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## The Persuasive Power of Political Memes: A Coping Strategy for Mitigating the Political and Social Stress Among Youth

Shazia Akram Janjua

Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto Institute of Science and Technology University, Islamabad.

[shaziajanjua49@gmail.com](mailto:shaziajanjua49@gmail.com)

Sana Mukhtar

Senior Lecturer, Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto Institute of Science and Technology University, Islamabad.

[sanamukhtar1@gmail.com](mailto:sanamukhtar1@gmail.com)

Dr. Taraq Waheed

Assistant Professor, Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto Institute of Science and Technology University, Islamabad.

[taraq.waheed@szabist-isb.edu.pk](mailto:taraq.waheed@szabist-isb.edu.pk)

### Abstract

*A prominent feature of the modern debate on politics, particularly among youth, is the spread of political memes on social media platforms. The effects of these memes on youth coping mechanisms and mental health are still poorly understood despite their increasing popularity. This qualitative study investigates how political memes can help youths cope with social and political stress. Based on in-depth semi-structured interviews with 20 participants, aged 18 to 25, a purposive and snowball sampling procedure was used to examine how youth use political memes to manage stress and anxiety related to political concerns using thematic analysis. This study investigates how political memes function as coping strategies against social and political stress. It evaluates the persuasion of memes, their function in stress relief, and youth opinions regarding meme use in political discourse. This study's conclusions add to our knowledge of how political memes function as vital resources for navigating and understanding the complex socio-political environment, in addition to being sources of amusement. Additional longitudinal and comparative studies are recommended to further investigate the long-lasting influence of political memes on youth political involvement in various cultural settings. Moreover, empirical research assessing interventions aimed at improving digital literacy can provide valuable practical knowledge on how to promote informed digital citizenship among young people, thereby positively influencing their active participation in democratic processes.*

**Keywords:** Memes, Stress, Persuasive power, Youth, Stress Relief, Citizenship, Social Media.

### Introduction

### Background:

Dawkins (1989), a well-known biologist, is credited with creating the concept of the "meme." He related his concept of genes to the concept of memes. According to him, memes are also like genes that are transferred from person to person, and memes are like genetic traits that are linked. Dawkins introduced the idea that any of the variety of imitators spread through social repetition could be considered a meme, highlighting the parallels between emergent rules in biology and culture. Concepts and practices flow and emerge from the idea itself (Dawkins 1976).

Another study provided an explanation of Internet memes as discourse. Social media platforms blame the rise of memes for fame. Memes are used by many professions, including public relations and advertising, to spread information and attract viewers' attention (Russ, 2014).

Youths are now often exposed to political information and have the opportunity to express their political opinions online through political memes. On the other hand, nothing is known about who distributes political memes online or whether being exposed to memes influences important political behavioral, emotional, and attitude effects (Halversen & Weeks, 2023).

Contextualizing political memories from a historical perspective, political memes are digital cultural artifacts that have a multiplicity of effects on political debate. They surpass the usual barriers to political communication with their extraordinary ability to communicate complicated ideas in clear and concise ways (Miltner, 2018).

Memes of politics posted on the Internet typically target political figures in an effort to either support or contradict their political beliefs. Furthermore, it provides a humorous demonstration of infotainment. Memes are considered more easily approachable and spread to target audiences, and people can access them easily (Lamerichs et al., 2018).

### **Types of Memes:**

There are different types of memes used on social media by the youth. The types of memes are as follows:

1. **Picture Macros:** Memes with text superimposed on them, usually in the form of large white writing. Typically used for amusing captions or observations (Seiffert-Brockmann et al., 2018)
2. **Response memes:** Memes that convey emotions or reactions, usually without words. prominently used in online forums and conferences (Griffin, 2021)
3. **Object Naming:** Memes with names affixed to different sections, usually in an absurd or entertaining manner (Halversen & Weeks, 2023)
4. **Parodies of phrases or circumstances:** Memes that play with word sounds or humorously reinterpret circumstances (Halversen & Weeks, 2023)

### **Problem Statement:**

Political memes have a greater influence on public conversation, since social media is becoming increasingly common. Not only can these memes provide enjoyment to youth, especially young people, but they also influence their political affiliation ideas

and views. This study aims to close this gap by examining the role of political memes in promoting particular political viewpoints, their ability to reduce stress, and their persuasive power. It also sought to grasp how youth view and interact with political memes as instruments to steer sophisticated political environments. This study offers important insights into the complex effects of political memes on youth's political involvement and mental health by systematically examining these factors.

The unavoidable impact of political memes on youth political beliefs, organizations, and methods for dealing with especially difficult times in present-day culture has become a critical and complicated peculiarity. Important questions regarding the connection between political memes and the sociopolitical environment are the subjects of this study's objectives. To comprehend the mind-boggling ways by which these visual enunciations function as tension focuses, this research will examine how political memes function as methods for dealing with stress for youth who are feeling squeeze from social and political worries, especially during trying times. This study also aims to examine the recognizable characteristics that make alluring power more pronounced based on particular memes in situations that encourage people to accept clear political views.

