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Meme Culture: A Study of Humor and Satire in Digital Media

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Abstract

Meme culture is an interesting phenomenon in digital media that plays an important role in digital communication and culture that has become a popular tool for conveying information and ideas that spread rapidly on the internet and social media platforms. The purpose of this study is to examine more deeply how the satire discourse is contained in pictorial texts and purely texts in memes how the role of memes in digital media, and how their impact in digital media as well as knowing how the role of memes in shaping individual and group identity. This research is interesting because the satirical humor style contained in memes is an effective, practical, absurd response to entertainment,

politics, education, culture, and others and can shift, exclude, and reverse discourse, because it can create new discourse. This research study uses critical discourse analysis by Norman Fairclough, which identifies that discourse can be a series of spoken and written words or a series of speech acts. With this analytical knife, it was found that satire in memes on social media is used in the form of satire and criticism of things that are going viral and how these issues affect social media in the real world. Memes are not seen as silent, passive, and ready-made texts when produced. Instead, memes are dynamic and mobile strategies through comedic satire.

Keywords: Meme, Humor, Satire, Digital Media

Introduction

Meme culture has evolved in three generations. Characters mark the first generation, emojis mimic the faces of the second generation, and narrative elements mark the third generation. Each generation has different narrative elements, which contribute to the development of virtual communication and online culture (HAIDÄU, 2023). As a unit of cultural information, memes spread like genes and spread through symbols or imitation. It is influenced by external experiences, internal experiences, and emotions, and is followed by the process of decline, variation, and selection (Xu *et al.*, 2022) ^[42]. Advances in communication technology also encourage creativity and reflect offline reality through attractive visuals (Murfianti, 2020) ^[26]. This form of low culture has become popular since the 1980s, has gained widespread recognition, impacts audiences by providing entertainment, fun, and relatedness while serving as a means to express feelings or opinions on pressing issues (Dimple Badlani, 2023) ^[11].

Meme culture is the phenomenon in which internet users quickly create and share humorous or satirical images, videos, text, and more on the internet. By providing entertainment, self-expression, and reflection on current events, memes are essential in digital culture and online communication (Shi, 2023) ^[35]. Memes have become an important component of mass culture because they are objects of internet creativity and form digital works that convey new meanings and codes (Denysiyuk, 2022) ^[8]. Memes have become popular because they are easy to create and share, and have become prevalent on various social media platforms. Memes utilize humor, relatability, and visual-textual interaction to engage audiences and convey ideas effectively in the digital world (Dashkova, 2022) ^[7]. Meme culture has undergone a dramatic transformation from an internet phenomenon to an important part of digital culture. This is especially true for humor and satire. At first, memes became popular for their ability to make people laugh and be surprised, reflecting the chaos and obscurity of contemporary symbolic production and exchange. Memes often rely on visual elements such as emojis and characters to convey emotions, reactions or cultural references, thus increasing their communicative power. This is because characters, emojis and narrative features play an important role in shaping the content and impact of memes (Wiggins, 2020) ^[41].

Meme culture produces many results, such as offering a means to investigate consumer culture and reveal collective ideologies through cultural texts (Deus *et al.*, 2022)^[9], offering a shortcut to investigate consumer culture and disseminating cultural information similar to genes, and influencing cultural development through variation, heredity, and selection processes (Xu *et al.*, 2022)^[42]. It serves as a new type of information and communication product in modern society, which makes people surprised and laugh while looking for ways to solve information chaos (VITIUK *et al.*, 2020)^[39], and restructures society's communication by changing political consumerism, reducing traditional types of political communication, eliminating ideological allegiances, and turning memes into political propaganda tools (Putra *et al.*, 2022)^[34]. These diverse results show the different impacts of meme culture on individuals, consumer behavior, cultural evolution, communication dynamics, and political discussions.

Memes in digital media do many things, such as social and political commentary, ideological influence, cognitive modeling, and encouraging demonstration movements. Memes convey hidden meanings and messages, reflect society, counter manipulation, and raise awareness of political issues (Korolova & Hrymaliuk, 2023)^[23] strengthen online networks, and influence public opinion through strategic content creation and dissemination (Troshchenkova, 2023)^[38]. They also serve as tools for civil discourse, encouraging users to think critically and talk about important events and phenomena (Johann *et al.*, 2023)^[21]. Memes also play a role in creating values in the digital media world as well as a linguistic picture of the world (Aladro Vico & Jardón Clemente, 2022)^[1]. Overall, memes in digital media have become an important part of expressing ideas, influencing opinions, and mobilizing people for various social and political causes.

