



## Political Memes in the Light of Agenda Setting Theory: A Fabricated Mayhem

Faiza Abid<sup>a\*</sup>, Rida Sarfraz<sup>b</sup>, Sidra Haroon<sup>c</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Assistant Professor, University of Management and Technology, Lahore, Pakistan. <sup>b</sup>Assistant Professor, University of Management and Technology, Lahore, Pakistan. <sup>c</sup>Lecturer, University of Management and Technology, Lahore, Pakistan

\*Email: [faiza.abid@umt.edu.pk](mailto:faiza.abid@umt.edu.pk)

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**Abstract:** Political memes play an integral role in creating the right atmosphere of attraction for political parties. The agenda behind these political memes is basically to divert the attention of the target audience and evoke their voters to vote for them as well as to degrade opposing political parties through the element of humor. This paper aims to layer out the political memes through the theoretical framework of agenda-setting theory that political parties deliberately launch on the cyber world in order to change the views and opinions of youth. They are the key agents to instigate any change in society. The methodology opted to execute the research is qualitative and quantitative. The mixed-method is indispensable in order to comprehend the perception of political memes on society. Thirteen randomly selected memes of three prominent political parties have been analyzed via Shaw and McCombs (1972) theory. Their theory of agenda-setting supported this study to understand how voter's agenda is correlated to media? Furthermore, how it serves as a key agent in gauging the changing thinking patterns? For scaling these thinking patterns and in order to understand the voice of the people specifically undergraduate university students, a Likert scale questionnaire has been developed. Purposive sampling technique is used to collect data from 25 undergraduate students and 25 postgraduate students. The results show that memes are remarkably playing a vital role in diverting people's attention to certain agendas. Both genders are attracted towards it but males are more inclined. Moreover, there are significant differences observed in age and qualification

**Keywords:** Politics, Memes, Agenda Setting, Mayhem

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### Introduction

Communication via memes have been widespread in different forms and in different contexts. Memes base on situations like; political, economic, social and nature has been evolved and has been trending as a new form of communication. In the realm of present Pakistani Politics these memes have incumbent role for infusing and diffusing certain political agenda via memes. Along with humor and satire, political memes have such a strong interwoven relation that it can lead the target audience to raise their in terms of raising voices for certain ideologies and agendas Guess *et.al* (2020) described political memes as a source for backing a candidate or raising a voice in disagreement on certain agenda. Therefore, memes are considered as concrete material while taking into notice the very connection between people and media usage alongside their political decisiveness. As per the definition of memes, these are considered components of cultural transfusion by replication (Blackmore, 1999). This research embarks and tried to layered out the fathom political memes that is fused with comic factors with visual satire. Furthermore, this study has focused on uncovered the fabricated mayhems via Political memes. The creators of these memes often ridicule, or defend, political performers who use mimicking and imitation in terms of satire or fun.

### **1.1 Research Questions**

How do political memes divert people's attention via certain agendas?

What are the various factors that helps in gauging the response of the voters in these Fabricate Political Mayhems via agenda-setting theory?

### **1.2 Research Objectives**

Research objectives are to:

Explore the connection between agenda-setting theory and Pakistani political memes.

Identify the fine traces of influence of political memes on the users in enticing their vote bank for the political parties.

Examine various factors that helps in gauging the response of the voters in these Fabricate Political Mayhems.

### **1.3 Significance of the Study**

This research is significant for analyzing and observing human behaviors. For future studies, it will torch the way for the researchers to explore Pakistani political discourse via political memes. Furthermore, this study allows the researcher to investigate the domain of socio-linguistics and political discourse with relation to Agenda-Setting theory. In order to achieve the relations of societal cause and effect with politics and memes, a mixed-method study has been inculcated.