In addition, the focus was on investigating the puzzling connections that exist between youth's exposure to political symbolism, the articulation of those convictions, the implications of these connections for the manner in which they act, and the degree to which they are politically committed. The reason for this study is to offer a huge body of knowledge into the unique communication between political memes and the world of politics that youths experience and explore through a subjective examination. This was achieved by providing a complex comprehension of the strategies utilized for endurance, the unpretentious impacts at work, and the general effect on political responsibility and affiliation.

**Research gap:**

Although several studies have addressed the role of political memes within this segment, there is a lack of explicit research on the subject (Vergeer et al., 2013). Examining the wider impact of digital media on political attitudes and behaviors among youth. Obtaining information on the effectiveness of political memes as coping mechanisms might help one better understand the socio-psychological dynamics of young people's interactions with (digital material) political memes. Most researchers have used quantitative research methods and emphasized textual and content analysis, survey methods, and open-ended questions (Guerrero-Solé, 2018).

**Rationale:**

In the present era, youth must deal with growing social and political anxiety, which affects their psychological well-being and overall success. Among them, political memes are universally useful specialized tools that provide comedy, conversation, and a common character in a tasty package. However, their actual potential as stress-resilience strategies remains unexplored. This research delved into the persuasive

power of political memes, revealing the ways in which they influence thoughts, emotions, and behavioral adaptations. By comprehending the potential of political memes as adaptive tools, we may obtain crucial insights into youth interactions and devise workable strategies to promote their success in promoting their wellbeing. This study delved into the intersection between political communication and electronic culture in a compelling and modern way. Recently, political memes have become a potent form of communication, particularly among young audiences. The purpose of this study was to better understand and investigate the persuasiveness of political memes and their potential as coping strategies for the political and social stress faced by youth.

This qualitative research projected that justification was the growing awareness of the social and political stress that youth were experiencing, as well as the growing impact of political memes as a novel mode of communication in the digital era. To better understand how political memes serve as a coping mechanism for youth facing social and political pressure, this study investigated the persuasive power of these memes. Political memes have become a popular form of communication in recent years, particularly among youth. These frequent and surprising visual representations have the power to alter political discourse and perceptions of sociopolitical concerns.

### **1.5 Research Objectives:**

1. To explore the persuasive power of political memes to affect youth political affiliations, opinions, and beliefs.
2. To explore how memes can be used as coping strategies to lessen the stress associated with social and political issues.

### **Research Questions:**

1. How does the persuasive power/nature of political memes affect youth's political affiliations, opinions, and beliefs?
2. How do youths use political memes as a coping strategy to manage and lessen the stress brought on by social and political issues?

### **Literature Review**

Political members serve as channels for suppressed emotions, desires, and conflicts (de Saint Laurent et al., 2021).

Researchers have discovered the hidden connotations of many political memes that circulate across online entertainment platforms through thorough examination (Guerrero-Solé, 2018).

Political memes have become effective instruments for social criticism, satire, and political communication in the Internet era. From a psychoanalytic perspective, memes (pictures) contain deeper symbolic significance despite their often-casual aspects, which is worthy of further study. Using Freudian and Lacanian theories to reveal the unconscious impulses and desires buried within political memes, this study aimed to shed light on the hidden meanings and ideological subtexts inscribed within these visual artifacts. Through an analysis of memes' visual and linguistic elements,

this research showed how memes simplify complicated socio-political topics and allow for the release of suppressed thoughts and feelings. Delving into an unconscious visual language. This study contributes to a deeper understanding of the psychological components that underpin modern political discourse (Bracher et al.,).

The analysis highlighted how online memes (photos), which function as visual representations of resistance, tenacity, and well-known web culture, provide a ridiculous means to handle difficult situations. This study advances our understanding of how memes function as coordination and survival techniques during trying situations. This study provides more evidence on how people utilize memes as a means of survival, a form of resistance, and a source of support when faced with challenges. It discusses how memes may be used as tools to articulate and adjust to social and political pressure, which may be pertinent to your review's investigation of how children use political memes as a means of survival. One study demonstrated that online memes serve as platforms for audience engagement and participation. The study's main goal is to demonstrate how memes have developed into a platform that allows anybody to share and spread their thoughts and original ideas, while also keeping people fully informed about the issues at hand. The fundamental goal of making political memes is not to promote a cause or gain notoriety, but to engage the audience and provide regular people with a platform to express their opinions and voice their concerns about political matters (R et al., 2018).

Memes are funny or satirical memes, pictures, videos, or text-based content that circulate on social media and other online platforms. Internet memes are a viral cultural phenomenon that proliferate via online channels. Memes or Images, videos, text, and other types of content shared and remixed by internet users are frequently amusing, relatable, or satirical. As a form of commentary, humor, and communication, internet memes frequently capture the social and cultural climate of the day. Their ability to concisely and easily share formats effectively communicates complex ideas or emotions, which makes them viral (Drakett et al., 2018).

