

Sociological Features Of Urdu And English Memes: An Analysis

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Abstract

In the contemporary realm of digitized existence, memes have become the norm of our virtual culture, omnipresent across the various platforms of social media. Functioning as a distinct and advanced mode of communication, memes enable social media users with an unfettered avenue to communicate their thoughts, jokes, ideas, critiques, etc. This study focuses on English and Urdu memes as one of the internet communication phenomena and their specific sociological features that make these memes interesting sociologically. Here mainly the memes that are in the form of images with a piece of written text on them are considered. Within the purview of this exploration, the General Theory of Verbal Humor presented by Raskin and Salvatore in 1991, has been undertaken as an analytical lens. Six memes apiece from both English and Urdu have been selected for the analysis. From the results, it was shown that memes are used as strong social expressions. These reflect public reactions to political, social, and economic events, depicting the strong influence of technology on social behaviors. Urdu memes, being intrinsically rooted in the national fabric of Pakistan, emerges as more understandable and relatable to a Pakistani layman. In this way, Urdu memes stand distinguished for

their contextual alignment with the Pakistani society, when put against English memes.

Introduction

In the current epoch marked by post-modernity, technological advancement attains its peak. The world has shrunk due to advanced scientific inventions, discoveries, and the persuasive influence of the internet. The internet has given birth to social media which is serving as an agent for global interconnectedness. The digitally mediated milieu is blessed with many capabilities. Due to the easy, affordable, and language processing tools of the internet, it has given more possibilities to its users to share, adapt, visualize, replicate, and manipulate their ideas and also the ideas of other people. Among the manifold outcomes given by the internet is the proliferation of ideas through internet memes. If we take the origin of memes, the concept found its origin in the seminal work "The Selfish Gene" by Richard Dawkins in 1979. He coined the term meme to describe "small cultural units of transmission, comparable to genes, which are passed from person to person through copying or imitation." Memes encompass a broad spectrum of concepts including ideas, gestures, signs, melodies, catchy tunes, garments, fashions, religion, science, emotions, social expressions, and politics (Dawkins & Davis, 2017; Akram et al., 2020). Manifesting in diverse formats, these range from visual depictions to textual forms. Most popular memes are in the form of digital images with captions on it following spelling mistakes, incorrect grammar, and slang, etc. Furthermore, the context of original memes does not usually remain the same, allowing a myriad of interpretations to be correlated with a single meme, ranging from social issues to personal sentiments. This study is significant in and of itself because it is one of the initial studies, particularly about Urdu memes. This study provides a starting point for further research on the subject in Pakistan. The importance of our national language Urdu is highlighted in this study where its optimistic picture is revealed and its creativity has been exposed thoroughly through analysis. The research helps to understand the use of language for humor and its implication in conveying a message in a social setting. Therefore, it would be beneficial for academia in particular and society in general.

Literature Review

Numerous studies have used social network elements to predict the virality of internet memes, while others have created mathematical

models that closely match the way memes spread online. Meme popularity exhibits a long-tailed distribution even when measured in a variety of methods. Most memes are only enjoyed by a few tens of people, and very few memes genuinely go viral. Memes are more likely to become viral when they are shared with diverse, linked audiences. Furthermore, individuals are more inclined to spread memes based on previously shared content.

A meme's success may be influenced not only by its content and social network dynamics but also by stylistic attributions. The examination of hashtags on Twitter unveils that element such as capitalization and conciseness follow legibility as determinants of meme popularity,

Events, occurrences, or behaviors frequently affect a cultural or global community as a whole. In such circumstances, we all experience the same feelings, tensions, and stress, which make our feelings reciprocal. Concerns are raised about the increasing engagement of adult internet users with political memes, prompting apprehensions about the potential propagation of misinformation and extremist ideologies. A recent analysis of Twitter data revealed that 30% of image-with-text memes have political content. The political and demographic groups that share those memes vary widely as well (Barnes et al., 2021).