Various aspects of society are affected by the emergence of memes in digital media, including cultural identity, communication patterns, social attitudes, and human behavior. Memes aid mobilization, raise awareness of political issues, and strengthen online networks, and play an important role in contemporary protest movements (Mason, 2022)^[24]. In addition, meme language reflects the shifting perspectives of society and the development of internet culture, which impacts the way people perceive reality and interact online (Petrova, 2021)^[31]. Memes have also evolved into digital persuasion tools that target specific groups to build tribal ties and influence mass audiences around the world (Das, 2023)^[6].

Memes have significant cultural relevance as they serve as cultural artifacts that reflect cultural stereotypes, modern realities, and societal beliefs (O'Dubhghaill & Winkler, 2023)^[30]. By creating a virtual society and facilitating globalization through humor and information exchange, they play an important role in cross-cultural communication (Deus *et al.*, 2022)^[9]. Due to their contagious nature and ability to convey ideas through different types of media, they are also a useful resource for improving digital literacy skills, especially for those learning English as a second language (Nguyen *et al.*, 2022)^[29]. In addition, memes are used as a methodological tool to investigate consumer culture, as they provide an understanding of consumer ideologies and behaviors that may not be easily accessible through traditional research approaches such as interviews. Moreover, art historical memes allow for emotional

engagement, social commentary, and humor, and bridge the past and present to create community and political discussions between users (Barclay & Downing, 2023)^[3]. In general, the ever-changing cultural text is called a "meme", and it shapes and shows the habits, principles, and interactions of society in the digital age.

Cultural and communication theories play an important role in understanding the context and meaning of humor and satire memes in digital media. Cultural theory is intertwined with communication, forming important relationships that shape social interaction and identity construction (Drion, 2022)^[12]. Theoretical perspectives such as the Theory of Multimodal Social Semiotics (TMSS) (Kobayashi, 2019)^[22] and the Grammar of Visual Design (GVD) provide a framework for analyzing the visual and discursive elements present in memes. In addition, the concept of recontextualization in digital media, as discussed in the context of political communication acts (García, 2020)^[16], explains how memes can be used to reinterpret and critique societal norms and practices. Moreover, the historical and identity aspects of memes, highlight how humor and satire can be powerful tools for expressing cultural memory and social commentary in the digital age.

The formulation of the problem in this article is based on the background above, namely how humor and satirical language are discussed in memes in digital media, how the role of memes in digital media, and how their impact in digital media and what is the role of memes in shaping individual and group identity. The writing of this article aims to examine more deeply how satirical discourse contained in pictorial text and pure text in memes, how the role of memes in digital media, and how their impact in digital media as well as knowing what the role of memes in shaping individual and group identities. This research is interesting because the satirical humor style contained in memes is an effective, practical, absurd response to entertainment, politics, education, culture, and others and can shift, exclude, and reverse discourse, because it can create new discourse.

Materials and Methods

This research uses Norman Fairclough's qualitative research methodology with critical discourse analysis. Fairclough's opinion on critical discourse analysis is the way language encourages established social groups to fight and put forward their respective ideologies. Fairclough's view can be divided into three traditions: (1) textual dimension (micro structure), (2) discourse dimension (mesostructure), and (3) actual socio-cultural dimension (macro structure). This research aims to explore the discourse on issues generated by cultural memes on social media. In discourse analysis, the meaning contained in memes is parsed by the text dimension. Macro-level analysis based on the belief that the social context outside the media influences the way we discourse in the media. As descriptive qualitative research, this research does not use hypotheses as another answer to the questions posed, as is common in quantitative research. However, the hypothesis was in the mind of the researcher and served as a guideline in conducting this research. The theoretical foundation in the literature search is not meant to be a binding basis for the researcher's exercise, nor does it lead to a particular alternative hypothesis that must be tested with empirical data, rather it serves as a knowledge base and

source of information to guide the researcher as they work with their research subject.

Based on this research design, it will (1) formulate the problem, (2) determine the type of data needed, (3) determine the data collection method, and (4) determine the data processing method. There are two major steps. And (5) draw conclusions. In accordance with the qualitative research design, in determining the research target, the description is as follows. The research is focused on memes on social media, and the subject of investigation is the satirical language used both in terms of word choice (phrases) and sentences.

The documentation method was used in this study. The documentation method is a qualitative data collection method by viewing or analyzing documents produced by the data subject itself or by others. Documentation is used by qualitative researchers to get a big picture from the subject's point of view through written media and other documents written or produced directly by the subject in the form of satirical and ironic statements. In this case, researchers carefully documented expressions of satire and sarcasm in memes circulating on social media. Then the analysis uses practical research as your analysis. The type of data collected through data collection technology, such as words and phrases that represent satirical language styles in social media meme culture such as Instagram. This data collection technique gives the researcher a direction for data collection, followed by tools, methods for assembling research equipment.

