation that could be spread through political memes. It seemed that respondents believed that these memes could provide only one side of the story and would exaggerate things. As a result, young people could form an opinion about political matters with insufficient information.

This theme reveals the possible problems of using memes as the source of political news.

4.3.1.5 Theme 5: Political Cynicism and Polarization

Memes which are satirical and critical are seen by several respondents as leading to political cynicism. It was suggested that when people mock politicians continuously, it creates an image for citizens where politicians cannot be trusted or that the whole process of politics is corrupt and ineffective.

It implies that the effects of meme culture are not limited to shaping public perception of individuals, but also the entire political system.

4.3.1.6 Theme 6: Entertainment and Humour

Many of the participants considered political memes purely entertaining. For these interviewees, memes were meant to make them laugh, while they were not supposed to be taken seriously as sources of information about politics. According to some of the participants, youth understands that memes are jokes, and thus, their politics cannot be affected by memes.

This theme shows that the degree of influence that political memes have can differ from one individual to another based on their seriousness about memes.

4.3.1.7 Theme 7: Individual Differences in Influence

One of the themes identified in our discussion is the understanding that the effects of political memes are influenced by individual differences. It was found out that people who are politically aware and have good critical thinking skills would not be easily swayed by memes but those people who are highly dependent on social media and lack political knowledge would be influenced by these memes.

This clearly indicates the importance of media literacy and individual attitudes toward the effect of political memes.

4.3.1.8 Theme 8: Importance of Critical Evaluation

In many answers, fact-checking and critique of meme culture were stressed by the respondents. It was noted many times that people's opinions about politics should

never be based on memes alone, and the information presented must always be checked in reliable sources. The point is related to respondents' understanding of the necessity to consume media critically in the modern world. From the thematic analysis, it can be noted that political memes are a two-way street phenomenon. For instance, they enhance political knowledge and participation, making politics fun and understandable through humour. However, they promote biases and misinformation, along with political cynicism and polarization of views on political figures. All things considered, it can be deduced that political memes have emerged as an important political communication tool among young people, and the impact they make is primarily based on whether they can discern the truth about such memes or not.

4.3.2 Question-2

In your opinion, do political memes promote critical thinking or spread bias? Please explain how. The following themes surfaced during the analysis of the above open-ended question.

4.3.2.1 Theme 1: Political Memes as Sources of Bias

The most common key theme that appeared in the answers is that political memes mostly carry bias. The respondents claimed that memes tend to provide only a single point of view on events, over-exaggerate facts, and reaffirm prior opinions. The respondents pointed out that political memes do not offer any background and aim to provoke an emotional response. Most of the respondents stated that because memes have a light and simplistic form, viewers are easily persuaded into taking things at face value. This means that biases conveyed by memes lead to politicized perceptions of political truths.

4.3.2.2 Theme 2: Promotion of Critical Thinking Through Satire and Questioning

The other important issue discussed was the role of political memes as catalysts for encouraging people to think critically about issues surrounding them. Political

memes, in particular satirical memes, were thought by some interviewees to have the potential to point out corruption, hypocrisy, and problems in government policy.

People might be encouraged to think about what was happening in politics through memes; and then conduct further research on these issues through other sources.

4.3.2.3 Theme 3: Dual Nature of Political Memes

A common theme throughout many answers was the observation that political memes have a dual nature. Most people observed that political memes can serve to stimulate critical thinking as well as propagate bias. The effect of these images is seen to be dependent on the context of the message within the meme and how people receive it.

Political memes were often described as a “double-edged sword” in that this medium has the ability to foster debate on the one hand and propagate lies on the other.

4.3.2.4 Theme 4: Political Issues Oversimplified by Memes

Another theme that emerged from the research is related to how political issues are oversimplified through the use of memes. It was stressed that any issue relating to politics is usually oversimplified to slogans, stereotypes, and humour, which is not helpful in promoting political knowledge. It was noted that memes emphasize brevity over analysis.