## **2. Literature Review**

Van Dijk, (2009) stated that the commercial producers and the mainstream media are no longer authentic developers of news. Apart from this digital media innovators and social network sites permit common people to add to the usual media atmosphere via certain online tricks. Alongside these additions on the behalf of ordinary people have the latent stamina to reach out common public on a large scale. In an atmosphere where being viral or going viral is the scale to gauge value, so the material from unknown sources is absorbed on a huge scale by internet users. (Jenkins, Ford & Green, 2013; Wasik, 2009). On the other hand various types of user oriented media materials affect the people who watch them, particularly when the material available on the media is related with daily life phenomena and most likely politics. There are a specific genre on internet that is called memes, is one of the user-oriented, developed, and belongs to cyber world material that has practical world influence on the people or audience who watches it. Memes are usually related to modernity and created by ordinary people on regular basis and furthermore, it get viral online. Particularly memes related with politics are given importance as these memes have a huge impact on the masses and their feelings about certain political issues. People's attachment to information is integral specifically with political information determines the aspects through which people process the provided data and this data also modifies the way people see the world. Therefore, it is integral to transform the political happenings (Wyer, 2004). A frequent form of meme looks similar to a developed cartoon, some block font and collage of images. This sort of meme can be humorous, funny, and catchy, and emotional at the same time. Moreover, this sort of meme is not carry an isolated picture rather it carries the idea underneath a specific combination of texts that are different yet referring to each other via utilizing similar themes (Shifman, 2014).

### **2.1 Internet Memes**

As per Dawkins point of view tones, funny phrases, vogues, abilities, catchphrases and tunes are all considered under the category of memes and according to him, they're just resembling to human genes that transference occur among humans and brains (Dawkins, 1976, p. 192). Although the definition provided by Dawkins have its biological side, yet the sharing of memes are way more social act than anything else (Regardless the technological side of the cyber world). It is pertinent to mention that the real biogenetic side of memes also caters to the important metaphor for internet memes in the same way as the genes. A cyber world related meme is component of information that duplicates as it is hard over and over again. Among the different roles, one primary role it plays is; to pass on the information. According to Liisi Lainesk (2016), Memes are used as a mechanism for influencing the masses to vote in favor of specific political party. Shiftman (2013) suggested that how digital medium was effectively utilized during the elections in US 2008. Additionally, he stated that political elites use these memes purposely in spreading the user generated content rather than information generated content. This incorporate recordings and photographs created by professional and after the careful speculation the content become a part of

political campaign. The citizens can communicate more effectively in sharing their political views and participate in debates and discussion by using these memes

## **2.2 Memes and Politics**

A paid team consist of bloggers, and analysts are recruited to create content. Through which they infuse certain ideologies and opinions in the mind of the masses. Recently, Leong (2015) reported that the production and transmission of memes were incorporated as a part of social media technique. Memes are utilized for purposeful publicity to strengthen philosophical ideology, characters, and stereotypes. During World War 1, memes were utilized as mocking writings, pictures, and artistic jargons. Even though, they hired artists and poets to make animated cartoons and messages that publicized through banners and newspapers. According to Nowak (2016)it has been observed that large number of individuals have started using internet and social media sites for the sake of political activities. Heiskanen (2017) describes that the individuals who follow different social media sites are occupied with sharing the information with the audience. As well as they create and convey content. Brunello (2012) highlighted the dynamic of politics by commenting and arguing on different issues which supports political engagement.

## **2.3 Agenda Setting Theory**

McCombs (2004) states that in the last 4 decades, numerous empirical researches prove that in any democratic society mass media has been playing a civic teacher role in setting agendas and forming opinions. According to Weaver, McCombs & Shaw (2004), this theory clarifies how different issues influence individuals' perceptions and at the subsequent level how mass media become the reason to draw the audiences' attention to notice those properties. Agenda setting theory mainly focuses on the advanced step in values formation and also gaining the audience's consideration. The major aspect of theory is to illustrate the process that prompts consensus building and sort certain issues (McCombs, 2004). According to Kim and McCombs (2007), this theory also clarifies the outcomes that impact proposing a broad elaboration on how people formulate their perspectives toward politics as an outcome of media content they devour. Kim et al. (2002) described that the theory incorporates the effect that agenda-setting can have in constructing image of politicians on certain issues which people use to frame their opinions. According to Iyengar and Kinder (1987), Individuals ordinarily depend on alternate ways when they are confronted with a judgment instead of examining carefully and weighing all accessible details. Consequently, different issues underline in the media become easy routes for judgment. According to Pan and Kosicki (1997), Agenda-setting theory has two separate media parts; priming mechanism issue preparing and attribute priming as the expansion in the media's remarkable salience of issues and tone related to it. Kim et al. (2002), clarify how the audience forms judgment towards politics that dependent on different issues underlined in the news report. Priming attribute is the process during the specific issue ascribed underlined in the media that becomes huge components in different assessment issues of people. According to Kim (2005), it emphasizes on various parts of the media reports that were related to the evaluation of the U.S. president and the emphasis on contrary parts of the economically determined decision of the individuals on the incumbent party. Additionally, audience ascribes that received broad media consideration were bound to influence competitors' attitudinal decisions. Both positive and negative quality sides were identified with the corresponding opinions (Kim & McCombs, 2007).

