EFFECTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA POLITICAL MEMES ON THE ATTITUDES AND BELIEFS OF YOUNG VOTERS IN LAHORE

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Abstract

In the dynamic landscape of modern politics, the influence of social media and the captivating world of political memes on the attitudes of young voters cannot be overlooked. This study was conducted to understand the effects of social media political memes on the attitude and beliefs of young voters. The research particularly targeted the young voters of Lahore in this study, that includes university going students. The survey has been conducted using a quantitative approach with a survey research design to achieve the desired goal. The survey questionnaire was distributed amongst the students of three prominent universities of Lahore that belonged to different disciplines. A simple random technique was used to select the sample of respondents aged 18-24 years old. The results revealed that the political memes are found to influence both the political attitudes and decision-making processes of young voters during elections. Moreover, specific types of memes, such as satire, are identified as effective tools in engaging young voters in political discourse. The study highlights the substantial role of social media platforms, particularly Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, as influential sources of political memes. Overall, the findings suggest that social media political memes play a crucial role in shaping the political perspectives and behaviors of the young voters. The research contributes valuable insights into the profound impact of social media political memes on the attitudes and beliefs of young voters in Lahore.

1.   Introduction

In the age of digital interconnectedness, the influence of social media on various aspects of society cannot be overstated. Lucky (2013) defines social media as a way for individuals to connect with one another and create, share, and exchange ideas and information through online groups and networks. According to Alison Doyle, an American Psychologist, people use social media to share information, including text, audio, video, photos, podcasts, and other forms of multimodal communication. Today, the use of social media is not only limited as a communication tool but also used for various activities, including political activities. Social media has a great impact on political discourse. As many studies have shown that social media has been widely used to spread information on political issues (Doris, 2014).

The word Meme comes from the Greek language, namely "mimema" which means "imitation". The idea of "meme" was created by the effort of known biologist Richard Dawkins. In Dawkins view, a meme is a tag provided to individual units of cultural dissemination as others imitate them. The idea of the meme has become famous due to social media sites. Internet memes are explained as discourse (Milner, 2012). Memes can be in the form of stories, satire, or sarcasm which are expressed in the form of images, writing, or videos. Images presented in memes are usually expressions of humans or animals, celebrities, to political figures being discussed. So, a political meme itself is a meme that contains political elements.

According to (Blackmore, 2000), internet memes shape behaviors, values, mindsets, and eventually actions and performance. Political internet memes are usually created to criticize political leaders in order to support or against their political ideologies (Lamerichs, 2018). In Pakistan, social media is extensively used for political propaganda, such as in the form of political memes on the Internet. In social media, political discussions are conveyed through various platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok. Political memes are not only limited to humor and jokes but there are messages that give rise to impressions, opinions, aspirations, criticisms, arguments, or dissatisfaction with the government or the policies and programs being implemented. As a result, there will be more political memes that are different from the previous argument. As this political meme goes viral, more and more people are enthusiastic about the political conversation. From the existence of political memes, it can be concluded that a simple form of meme can have an influence on its readers, and its spread is fast and widespread.

One particularly compelling area of study is the impact of social media political memes on the attitudes and beliefs of young voters in urban centers like Lahore, Pakistan. Firstly, Lahore, as Pakistan's second-largest city and a cultural and economic hub, holds a significant share of the country's youth population. Young voters in Lahore are not only more exposed to social media but also more inclined to participate in the electoral process. As a result, their perceptions and political choices are increasingly influenced by the content they encounter on these platforms, including political memes. Secondly, political memes, characterized by humor, satire, and brevity, offer a distinctive and engaging means of conveying political messages. These memes influence emotions, evoke shared experiences, and simplify complex issues, making them a potentially powerful tool for shaping young voters' political attitudes and beliefs.

However, the attitudes and beliefs of young voters which includes their political preferences, ideologies, levels of political engagement, and perceptions of political issues depends upon the social media political memes. The sources of the memes are encounter on platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. This research aimed to determine whether and to what extent social media political memes effect the political attitudes and beliefs of young voters in Lahore.

1.1 Statement of the Problem
This research will analyze the effects of social media political memes on the attitude and beliefs of young voters in Lahore.

1.2 Research Objectives
The objectives of this study are:

• To find out whether political memes affect the political attitudes and beliefs of young voters.

• To examine the relationship between exposure to political memes and changes in the political attitudes and beliefs of young voters.

• To determine whether exposure to political memes influences the decision-making processes of young voters during elections.

• To assess the impact of political memes on the formation and alteration of political perceptions among young voters.

• To find out whether political memes engage young voters in the political discourse.

1.3 Research Questions
• Do political memes affect the political attitudes and beliefs of young voters?

• Do political memes affect the decision-making processes of young voters in elections?

• Do specific types of political memes, such as satire or misinformation, have varying degrees of impact on engaging young voters in political discourse?