4.3.2.5 Theme 5: Echo Chambers and Reinforcement of Existing Beliefs

Participants stressed that political memes reinforce pre-existing views rather than confront them. Participants said that the algorithmic design of social media platforms and the presence of ideologically biased meme pages leads to users being presented with information that corresponds to their preferences, resulting in echo chambers.

This causes people to prefer consuming information that affirms their existing views, causing increased political polarization.

4.3.2.6 Theme 6: Influence of Media Literacy and Individual Interpretation

Some of the participants felt that the effect of political memes would depend a lot on the maturity level of the individual viewing them, his political awareness and his level of media literacy. People who can evaluate things for themselves will not succumb to false information, but those who lack such knowledge are easily manipulated. This implies that political memes have an effect depending on individual characteristics.

4.3.2.7 Theme 7: Entertainment and Humour as Primary Functions

The other theme that could be seen emerging out of the data was the view of the memes as sources of entertainment and not as political news or information. It seemed that some respondents viewed the political memes just as humor and that these were not to be taken seriously. The argument here was that people consume these memes simply for the sake of entertainment.

4.3.2.8 Theme 8: Need for Verification and Critical Evaluation

Another important common theme among all the answers was the need for fact-checking and use of trustworthy sources. The respondents stressed the idea that political memes could not be trusted blindly and one needs to fact check the information first.

4.4 Summary of Discussion

This study investigated the role of language in Pakistani political memes by applying Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) in order to examine the students' perception towards political memes using closed-ended and open-ended questions in the questionnaires.

It is discovered from the qualitative analysis of the selected political memes that language plays an important part in making of these memes in Pakistani context because they involve use of language devices such as satire, irony, hyperbole, metaphor, rhetorical questions, presupposition, code switching, and intertextuality. With the help of language devices, meme makers can criticize their political leaders or raise questions against the policies of governance and show the gap between the promise made by politicians and the social reality through humour. Textually speaking, these memes use particular vocabulary and visual aids to convey hidden meanings. Discursively speaking, these memes represent the participatory nature of digital communication. Socially, these memes represent the politics of power, ideology, accountability and dissatisfaction among other things.

The results of the closed-ended questionnaire survey fully confirmed the qualitative analysis. A considerable number of the students were convinced that humour is used in political memes in order to convey serious political messages, form public opinion and create an image of political leaders. Satire, irony, hyperbole and symbolism used in political memes was also identified by the participants. Moreover, most of the respondents stated that understanding of political memes needs knowledge of current political events. These results prove the awareness of students about linguistic and ideological aspects of political memes.

In the same way, the thematic analysis of the open-ended questions provided even greater understanding of how the students interpreted the issue at hand. The vast majority of respondents noted that political memes were a very powerful and enjoyable means of conveying criticism of politics and making people aware of different social and political problems. The use of humour was seen by the students as one of the ways of making a complicated political message easily understandable and catchier. It is also worth mentioning that the students pointed out that memes promote discussion and thinking about political problems, although some of them mentioned that memes might be misleading because they often contain biased information.

The convergence of results received from the analysis of political memes and the answers given in the questionnaire increases the validity of the research. The

linguistic features highlighted through the use of Fairclough's model proved to be present in the perceptions of students as well, which confirms that the textual nature of political memes is successfully shaping audiences' interpretations. Therefore, it can be concluded that political memes are not only entertaining products of digital culture but significant discourses that construct political reality, negotiate ideologies, and create perception of political events among the audience.

All in all, the research proves that the use of Pakistani political memes is essential for digital political communication. By employing various linguistic and visual features, such memes simplify political matters, oppose prevailing political discourses, and motivate citizens to get involved in social and political activity. What is more, the analytical framework proposed by Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model has proved to be very helpful in the investigation of the relation between language, discourse, and society in the context of digital media. Besides, the study shows the significance of the usage of political memes in the educational process, specifically in English Language Teaching (ELT).