## **3. Research Methodology**

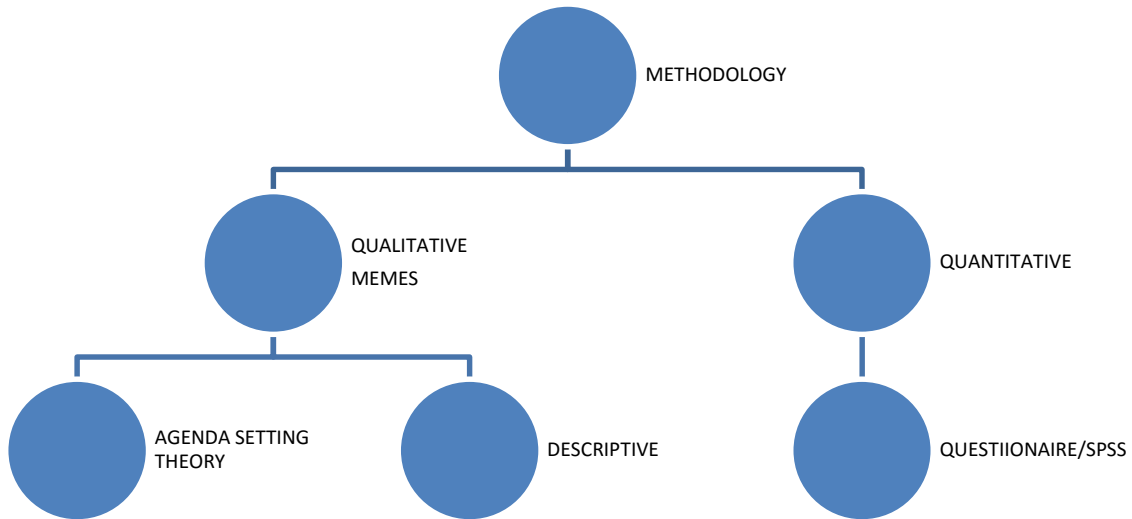


Figure 1: Theoretical Framework

The study consists of a mixed methodology. This study has an amalgamation of both quantitative and qualitative analysis in layering out the agenda that have been set out to use of political memes. For qualitative study, Agenda-setting theory will help in defining the perception of the youth. For the quantitative study, 25 undergraduate students and 25 postgraduate students will be taken as a purposive sample population. For scaling these thinking patterns, 15 close-ended questionnaires have been used through the Likert scale. Variables like age, gender, and qualification have gauged the study in determining the perception of the sample population. Data has been analyzed on SPSS by applying a t-test

### 3.1 Research Gap

This research is a fusion of both qualitative and quantitative studies regarding the political memes in the Pakistani context. It inculcates how these memes divert the masses' attention by setting certain agendas. Different Research have been conducted on memes in the milieu of humor irony and satire but memes, Pakistani political settings and specifically for election campaign of 2018 has not been layered out yet. So, the study will help to bridge the gap between the current research and future research. Moreover, the research will pave the way for new researchers in exploring, analyzing, and finding new dimensions for numerous issues that are hidden in existing society.