While considering political memes, it refers to those are frequently employed to make lighthearted or scathing remarks about or critique political issues, personalities, policies, and events (Beskow, D. M., Kumar, S., & Carley, 2020).

Another study examined how three large companies connected to Morocco's powerful individuals were the target of a 2018 boycott campaign that made use of Internet memes. They employed an analysis that examined how various objects are used for communication to examine the memes made during the boycott. According to the study, even though there was no designated venue for them to declare victory, these humorous, widely circulated memes served as a platform for everyday people to fight justice. These memes allow the weaker people to take the aim of the ruling class. This paper, which we were considering for our study, advances our understanding of how humor plays a major part in online memes and how they may be used to address politics through a range of media. In February 2016, the

Washington Post dubbed the official contest "the most-meme political race in U.S. history". This implies that throughout the election, a great deal of amusing or critical pictures and statements about the candidates circulated online. These memes (web pictures) made contentious and important topics for the 2016 political choice excellent discussion starters. This article examines the ways in which individuals use memes to criticize or denigrate rivals from both conservative and vote-based groupings. Memes provided alternative viewpoints to those found in traditional news and enabled people to respond to political decision events rapidly (Bülow & Johann, 2023).

They also assisted in persuading others to become engaged, who would not normally be enthusiastic about legislative matters. Memes provided a platform for political discourse on culture and politics in 2016, which was not possible in traditional political analysis (Kulkarni, 2017).

### **Political Memes in Pakistan:**

According to the study, cyberbullying is being brought on by an increase in political (content), especially memes on social media, particularly among younger users. Allies of different ideological groups are becoming alienated from each other because of cyberbullying, which regularly utilizes overly critical language, photo-shopped pictures, ridicule, and bogus data. Interestingly, male users seemed to encounter more offensive language than female users, possibly because of their larger social networks. Bullying, trolling, and the use of memes have become important tools for influencing voters with specific political ideologies and forming political agendas in Pakistan's political landscape. This is consistent with our studies on the persuasive power of political memes and coping mechanisms used by youth (Rehman Qaisar & Nawaz, 2022).

This research investigated satire found in online memes about politicians and politics. Its main goal was to investigate the use of satire in political memes and the hilarious and sarcastic portrayal of politicians and their behavior. The study emphasized the importance of Internet memes on social media and their function in informing and updating audiences about political matters (Sheikh et al., 2022).

This study explored the potential of political memes as defense mechanisms against the anxiety and tension resulting from political discourse. Based on psychoanalytic concepts such as sublimation and relocation, the analysis highlights how memes (pictures) serve as pathways to treatment and psychological support for those investigating sociopolitical forces (Burton, 2019).

### **Theoretical Framework:**

#### **Psychoanalytical Perspective:**

In this hyperconnected era of computers, memes/visuals increasingly influence political discourse and social engagement, particularly among younger audiences. In this study, we examined the ways in which political memes might assist youths in managing the stress that arises from social and political stress. This study explored

the psychological processes involved in the production, transmission, and adoption of political memes. This was accomplished by using the psychoanalytic perspective, specifically the views of Sigmund Freud and his followers. Psychoanalytically, political memes serve as a kind of safety net that helps individuals, youth in particular, adapt to the overwhelming strain and stress caused by today's complex legal and social challenges. According to Freud, meme producers and consumers connect with their ID, ego, and superego in a progressive manner (By & Jones, 1949). Based on joy rule, political memes provide a moment of relief from the stressful realm of politics through comedy, incongruity, or parody. The analysis highlights the significance of unconscious cycles and images in human behavior. Political memes often resonate with people at a deep, subconscious level by drawing on prime examples, collectively unconscious images, and societal allusions (Bracher et al., n.d.). Youths who are drawn in by political memes may unintentionally investigate their formative tasks, attempt to establish their independence, define their personalities, and set recognized norms within the advanced scene. According to psychoanalytic theory, "face-to-face therapy sessions" play a crucial role in the system of adaptation used by political memes. Through the exchange of authentically charged visual information, youth may experience release and relief from suppressed frustrations, anger, or tensions related to social and political concerns. Youths might feel a feeling of relief and release from repressed emotions, rage, or fears related to political and social issues by expressing and sharing emotionally charged information through memes (Erikson, 1950).

Memes give people a convenient and secure way to express their feelings, validate their experiences, and connect with like-minded others. Amid unstable socio-political environments, youth may find momentary emotional stability through the cathartic act of creating and consuming memes. Unlike the usual face-to-face treatment sessions that psychoanalysis generally demands, the participatory character of memetic culture offers a unique possibility for therapeutic expression and exploration. Youths may question popular narratives, externalize their internal difficulties, and get a sense of organization in shaping political discourse by creating, sharing, and remixing memes/images. Memetic commitment may foster a sense of community and resilience in youth facing similar challenges by providing support and encouragement as they delve into the complexities of modern sociopolitical variables (Kernberg, 1984).