Chapter 5

Discussion and Conclusion

This chapter presents the findings obtained from the linguistic analysis of selected Pakistani political memes. The analysis is guided by the research questions. These research questions focus on the linguistic elements, their impact on the perception, the mechanisms of political meaning construction, and the overall role of memes in political discourse formation. To collect information for the study, a combined approach involving the collection of data from social media users and political memes was applied. The analysis in this chapter is based on the results obtained through the linguistic analysis of selected political memes and also the thematic analysis of the questionnaire responses, using the thematic analysis framework by Braun and Clarke (2006). This method is flexible, qualitative in nature, and used to find patterns/themes within the data. In thematic analysis, data is coded in an organized way, codes are developed into themes, these themes are reviewed and then interpreted in relation to the research goals. Thematic analysis is commonly applied due to its structured nature and flexibility. The results obtained during the course of the study demonstrated that political memes apply humour, sarcasm, irony, visuals, and cultural aspects, among other linguistic elements, in order to portray political figures positively or negatively. While some respondents regarded the memes merely as an element of entertainment, the vast majority recognized that memes played a role in opinion forming. The following section contains the main findings, conclusions, and recommendations obtained through the study.

5.1 Findings

The study generated the results from the linguistic analysis of selected Pakistani political memes, as well as the questionnaire completed by the targeted sample group.

The first section focused on the findings generated from the content analysis of selected memes. The in-depth analysis of memes presented the frequent use of humour, sarcasm, irony, exaggeration, and culture-based imagery to communicate political message. Memes also make heavy use of captioning, visual symbolism, intertextuality, and slang language to create certain images of political figures. The use of language and visual imagery helped to translate complicated political ideas into succinct messages. Owing to the informal nature of memes, people can criticize, support, and promote their ideologies without having to conform to conventional political discourse.

The second section comprised the findings obtained from students' questionnaire. It is important to state that the design of the questionnaire was done according to Fairclough's 3 D model through the scale known as the Likert scale, which contained both close-ended and some open-ended questions

5.1.1 Findings from the Content Analysis of Political Memes

This section discusses the results that were obtained from an in-depth analysis of selected Pakistani political memes in order to understand how the perception of political figures is formed through linguistic elements.

The findings presented below are obtained after the analysis of selected political memes.

- i. Political memes make extensive use of both colloquial and hybrid combinations of Urdu and English languages to communicate in an informal manner. This hybrid language makes political messages easy to comprehend for a

larger number of people, especially young people who find it easier to understand such language usage. Using everyday language in politics draws the language closer to the masses.

- ii. Humour and satire play an instrumental role in creating political discourse. Instead of engaging in direct critique of politics, memes employ ironic statements, exaggerations, and sarcasm in order to expose political absurdities and weaknesses in society.
- iii. There is a tendency to use metaphors that transform complicated political realities into more relatable life situations. Political conflicts, problems of governance, and issues of leadership can be interpreted by the use of consumer-related metaphors or domestic metaphors.
- iv. An important revelation made in the findings is how political leadership and politics are represented as commodities. Political issues become objects for exchange, disposal, and sale, indicating that the economic paradigm of thinking has permeated the digital era and even extends to the political realm.
- v. The memes contribute in the creation of a sceptical perception regarding political figures and institutions. Political figures are shown to be incompetent, replaceable, or ridiculed. There is overall lack of trust in political structures, and it shows that the memes are used to express political dissatisfaction indirectly.
- vi. The findings show that the meaning contained within political memes comes from the cultural knowledge and intertextual references. Political memes tend to use digital technologies, slang, contemporary political events, and politicians themselves to make jokes and convey political information. Such references allow viewers to relate to the memes as they can understand them within the context. It is clear that political memes gain their efficacy depending on the previous knowledge possessed by the audience since the humour in the meme can only be understood with such knowledge.

- vii. Political memes have a unique ability to simplify political complexity and governance issues into stories that can easily be understood and communicated. This is done through the utilization of linguistic aspects such as humour, satire, and metaphor, whereby political events are made simple for people to understand. This simplification aspect makes discussion less profound due to the reliance on humour and emotions.
- viii. Political memes contribute to a redistribution of symbolic power from political elites to ordinary social media users. The use of humour, satire, and criticism enables social media users to evaluate and question political elites and institutions. Online social platforms give citizens a chance to engage themselves in political debates through the creation of interesting content that can attract many people.
- ix. Political memes mostly focus on the negative aspects of politicians. Politicians are portrayed as either inept, corrupt, inefficient, or delusional through sarcasm, irony, exaggeration, and humour. Positive representation of politicians through memes is very rare. As a result, such representation contributes to declining trust on political leadership.