The data needed to answer the problem being solved are gestures that represent speech, words, phrases, speech styles, and satirical speech styles. Survey tools are also used in this study to support data collection techniques. The selection of instruments must support the use of methods in data collection. Research instruments are tools or devices used by researchers to collect data so that research activities can be carried out smoothly and systematically. These tools and facilities are important for research activities. The aim is to facilitate the researcher's work in the sense that it is more thorough, complete, systematic and produces the best. Data analysis in this study used qualitative data analysis techniques. In general, data analysis using this model has three stages: (1) data cleaning, (2) data presentation, and (3) validation or conclusion drawing. The three phases interact from data collection to the completion of the research report. All these phases are interrelated.

Results and Discussion

As evidenced by various research papers, meme culture thrives at the intersection of language, culture, and social context. Memes, often referred to as "digital graffiti" on social media (Souza & Paiva, 2022) [36], are fast-moving tools that solve power structures and social problems, reflecting tensions in the culture wars (Fedorov, 2023) [15]. The study of memes should integrate knowledge of prejudice and modern socio-cultural contexts (Guseynova *et al.*, 2022) [18].

Memes are not only limited to text; they also include visual elements that can be influenced by socio-political events and cultural traditions (Cochrane *et al.*, 2022) [5]. The field known as memetics seeks to rationalize the irrational aspects of human behavior by combining narratives, institutional ideas, and memes in a broad context (Duch, 2021) [13]. This unification process provides a theoretical perspective that

allows for a better understanding of how cultural patterns spread and are consolidated, which helps explain human decision-making processes. Ultimately, a meme is more than just a funny image; it is an effective communication tool that reflects and shapes societal norms and values, making it an interesting subject of study in the digital age (Potapova, 2022) [33].

With the advent of the Internet and online social platforms, the history and development of memes has expanded significantly, resulting in a vibrant meme culture that plays an important role in virtual communication (Yuherman & Yefterson, 2023) [43]. Internet memes often use historical artworks along with short texts for social commentary; this creates a transhistorical engagement between past artifacts and modern society, especially with a focus on emotion and humor (Barclay & Downing, 2023) [3]. Historical memes have expanded into the field of education, where they are used as a learning medium to enhance students' understanding of historical topics and have practical applications in various fields (Godoi, 2023) [17]. This revolution demonstrates memes as an effective tool for spreading ideas and information in a humorous and engaging way, shaping the contemporary digital communication landscape.

Memes, as objects of Internet creativity, belong to mass culture and play an important role in digital communication; they originate in social networks and impact mass cultural creativity and intercultural communication online (Denysiyuk, 2022) [8]. Memes on social media, whether in text, images or cartoons, serve as a creative way to respond to current events, often with satire and humor (Almucharomah *et al.*, 2023) [2]. These memes have developed into an important component of cross-cultural communication, engaging audiences from around the world and reflecting cultural stereotypes and modern situations (Fajar *et al.*, 2022) [14]. Memes have been shown to convey invisible meanings and messages through critical discourse analysis. They can also be used as a tool to provide social and political commentary and reflect and shape people's perspectives (Muhammad Babar Jamil, Shabbir, 2022) [25]. Memes also serve as a means of coping for those facing problems (Weiser & Alam, 2022) [40]. It has a short-term impact in changing sensitivities. Memes also play an important role in shaping individual and group identity by serving as bonding icons that foster shared feelings and reinforce collective values (Newton *et al.*, 2022) [28].

In memes, comedy and satire are essential, especially in political and social contexts. Memes, which often use satire as a means, have evolved into a powerful tool for communication and critique on social media (HAIDÁU, 2023). They evolved from traditional humor to convey subversive criticism and engage audiences in discussions about social issues (Pian, 2022) [32]. In addition, internet memes have been used in political campaigns, influencing political engagement between digital natives and migrants, although the impact on audiences political views can differ (Bülow & Johann, 2023) [4]. Overall, satire and humor memes serve as dynamic tools to convey messages, spark discussions, and create political discourse in the internet age.

Memes are dynamic and impactful, providing a platform for individuals to express criticism, parody, and comedy in response to various issues. This makes them an interesting subject to study as they are effective in conveying criticism

and influencing online conversations (Torres Bernal, 2023) [37]. The language of satire, especially in the context of social media memes, has evolved into a common and successful tool for conveying criticism and satire on various societal topics (Natsir, 2023) [27]. Satire expressed through memes serves as a way to change, eliminate, and create new discussions by criticizing culture, politics, economics, and other elements of society (Dias, 2023) [10]. Satire demonstrates the power of humor and criticism in shaping modern social discussion and reflection. Memes have become a popular tool for conveying information and ideas in a humorous way and spread rapidly across the internet and social media platforms (Yuherman & Yefterson, 2023) [43].