1.4 Hypotheses
H_1: Political memes affect the political attitudes and beliefs of young voters.

H_0: Political memes do not affect the political attitudes and beliefs of young voters.

H_1: Political memes affect the decision-making processes of young voters in elections.

H_0: Political memes do not affect the decision-making processes of young voters in elections.

H_1: Political memes engage young voters in political discourse.

H_0: Political memes do not engage young voters in the political discourse.

1.5 Rationale of the Study

As we all know, meme culture is increasing day by day in this age of technological advancement. There are several researches done on the effects of memes as a whole but there are very few researches done on the effects of social media political memes on the attitudes and beliefs of young voters. As the effects of social media political memes on the attitudes and beliefs of young voters is not a widely discussed topic, therefore, this research analyzed the effects of social media political memes on the attitudes and beliefs of young voters in Lahore.

These memes frequently communicate political ideas in a light-hearted manner. This research aimed to determine whether these memes have the potential to influence the political perspectives of young individuals or alter their viewpoints. This study is of significance because it delves into the opinions and voting choices of young people, which are fundamental to the future of the country. In the current digital age, social media is a central arena for political conversations. Hence, it is critical to comprehend how exposure to such political memes on the internet affects the attitudes and beliefs of young voters in Lahore concerning politics. This research aimed to provide insights into whether these entertaining internet memes possess the capacity to shape the political convictions and behaviors of the youth. The research has the potential for future researchers to develop more understanding and study to incorporate some solutions.

2. Literature Review

A literature review is a critical examination of the existing research and writings on a particular topic. It helps readers gain a deeper understanding of the subject by summarizing, analyzing, and evaluating previous work done by other researchers. In this literature review, the key findings and insights from various sources related to effects of political memes on the attitude and beliefs of young voters in Lahore will be explored. By doing so, a comprehensive overview of the current state of knowledge in this area and identify any gaps or areas where further research is needed will be provided.

Zhang and Gearhart (2022) explained in their research the role of political memes as cultural units in shaping public opinion and political engagement among online users. Drawing from the uses and gratifications theory, the research surveyed 1,000 Facebook users nationwide to understand their motivations for interacting with political memes. The findings reveal that political memes serve various purposes, including political entertainment and observation, with individuals high in political trust and humor tendencies using them to engage with politics actively. In contrast, those primarily seeking entertainment value tend to share and view memes without creating them. The study offers both practical and theoretical insights into the use of memes for political engagement and its potential effects on public opinion and participation.

Javed et al. (2022) in their research provided an overview regarding the concealed meanings and societal messages conveyed by memes in Pakistani social media. It explores memes as a form of social and political commentary, delving into their role as reflections of contemporary society. Memes, often used for humorous illustration and communication, are selected randomly from the internet and subjected to analysis. The study employs a multimodal theoretical framework, integrating linguistic and visual elements to discern socially constructed contextual meanings. The research aims to provide readers with insights into deciphering hidden meanings in memes, their functions in shaping perspectives, and their significance in civic discourse, offering valuable guidance for future researchers examining the societal impact of memes in the digital age.

Haqqi et al. (2022) in their research paper investigates the role of political-themed memes on social media in critiquing political policies in the United States between 2016 and 2019, encompassing the 2016 US presidential election and Donald Trump's presidency. Memes have emerged as a popular medium for the expression of public opinion on US policies and political issues. The study employs qualitative methods and draws data from books, journals, and official US media sources. It highlights memes as an engaging and unconventional way of representing US public sentiment. However, it emphasizes that memes primarily serve as a means to take a stance on political developments and policies via social media, underscoring their significance as tools in the realm of digital politics. The study ultimately suggests that these digital instruments have played a crucial role in shaping political discourse in the US, offering valuable insights for government and policymakers to consider in the context of public participation through digital media.

Qazi et al. (2022) in their research paper investigates the portrayal of prominent Pakistani political figures on social media, specifically through the analysis of 500 Facebook memes. Focusing on five well-known politicians, including Imran Khan, Maryam Nawaz, Bilawal Bhutto, Nawaz Sharif, and Shafqat Mehmood, the research applies framing theory to categorize memes into various frames such as Personal Attacks, Satire, Morality, and Incompetent Leader. It also explores visual elements like camera angles, shots, and emotions in these memes.

Employing a purposive sampling technique, the study selects memes that were trending from November 2020 to January 2021. Within the broader context of political meme literature, this research contributes to the growing recognition of memes' significance in contemporary political communication. The findings, highlighting the prevalence of the "Incompetent Leader" frame, align with prior research on the negative portrayal of political figures in online memes.

Moreover, the examination of visual components of memes deepens our understanding of the visual rhetoric in political memes, an aspect that has been relatively underexplored. The study underscores the increasing role of memes as potent tools in digital media, particularly within social media sites, offering valuable insights into the representation of political personalities in the digital age.