Freud's defense mechanisms shed light on how youth use their devotion to political memes to withstand social and political pressures. By giving people a lighthearted way to outlet their fears, political memes might help indirectly address these suppressed emotions. Youths who experience repression may unintentionally hide their stress, but denial of stress can be reinforced by memes that lightheartedly discuss problems and promote downplaying or dismissing worries. Projection helps prevent individual confrontation by allowing youth to attribute their feelings to

external sources represented through memes. Displacement resentment onto harmless meme (image) targets temporarily relieving pressure. Sublimation transforms problematic drives into creative expressions through the production of memes. Rationalization avoids having a significant impact by justifying the use of memes as harmless entertainment or data. During stressful seasons, a myopic picture provides comfort for relapse. By satirically expressing divergent opinions through memes, youth might utilize response generation as a coping mechanism for internal tension. Intellectualization maintains a significant distance when examining visuals rationally. Fixing offers treatment and moral prominence by using memes to offset anxiety and responsibility. In this way, political memes serve as multilayered tools for youth to examine intricate socio-political contexts (Freud, 1923).

## **Methodology**

### **3.1 Research Design:**

Qualitative Method in which Subjective exploration was used in this study. The researcher planned for subjectivity. It featured evaluations from in-depth, semi-structured interviews. Since the idea of the review calls for a more appropriate method of gathering related data, the flow concentrated on the examination led to meetings.

### **3.2 Sample Selection and Population:**

To effectively achieve the objective of the review, the participants were guided through purposive and snowball sampling. Twenty people were selected for the interviews. Verifying the participants, interview candidates who fulfilled the criteria were selected for the screening process. In addition to being willing to participate in a follow-up interview, the selected participants had to be politically meme in their early twenties and able to respond to every question in the semi-structured interview. Additionally, the individuals interviewed were young adults between the ages of 18 and 25 (Newton et al., 2022).

#### **3.2.1 Inclusion criteria:**

- Age range: University students aged 18-25 years old.
- Gender: Both male and female students.
- Social media usage: Students who use social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok or WhatsApp.
- Familiarity with political memes: Students who are familiar with political memes and engage with them on social media.
- Participants who actively created memes or reused them.

#### **3.2.2 Exclusion criteria:**

The exclusion criteria could include:

- Participants who have not been active on social media sites for the last one year
- Memes study taken from the last 2 years.

### **3.3 Data Collection Procedure:**



Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data. The following priorities were considered in the semi-structured interviews. The following approach was used during the center gathering conversation: basic questions were asked, and no more than one question was asked at a time. These questions should not be assumed. To obtain their opinions, direct questions were asked in the first step, followed by indirect questions. Following this, structured questions were asked to schedule apprentices on the primary topic of discussion.

### **3.4 Sources of data:**

In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with youth who either used or were exposed to political memes. These qualitative data were used to learn about individual experiences and viewpoints regarding stress reduction.

### **3.5 Data Analysis Technique:**

#### **3.5.1 Thematic analysis:**

Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data in the proposed study. Using this method, important themes present in the collected qualitative data were identified and systematically analyzed. A systematic approach is required to effectively use thematic analysis. Finding, analyzing, and summarizing recurring patterns or themes in data, such as interview transcripts, is a method of qualitative research known as thematic analysis. A flexible and well-known strategy supports' comprehension scientists might interpret the significance and hidden importance of printed information (Drakett et al., 2018).

#### **Ethical consideration:**

Ethical criteria were followed in this study to guarantee participant anonymity, informed consent, and safety. Before starting the research, permission from the appropriate ethical committee was requested. It was ensured that there should be no harm done to research subjects in any way. The dignity of study participants was taken into account and their consent was obtained before the study. Participants in the research were assured that their privacy would be protected.

### **Results**

#### **4.1: Demographic Analysis**

A demographic study of data collected from university students showed several key traits. The majority of the adults in the example are young adults aged between 18 and 25 years. With regard to the distribution of orientation, there was a small bias in favor of males, in which approximately 60% of the samples were male. This indicates a normal marital status of individuals in this age range. Most participants were single. All participants understudied in four years of Science Education (BS). The educational backgrounds of the members show a distinct etiological scene in which Pashto, Punjabi, and Urdu are Included in their first language. Nevertheless, Urdu is the language that members practice the most, followed closely by Punjabi and Pashto. Financially speaking, the members mostly acknowledge that they are dependent, relying on family for financial support.

The number of participants speaking Punjabi is 55 %

The number of participants speaking Pashto is 35 %

While Urdu Speaking is 10%.