### 4. Discussion

Keeping in view the cult of memes. 13 memes have been randomly chosen from Facebook and Twitter. These memes revolve around the three major political parties. PPP and PLMN have already ruled for decades whereas PTI has been struggling for years and back in 2018 finally got the opportunity to govern Pakistan. Analysis of the memes actually depicts how politicians use unlawful activity records, specific dialogues, and particular actions and name-calling to divert people 'attention. Which ultimately helps in gaining their vote banks for the upcoming elections



Figure: 2

This political meme is funny in the political context. As the two brothers were on leading roles in the country but after that Imran Khan became prime minister and these two brothers have been part of some unlawful activities so now this meme makes fun of the political opposition that the three were in good terms back in time. Moreover, in this meme the impact was given that Nawaz Sharif has updated his Facebook status by sharing this picture He is feeling excited to share the nostalgic click.



Figure: 3

This political meme also become famous in Pakistani political scenarios as Nawaz Shrif's picture has been taken yet the caption has been added a funny way. It denotes the meaning of post Imran Khan's UN speech scenario that has been appraised across the globe so the meme points out that Nawaz Sharif is asking why he has not been provided with such a remarkable speech. As he is regretting for what and how he has done in his ruling era.



Figure: 4

This political meme is related to the political scenario but the picture of Trump makes this meme a universal touch. The caption is the slogan of Pakistan Muslim League N after they failed in the Elections and declared the election as rigged. So the meme is all about Trump being defeated by Bidon saying "Vote ko Izzat do? Give respect to vote" That is PMLN slogan. In the light of the setting theory this meme not only is funny but it points out the typical mentality of a losing candidate and the audience finds it funny. To make it more real they have tried to copy Twitter account of Donald Trump with the frequency of likes quotes and retweets.

Abu keh rahain han, Maaf kr dain



Figure: 5

This meme is the morphed picture of the political party's leader. These depicted two opponents in Pakistani political scene and lady id whispering with her opponent that "my father is saying to forgive him" pointing out towards the PMLN leader Nawaz Sharif as he is in self-exile because there are many law cases against him in the country and if he returns, he will be arrested. So his daughter is whispering to Imran Khan to forgive him. In the milieu of Agenda Setting Theory tis meme is signifying the true



hilarious meaning of extreme political opponents and present it in a funny way. Yet the Pakistan Tehreek E Insaaf people find it funnier and mocking towards PMLN party



Figure: 6

In the light of agenda-Setting theory, this meme is also made by PTI’s people in order to make fun of PMLN’s leader Nawaz Sharif. His famous dialogue,” Mujhe kyun Nikala?” has been mocked. His picture with this caption and picture depicts the helplessness of the political leader. His tenure as Prime minister has been suspended due to Panama Leaks about his property which is illegal across the world. So he used to mention in his many speeches that “Mujhe kyun nikala? Wy you expelled me?”

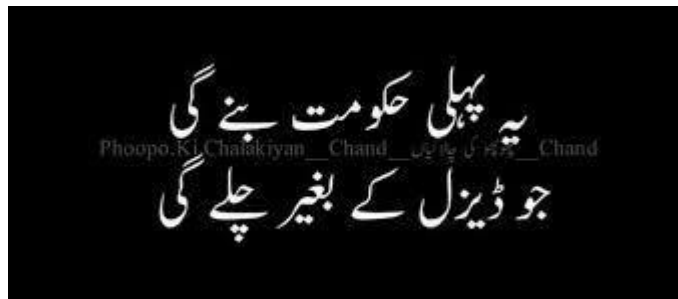


Figure7

This meme contains a huge background. Only the Urdu caption is pointing towards various meanings, it says, “This is the first Government that will be run without Diesel”. Here “Diesel” has been used metaphorically as Imran Khan used to call leader of another party “Diesel” as he attach with every political party in order to gain power. As PTI is the only political party that is in power without the support of that very political leader therefore it commutates that PTI’s Government will be first that will rule without that particular person. In the light of agenda setting theory such meme enhances the confidence of pro-PTI voters and attracts masses in an amusing yet innovative way



Figure: 8

This meme is a kind of blow to those politicians who switch political parties in the greed of power and money. This meme is pointing towards a candidate for the Elections and he has switched the abovementioned parties. The background of the meme is political party flags belonging to various

parties but the candidate is one. This meme is informative a kind of remembrance for the audience yet mocking the greedy mentality of politicians. In the context of agenda-setting theory, this meme is a warning for voters to keep them away from such switching and hopping political candidates.