Aminulloh et al. (2022) in their research paper talks about the significant role played by political memes in shaping the discourse and propaganda strategies during the 2019 Indonesian presidential election campaign on social media. In an era where digital media has become pivotal in influencing public opinion, the research employs critical discourse analysis to unveil the underlying meaning behind political memes used by the two presidential candidates. Social media emerges as a potent and cost-effective platform for disseminating memes that reach a vast audience of potential voters. These memes were employed to construct or deconstruct the discourse surrounding the candidates, particularly portraying Joko Widodo's alleged links with the Indonesian Communist Party and Prabowo Subianto as a purported supporter of the caliphate in Indonesia. This study underscores the crucial role of social media in contemporary political communication and how political memes are leveraged as a form of propaganda to shape the reputations of presidential candidates and influence public opinion, aligning with the broader literature on the evolving dynamics of political campaigns in the digital age.

Johann (2022) explains in his research paper the emergence of internet memes as a potent and popular vehicle for the expression of individual political views within the realm of social media. This study, rooted in a quantitative online survey of political internet meme users sourced from fringe web communities and sharing platforms, investigates the underlying factors that drive political expression through memes. The research uncovers several significant findings, demonstrating that political meme usage is contingent on users' political interest, their level of engagement in social media presumption, their motivations for political involvement, and their internal political efficacy. Additionally, the study

reveals a noteworthy link between the use of internet memes as a means for political expression and users' broader political participation, both online and offline. As the first empirical exploration of creators and sharers of political internet memes, this research adds to the growing body of knowledge surrounding evolving participatory practices within the dynamic landscape of social media. Importantly, it redirects the focus from general social media use to the specific and influential realm of meme-based content, shedding light on the transformative role of memes in shaping contemporary political discourse.

Kanashina (2021) stated in his research paper the key characteristics of internet memes, such as multimodality, caricature style, humor, interactivity, and rich stylistic content, emphasizing their capacity to engage and resonate with young voters through modern communicative strategies. The interactivity of memes facilitates a dynamic virtual dialogue between politicians and voters, while their stylistic diversity, often expressed in a multimodal form, contributes to the visual and expressive appeal of these online artifacts. As politicians increasingly harness the power of internet memes to attract voters and enhance their public image, it becomes crucial for researchers to explore the multifaceted nature of this emerging form of political discourse.

Singh and Puyok (2021) explained in their research paper the political satire among youth and its potential impact on their political perceptions. The study analyzed seven different forms of political satire, ranging from political graphics and cartoons to memes and satirical news, derived from social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter. The findings indicate that political satire significantly influences the political interests of young individuals, enhancing their political understanding and presenting political issues in engaging and creative ways. While it is suggested that political satire has the potential to shape the political thinking of youth, the direct impact on their voting inclination remains inconclusive and warrants further exploration.

Salikin and Sulaksono (2021) explains in their research paper the impact of political memes on social media platforms on the political participation of newcomers in the 2019 Presidential Election in the Karimun Regency, Indonesia. Employing a quantitative approach, the study targets individuals who were participating in their first presidential election, with a sample size of 100 respondents and data collected through questionnaires and Google Forms. The analysis employs techniques such as Simple Linear Regression, Cronbach Alpha reliability testing, and Pearson Product Moment Correlation for validity assessment. The findings of this study demonstrate a positive and statistically significant relationship between exposure to political memes on social media and increased political participation among these newcomers.

The research highlights the potential of political memes to engage social media audiences and stimulate their involvement in political processes, particularly by encouraging discussions and sharing of election-related content. Within the context of the literature on the role of social media in political participation, this paper contributes by specifically focusing on the impact of a specific form of digital content, political memes, on political engagement during a pivotal electoral event. It underscores the increasingly influential role of social media in shaping

political behavior and engagement, offering valuable insights into how novel and unconventional forms of communication, such as memes, can impact political participation among new voters.

Chabot (2021) in his thesis addresses a significant gap in the literature by investigating the impact of political memes on Canadian voters during the 2019 federal election, a topic that has been largely unexplored. Drawing on the methodology employed by Huntington (2017) in her research on political memes' effects and affect, the study conducts an online experiment involving 550 potential voters from across Canada. The selected memes center around two dominant election issues: climate change and the blackface scandal involving Prime Minister Justin Trudeau. These memes target both the Liberal and Conservative

parties and their respective leaders. The research assesses changes in vote likelihood and candidate and party evaluations post-meme exposure, as well as the persuasiveness and resonance of the memes. The study also examines how voters' characteristics and meme content influence the memes' effects. The findings reveal that, in general, political memes had a relatively low impact on vote likelihood and evaluations, but this effect varied depending on specific voter characteristics and meme content, underscoring the nuanced nature of political meme influence in the Canadian electoral context.

