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Article:	**Memes in the Digital Age: A Content Analysis of Social Media Memes in Pakistan**
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ABSTRACT

Memes have become a progressively common form of visual communication in past years, which has recently grabbed significant research interest. This study was conducted to explore the types/categories of memes and the way memes contents were presented on social media. The researcher did a content analysis and generated a coding sheet of fifty memes, twenty-five from Twitter and twenty-five from Instagram, and found that memes were classified as (informational, educational, political, promotional, religious, social, and cultural) memes categorized under seven major themes (awareness, factual, humiliating, humorous, roasting, serious, and trolling) according to their nature and content presentation. It is explored that most of the memes in a political category are serious and trolling in nature but in social/cultural categories, memes are used as humorous and humiliating in nature. On the other hand, five major themes emerged according to the coding sheet, these are (verbal language, attire, environment, personification attribute, and non-verbal language). The results show that in the present study, more memes are found in the English quality language and several memes in the Urdu slang language are greater while national attire is more leading in memes and they are more made in a domestic environment. Under the category of personification attribute, real-time characters and entertainment-based celebrities are highly highlighted in memes, and within the category of non-verbal language, the researcher derived thirty major themes based on the content of social media. According to this analysis, the political aspects category is more found in body language analysis of the contents of memes which shows that most of our memes are related to political characters and issues. The concept of code-mixing from English to Urdu and Urdu to English has also been observed.

Keywords: Memes, Social Media, Twitter, Instagram, Visual communication, Brand marketing, Verbal language, Slang language, Content analysis.

Introduction

In the 21st century, the advancement of social networking and social media websites transformed the landscape of communication dramatically. According to Camarero (2020) the American estimated survey of 2020 reveals that social media is used by 58.4% of the world's whole population while the social media apps mostly used by people are Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, Twitter, TikTok, WeChat, Sina Weibo, and QQ.

According to Shifman (2013), internet memes can be classified as a distinction between online memes and other memes. Internet memes are defined as (a) a group of digital artifacts that share common content, form, and/or posture features, (b) were generated with awareness of one another, and (c) were distributed, mimicked, and/or transformed by numerous users via the Internet. The word "meme" was produced by Dawkins (1976) which indicates the viral transmission of ideas. The first meme was made in 1996, which went viral with the sensation of a baby dancing 'cha-cha-cha' (Buhr, 2014).

Memes are a dominant unit of visual communication, which transmits symbols, cultural ideas, or practices that can be disseminated from one person to another person through gestures, writing, and rituals. Furthermore, research from University College London (2017) found that people who might be shy about expressing their values and opinions often use memes instead. Thus, according to Milner (2012) internet memes are the most common video and photo content on the internet, which convey or send a specific (often humorous) message, whose codes and meanings are well-grounded in the global culture

The aims or research objectives for the study are:

- To explore the types/categories of memes.
- To explore the way, the contents of memes are presented on Social Media.

The research questions of the study are as follows:

RQ1: What are the types/categories of memes?

RQ2: How contents of memes are presented on Social Media?

Literature Review

According to Hawley (2017), literature reviews bring focus and clarity to the research problem, improve research methodology, enhance knowledge in the research area, and contextualize researcher findings. Denisova (2019) analyzed that memes always appear with some kind of feelings, which may be feelings of happiness, sadness, or sarcasm. The age of memes is very short, they take less time to disappear, but they leave a lasting impact on people's minds. Saumya and Simran (2019) analyzed that memes are considered an authentic medium

to provide information on issues on which content is limited. It is also examined that memes produce controversy if they are not perceived properly by people, similarly, memes produce awareness if understood by a large group of people. Shamsi (2015) found that memes are being favorably used in digital media to grab the attention of people on a large scale as they serve a specific purpose that includes effective communication, presenting strong cultural bonding, and developing a strong reaction among online natives.

Abdul, R., Carmel, M., & Anju, M. (2020) analyzed that several social media pages are full of sarcasm and humor material that is exclusively dedicated to meme content. The results indicate that memes become the primary source of sarcastic content among a vast range of people as satirical memes are a helpful tool for people to highlight the critical, serious, and alternative perspectives of the realities of society. Stieger, S., Formann, A.K. & Burger, C. (2011) examined that satirical content plays an important role in criticizing famous personalities. It is observed that sarcastic content on memes has a great influence on the lifestyle of celebrities because people are making fun of them on an extensive level.