Overall, the study implies that digital media has become important places for political communication and political participation. Political memes are used not only for fun and enjoyment, but also as means for expressing political criticism and social negotiations. By using humour and satire, people can share their points of view and take part in political communication. Therefore, it is possible to conclude that the current concepts of politics and political leadership have been formed through online interaction and the development of digital culture.

5.1.2 Findings from the Students' Questionnaire

The following section highlights the results obtained from the questionnaire conducted to the BS students.

- i. The results indicate that respondents exhibit high levels of awareness regarding explicit linguistic strategies employed in political memes. Exaggeration becomes the most noticeable characteristic in this respect, while humour and word choice come second and third. This implies that recipients exhibit high sensitivity towards the use of linguistic devices in political memes that are explicitly present in captions. Such linguistic characteristics can be detected without difficulty as they are emotionally charged and include humoristic approaches. More sophisticated aspects of language used in political memes, include the employment of metaphor, irony, exaggeration, and interaction of image and text.
- ii. In general, it can be seen that there are disparities regarding the level of awareness when it comes to the different textual components. The survey exhibits better ability to recognize linguistic devices that are concrete and obvious, while the abstract and interpretive ones appear to be recognized less often. These findings suggest that in cases the interaction of the audience with memes tends to happen on a superficial level rather than a more profound one.
- iii. The findings confirm the theory that political memes serve as potent places for meaning making via language and semiotics. The use of humour and hyperbole and the choice of certain vocabulary in memes tend to focus on criticism and negative appraisal of political personalities. Hence, political memes can be said to have an impact on the understanding and interpretation of political and social reality.
- iv. From the results, it is clear that the respondents appreciate the use of linguistic structures in the creation of political memes in terms of tags, slogans, captions, jokes, intertextuality. This is evident that respondents exhibit the highest level of agreement (88%) in relation to tags and slogans since they are repetitive and memorable linguistic structures. In addition, references to political speeches and news reports prove the fact that the creation of memes involves the use of existing political media discourse, which is reinterpreted humorously or satirically.

- v. There are references and numerous sources involved in interpreting memes, suggesting that there is high level of intertextuality associated with meme interpretation. Political memes often incorporate political comments, bits of news, culture and digital references, thus forming complex layers of meanings. The respondents were aware that memes do not exist in isolation and need prior knowledge of political events and media discourses to be understood.
- vi. The findings also bring up another aspect concerning respondents' knowledge about the circulation of political memes beyond one particular platform, suggesting their wide distribution across several online media. It shows that the meme culture is indeed characterized by the participation and sharing of information, which leads to continuous reproduction of memes, their transformation, and reinterpretation. Furthermore, the results also suggest that background knowledge is crucial for interpreting memes, thus indicating that the decoding process depends on people's awareness of current political events and personalities. As per the theoretical framework of discourse studies, meaning is never established once and for all but co-created through contextually dependent knowledge and communication process.
- vii. There is a consensus among the respondents regarding the contribution of political memes to public discussions and political awareness. This implies that the respondents do not view memes as simply fun or entertaining but rather see them as accessible means of communicating politics. In terms of linguistic features, political memes reduce complex political phenomena using humour, satire, hyperbole, and informal language. From the standpoint of social practice theory, this implies that political memes play a critical role in the formation of public discourse as simplification and re-representation of reality.
- viii. A large number of respondents think that political memes have an impact on the image of the politicians in Pakistan. This can be attributed to the understanding that linguistic features of memes, like irony, farming, exaggeration, and metaphors, play a key role in forming certain images of political

leaders. Through linguistic analysis it becomes clear that political memes usually focus on criticism, satire, and negativity of politicians, which can form collective attitudes towards them.