### **Thematic Analysis:**

Thematic analysis is a qualitative research tool employed by researchers to arrange and examine complicated datasets methodically. The objective was to identify themes that accurately represented the narratives found in the datasets. The process entails discerning the underlying concepts by thoroughly examining and reviewing the transcribed material. A systematic and thorough theme-analysis methodology has the potential to generate perceptive and reliable results. Thematic analysis is conceptually adaptable to the precise discovery, definition, and analysis of patterns (themes) within a dataset. Braun and Clarke assert that employing thematic analysis in qualitative research boosts the validity of the analysis because of its accessibility, transparency, and flexibility. Thematic analysis can be conducted using inductive (bottom-up) or deductive (top-down) approaches. During the inductive analysis, the data were categorized without attempting to align the themes with a pre-established coding framework or the researcher's preconceived notions about the research. subjects naturally arose from the data itself, independent of the issues explored in other studies. Themes are intricately connected to facts rather than influenced by the researcher's theoretical interest in the subject. In contrast, the deductive approach is researcher-driven, giving researchers the ability to analyze data based on their theoretical interest in the issues being studied. The researcher employing this methodology typically initiates the analysis by examining the themes identified through a comprehensive examination of the existing literature. To enhance the depth of the investigation, it is possible to employ both deductive and inductive methodologies (Drakett et al., 2018).

**Table 2 Displays the five distinct stages of thematic analysis.**

Stages.	Explanation of the Procedure.
1.Familiarizing oneself with data & Transcribing data,	Acquainting oneself with the data Transcribing data, if required, and carefully analyzing the information. Recording first thoughts and observations.
2. Coding.	Creating initial codes Systematically coding relevant features of the dataset and organizing pertinent data for each code. Exploring underlying patterns or subjects of interest. Compiling codes into possible themes, collecting all of them.
3.Analyzing and evaluating.	Analyzing and evaluating recurring topics Verifying the coherence between the themes and the coded extracts at level 1, as well as the complete data set at level 2, in order to create a comprehensive thematic analysis 'map'.

4. Establishing and assigning themes.	Establishing and assigning labels to themes. Continual analysis is being conducted to enhance the details of each theme and the overall narrative conveyed by the study. This involves creating precise definitions and titles for each theme.
5. Generating the report.	The ultimate chance for examination. The process involves carefully choosing vivid and captivating instances from the text, doing a thorough analysis of these selected extracts, and then connecting this analysis to the research (Braun & Clarke, 2019)

#### **Phase One: Familiarization with the Data:**

The first step and phase of thematic analysis is that the researcher has to study their data repeatedly so that the researcher is familiar with the collected data. This helped the researcher figure out so many themes from their collected data, although this stage is more difficult and carries out further steps or phases to emerge themes for their collected data, and the researcher would carry out their analysis in any appropriate way.

First, all the collected data from the interviews were transcribed in a written and appropriate way, which gave a sense of how the participants responded to the research questions and their thoughts and perceptions about the research. Subsequently, a comprehensive and repeated study of the transcript was conducted with the intention of perceiving the transcripts as independent entities while actively avoiding any influence from the researcher's own expertise and understanding in the research. Upon reviewing the transcripts, the researcher highlighted all the intriguing data. The primary objective of carefully analyzing the data in this manner was to engage deeply with the entire dataset and gather early areas of focus. This phase provided the researcher with a comprehensive understanding of the extent and scope of the content (Drakett et al., 2018).

#### **Phase Two: Generating Initial Themes:**

The initial phase of data analysis, which involved becoming comfortable with the data, revealed the depth and complexity of early findings. Nevertheless, the significance of reviewing transcripts before generating codes was considered. Consequently, the researcher reviewed the transcripts and systematically categorized the data. The transcripts were methodically coded following thorough and repeated readings.

#### **Phase Three: Developing Theme:**

This stage started with a comprehensive compilation of the codes identified throughout the dataset. The primary objective of this phase was to identify patterns and correlations within and among the complete dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2019). An analysis of the codes was conducted, considering the potential combinations of different codes to create comprehensive themes. To clarify, the primary emphasis in this stage was on analyzing themes at a higher level rather than concentrating on individual codes. According to the researcher, a theme is a significant aspect of the

data that relates to a research topic and shows a patterned response or meaning within the dataset. Therefore, we needed to depict these codes as fundamental components and merge comparable or multiple codes to produce prospective themes in connection with study inquiries. This stage is the most challenging part of the analytical process. To streamline the process, we followed Braun and Clarke's recommendations and created a list of subthemes/codes on a separate sheet. The researcher then grouped these codes into lots based on the links between the codes and themes. Owing to the investigative nature of the study, it was crucial to revisit and thoroughly review all the transcripts prior to categorizing codes based on the themes. Therefore, the transcripts were carefully reviewed and several codes were merged to form prospective themes. All pertinent coded data extracts were then organized into the identified themes. During the process of constructing the themes, the author had the ability to incorporate the thoughts and issues that she had previously identified in her literature review. Upon conducting a literature analysis, she discovered that certain themes held significant value, and it was possible to categorize certain codes within these themes (Dawadi, 2020).

#### **Phase Four: Reviewing Themes**

At this point, all themes (including master themes, main themes, and sub-themes) were deliberately consolidated to refine the initially grouped themes and present them in a more organized manner. Researchers have proposed that themes should be evaluated for internal homogeneity, which refers to their coherence and consistency, and for exterior heterogeneity, which involves identifying distinctions within themes.