In the fabric of cultural and global communities, memes are among the best ways for members of a cultural group to deal with any stress or anxiety brought on by a circumstance. Memes' rising popularity is due to their capacity to foster social integration. Most people can connect to, discuss, and feel less alone in a stressful circumstance when it is turned into a humorous meme. As a result, dealing with the stressor is easier and less painful. In today's fast-paced and demanding lives, coupled with moments of personal dependency, struggle for ease and leisure is necessary. In addition, certain life situations can make us feel down. So it makes sense to look for ways to improve oneself. Different people employ various activities to improve their mood, such as playing video games, watching TV, conversing with family members, and so forth. And this is when memes come into play. Memes can be used as a tool to improve your mood. The brain quickly begins releasing feel-good hormones like endorphins and oxytocin when it encounters a humorous image or video, which improves the mood. Another factor contributing to memes' widespread appeal is their important function in mood improvement. They are frequently used by people to escape the stresses of daily life and feel calmer and happier (Arsalan, 2022). Similar views

were discussed by MacDonald that topics that are challenging to discuss are commonly covered in memes. Politics, peer pressure, and significant societal developments can all be addressed through memes in a way that makes a point and still makes people laugh. People love memes that express their feelings about things and push them to consider ideas from new angles. Utilizing social media to its full potential can help the business engage with clients in fresh ways that stand out in your industry. Let Pennington Creative create a social media marketing strategy for the company that is tailored to people's industry, talks in one's tone, and links one to influential people in the neighborhood (McDonald, 2018).

Internet memes are now a part of our Pakistani culture. They are used, perceived, and transmitted through social media. Memes were not originally of funny or viral nature but were only meant to explain the replication of ideas in a culture. The meme culture has a paradoxical nature where it is both unifying in the sense of polarizing and predation in terms of content. Memes have the ability to handle serious issues in funny ways which otherwise might be taboo to talk about. They mostly satirically criticize popular narratives and create space for multi interpretations of a signal event or idea. The meme game in Pakistan is extremely strong. It has its own Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter pages where its creators create by dissecting everything from the latest political upheavals, and sports results to every social concern that occupies our collective attention in the country. The researchers further elaborated on the Pakistani memes by giving examples from the Pakistani context which went viral. (Bokhari, 2020)

Dawkins goes on to list the three key characteristics of a meme as being faithfulness, fertility, and longevity. The term "longevity" refers to a meme's capacity to endure through time. The first two of these characteristics are derived from the Ancient Greek word mimesis, which means imitation; the former alludes to a meme's capacity to be accurately and massively copied. The "dil garden garden hua" meme, which has grown in popularity in recent years, is an obvious example of how an intellectual meme may enter the common awareness within the Pakistani memesphere as shown in Fig. 1. The original video that gave rise to the viral image may or may not have attempted to quote the Bollywood song Dil Garden Garden Ho Gaya, but it unmistakably references the poetic form of gulshan shayari, where the meaning of the garden in the text is understood and replicated over time - as any good meme should be (Moaswes, 2019).



Fig.1. Dil Garden Garden Howa Meme

When the Coronavirus hit the street of Pakistani nation, Imran Khan, now the former Prime Minister (PM) of Pakistan made a speech for the nation on the breakdown of COVID-19 in Pakistan. He asked everyone in his speech not to worry about anything in Urdu as “apne sub sy pehly ghabrana nahi hai”, which in English means that first of all, do not panic/fear. People used his image as shown in Fig.2, and wrote “aapey ghabrana nahi hai” making fun of his statement. Later on, Pakistani music composer, Saad Alvi, uploaded a video on his YouTube channel which was titled “PRIME MINISTER IMRAN KHAN SAY’S AAP NE GHABRANA NAHI HAI” highlighting a strong sociological feature of satire and humor. This video was a mashup of the PM’s speech with a musical spin that got viral overnight in Pakistan and India. Deep down this meme was used to mock someone’s condition that is in great trouble (Maker, 2021).