According to the results, repeated meme stories and language constructs affect the judgment of public, while there is a difference in the level of awareness of ideological influences among the respondents. Memes often use repetitive captions, catchphrases, and sarcasm in order to reinforce certain perspectives on political occurrences. Though some respondents recognize the ideological influence of memes, but there are others who remain uncertain. It suggests that this influence often operates at a subconscious level.

5.2 Conclusion and Recommendations

When considering linguistic aspects of political memes, it can be concluded that they serve as multimodal discourses where meanings are created based on the combination of the written language, visuals, sarcasm, and intertextuality. The findings of the current research, show that political memes use various linguistic techniques such as particular lexical choices, code-switching, exaggeration, irony, and metaphors in order to represent positive and negative portrayals of political leaders in Pakistan. In terms of creating meanings, it is possible to say that linguistic aspects used in memes significantly influence public opinion by turning complicated political realities into simple, understandable, and emotional messages. In any case, the ability of language to be flexible in memes creates various interpretations, which can possibly create ambiguity for individuals without digital literacy skills.

The study yielded the following findings in relation to the research questions.

- i. What specific linguistic features appear in Pakistani political memes that target Pakistani politicians?
 - i. Political memes frequently employ humour, satire, irony, and sarcasm among other linguistic devices to portray political leaders in an oversimplified way.

These devices allow for simplification of complicated political issues and their transformation into short statements which are easily understood and spread in digital environment. The purpose of using humour is to make political content more appealing and available to wide audience. Satire is used as the indirect criticism of political actions and demonstration of contradictions which exist in politics. Irony helps to provide messages with meanings that are opposite to the real situations. Sarcasm, in its turn, adds to the criticizing effect and provides messages with meanings that are opposite to explicit messages.

- ii. Exaggeration is a common feature of political memes to make the message more intense and point out the political failures of particular people. Through exaggeration, the issue is depicted on a larger scale than it actually is and becomes more noticeable for the audience. Such a technique creates strong emotions in the minds of people by depicting the situation in an exaggerated way. Exaggeration also brings attention to political mistakes and scandals that would not be noticed by many people. In addition, by simplifying the political reality through the process of overstatement, exaggeration makes the content more understandable and entertaining.
- iii. The informal language, including slang, is extensively used in political memes to make them more relevant and easier to understand. This type of language is associated with speech patterns utilized by people on a daily basis. In this way, it creates a feeling of familiarity and eliminates formal boundaries. Slang makes the memes more natural and realistic, thus increasing the efficiency of communication. It is especially efficient when targeting young people who regularly consume online content. The usage of such a language increases the effectiveness of interaction between political memes and audiences.
- iv. In political memes, negative connotation evaluative lexical choices are applied quite often in order to form the image of political personalities and governance problems. Evaluative lexical choices reflect opinion and assessment but not neutral description of the situation and thus impact how people

react emotionally to these political figures. Negative lexical choices are often used to assess political performance and highlight its weaknesses. The use of evaluative lexicon helps build both positive and negative political identities by attributing certain qualities to political personalities and institutions.

- v. Political memes that employ metaphoric language help to simplify political issues by making the abstract concepts more tangible. Metaphors make political situations relatable to common life scenarios through which the issue becomes more comprehensible and attractive emotionally.
 - vi. References from intertextuality, slogans, and repetitions are common features in political memes as they aid in relating the content of the meme to events taking place in the real world. Using well-known speeches, news, and statements allows for more meaning to be added and increased understanding of the issues in politics. The repetition of these ideas makes the memes easier to go viral on the internet.
- ii. How do these linguistic choices influence the public perception of political leaders?
- i. The results show that political memes significantly contribute to the shaping of the largely negative perception of political leaders, as the survey participants admitted that memes affect their perception of political figures. The questionnaire data shows that the audience does not see the memes as entertaining material only. On the contrary, they serve as the means through which the perception and attitude to political figures is formed.
 - ii. Satire, irony, and hyperbole are often deployed to point out deficiencies, problems, and controversies, thus directing the audience to analyse politicians in a critical way. Through the use of such language and rhetorical tools, complicated political problems become easier to comprehend and particular traits of the politicians get highlighted in a funny way.
 - iii. Negative evaluative language tends to depict political leaders as inefficient, corrupt, and unreliable, which creates negative portrayals of political actors

through memes. Using negative lexical devices helps meme creators create negative portrayals of politicians. These lexical devices impact how people think about certain attributes of leadership and create negative attitudes towards political figures