Akhther (2021) analyzed in what way internet memes do sarcastic communication on politics, as the importance of internet memes has increased in the modern era. It became a common trend for memes to communicate information by carrying sarcastic or hilarious factors, so this study is conducted to find out how these online memes affect political communication. Kaniz (2020) investigated that memes behave as a sarcastic tool as they are just a click away from the public's opinion. They have the power to highlight those serious issues that need much attention so it can be said these memes are the source to bridge the gap between political parties and the public because memes allow people to understand the issue just in a few words.

Marco, P., & Andrea, C. (2022) examined in what way the United States and Ecuador citizens utilize memes in their public conversations. It is suggested by research of study that the utilization of hilarious or sarcastic memes become a common trend among people to question the authority in a candidate debate. Furthermore, a message becomes a meme when there is less or no gap between reality and expectations. Maltseva (2017) examined that viewers are highly inspired by the attire of celebrities shown in memes as the world is overtaken by visual communication and among them, memes are on the top.

Hymes (2013) analyzed that meme slang language severely affects them psychologically, even if they like to use such type of language in their daily conversation. It is also found dialogues of celebrities in memes slang language more quickly get popular as compared to quality language.

Theoretical Framework

Shahid (2019) says that social responsibility theory appears with certain fundamentals like the obligation of media towards a society which means the media content, especially news must have relevance, objectivity, and truthfulness. Shahzad (2016) observed that social responsibility theory depends on the new procedure to maintain an interaction-relied forum along with moral, social, and ethical values. Siraj & Hussain (2016) say that the assumption of social responsibility theory leads toward the concept that the media must be responsible regarding its laws and regulations, the media must be capable of sorting out any matter or conflict in society without spreading sensationalism and exaggeration because media is considered a mirror of society.

While, according to the present study, social responsibility theory suggests that memes used on social media must be unambiguous, fair, and fact-based while vulgar and indecent content must be avoided as they harm the viewer's opinion and perception. Siraj & Hussain (2017) stated that social media must recognize its obligation to resolve the dispute that emerges through its content like memes become a popular platform that can transmit and communicate something such as insults, or critics of a person or society. According to Soumya (2011), there are several memes uploaded on the platform of social media by the memers according to the current turmoil in society, so the content of social media must be fair, accurate, truthful, and objective here we take memers as content producers of memes.

Thus, this theory relates to the current research work in a way that it guides the meme's contents to stay within their limits and encourage ethical standards. There should be a regulatory authority to regulate the contents of memes according to the ethical boundaries of our society. The content of memes can also be improved by self-actualization, or realization method which can bring positivity to our society.

Methodology

The current study based on "Social Media Memes in Pakistan: An Exploratory study consisting of the Content Analysis of viral Memes on Twitter and Instagram Users" is a qualitative study. The unit of analysis of this study was the entire meme. The population of this study is memes, both Twitter and Instagram memes are included in the population. The sample size of this study was fifty memes, twenty-five taken from Twitter and twenty-five from Instagram as it is not possible to analyze all the memes. The purposive sampling technique was used to select the sample of the most viral memes from the last 4 months from 1ˢᵗ of January to 30ᵗʰ of April, 2022. While *"Memes of Pakistan"* page for Instagram and *"Sir Saith Abdullah"* were selected from Twitter for the study. The reason behind choosing these two platform pages was their

popularity and followership among people in Pakistan. For this study, a coding sheet was used as an instrument. The thematic analysis was used for data collection and to answer research questions. The validity of the instrument such as coding was checked by the experts before collecting the data. For this purpose, four Professors of the University of Sargodha were chosen to check and approve the instrument to further conduct the research.

Data Analysis

5.1 What are the Types/Categories of Memes?

This study categorizes and analyzes memes using NVivo 12 Software and qualitative data techniques. Information is organized under parent themes, with nodes and specified codes assessed through triggers. Emphasis is placed on systematic graphical characteristics employed by social media users. Codes are assigned to nodes, and the repetition of nodded images is compared using coded matrix queries, cluster analysis, word mapping, and file classification. Data exploration and visualization involve cluster-by-word similarity queries, matrix coding queries, coded analysis by nodes of sources, and nodes exploration with associated sources. The qualitative content analysis interpretation is presented without conflict of interest in the following pages.