Fig.2. PM of Pakistan's Utterance Used as Meme

According to the most recent government statistics, Pakistan is the world's largest importer of tea, or "chai", paying more than \$515 million annually to bring the commodity in, largely from Kenya. However, the nation is experiencing a protracted economic crisis as its depleting foreign reserves are being utilized to pay off its crushing debt. The citizens of Pakistan responded negatively to the minister's suggestion to reduce tea drinking by making memes about him as shown in Fig.4. and Fig.4. given below (Bhalla, 2022).

response of chai lovers:



Ahsan Iqbal requests nation to cut down tea consumption
Le Tea lovers: 😊



Fig.3. Reaction Meme on Tea's cut off **Fig.4.** Reaction Meme on Tea's cut off

Methodology

Understanding the sociological features found in internet memes was the main goal of this study. We examined memes with a focus on political, social, and economic concerns from a range of sociological categories. After careful screening, 6 memes (3 in English and 3 in Urdu) were chosen for in-depth analysis. The study draws on the "General Theory of Verbal

Humour" to analyze the sociological relationships between jokes and memes, emphasizing components including satire, social criticism, and cultural representation.

Analysis of Memes

Sociological perspectives examine how political interactions, economic relationships, and social institutions affect behaviour. In social sociology, behaviours within families and communities are investigated. Labour, consumption, and markets are the main topics of economic sociology, which frequently involve institutions. Political sociology investigates how political institutions shape power. The sociological aspects of English and Urdu memes are the following:

Meme on Imran Khan Meeting Bill Gates (Political meme in English)

Imran Khan, the PM, and other leaders were met by Bill Gates, co-chair of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, in Islamabad. Bill Gates, a co-founder of Microsoft Corp and philanthropist, visited Pakistan on February 17, 2022. In this meeting, he suggested that Pakistan, one of the last two countries in the world where the polio virus is endemic, could be free of the disease within the next few years (Greenfield, 2022).

Keeping in view the background of the meeting which was solely political, memers have turned it into a politically funny meme. Netizens made fun of this meeting and created a meme using a funny image of Imran Khan and Bill Gates standing and talking. This is where the PM starts talking about what he knows about things best than Bill Gates. As in this meme, the memer has written that Imran Khan is telling Bill Gates that he knows MS Word better than Bill Gates. As it shows that the PM has more knowledge of things than Bill Gates who has great knowledge of software in the whole world. Here, Imran Khan has presented himself as a stylish individual and it might have triggered the brain of this memer, so he has presented himself as superior to Bill Gates.



Fig.5. Political Memes in English (W. D. Staff, 2022)

Meme on Imran Khan becoming Prime Minister of Pakistan (political meme in Urdu)

Haider (2021) said that the central committee and the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) clergy have been at odds over moon sighting during Ramadan and Shawwal for a very long time. The provincial administration has recently embarrassed the federal government by formally recognizing the choice made by the province's clerics. He added that the senior KP minister Bashir Ahmed Bilour declared a day before the central government's Eid that the provincial government would observe Eid yesterday. "If they can't wait for us and don't accept our decisions, then we will also not accept their decisions," he added.

In addition, On Wednesday, July 25, 2018, general elections were held in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in which PTI won 67 general seats out of 99, while Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal won 10, Awami National Party won 6, Pakistan People Party won 5 seats, PMLN won 5, General Independent Seats (IND) won 5 seats, and Qawmi Watan Party won 1 general seat (Geo News, 2018).

Therefore, in this political meme, it is predicted that Peshawar usually sees the Eid moon a day before the rest of Pakistan. Imran's Peshawar and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa are the PTI's strongholds. In this meme, the cartoon predicts Imran Khan as prime minister. "Peshawar mein wazirazam nazar aagaya" is what it says, meaning "The prime

minister has been seen in Peshawar" after the General Elections. It means that this prediction of Eid can also be used in political backgrounds by the memers to give hype to the situation even more or to simply make people laugh.