Rastogi and Kashyap (2019) explained in their paper that the origins and evolution of internet memes as influential tools for communication are explored, with a focus on their role in shaping political discourse in India. Drawing from Richard Dawkins' concept of memes as carriers of cultural information, the study employs content analysis to examine how political memes are utilized and the extent to which they contribute to a new paradigm in Indian politics. The paper also assesses audience engagement through viewership and comments, seeking to determine whether these memes impact political perceptions and the factors that facilitate their effectiveness in this regard. Ultimately, this research investigates the transformative potential of internet memes as a means of influencing political attitudes among the Indian population.

Gubbay (2018) stated in his newspaper article that in today's digital age, political memes have become a prominent vehicle for conveying political messages and influencing young adults, particularly on platforms like Twitter. While these memes can engage and inform a previously disinterested demographic, potentially altering the political landscape in their favor, they also carry the risk of spreading false information and creating echo chambers. The power of political memes lies in their ability to simplify complex issues into shareable and entertaining content, but their impact on public perception and engagement in politics remains a subject of ongoing study and debate.

Kulkarni (2017) stated in her research paper that the rise of digital technology has led to an increase in the popularity of online memes. Memes are forms of media that use humor and satire to spread information. Internet memes are now utilized in political campaigning. Thus, this research article examines how political satire has been spread online through memes. The study examines how online memes affect both digital immigrants and locals in India. The impact of memes is examined using metrics such as political participation, influence on political opinions, and voting behavior. The study suggests that online memes are utilized as a tool of political discourse but do not significantly affect audience, even using a questionnaire as a data gathering instrument.

Huntington (2017) explained in his study the realm of political internet memes and their impact in our contemporary participatory media culture, addressing a critical gap in the existing literature by quantitatively examining the effects of political memes on viewers. Memes have increasingly become a tool for citizens to actively engage in digital public discourse, yet their specific effects have remained unclear. The research employs an online quasi-experimental design, differentiating between political and non-political memes to establish how they influence viewers' affect and perceptions of persuasiveness. The findings reveal that political memes generate distinct effects compared to non-political ones, with viewers experiencing more aversion and scrutinizing the arguments presented in political memes to a greater extent. Notably, motivated reasoning plays a role, as viewers whose political ideology aligns with the memes, they encounter are more likely to perceive them as effective messages and engage in less argument scrutiny. This study contributes valuable insights into the influence of political memes, underscoring their significance in contemporary media, particularly in the context of opinion polarization, civic discourse, and the digital public sphere. Moreover, it provides a foundational framework for conducting quantitative research on internet memes, emphasizing the need for future investigations to explore this emerging form of user-generated media in greater detail and in relation to its distinct characteristics within the broader media

landscape.

Rolan and Otero (2016) explained in their research the shift from traditional politics to the realm of social media, particularly Twitter, and its impact on political communication in Spain. It investigates how Spanish political parties strategically incorporate images, particularly memes, into their digital discourse, with a focus on the 2015 State of the Nation Debate.

Employing content analysis, the study delves into the typology of images, communication strategies, main hashtags, and their overall impact. Additionally, thematic tagging of graphic memes is conducted to analyze the textual and visual meanings. The research uncovers noteworthy disparities in meme usage among political parties in the Spanish Parliament and identifies Twitter accounts with significant memetic influence.

Sreekumar and Vadrevu (2013) in their research paper provide an overview on the use of static visual memes on social media in Singapore as a means for political actors to comment on the ruling party and its policies. Through semiotic analysis and interviews with young Singaporeans aged 18-24, the study reveals that these political memes play a crucial role in socializing citizens to become more critical of the status quo, particularly by satirically commenting on the ruling party's narratives and constructing subversive counter-narratives with wit, sarcasm, and parody. These findings are significant as they indicate that political memes have the potential to enhance political engagement in a population often viewed as depoliticized and apathetic, contributing to the broader discourse on the intersection of digital culture and political participation.

The reviewed literature offers valuable insights into the role of political memes in shaping public opinion and political engagement in various contexts. Researchers have explored the motivations behind users' interactions with political memes, highlighting their multifaceted purposes, from entertainment to political commentary. Memes have been found to impact political discourse, influence young voters, and provide a means for political satire. However, their potential to shape voting behavior remains inconclusive, and concerns about misinformation and echo chambers persist. Memes have emerged as influential tools in the digital age, simplifying complex issues into shareable content, and their role in shaping political attitudes and perceptions continues to be a subject of study and debate.

3. Theoretical Framework

This chapter outlines the theoretical framework employed in the study, which serves as the foundation for understanding how social media political memes influence the attitudes and beliefs of young voters. It encompasses various communication and media theories that shed light on the mechanisms through which these memes impact the perceptions and opinions of this demographic, as well as the active role played by young voters in selecting and engaging with such content.