5.1.1 Themes and Subtheme Development

The goal of theme development was to identify and categorize memes on social media. Memes were classified into informational/educational, political, promotional, religious, and social/cultural categories, leading to the identification of seven major themes:

1. Awareness, **2.** Factual, **3.** Humiliating, **4.** Humorous, **5**. Roasting, **6.** Serious, **7.** Trolling

Figure 1: Coded Matrix Based on Parent Codes of Memes Type

A coding matrix query assessed meme references to explore their dimensions towards nature and types. Across seven major themes, memes were categorized based on nature and content presentation. The analysis revealed a higher prevalence of humor and trolling themes, indicating that a majority of memes fall within these categories.
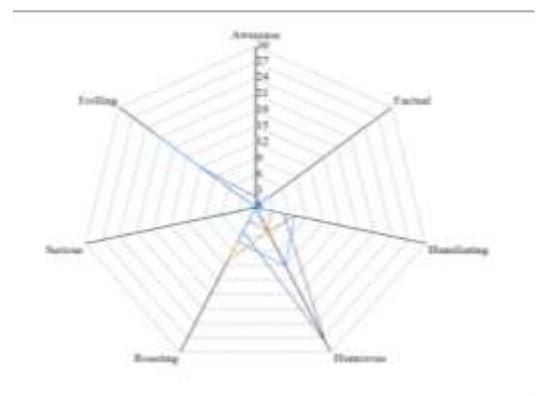
Figure 2: Comparative Analysis of Meme Types and Memes Nature

Figure 2 compares meme types on social media, revealing a predominant focus on humor. Political and social/cultural memes are associated with trolling, while matrix coding highlights that a higher percentage of political memes are serious (65.71%) and trolling (50.91%). In the social/cultural realm, humor (65.56%) and humiliating memes (51.56%) prevail. Political memes often aim to criticize and oppose, while social/cultural memes tend to cross ethical boundaries for humor.
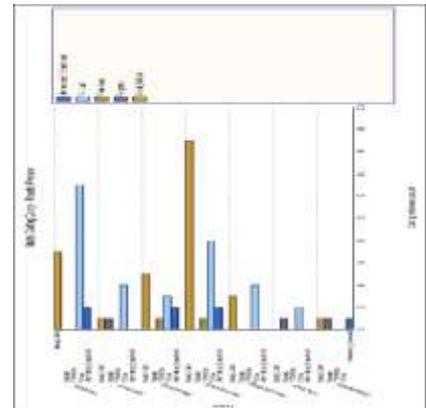
5.2 How Contents of Memes are presented on Social Media?

Five major themes were emerged according to the coding sheet for question no 2 as followed:

Verbal Language

Costume/Attire

Environment

Personification Attribute

Foreign

Native

Natural

Western

Public

Domestic

Entertainment based

Political based

Slang

Quality

Traditional

Official

Cat-based

Slang

Quality

Non-Verbal Language
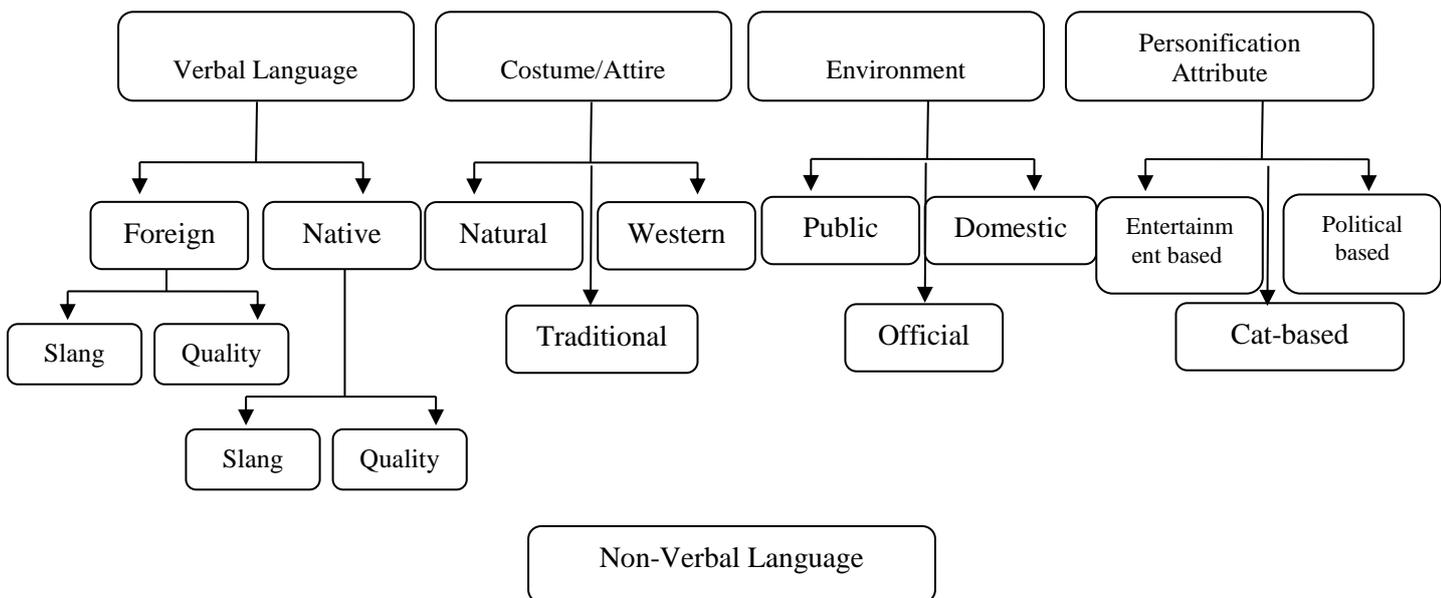
5.2.1 Verbal Language