Figure: 9

This meme is a depiction of a famous and handsome athlete Imran Khan who is now the leader of a famous political party and also the Prime minister of Pakistan. During the Election campaign, this meme became famous as he is gorgeous so his picture with the caption is pointing toward the voters to vote for him and giving them another reason to vote that he is also attractive



Figure: 10

This meme signifies the grandeur of yet another political party in Pakistan that is Pakistan People's Party PPP. The chairman or head of the party name is "Zardaari". This meme is his picture with the caption that only their leader is enough. Only this leader is heavy in contrast with all other leaders. In the light of Agenda setting theory this meme is no mocking rather this meme is a dare to other political parties and to enhance the confidence of the supporters of this particular party



Figure:11

The above meme has been attached with three other memes to give the audience a vivid image of the famous dialogue that was uttered by Prime Minister Imran Khan while addressing to his nation. He has somehow tried to consolidate the public by giving them suggestion not to worry even in the worst scenario. So, now whenever there is something to worry people use to refer this dialogue either its your low account or sky touching pricing of the petrol. Adding more fun into it they have also tried to tie the threads with the Islamic events like Eid.

#### 4.1 Results

##### 4.1.1 Combine Mean & Standard Deviation

Table 1: Combine Mean & Standard Deviation

Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Female	30	58.8667	7.70908	1.40748
Male	30	59.4667	8.50450	1.55270

The result revealed that males are found to be slightly higher in making and posting political meme, as compared to females.

##### 4.1.2 Separate Mean & Standard Deviation



Table 2: I prefer to use social media on a regular basis

	Gender	N	Mean	Std.	Std. Error
				Deviation	Mean
Q1	Female	30	4.1333	.77608	.14169
	Male	30	4.0333	.71840	.13116

The result revealed that females are found to be given more preference to use social media on a regular basis as compared to males.

Table 3: I use social media often

	Gender	N	Mean	Std.	Std. Error
				Deviation	Mean
Q2	Female	30	3.9333	.86834	.15854
	Male	30	3.9667	.71840	.13116

The result revealed that both male and female are found to be similar in using social media.

Table 4: I appreciate memes generally

	Gender	N	Mean	Std.	Std. Error
				Deviation	Mean
Q3	Female	30	3.7333	.90719	.16563
	Male	30	3.9000	.88474	.16153

The result revealed that males are found to be slightly higher in appreciating memes generally as compared to females.

Table 5: I enjoy memes based on political situations

	Gender	N	Mean	Std.	Std. Error
				Deviation	Mean
Q4	Female	30	3.5667	1.07265	.19584
	Male	30	3.9667	1.15917	.21163

The result revealed that males are found to be slightly high in enjoying memes based on political situations as compared to females.

Table 6: I share political memes

	Gender	N	Mean	Std.	Std. Error
				Deviation	Mean
Q5	Female	30	3.1000	1.21343	.22154

Male	30	3.0000	1.48556	.27123
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The result revealed that females are found to be more share political memesas compared to males

Table 7: I feel amused by political memes

Gender	N	Mean	Std.	Std. Error
			Deviation	Mean
Female	30	3.3000	.91539	.16713
Male	30	3.6667	1.02833	.18775

The result revealed that males are found to be higher in feeling amused by political memes.

Table 8: I think political memes are important in creating awareness

Gender	N	Mean	Std.	Std. Error
			Deviation	Mean
Female	30	3.5667	.89763	.16388
Male	30	3.4667	1.22428	.22352

The result revealed that females are found to be slightly different in thinking about political memes that it is important in creating awareness.

Table 9: I believe political memes are important for propaganda?

Gender	N	Mean	Std.	Std. Error
			Deviation	Mean
Female	30	3.6333	.80872	.14765
Male	30	3.4000	.89443	.16330

The result revealed that females are found to be higher in their beliefs that political memes are important for propaganda as compared to males.