3.1 Diffusion of Innovations Theory

The Diffusion of Innovations Theory, introduced by sociologist Everett Rogers in 1962, provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how new ideas, technologies, products, and practices spread within a society or social system. At its core, the theory aims to explain the process through which an innovation is adopted by individuals and groups over time.

Rogers proposed that the adoption of an innovation is influenced by various factors, including the characteristics of the innovation itself and the social system within which it is being adopted. The theory emphasizes the importance of communication channels, social networks, and the perceived attributes of the innovation in shaping the rate of adoption.

Building on Rogers' foundational work, subsequent research has highlighted several key components of the Diffusion of Innovations Theory. One such component is the categorization of individuals based on their willingness to adopt new ideas or technologies. These categories include innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority, and laggards, each representing different segments of the population based on their attitudes toward innovation adoption.

Furthermore, the theory underlines the significance of communication and interpersonal networks in the diffusion process. Opinion leaders and influential individuals within social networks are instrumental in spreading information and shaping the perceptions of the innovation, thereby influencing its adoption rate within a community or society.

The Diffusion of Innovations Theory also emphasizes the critical role of the perceived attributes of an innovation in determining its adoption. These attributes include relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, trialability, and observability, all of which affect the likelihood of an individual or a group adopting a particular innovation.

3.1.1   Application of the Theory

The theory highlights the role of communication channels in the diffusion process. In the case of social media memes, platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram serve as key communication channels through which these memes are disseminated among young voters in Lahore. The rapid and widespread sharing of political memes on these platforms can contribute to the amplification of certain political attitudes and beliefs among the youth population.

Moreover, the theory emphasizes the role of influential individuals and opinion leaders in the adoption of innovations. In the context of social media, influential figures such as popular social media personalities, bloggers, or political figures with a significant online presence can act as opinion leaders, shaping the attitudes and beliefs of young voters through the propagation of specific political memes. The endorsement or sharing of memes by such influential individuals can significantly impact the diffusion of certain political messages and ideologies among the youth in Lahore.

Additionally, the theory emphasizes the significance of perceived attributes of innovations in influencing their adoption. In the case of social media memes, the content, format, and messaging of the memes play a crucial role in shaping the attitudes and beliefs of young voters. Memes that effectively capture and communicate political messages in a relatable, humorous, or emotionally compelling manner are more likely to resonate with the target audience, potentially influencing their political attitudes and perceptions. Furthermore, the diffusion theory underscores the role of social networks in the adoption of innovations. Within the context of social media, the interconnectedness of young voters in Lahore through various online communities and networks facilitates the rapid spread of political memes and the reinforcement of certain political attitudes and beliefs within these networks.

3.2   Social Learning Theory

The social learning theory, developed by psychologist Albert Bandura in the 1970s, posits that individuals learn through observing others' behavior and the consequences of those behaviors. It emphasizes the role of cognitive processes in determining the way people perceive and respond to the world around them. According to Bandura, learning is not solely a result of direct reinforcement, but it also occurs through the observation of others within a social context.

One of the fundamental ideas in the social learning theory is that individuals can acquire new behaviors by observing the actions of others and the outcomes of those behaviors. This observational learning, or modeling, can occur through various mediums, including live models, verbal instruction, and symbolic representation. Bandura proposed that this observational learning process is influenced by various factors, such as the characteristics of the model, the observer's cognitive capabilities, and the anticipated consequences of the behavior.

Additionally, the social learning theory highlights the importance of reciprocal determinism, suggesting that behavior, the environment, and personal factors continually interact and influence each other. This bidirectional relationship between an individual and their environment underscores the dynamic nature of human behavior and the significance of social influences in shaping one's actions and beliefs.

Furthermore, the social learning theory suggests

that individuals are more likely to imitate behaviors that result in desirable outcomes and are consistent with their own values and beliefs. This emphasizes the role of reinforcement and motivation in the learning process.

Moreover, the theory recognizes that individuals are not passive recipients of their environment but are actively engaged in cognitive processes that facilitate the acquisition and retention of new behaviors.

3.2.1 *Application of the Theory*

According to the social learning theory, individuals learn by observing the behavior of others, particularly those they perceive as credible or influential. In the context of social media political memes, young voters may be exposed to various political viewpoints and opinions that are portrayed in a humorous or satirical manner. These memes can serve as models for behavior and beliefs, potentially influencing how young voters perceive political issues and candidates. Moreover, the theory suggests that individuals are more likely to imitate behaviors that are reinforced and yield desirable outcomes. In the case of social media political memes, if certain memes receive widespread attention, likes, or shares, they may be perceived as socially acceptable or popular, influencing young voters to adopt similar attitudes or beliefs. Additionally, the interactive nature of social media platforms allows for the rapid dissemination of political memes, increasing their potential impact on the attitudes and beliefs of young voters.