5.2.1.1 Definition

Verbal communication is considered as any interaction that involves words for communication, whether they are spoken, signed, or written.

Verbal language is the major theme. It has some sub-themes as follows

5.2.1.3 Foreign Language

A foreign language is not a mother or native language as it is not commonly spoken in Pakistan such as English, Arabic, French, Chinese, etc. but English is the most common language used in memes.

- **Slang Language**

Slang is a type of informal language, common in speaking rather than writing. Here we conceptualize it as foul language or language in a bad and unethical sense.

Here are examples of English-slang language memes:

Waseem badami with his khubani.

In this meme 'Waseem Badami with is Khubani' is pointed toward the English slang language. Because *Badami and Khubani* are associated with father and son names here. Here the meme is providing light humor by comparing father-son relations with two dry fruit names.

- **Quality Language**

Quality language is conceptualized as a language following the ethical standards of our society and norms.

Here are examples of English-quality language memes:

Here it is indicated that all members of the PTI left the parliament house but Ali Muhammad sat alone thereby representing his party. A sense of respect put this meme in the form of quality language as it shows the commitment of Ali Muhammad Khan towards his leader Imran Khan

5.2.1.4 Native Language

It is conceptualized as the language that the person in early childhood acquires. The major languages spoken by natives of Pakistan are Urdu, which is the National Language of Pakistan

Slang Language

Slang language refers to language which is unethical and not common in formal conversion. Here are examples of Urdu slang language memes.

Here are examples of Urdu-slang language memes:

In this meme two captions are given, one is '*Baki politicians ka jalsa hota hai*' and the other is *'Imran Khan ka concert hota hai'*. These types of mock captions criticize other political parties and appreciate PTI *Jalsa* which was crowded or jam-packed in the current past.

Quality Language

Quality language is considered ethical and according to the norms and standards of society. Here are examples of Urdu's quality language.

Here are examples of Urdu-quality language memes:

In this meme, the devotion and courage of PTI Chairman Imran Khan are shown by his wording, and the caption is given '*Are you with Imran Khan"*? Such type of words is taken in the form of quality Urdu language as the emotional message is propagated to the audience that they should support their leader Imran Khan.

Data Analysis

Here the research analyzed 50 memes from Twitter and Instagram, to categorize them into native (Urdu) and foreign (English) languages, further dividing them into sub-themes of Slang and Quality language. Contrary to previous studies, the findings indicate a higher number of

memes in Urdu slang language and English quality language. The concept of code-mixing, involving the use of vocabulary and grammar from English to Urdu and Urdu to English has been observed which is too common in writing, typing, and speaking styles
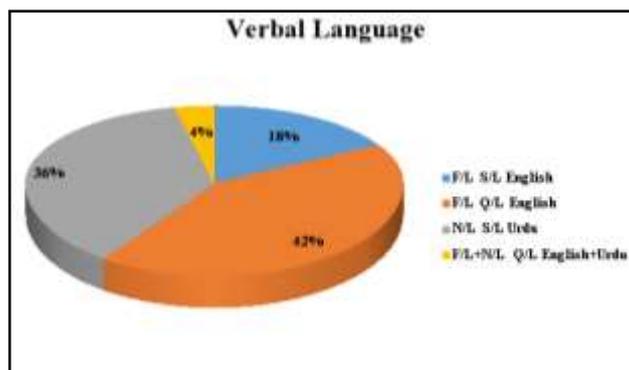
5.2.2 Attire

5.2.2.1 Definition

Attire are garments worn to show the cultural, national, or religious identity of a person or nation.