This stage included two stages. At the beginning level, all subthemes/coded extracts connected to the early theme were taken from the data and copied into a Microsoft Word document that enabled cross-referencing coded extracts with the themes. This was performed to facilitate the retrieval, comparison, and organization of coded extracts and themes in a meaningful manner. The researcher evaluated all compiled codes for each theme, organized the sub-themes/codes and themes into clusters, and assessed whether they might create a cohesive pattern. All codes analyzed the themes and gathered extracts to determine whether they formed a cohesive pattern that accurately represented the coded material.

A comparable procedure was implemented at the second level; however, it was applied to the full dataset. At this stage, the credibility of the specific themes connected to the dataset was considered. It was crucial to confirm that the thematic map precisely represented the significance included in the entire dataset. Consequently, all transcripts were carefully reviewed, and in some cases, certain sections were reanalyzed to verify that the themes applied to the entire dataset. Several novel codes surfaced during this phase. However, recent codes did not contribute to any significant addition. Therefore, the process of recording data ceased. Subsequently, many themes were reassembled, and the thematic map was refined to capture the essence of the themes created for the study. This process

allowed for an examination of how the themes interconnected and the overarching narrative they conveyed about the data. Throughout the evaluation process, numerous themes or sub-themes were either united with other primary themes or eliminated (Braun & Clarke, 2019).

**Table 4 Reviewing themes:**

Sr. No	Themes	Sub – Themes
1.	Nature and scope of political memes	Political memes' historical evolution, Types of political memes and their characteristics, Discrimination channels and platforms, youth engagement and their interactions with political memes, and psychological impact on youth.
2.	Political memes impact on youth.	Historical development of political memes, various types of political memes and their attributes, channels, and platforms that discriminate, young engagement and their interactions with political memes, and the psychological effects on youth.
3.	Political memes as a tool of persuasion.	Memes and Cognitive Biases, Visual and Design Elements, Political Memes and Rhetorical Strategies, Persuasion Mechanisms in Political Memes Comparing Modern Political Persuasion Techniques with Targeting and Audience Segmentation, Virility and Network Effects, Impact on Political Behavior and Decision-Making
4.	Political memes as coping mechanisms.	The effects of political memes on psychology, as well as the effects of social and community support, narrative and reframing, identity and empowerment, coping strategies and cognitive processing, digital media and information overload,
5.	Social and cultural context of memes.	Historical Development of Memes, Localization and Cultural Specificity, Social Criticism and Commentary, Community, Representation, belonging, community and identity, Participation and Digital Literacy, The relationship between mainstream media and

		memes, commercialization and consumerism, generational dynamics, and technological influences.
6.	Ethical considerations of political memes.	Misinformation and truthfulness, defamation versus satire, Respect and Cultural Sensibility, Confidentiality and Privacy, Extremist Speech and Hate Speech, Effect on Political Polarization, power and Manipulation, Attribution or Intellectual Property, Accountability and public figure, Youth and Vulnerable Groups, Platform Obligations and Moderation, Positive versus Negative Conversations, Anonymity and Accountability,

#### **Phase Five: Naming and Defining Themes:**

This stage started with the goal of refining and characterizing themes, namely, "identifying the fundamental nature of each theme (as well as the themes as a whole), and determining which aspect of the data each theme represents." Braun and Clarke (2006) contend that a theme cannot possess excessive diversity and complexity. Consequently, the researcher revisited the compiled data excerpts for each theme and systematically arranged all themes into a logical and harmonious narrative. Precise attention was given to discerning the narrative conveyed by each topic and how it was integrated into the overarching narrative the researcher aimed to present their data concerning the research questions. This was done to ensure that there was little redundancy between the themes. The particulars of each participant were carefully refined.

Thoroughly review all primary themes and sub-themes, codes, and extracts to refine the themes. Subsequently, a corresponding definition and definitive name were assigned to each subject to narrate a cohesive account of the facts. During this phase, several lower-level themes were integrated with higher-order themes because of the recognition that these lower-level themes would increase the complexity of the thematic map while contributing minimally to the narrative conveyed by the data (Braun & Clarke, 2019).

#### **Phase Six: Writing Up:**

The last phase of the analysis generated a report on the findings. The researcher argued that a theme analysis report should effectively persuade readers of the worth and quality of research. Therefore, an important effort was made to present a succinct, cohesive, and rational narrative of the information conveyed by the data.

**Table 4.2. Major and sub-themes were deduced from the data.**

Sr. no	Themes.	Sub – Themes
1.	Sense of Community.	Youth participation. Sense of Belongingness. Sense of Authority. Social acceptance.
2.	Persuasive Power of memes.	Nature of Memes. Message farming. Humor & Irony. Confirmation Bias. Persuasive Communication. Political Polarization. Credibility.
3.	Political & Social stress.	Political stress. Social Injustice. Sensing helplessness. An absence of hope.
4.	Political Memes Efficacy.	Release and Catharsis. Sense of Mastery. Encouragement and unity Motivation for Political Activity.
5.	Symbolic Representation.	political personalities with symbolic significance. Memes' illustrations and symbolism. The Covert Meaning of Social Media Memes. Memes Unconscious Meaning.