- iv. The humorous nature of political satire makes it more palatable and interesting and thus enables people to digest negative information and ideologies through memes. In other words, the entertaining aspect of memes allows criticism to be conveyed in a subtle way. In this way people tend to unconsciously adopt the ideology behind memes.
 - v. Frequent exposure to the same type of meme narratives tends to solidify opinions and contribute to the formation of public opinion on political personalities. The more people come across the same type of messages expressed through memes, the more likely they are to believe them. Exposure to memes influences public perception of political reality.
 - vi. The positive representation of politicians is much less common, which can imply that political memes exist primarily as a tool of political criticism, but not as a means of support or approval. The majority of the examined memes revolve around the exposure of flaws, political criticism, or ridicule of political figures, and not in the creation of a positive image.
- iii. How do these memes use language to either support or go against the main political narratives?
- i. Memes in politics are mostly used to undermine dominant discourses on politics, rather than promote them. Memes can serve as alternative communicative forums wherein official accounts of events are either questioned or reconstructed by the audience. Instead of relying on traditional political discourses, memes often tend to identify the weaknesses, paradoxes, or neglected aspects in these discourses. As a result, memes make the audience think critically about the information presented in political communication and help them view things from a different perspective.

- ii. Irony, sarcasm, and satire are the most common ways of undermining existing discourses and showing the contradictions or failures. Using such rhetorical devices enables meme producers to mock politicians and political institutions effectively. Through using sarcasm and irony in relation to a political issue or an event, it becomes easier to point out any flaws in leadership, policymaking, or politicians' public statements
- iii. It is crucial to emphasize that evaluative language and negative labels in political memes are effective tools for constructing the perception of politicians and their actions. Negative terms like "corrupt," "incompetent," or "unreliable" "imported" are typical examples of language that helps to simplify and reduce political actors into certain stereotypes, which in a way highlights criticism rather than neutrality. Memes can be regarded as the tools for constructing counter-narratives, and thus, providing different perspectives of political leaders and their policies. Memes often make use of labelling, which ultimately leads to critical stance.
- iv. The use of metaphors and symbols in memes can play a major role in making complicated political scenarios simpler and relatable to the viewers, as they link them to concepts or objects that are easily understandable. For example, rising prices are compared with tsunami. Political scenarios and politicians can be described through games, and players, thus helping viewers get the point without requiring any lengthy explanation. The other aspect is that the metaphors used in political memes are critical, as they change the perception of political happenings. Some flaws or contradictions of political leaders and policies become visible with such an approach.
- v. Humour is used in political memes as a very effective strategy to communicate an oppositional or a critical message using a light tone of communication. The use of humour, satire, or visuals in memes reduces the seriousness of the message. Thus, the audience easily accept it. In addition, the use of humour allows people to deal with serious issues indirectly and in a comfortable way, since the tone becomes indirect. Therefore, the audience is more willing to accept an alternative point of view or a dissenting idea.

- vi. Moreover, in some cases, political memes also play an important role in reinforcing prevailing political narratives through the repetition of commonly held beliefs and ideologies. This occurs when memes repeat the views that coincide with the existing ideology of the target audience. Nonetheless, such supportive representations are quite rare in the context of all meme rhetoric. The majority of memes are concentrated on criticism and satire, not endorsement. This indicates that the role of political memes is mostly that of a tool used for criticizing dominant political narratives.