Furthermore, the social learning theory highlights the significance of cognitive processes in shaping behavior. Young voters engage in cognitive activities, such as critical thinking and information processing, to evaluate and interpret the political messages conveyed through memes. These cognitive processes can influence how young voters internalize and integrate the information presented in memes, ultimately affecting their political attitudes and beliefs.

Additionally, the theory of reciprocal determinism underscores the bidirectional relationship between individuals and their environment. Social media platforms not only serve as environments where young voters are exposed to political memes but also provide opportunities for engagement and feedback. This interaction can further reinforce certain political beliefs and attitudes, creating a feedback loop that influences young voters' perceptions of political issues and candidates.

4. Research Methodology

This chapter includes the methods or processes that were used to collect and evaluate data pertaining to a certain research topic. The methodology section of a research paper gives reader the chance to evaluate the general validity and reliability of a study.

4.1 Research Method

The type of research that was applied is quantitative research, as it allowed to enhance understanding about the effects of social media political memes on the attitude and beliefs of young voters in Lahore. Survey Method had been used to attain information from young voters and their opinions, preferences and feedback on how it affects them. Survey was allowed to gather important information which was useful in analyzing the research topic. The survey method was flexible to accumulate information for this research.

4.2 Universe

The universe of this study involved urban city of Pakistan which is Lahore. Lahore, as Pakistan's second-largest city and a vibrant cultural and economic hub, had been chosen for this study due to its unique blend of diverse demographics, rich history, and a thriving urban population. Lahore was selected because it's a city with a significant youth population and a dynamic social media landscape, making them a prime setting for examining the impact of political memes on the emerging electorate. As the study was conducted in Lahore the research accomplished authentic results through surveys by spreading the surveys in different parts of Lahore.

4.3   Population

Population is the subset of universe which was targeted in particular research. The audience or correspondents of this research were basically the young voters from bachelors and masters' students in Lahore aged 18-24. University of Lahore (UOL), University of Central Punjab (UCP), and Forman Christian College, University (FCCU) were selected for this study due to their diverse student bodies. The questionnaires were distributed to college campus and some of hostel premises of these universities. These universities collectively represent a wide range of students from various backgrounds and disciplines, making them an ideal cross-section for investigating how social media political memes influence the attitudes and beliefs of young voters in Lahore.

4.4   Sampling Technique

Simple Random Sampling Method was used in this research. In this type of sampling strategy every element in the study population has an equal chance of getting selected.

University students had been getting the questionnaire randomly without choosing any specific group of students. The survey was provided to them so the findings had been randomly from university going students irrespective of their departments or field of study.

4.5   Sample Size

The target audience consisted of bachelor's and master's going students aged 18-24 because they represent the young voting demographic, which encompasses both males and females. A total of 250 people was selected to participate in the sampling process.

4.6   Tool of Data Collection

Due to the fact that "A quality questionnaire is always brief, specific and to the point and a crystal information can from the respondents can be extracted by using a good and quality questionnaire" (Black 1976) an Online Questionnaire was used for data collection. A total number of 26 questions was included in the Questionnaire. There were basically two parts of the questionnaire. Questionnaire is a part of survey question that can be divided into two broad types, which are structured and unstructured. In this questionnaire, the structured question type was used. This was because the respondents sometimes are unable to write the good answers for the unstructured questions. The questionnaire consisted of 5-point Likert scale questions. This type of questions can be considered as level of measurement because the researcher wanted to measure the understanding or knowledge of agreement regarding the statement in the question form.

4.7   Pre-testing

To ascertain whether the research strategy is sound and to assist in question improvement, a mini study, sometimes referred to as pre-testing, is carried out with a small sample. The pre-testing of the questionnaire aims to increase its validity and reliability. A questionnaire consisting of 26 questions was developed and then was tested through a pilot study comprising of approximately 25 university going students. After reading the instructions and directions, the respondents carefully filled out the questionnaire. Following the completion of the questionnaire, the study was discussed with the respondents. They were questioned about their understanding of the questions, how easy they were to respond to, and other things.

$$\alpha = \frac{N \cdot \bar{c}}{\bar{v} + (N-1) \cdot \bar{c}}$$

The above formula is Cronbach's alpha. The Cronbach Alpha pre-testing procedure was used to examine the validity of the survey. Pre-testing yielded a result. .7 is considered a good reliability whereas .8 is considered very good. As a result, the pre-testing result is used to help build the questionnaire so that it serves the study's intended goal.

Data collected from 10% of the total sample size that was 250 and then was entered in SPSS. Variable view was filled with question numbers, labels, measures and values. This data was used to

complete the reliability test that provided an output file, including the value of Cronbach's

Alpha that was .901.

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.901	30

4.8 Data Analysis Procedure

The structured, closed-ended responses were rated in percentages. Each alternative's response rate had been reported and analyzed. The Statistical Package for Service Solution software program was used to analyze the collected data (SPSS). Basically, IBM created a statistical software suite called SPSS Statistics for data management, advanced analytics, multivariate analysis, corporate intelligence, and law enforcement.