Table 9: I feel many memes are stuck at my mind regarding different politicians

Gender	N	Mean	Std.	Std. Error
			Deviation	Mean
Female	30	3.1667	1.08543	.19817
Male	30	3.7667	1.04000	.18988

The result revealed that males are found to be higher in feeling that any memes are stuck in their mind regarding different politician.

Table 10: I think that memes are an important part of cybermarketing?

	Gender	N	Mean	Std.	Std. Error
				Deviation	Mean
Q11	Female	30	3.7000	.91539	.16713
	Male	30	3.5667	.85836	.15671

The result revealed that females are found to be high in their thoughts that memes are an important part of cyber marketing as compared to males.

Table 11: I find memes amusing

	Gender	N	Mean	Std.	Std. Error
				Deviation	Mean
Q12	Female	30	3.9667	.80872	.14765
	Male	30	3.8000	1.03057	.18815

The result revealed that females are found to find memes amusing as compared to males.

Table 12: I find political memes funny

	Gender	N	Mean	Std.	Std. Error
				Deviation	Mean
Q13	Female	30	4.0333	.80872	.14765
	Male	30	4.0667	1.01483	.18528

The result revealed that both males and female are similar in finding political memes funny.

Table 13: I think memes can elevate the popularity of any political party

	Gender	N	Mean	Std.	Std. Error
				Deviation	Mean
Q14	Female	30	3.8000	.92476	.16884
	Male	30	3.7000	.91539	.16713

The result revealed that females are found to be more in their thinking that memes can elevate the popularity of any political party.

Table 14: I think memes play an important role in election campaigns

Gender	N	Mean	Std.	Std. Error
			Deviation	Mean
Female	30	3.6000	1.10172	.20115
Male	30	3.3333	1.09334	.19962

The result revealed that females are found to be higher in thinking about memes play an important role in election campaigns as compared to males.

Table 15: I think that memes are the source of political gain for the parties?

Gender	N	Mean	Std.	Std. Error
			Deviation	Mean
Female	30	3.6333	.76489	.13965
Male	30	3.6667	.88409	.16141

The result revealed that both male and female are found to be similar in thinking that memes are source of political gain for the parties.



Table 16: Independent Sample t-test of Political meme between gender (N=60)

Variable	Men		Women		95% CI				
	(n = 30)		(n = 30)		<i>t</i> (60)	<i>p</i>	95% CI		<i>Cohen's d</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			<i>LL</i>	<i>UL</i>	
Political mean	59.46	8.50	58.86	7.70	.40	.77	-4.79	3.59	0.07

Note. CI = Confidence Interval, LL = Lower Limit, UL = Upper Limit,

The results revealed that there was significant gender differences were found among political meme in men and women students.

Homogeneity of variance is assumed.

Table 17: Independent Sample t-test of Political meme of graduate &amp; postgraduate students (N=60).

Variable	Graduate		Postgraduate				95% CI		Cohen's d
	(n = 30)		(n = 30)				LL	UL	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i> (60)	<i>p</i>			
Political mean	59.66	8.24	59.66	7.96	.71	.63	-5.18	3.18	0.01

Note. CI = Confidence Interval, LL = Lower Limit, UL = Upper Limit,

The results revealed that there was significant qualification differences were found among political meme in graduate and post-graduate students. Homogeneity of variance is assumed.

Table 18: Independent Sample t-test of Political meme of age (N=60).

Variable	18 to 22 years  (n = 30)	23 to 28 years  (n = 30)	95 % <i>CI</i>
Political mean		7 . 6 9	

Note. CI = Confidence Interval, LL = Lower Limit, UL = Upper Limit,

The results revealed that there was a significant age differences were found among political meme in graduate and post graduate students. Homogeneity of variance is assumed.

### 5. Conclusion

The study delves deep into the civic patterns of Pakistani society and the implications of these influential memes on the audience. Under the lens of agenda-setting theory, it has been observed that memes are actually playing key role in setting agenda of politicians and gathering vote bank for their parties. Slinging mud at each other yet in a funny way is a ploy to achieve goals. Results reveal that there is a significant difference observed in age qualification and gender toward these memes. Therefore, the study helps in tracing the linkages that create mayhem on the part of political scoring as well as ignite the emotions of youth on the societal level that leads to the opposition of opinions.

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