Overall, political memes are more than just a form of amusing internet-based entertainment; rather, they are linguistic resources through which the meanings related to politics are constructed and contribute to the understanding of political reality. Using satire, irony, evaluative words, metaphors, and humour, political memes create meanings that affect how the audience perceives politicians and political events. Despite some memes reproducing preexisting attitudes, the dominant tendency of political memes is critical and oppositional, as they oppose the official version of the reality and provide an alternative way of looking at political events.

Based on the findings of the study the following recommendations are proposed for further investigation of the linguistic analysis of political memes and its effects on political perception. First, any future studies need to go beyond mere linguistic analysis and opt for multimodal research. The political memes do not only convey meanings through linguistic means alone but also through images, colours, layout, etc. The comprehensive analysis of all these semiotic tools will contribute to a better understanding of the way meaning construction and interpretation processes work. It is recommended that researchers apply the approaches like multimodal discourse analysis to achieve this goal.

Second, there is a need for future research to increase the number and diversity of the sample population. The current study confines itself to a particular group of respondents. It means that it limits the applicability of findings to other cases. If one increases the number of participants and uses those with various

age, education, profession, and political beliefs, it will be possible to have a better understanding of how political memes are viewed by people.

Thirdly, there is a need for educational institutions to incorporate media and digital literacy programmes in their curriculum. Given the fact that political memes tend to blend humour with an ideologically-loaded message, not everyone evaluates the meaning conveyed through such memes. With media literacy training, people will be able to critically think and therefore recognize persuasive linguistic devices like satire, exaggeration, and evaluative language.

Fourthly Authentic digital texts, such as political memes, should be incorporated into the language classes by ELT professionals to help students learn linguistic strategies in actual contexts. The application of digital texts may help learners develop their linguistic awareness, discourse analysis, pragmatics, and media literacy skills.

Finally, future studies should incorporate comparative and cross-cultural perspectives. Memes work differently in different cultures and political climates, and linguistic strategies may differ across various social contexts. Such research would enable comparisons of meme construction in diverse settings, and at the same time it will offer a wider perspective on the phenomenon.

5.3 Limitation of the Study

Although this research provides very useful insights into the linguistic analysis of political memes and their impact on perceptions of political leaders. However, it is important to highlight some limitations inherent to the research that should be taken into account.

First of all, the research is limited by the context, which means the memes used for analysis are taken from the political discourse of Pakistan only. Consequently, the results can vary in any other socio-political environment due to peculiarities of those settings.

Second, the sample is rather small and is limited to a particular group of respondents, and thus may not fully represent the entire population.

Third, the analysis is largely focused on language-based aspects, with little regard for multimodal elements like visuals, images, colours, and layout, which also contribute significantly to meaning-making in memes. The study of such elements will provide a more comprehensive understanding of memes.

Finally, the fast-changing aspect of digital media is another limitation, as memes evolve quickly over time. The results of this study only depict a specific time period and do not reflect ongoing developments in political meme discourse.

The study suggests future research to explore the topic in a greater depth.

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Appendix

Questionnaire for BS Students

Linguistic Analysis of Memes in Shaping Perception of Pakistani Political Leaders

This questionnaire investigates how linguistic features (such as irony, humor, satire, word choices, and hashtags) in political memes affect students' perceptions of Pakistani political leaders.

Meme



Target Audience: Students of BS Programs

Consent Form

Dear Participants,

Thank you for taking part in this research study. Before we proceed, I would like to obtain your informed consent. This study is purely conducted for an academic purpose to

Linguistically Analyze the Memes in Shaping Perception of Pakistani Political Leaders. Your participation is completely voluntary, and any information provided by you will be strictly kept confidential and anonymous. You reserve the right to freely decline to answer any question that may feel uncomfortable to you or withdraw from the study anytime. You are requested to spend a few minutes and kindly proceed with this form if you understand the purpose of this study and volunteer yourself to participate.

Demographic Information

1. Kindly provide the required information to complete your demographic data.

1. a. Name (optional)*

2. b. Age*

Mark only one oval.

☐ 19-21

☐ 22-24

☐ 25 +

3. b. Gender*

Mark only one oval.