To understand whether to accept or reject the proposed statement, proposed testing to the hypotheses was applied. This was proven on the basis of the data collected from the decided population. This step is an integral part of the research procedure. There are several ways to perform the test, however the test that suited the best to this mode of research was the "Spearman Rho Test". The spearman Rho Test is the test of Relationship. Spearman Rho had been used to test the hypothesis of the study.

5. Discussion and Analysis

A research paper's discussion part serves the primary objective of outlining each and every step taken from the start of the investigation to the conclusion. One of the last sections of a research paper is the discussion section, where the results are explained, analyzed, and interpreted. The results' significance is explained (Rajpurohit, 2021).

The findings of this study shed light on the profound impact of social media political memes on the attitudes and beliefs of young voters in Lahore. In a survey involving 250 participants, the data revealed a balanced distribution of gender, age, educational background, and university affiliation. Notably, the majority of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with statements affirming the persuasive, humorous, and informative nature of political memes on social media platforms. The findings also answered the following research questions:

RQ1: Do political memes affect the political attitudes and beliefs of young voters?

This research question resulted in a positive response in finding that do political memes affect the political attitudes and beliefs of young voters.

The results shows that 3.60% remained neutral, 44.80 % agreed and 51.60% strongly agreed that yes political memes have influenced their attitudes and beliefs. The findings of this study are similar to the findings of the studies in the past. The consistency in the obtained results follows the patterns identified in previous study named the internet memes as a form of political expression in social media (Johann, 2022) which revealed that that funny pictures and messages about politics on social media have a real impact on what young people think about politics. This shows that these memes are powerful in shaping the way young people see and understand political issues.

The theories examined and applied in the research effectively addressed this research question. The diffusion of innovations theory underscores the role of social networks in the adoption of innovations. Within the context of social media, the interconnectedness of young voters in Lahore through various online communities and networks facilitates the rapid spread of political memes and the reinforcement of certain political attitudes and beliefs within these networks. The findings are also related to social network theory because social media platforms not only serve as environments where young voters are exposed to political memes

but also provide opportunities for engagement and feedback. This interaction can further reinforce certain political beliefs and attitudes, creating a feedback loop that influences young voters' perceptions of political issues and candidates.

RQ2: Do political memes affect the decision-making processes of young voters in elections?

This research question resulted in a positive response in finding that do political memes affect the decision-making process of young voters in elections. The results show that 1% strongly disagreed,0.2% disagreed and 2.40% remained neutral on the statement. Whereas 40.00

% agreed to the statement and 56.40% strongly agreed that yes political memes do affect the decision-making processes of young voters in elections. The findings of this study are similar to the findings of the studies in the past. The consistency in the obtained results follows the patterns identified in previous study named the Influence of Political Memes in social media on the Level of Political Participation of Beginner Voters in The Presidential Election Year 2019 in Karimun District (Salikin & Sulaksono, 2021) which revealed that political memes significantly influence the decision-making processes of young voters in elections by shaping their perceptions, framing political issues in a relatable and often humorous manner.

The theories examined and applied in the research effectively addressed this research question. Diffusion of innovations theory suggests that innovations or new ideas spread through society in a predictable pattern. In the context of political memes, the consistent impact observed across studies is attributed to the diffusion process, where memes, as innovative communication tools, quickly gain acceptance among young voters and influence their decision-making by shaping perceptions in a relatable and humorous manner. The study's findings are also connected to Social Network Theory, emphasizing the role of social connections in the diffusion of information. Political memes, often shared within social networks, leverage the influence of interpersonal connections. The patterns identified in the literature and consistent findings imply that young

voters are interconnected through social networks, where the impact of memes spreads and influences decision-making processes within these networks.

RQ3: Do specific types of political memes, such as satire or misinformation, have varying degrees of impact on engaging young voters in political discourse?

This research question resulted in a positive response in finding that do specific types of political memes, such as satire or misinformation, have varying degrees of impact on engaging young voters in political discourse. The results shows that 0.4% disagreed to the statement that political memes do not engage young voters in political discourse. 3.60% remained neutral on the statement whereas 43.20% agreed to the statement and 52.80% strongly agreed that yes political memes engage young voters in political discourse. The findings of this study are similar to the findings of the studies in the past. The consistency in the obtained results follows the patterns identified in previous study named internet meme and political discourse: a study on the impact of internet meme as a tool in communicating political satire (Kulkarni, 2017) which revealed that satirical memes appeal to young voters by infusing humor and relatability, encouraging critical thinking and political awareness. In contrast, misinformation, although attention-grabbing, presents a dual challenge, potentially misleading young voters and undermining the reliability of political information.