#### 4.2.1 Sense of Community:

The data collected showed that 66.87% of the participants were of the viewpoint that the "Sense of Community" has emerged in modern culture, especially among youth, where digital interactions are quite important. This growth may be seen in how youths use modern media, such as political memes, to engage with one another and their environment. Political memes, often characterized by their humorous and engaging content, function as a kind of distraction and powerful tool for youth social engagement and local area activity. By making, sharing, and debating political memes, youth actively participate in a common digital culture and strengthen their sense of community. As reported by one participant,

*"We tend to become involved in national affairs, whether it be related to elections or any other issue led by politicians."*

The sense of belonging that political memes foster in the youth is a crucial component of this sophisticated sense of community. Political memes usually convey universal feelings, societal challenges, and current trends, thus making them relatable. When youths submit political memes that resonate with their own experiences or emotions, they receive validation from peers who understand and have gone through similar things. Mutual recognition through digital contact strengthens one's sense of belonging to a community, in which thoughts and feelings are acknowledged and shared by others. Thus, political memes serve as a bridge between people who have similar interests and emotions, rather than just being insignificant parts of society at large, mainstream society, yet serve as a barrier between individuals who have similar interests and emotions. As reported by one participant,

*"I believe that there is a great deal of commitment in youth today because they follow a lot, just as there are a lot of Imran Khan supporters at this time. As a result, they are very aware of this, they make thoughtful decisions about everything, and they are curious to know what is going on".*

In the digital age, youth feel more in charge of their social interactions, inventions, and content when they use political memes. When information overload is frequent, political memes help youth edit their social media feeds to reflect their personalities, sense of humor, and political beliefs, allowing them to create a personalized online identity. This act of creation and decision-making highlights a sense of control and structure over how they interact with their friends and the larger community, as well as how they present themselves. As reported by one participant,

*"We often encounter political memes and share them with our peer group, family, and especially with our father the motivation behind this is to convey our ideas and support to our party, so it is helpful to deliver our point of view".*

Additionally, political memes aid social acknowledgment because they often serve as ideas or conversation starters among peers, facilitating social relationships in a less threatening manner than face-to-face interactions. They play a crucial role in shaping and conveying a sense of community among the youth today. Thus, with the help of memes, youths conduct a joint virtual dialogue, find a feeling of intimacy, establish control over their social communication, and receive social recognition. In addition, subsequent interaction enhances their outgoing possibilities and is a serious factor in how computer technology has changed and continues to transform the development of networks.

#### **4.2.2 The persuasive power of political memes:**

The data collected showed that 75.87% of the participants were of the viewpoint that political memes are especially useful because they can employ sarcasm and comedy to express ideas, which can make them more memorable and enticing. Because



political memes frequently employ satire or exaggeration to highlight points or critiques of social standards, they are an effective tool for social commentary. Fifth, comedy does not just make people talk about something; it also allows something hard or controversial to be presented in a more engaging manner to a wide audience. By framing political memes in a lighthearted manner, they can subtly affect people's perspectives without evoking the typical defensive reactions that outright criticism or overt persuasion could. As reported by one participant,

*"Political memes can be found on legislative matters, on politicians themselves, or on those who make fun of their opposition party by looking up information about it. to demonstrate to individuals who belong to that party that it is superior and that its members are useless. Therefore, political memes are meant to either calm people down or satisfy them and help persuade youth and bit to change their political affiliation".*

Beyond their immediate entertainment value, political memes significantly influence attitudes, behaviors, and even political beliefs in today's digital culture. By their very nature, political memes are short and often humorous pieces of media that have the power to effectively and engagingly encapsulate complicated ideas. Their accessibility allows them to proliferate swiftly through social media channels, reaching an unparalleled audience. As reported by one participant,

*"When I encounter political memes that amaze me about what has happened, I try to explain them in detail. Political information is beyond our control, but every time we encounter a political meme, there is a party that supports and resists it. Therefore, it affects someone, makes fun of him, embraces him with joy, puts him at the forefront of their minds, and does a lot to support him. There are conflicts between two separate groups, but this has little effect on the situation. When we share political memes, we Do this to lighten the mood. If you have a vision that makes you laugh or refocuses your energy, it will appear that your partner's thoughts will wander when you send it."*

Political memes often exploit confirmation bias by reiterating the preconceived notions and opinions of a community or group. Sharing a political meme that confirms someone's preconceived notions increases its likelihood of spreading, creating a feedback loop for positive concepts. As a result, political memes are characterized by a high power of logical persuasion that relies on polarization and persuasion communication. First, they become the occasion for the polarization of "combatants" in political processes; lovers are increasingly enveloping their own, safe worlds of disagreement. Second, memes are effective carriers of ideology because of their emotional simplicity and focus on describing complex things in terms of a binary opposition that deepens division.