☐ Male

☐ Female

4. c. BS Programs (semester)*

Mark only one oval.

☐ semester-1

☐ Semester-2

☐ Semester-3

☐ Semester-4

☐ Semester-5

☐ Semester-6

☐ Semester-7

☐ Semester-8

5. d. Most used Social Media Platform *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Instagram
- ☐ TikTok
- ☐ Facebook
- ☐ Reddit
- ☐ Twiter/X

6. e. Preferred political party (optional) *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI)
- ☐ Pakistan Muslim League - Nawaz (PML(N)
- ☐ Pakistan People's Party (PPP)
- ☐ Awami National Party (ANP)
- ☐ Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM)
- ☐ Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI-F)
- ☐ Jamaat-e-Islami (JI)

Dimension 1: Textual Analysis of the Meme

This section explores how the linguistic, visual, and symbolic features of political memes shape students' views of Pakistani political leaders.

Please rate your agreement with each statement using the 5-point scale below. Select the option that best reflects your perspective.

7. i. I believe that the use of word choices (such as "selected,"
"Imported," and "youthia") in political memes helps me understand the
hidden message. *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

8. ii. In my point of view, the use of humour, sarcasm, and irony (i.e.,
putting an amusing caption, making fun of the blunder made by the
political leader while speaking in public, or just saying the absolute
opposite of what is right) is quite an apparent feature in political memes. *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

9. iii. I don't think that memes depict topics like corruption, justice, or governance through metaphors (ladla, imported) and symbolic language (Panama Papers, Calibri Font). *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

10. iv. I think my interpretation of political memes is influenced by visual components, including settings, colours, symbols, and facial expressions. *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

11. v. I am of the view that my understanding of political statements is not influenced by the language and imagery employed in political memes. *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Disagree

☐ Strongly Disagree

12. vi. I believe political memes frequently exaggerate or distort facts to convey a stronger message. *

Mark only one oval.

☐ Strongly Agree

☐ Agree

☐ Neutral

☐ Disagree

☐ Strongly Disagree

Dimension 2: Discursive Practices

This section discusses the intertextuality, circulation and meaning making in political memes that affect students' perception of Pakistani political leaders.

13. i. I think political memes contain tags, slogans, or catchphrases such as "Tabdeeli Aa Nahi Rahi," "Tabdeeli Aa Gayi Hai," "Vote Ko Izzat Do." *

Mark only one oval.

☐ Strongly Agree

☐ Agree

☐ Neutral

☐ Disagree

☐ Strongly Disagree

14. ii. I perceive that memes usually refer to political speeches, events, and news. *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

15. iii. I am of the view that a clear knowledge of the references in memes help me interpreting their meaning better. *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

16. iv. I don't think political memes circulate from one social media platform to another. *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

17. v. I think political memes do not require any previous knowledge^{*} or background context to understand them.

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

18. vi. I observed that political memes combine multiple sources^{*} (images, speeches, news) into a single meme with a new meaning.

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

Dimension 3: SOCIOPOLITICAL PRACTICE

This section discusses the ideology, power and socio-political impact in political memes that affect students' perception of Pakistani political leaders.

19. i. I understand that political memes contribute to socio-political^{*} discussions (such as corruption, dynastic politics, and election rigging) regarding socio-political concerns in Pakistan.

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Strongly agree

- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

20. ii. I think memes on topics such as corruption, justice, and accountability influence how I perceive politicians. *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

21. iii. I believe that repeatedly told narratives about a certain topic in memes, influence my judgment of political personalities and leadership qualities. *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

22. vi. I believe that repeatedly told narratives about a certain topic in memes, influence my judgment of political personalities and leadership qualities. *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Strongly Agree

- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

23. v. In my opinion, political memes only entertain me; they do not have any impact on my political attitude. *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

24. vi. I understand that political memes help in critically examining political power and authority. *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

Open-Ended Questions

25. A. How do political memes impact the youngsters' perceptions of political leaders and politics? Please justify your answer.

*

- 27 B. In your opinion, do political memes promote critical thinking or spread bias? Please explain how.

*