5.2.2.3 National Attire

National attire represents the national dress of the locals of the country. It is conceptualized as Shalwar Kameez the national dress of all five provinces of Pakistan.

As an example, in this meme, it is shown that PTI Chairman Imran Khan during his Jalsa wears the national attire of Pakistan *'Shalwar Kameez'* and *'Waistcoat'* which shows the national tradition of Pakistan, and *'Tasbeeh'* in his hand showing his spirituality towards Islam.

5.2.2.4 Traditional Attire
Traditional attire represents the culture or heritage of the natives of the country. Such as Sindh, Balochi, Punjabi, Khyber Pakhtun Khwa clothing, Gilgit, and Kashmiri dress.

As an example, in this meme, Bilawal Bhutto, Pakistan's Foreign Affairs Minister, is depicted wearing traditional Sindh attire, 'Shalwar Kameez' and 'Ajrak.' The satire mocks his Urdu language skills, suggesting humorously what it would be like if he were an Urdu teacher, highlighting his perceived lack of proficiency in his native language.

5.2.2.5 Western Attire

It is conceptualized as the type of costumes or attires in which men's and women's clothes are derived from Western countries. For example, hats, neckwear, shirt, pants, trousers, coats etc.

As an example, in this meme, it is shown that Barack Obama, the ex-President of the USA wears the Western attire *'Pant Coat'* and *'Tie'* during the official meeting. This meme humorously compares Barack Obama and Pakistan's Interior Minister, Rana Sanaullah. As Rana Sanaullah removed himself from ECL while Barack Obama awarded himself the Nobel Peace Prize in 2009,

Data Analysis

Here it is discussed which kind of attire (national/ traditional/ western) is highly examined in memes. For this, the researcher analyzed 50 memes from Twitter and Instagram, categorizing them based on the Attire theme: national, traditional, or Western attire. Results indicated a higher prevalence of memes featuring national attire, followed by Western attire, with the least representation of traditional attire. This contrasts with previous findings, emphasizing a shift toward national attire being more prominent in memes according to the present research.
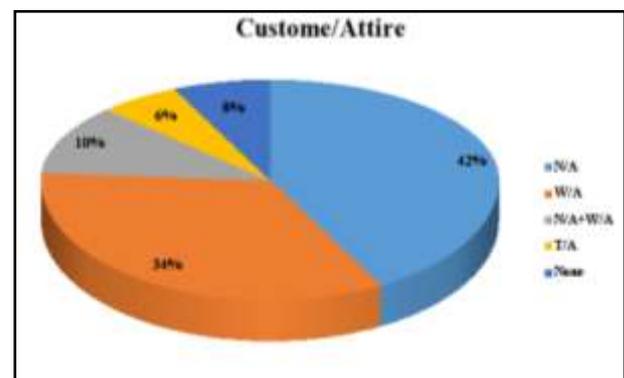
5.2.3 Environment

The environment is considered as a geographical area in a whole or particularly, where people live, interact or perform certain activities.

5.2.3.1.1 Domestic Environment

In a domestic environment, the occupants live and interact with socio-cultural and environmental factors such as their homes, etc.

As an example, in this meme, the duck is shown and its caption *'Girls going to the kitchen at 3 am and suddenly lights turn' off'* presents the domestic environment'. The running speed of the duck shows that girls run speedily at 3 AM, if the light turns off, such a situation depicts a domestic environment.

5.2.3.1.2 Official Environment

In the official environment, the people are in a formal setting, where they are working in an official setup by having some rules and regulations set by the company or any other institution.

As an example, in this meme, the picture of Ali Tareen shaking hands with Hamza Shahbaz shows the official environment as they are together in some official meeting. The meme shows the hypocrisy of PMLN candidate Hamza Shahbaz as his political party used to chant *'Cheenichor'* at Ali Tareen while here he is shaking hands with him

5.2.3.1.3 Public/Outdoor Environment

It is conceptualized as the environment in which people are in an outdoor environment, where programs and activities take place by interacting with others.