The theories examined and applied in the research effectively addressed this research question. The Diffusion of Innovations theory focuses on how new ideas, innovations, or technologies spread and are adopted within a society. In the context of political memes, particularly satire, the engaging and humorous nature of these memes aligns with the characteristics that promote innovation adoption. Young voters, often considered early adopters, may be more inclined to engage with and share satirical memes due to their novel and entertaining qualities. Social Network Theory emphasizes the influence of social relationships and interactions on individual behavior and the spread of information. In the context of political

memes, the positive response may be attributed to the role of social networks in amplifying the impact of specific meme types. Satirical memes, being relatable and shareable, are likely to spread rapidly within social networks, reaching a broader audience. Young voters, often well- connected in online social networks, may contribute to the dissemination of satirical memes, leading to higher engagement levels. On the other hand, misinformation may also spread through social networks, emphasizing the need for critical evaluation within these interconnected communities.

6.   Conclusion

The Meme culture has roped in common man who was previously unaware of what's going on in the media. The research was designed to study that whether social media political memes effect the attitude and belief of young voters. The study focused on Lahore, a significant urban center with a substantial youth population exposed to social media, making their political choices potentially influenced by the content they encounter, including political memes.

According to the research questions, it is estimated that great number of young voters totally agrees with the political memes effecting their attitude and beliefs.

The paper explores the influence of political memes on the decision-making processes of young voters during elections. The findings suggest a significant impact, with political memes shaping perceptions in a relatable and humorous manner, aligning with the diffusion of innovations theory. Additionally, the study investigates the engagement of young voters in political discourse through specific types of political memes, such as satire or misinformation. The results indicate that these memes have varying degrees of impact on engaging young voters, with satirical memes appealing to critical thinking and political awareness, while misinformation poses challenges by potentially misleading voters. Political memes do affect the attitudes and beliefs of young voters. Political memes leverage humor, satire, and relatability, making them easily accessible and

engaging for a broad audience, particularly young people. The informal and entertaining nature of memes facilitates quick consumption and sharing, drawing the attention of young voters who may find traditional political discourse less approachable. Memes often tap into emotions, ranging from humor to frustration, creating a strong emotional connection with the audience. Emotions play a crucial role in shaping attitudes and beliefs, and political memes can evoke specific feelings that influence how young voters perceive political issues, candidates, or ideologies. Social media platforms serve as fertile ground for meme sharing. Young voters, active on platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, encounter and share political memes within their social circles. The act of sharing and discussing memes within peer groups enhances social bonds and establishes a shared understanding, contributing to the influence of peer groups on individual attitudes. Young voters, who are often attuned to the latest cultural references, find political memes culturally relevant. This relevance increases the likelihood of engagement and resonates with the worldview of young voters, shaping their attitudes within the context of contemporary issues. While some political memes are lighthearted, others may convey satire or sarcasm. These elements encourage critical thinking as young voters decipher the underlying messages. Memes can prompt individuals to question and reflect on political narratives, fostering a heightened awareness of political issues and encouraging active engagement in political discourse.

6.1   Limitations

•   The survey questionnaire was being circulated among few people. To generalize the result on the basis of this might lead to an inaccurate result.

•   Since the research only caters to the university going students aged 18-24 in particular, this does not take under consideration the effects of political memes on the attitude and belief, faced by all young voters.

•   Only three universities were included in the survey. This might limit the

possibility of attaining accuracy in the results. A broader selection of universities could have provided a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of political memes on young voters.

• The survey questionnaire was difficult to get filled by university students.

• The research has been constrained by a relatively short time frame for data collection.

A more extended period could have provided a more comprehensive understanding of how political memes impact young voters over different political cycles.

6.2   Recommendations

These recommendations are for future researchers who would further study the effects of social media political memes on the attitude and beliefs of young voters.

• Data collection could be done through national and international articles and research papers to draft authentic facts and figures.

• Sample size could be increased to have precise and much clearer outcome of the study.

• More universities could be added in order to increase sample size and overall population's effect could be better understood.

• Future researchers can delve deeper into the dynamics of meme creation and sharing on social media platforms. Understanding the factors that contribute to the virality of political memes, such as humor, relatability, and timing, can provide valuable insights into the mechanisms that make certain memes more influential than others.

• Research could focus on the impact of social media algorithms on the visibility and reach of political memes. Examining how algorithms on platforms like Facebook and Instagram determine the exposure of memes to users could help uncover potential biases or trends in meme dissemination.

• While quantitative data provides valuable statistical insights, future researchers could complement this with qualitative research methods. Conducting interviews, focus groups, or content analysis of individual meme narratives can

offer a more in-depth understanding of the cognitive and emotional responses of young voters to political memes.

• Investigate whether the influence of political memes extends beyond attitudes to actual voting behavior. Understanding whether exposure to memes translates into tangible actions, such as increased political engagement or changes in voting patterns, would contribute to a more holistic understanding of the impact of political memes on young voters.

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