Satire language is widely used today, especially on social media, and is seen as an effective medium to convey criticism and satire. This is interesting because the use of these satirical words creates a lexicon or selection of words, sentences, and jargon that goes viral and stirs up the public. Social media memes are interesting to explore because they can be used for satire, criticism, and entertainment in various topics. Here are social media memes with satire in sentences and words chosen by meme creators on social media or digital media such as Instagram, Facebook, X, and online news.

Data 1:



Meme in data number one with a photo object of someone who is looking at the camera with a flat face running which is made into a meme with the word satire "Kenapa hati bisa merasa kesepian? kalo rame lanjut part 2" in English means "Why can the heart feel lonely? if this is the crowded, continue part 2". This meme was created to satirize influencers or content creators who deliberately provide information by half or with the concept of "Part to Part". Initially, netizens were used to the phenomenon of presenting information with this concept, but the increasing number of content creators who deliberately cut information and increase parts for reasons of lack of duration when in fact the platform used fully supports users to provide information with a single presentation. This clearly infuriates netizens as readers of the information, arguing that the concept is ineffective and inefficient, and the information is half and half.

Data 2



The meme in this data with a photo of a person holding an orange shirt with the words "Tahanan KPK" in English means "KPK detainee" which is made into a meme with the satirical caption "Baju termahal di dunia, minimal nyolong uang negara 1-M bisa pakai baju ini" in English means "The most expensive clothes in the world, stealing at least 1 billion can only wear this shirt". This meme was created to satirize people who do or have done corruption of state money with a very large amount. Which is humorously charged by calling the shirt the most expensive shirt in the world.

Data 3



The meme in this data is circulating on Instagram with the object of a photo of someone running from the person behind him who is made into a meme with the satirical word “*Lari ada temen yang curhat gamau balikan tap ujungnya tetep balikan*” in English means “running from a friend who confided that he didn't want to go back but in the end he still went back”. This meme aims to satirize people who often confide or tell their friends that they don't want to get back into a relationship with their partner but in the end they keep getting back into a relationship with their partner. Therefore, this meme aims to satirize people to be more honest, mature and careful in saying things because in reality we never know what will happen in the future.

Data 4



The meme in this data is circulating on X with the object of a father and son illustration made into a meme with the word satire “*Nak, semales malesnya lu kuliah, minimal kerja kelompok ikut ngerjain*” in English means “son, as lazy as you are in college, at least participate in group work”. This meme aims to satirize people who are often lazy in college and also do not participate in working when there is a group assignment. Therefore, this meme aims to make people who are often lazy in college become more diligent and at least if there is a group assignment he also helps to do the task.

Data 5



The meme in this data with a photo of a former president who was giving a speech that was made into a meme with a satirical word “*Lebih baik BBM naik, dibanding BBM diread tapi gak dibales*” in English means “It is better for fuel to go up, than for BlackBerry Messages to be read but not reciprocated”. The word BBM here has two meanings, the first word BBM means fuel oil while the second BBM is an instant messaging application provided for BlackBerry device users. This meme aims to satirize the problem of the increase in fuel at that time accompanied by humor by saying than BlackBerry messages are read but not replied to.

Data 6



The meme in this last data is circulating on X with the object of one of the cartoon characters made into a meme with the word satire “*Talking stage mulu, tu pdkt apa interview?*” in English means “Talk and talk stage, is that an approach or an interview?”. This meme aims to satirize people who are approaching but only talking as if they are conducting an interview.

Conclusions

Meme culture is an interesting phenomenon in digital media that plays an important role in digital communication and culture that has become a popular tool for conveying information and ideas that spread rapidly on the internet and social media platforms. Memes not only use text with humor and satire, but also include visual elements to convey ideas, criticize culture, politics, economics, and various other elements of society and influence opinions as well as satirize or build identities. Digital media memes can be an effective means of conveying messages of criticism and satire with humor in them. Memes allow individuals and groups to voice opinions, challenge the status quo, and encourage social change and are shown to convey invisible meanings and messages through critical discourse analysis. Ultimately, a meme is more than just a funny image; it is an effective communication tool that reflects and shapes societal norms and values, making it an interesting subject of research in the digital age.

Various aspects of society are affected by the emergence of memes in digital media, including cultural identity, communication patterns, social attitudes and human behavior. Memes aid mobilization, raise awareness of political issues, and strengthen online networks, and play an important role in contemporary protest movements. In addition, the language of memes reflects the shifting perspectives of society and the development of internet culture, which impacts the way people perceive reality and interact online. Memes have also evolved into digital persuasion tools that target specific groups to build tribal ties and influence mass audiences around the world. Overall, memes are not seen as silent, passive, and ready-made texts when produced. Instead, memes are dynamic and mobile strategies through comedic satire that influence social discussions, human psychology, affect the way people think collectively, and shape online culture in digital media.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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