As an example, in this meme, the public environment is shown, as Shaheen Afridi lifting Muhammad Rizwan on the cricket ground by celebrating their victory in PSL while the meme shows the love and bonding between Pakistani cricketers.

- **Data Analysis**

Here it is discussed which kind of environment (official environment, domestic environment, and public environment.) is highly examined in memes. For this, the researcher collected data from Twitter and Instagram, analyzing fifty memes based on their environmental themes. The findings show that domestic environments have the highest number of

memes, followed by public environments, with the least in official environments. This aligns with previous research, suggesting that memes are often created in domestic settings to resonate with viewers' daily lives and routines.
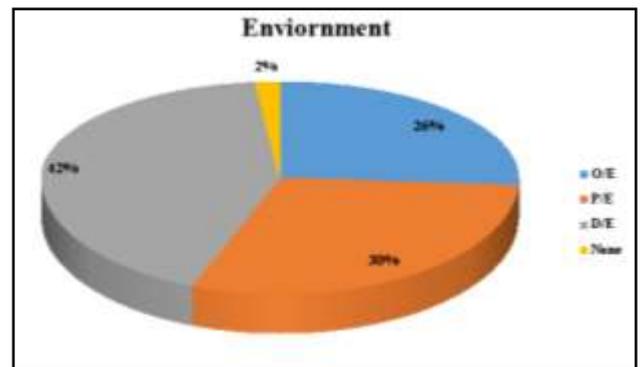
5.2.4 Personification Attribute

5.2.4.1 Definition

A personification attribute refers to the person or animal who is dominant in a particular setting by behavior, style, quality, or designation.

5.2.4.3 Entertainment Based

It is conceptualized as a person, who is related to the entertainment or media industry and that particular person is prominent due to his personality, quality, or elegance.

As an example, in this meme, the caption 'Yeh Mohabbat nahin to or kya hai' features popular Pakistani actors Syra Yousaf and Feroz Khan, embodying an entertainment-focused representation at a PTI Jalsa.

5.2.4.4 Political Based Personification Attribute

It is conceptualized as a person who is related to a political field or that particular person is famous in politics or political activities.

As an example, in this meme with the caption *'Jab 2 min ke liye class ki light chali jay,'* the Pakistani Member of the National Assembly Amir Liaquat is indicated and taken as a

political personification attribute. This meme shows the excitement of backbenchers when lights go off in the classroom.

5.2.4.5 Cat-Based Personification Attributes

It is conceptualized as the cat being used as an indicator in a particular setting because various animals are used as personification attributes in various situations and famous among the people.

In this meme, the cat is taken as a personification attribute as it is popular and well-known among the memers and the general public. This meme provides humor as it shows that if your birthday comes in Ramzan, you replace your cake with dates.

- **Data Analysis**

Here discussion focuses on the personification attributes present in memes, categorized into entertainment-based, political-based, and cat-based themes. For this the researcher collected and analyzed fifty memes from Twitter and Instagram, focusing on personification attributes. The result indicates that real-time characters and celebrities from the entertainment industry are prominently featured, while fictional or animal-based attributes are less common compared to political and entertainment themes.

5.2.5 Non-Verbal Language/Body Language

The fifth theme, examining how memes present content on social media, was analyzed similarly to the first question. Social media memes exhibit various flavors for opinionated sharing, ranging from funny and humorous to commentary on political and social issues. The researcher identified five major categories: Sarcastic, Humorous, Fearful, Political, and Sentimental, each further divided into thirty themes.

- Pointing something, Trolling, Joking, Criticizing, and making fun under the Sarcastic Category.
- Celebrating, Happily Married, Humorous under the Humorous Category.
- Afraid, Angry, and Scared, Shivering with Fear and Alarming under the Fearful Category.

- Awarding, Charged Mob, Democratic Leadership, Discussing, Spying, Actively Participant, Committed, Smartness, Addressing, Confidence, Support Someone, Teaching under Political Category.

- Affection, Gloom, Missing Someone, Overburdened, and Disappointed under Sentimental Category.

The themes were developed based on body language, movements, and emotions portrayed in graphical memes, utilizing both English and Urdu languages.