Fig.3. Political Memes in Urdu (Vij, 2018)

Meme on a Mom Taunting Her Son for Being Only a Social Media Manager (Social meme in English)

There are parents who always taunt their children for using their mobile phones and laptops all day and night. There is a famous red monkey meme that stares or looks in a serious way. Here, this meme says that the mom after watching her children on social media always says that you won't be able to get any kind of job because you always use your phone and social media instead of doing anything creative. In this image, the red hair monkey with budging eyes is shown as a reaction the child to his/her mother. Here, this stare is from a social media marketer to his mom. It shows that social media managers work and earn more as compared to a normal human having a job. These are the managers who socialize with people from online sites or even make ads that make them earn much money because of technological growth; the work of such marketers is getting more innovative day by day. Red hair monkey shows bad feelings because any mom saying this to their children is having a job. This monkey made many people laugh who could relate their situation to it.

This meme highlights a social phenomenon that shows the concerns of almost all mothers who don't want their children to waste time on social media.

Mom: You won't get a job wasting time on social media all day and night.

Social Media Marketer:



Fig.3. Social Meme in English (Bot, 2020)

Meme on Black Couple Clothing (Social meme in Urdu)

As said earlier, memes largely reflect the social conditions. In this Urdu meme, the memer has used the image of a couple wearing clothes made of green leaves. The memer had made a joke about their funny looks that the couple looks beautiful. And, all should pray that goats do not come near them. In Urdu, it says "bohat hi khubsurat jora hai bs bakriyan na ajaye". This meme is highlighting one of the social features globally in which the dressing of of the couple has been mocked,appealing to everyone to pray for them. The couple in meme seems really confident about their looks which is impressive but it looks funny too.



Fig.4. Social Meme in Urdu (Fari, 2020)

Meme on Worst Economic Days in Pakistan (Economic meme in English)

Rabie (2016) says that the development and maintenance of society depend on the presence of a strong economy. Every economy operates solely to satisfy peoples' expanding demands as their circumstances change. Therefore, economy is a part of society, and society is the setting in which the economy operates. Every society has its own economy as a result of this relationship, and each economy reflects the requirements and cultural characteristics of the society as well as the main characteristics of the civilization in which it lives. Thus, the economy is one of the leading sociological factors in our societies. Keeping this view in the background, we can say that the unstable condition of Pakistani's economy has given a free hand to memers to highlight, discuss and laugh at it. The meme selected for analysis is given below, where a statement about the economic condition of Pakistan is written by the meme creator. Two pictures of an interviewer and Imran Khan, the former PM, are taken where in the first picture, it is written that Imran Khan promised the

nation after becoming the PM that the bad days are over fortunately but then the memers attach a second picture, which says that now the whole nation will face worse days of your life. Here, Imran Khan's behavior took the attention of the audience and the memers made many memes to circulate humor as well as satire. As netizens could relate the economic condition of Pakistan to this meme, it got famous. People laugh at the mockery used in this meme because deep down it meant that Imran Khan's tenure as a PM would worsen the economic condition of Pakistan. In this way, memes can create higher level of awareness among the people. These are easy to understand and serve as a powerful form of commentary.



Fig.5. Economic Meme in English (India, T. O., 2022)

Meme on High Inflation Rates (Social meme in Urdu)

Like many other PMs tenure, in Imran Khan's tenure too, high inflation rates were observed (Parkin & Bokhari, 2022). Memers made memes on such situations mocking the tenure of the PMs highlighting the socioeconomic condition of the country. The meme selected here for analysis is a photo-shopped image of Imran Khan with white hair and a beard. It shows his old age. The Urdu text written on meme means that

in 2038, Imran Khan becomes the Prime Minister of Pakistan for the fifth time. And, now the population of Pakistan has remained at only 0.2 million, the rest of all died of the high inflation rates in the country. This meme has mocked the tenure of Imran Khan as a PM as high inflation rates were observed in tenure.



Fig.6. Economic Meme in Urdu (Zia, 2020)

Conclusion

The sociological components encoded in English and Urdu memes are thoroughly examined in this study, highlighting their increased relevance in the world of digital communication, especially among the younger population, as effective instruments for conveying feelings and ideas. Examining memes in the analysis reveals a range of functions they fulfil, including humour, satire, and social expression. Notably, Urdu memes have a strong emotional resonance with Pakistani viewers, enabling the moving expression of feelings and thoughts.

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