Figure 1: Item Clustering by Word Content Similarity in Memes.

A cluster analysis query based on the word similarity of themes is employed to develop the patterns of themes. The larger cluster of topics was distributed under the last bunch (light green) in Figure 1. There were eight themes centered on awarding, trolling, celebrating, scaring, democratic leadership, criticizing, teaching, and addressing.
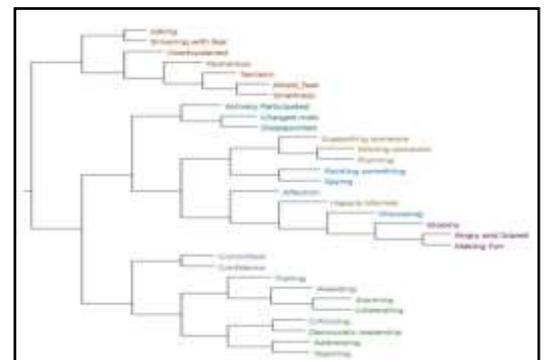
Figure 2: Overview of Concept Map based on Coded Structure for Content of Memes

Figure 2 illustrates the busiest traffic connections identified through mapping 50 memes and their themes. Interrelated links in file classification, linear relationships, and displayed images initially followed the same direction. However, the introduction of democratic leadership altered the direction, particularly in connection to mega themes and memes.

According to this analysis, the political aspects category is more found in body language analysis of the contents of memes. Which shows that most of our memes are related to political characters and issues
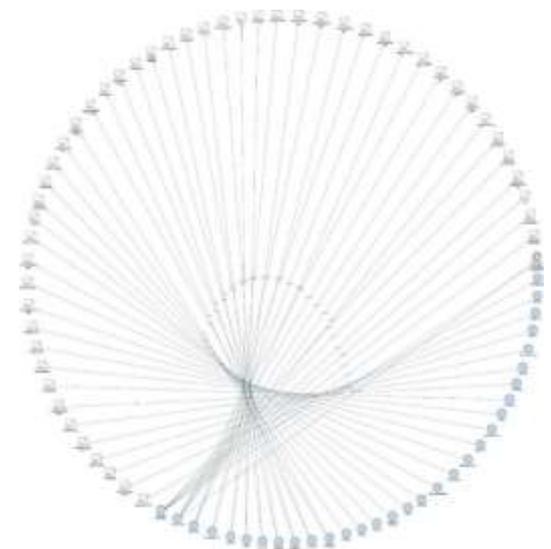
5.4 Discussions and Conclusions

The content discusses the increasing importance of social media in the modern era, with a focus on visual communication platforms and the prevalent use of internet memes. Memes, often in the form of videos or combined text and images, are widely shared on platforms like

social media, 9GAG, and 4Chan, covering various aspects of private life, politics, fashion, and gender roles.

The researcher conducted a content analysis of fifty memes from Twitter and Instagram, categorizing them into seven themes: informational, educational, political, promotional, religious, social, and cultural. These themes were further classified based on nature and content presentation, resulting in awareness, factual, humiliating, humorous, roasting, serious, and trolling categories. The study found that political memes were often serious and trolling, while social/cultural memes tended to be humorous and humiliating.

Additionally, the content analysis identified five major themes – verbal language, attire, environment, personification attribute, and non-verbal language. Results indicated a prevalence of English verbal language, a significant number of memes in Urdu slang, a focus on national attire, creation in domestic environments, and the highlighting of real-time characters and entertainment-based celebrities under the personification attribute category. The researcher derived thirty major themes based on the content of social media in the non-verbal language category.

Limitation and Further Research

This study explores the impact of memes on Twitter and Instagram, providing unique insights. However, it has limitations, focusing solely on these platforms and specific pages. Other social media platforms with similar patterns were not included. The study encourages future researchers to compare meme content across various sites and popular pages to explore different dimensions. Despite its limitations, the study contributes to understanding meme culture's lasting impact on user opinions, predicting increased popularity and global usage in the coming years.

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Appendix A

Coding Sheet for the Types of Memes

Date	Title	Political	Social/Cultural	Economic	Religious	Informational/ Educational	Promotional (Marketing)

Appendix B

Coding Sheet for the way Contents of Memes Are Presented on Social Media

Title	Verbal Language	Costume / Attire	Environment	Personification Attribute	Non Verbal Language/ Body Language