In conclusion, the dependability of political memes is often determined by the situation in which they are circulated and their source. The information gained a lot of persuasive value when the meme was utilized by a good influencer or respected

group, even if the subject of the information was genuine. Because untrue or intentionally true information circulates as quickly as real information, vital topics are often destroyed, and the capacity to make judgments is hindered. Finally, political memes are a lively and active communication element that uses key power factors to affect public assessment and discussion in the age of computers. Relative to contemporary communication techniques, their adaptability, appearance, skillful information transmission, and clever supply of humor make them distinct resources with the potential to subtly and implicitly affect social and political independence.

As reported by one participant:

*“Political memes have psychological impact over youth and youth consider it as a more credible as other or mainstream media, Political memes are helpful for youth to come out of stress and anxiety of their life”.*

#### **4.2.3 Social and political stress:**

The data collected showed that 89.87% of the participants were of the viewpoint that political memes help to mitigate social and political stress for the time being. In modern culture, it is becoming increasingly evident that social and political stress can cause a wide range of psychological and emotional reactions in both individuals and societies. Political tension, in which youths feel overwhelmed by swift changes and weaknesses in the political landscape, frequently depicts this pressure. The constant convergence of information, both fake and real, that permeates daily life and creates a perpetually uneasy sensation exacerbates these conflicts. People struggle with the effects of political decisions on their daily lives and prospects for the future, which affect both cultural aspects and individual affluence. As reported by one participant:

*“For the last two years we (youth) have been under great political and social stress because of uncertainty and unpredictable political scenarios we feel overwhelmed by the changes and weakness in the political scenario, so we feel social injustice, sensing helplessness and feeling of insecurity so in order to overcome all these things we use social media and encounter with political memes which are helpful to overcome social and political stress and political memes are more accessible.”*

Political and social stresses are also significantly influenced by the widespread perception of social injustice. When specific groups believe that they are subjected to unjust treatment or systemic injustices, they may feel extremely disenfranchised and frustrated. This is particularly true in communities that are excluded or subjected to discrimination, as injustices can cross racial, ethnic, and gender boundaries. Modern media often contributes to the exposure of such betrayals and situations that would not otherwise be known or forgotten. However, this knowledge does not necessarily provide a course of action or justice; in many instances, this line of reasoning only strengthens the injustice of the situation, making the victims angrier. Helplessness is the most common emotional reaction to these situations that million of people feel – a disturbing-seeming belief that people have no power over the fates shaping their lives, brought around by the overly complicated political and governmental systems

that seem disinterested in anything about the common citizen or the societies that do not appear changeable. Emotional reactions are usually followed by a strong disbelief in the intentions and eventual output of any political or social organization. In this situation, cynicism protects against a cycle of disappointments that leads to disillusionment and mistrust in attempts to bring about real change. Political tension, social injustice, feelings of weakness, and an inevitable sense of criticism form a complex web of social and political pressures that affect people's emotional health and cultural affiliation.

#### **4.2.4 Political memes efficacy as coping mechanisms:**

The data collected showed that 70.87% of the participants were of the viewpoint that the use of political memes as a survival tactic shows their sustainability beyond simple distraction, providing enormous mental and social capacities. People coping with the stress of everyday life can benefit from political memes in the form of delivery services and therapy. Humor achieves this calming effect by considering the expression of emotions and disappointments in a way that is both calming and socially acceptable. There is a kind of deliverance that people go through when they first investigate political image macros that connect with their own experiences or cultural dissatisfaction. This process injects personal and collective dissatisfaction into the humor of an image; thus, it diverts focus and normalizes one's thoughts. In addition, a meme is an opportunity to engage in the control of one's immediate future. The view is that when one may frequently feel inundated due to the day-to-day recurrence of public notifications or personal challenges, creating and publishing political image macros allows one to comment on and solve these problems at one's discretion. This presentation is excellent, as it has the siege to be the focal point of attention and can equally offer a certain sense of agency within a spoken or visual representation from which one may not sense it. The answer is that meme macros allow one to reclaim the power to confront grave problems in a frame where one can be easily captured or taken by astonishment, enabling one to warranty control over the self in answering and processing these problems rather than fully sense powerlessness.

Political memes also foster resilience and support among networks. Political memes strengthen social relationships by moving within networks that have a similar social understanding or grievances. Political memes are a particularly good example of how youths can come together to share difficult or funny experiences. When a political meme gains popularity on the Internet, it usually resonates deeply with a large audience, suggesting a general acceptance and approval of the experience it portrays. As reported by one participant:

*"Sharing and encountering political memes are helpful to overcome stress and anxiety for the time being and political memes are also beneficial to engage youth and they can share their ideas and points of view in the peer and social group it's an acid that*

*unites youth. Political memes reduce political pressure and unease. Youth only view political memes as jokes since they don't approach legislative concerns.*

#### **4.2.5 Symbolic Representation:**

The data collected showed that 78.87% of the participants were of the viewpoint that the use of political memes serves as a potent kind of iconic portrayal, providing a unique lens through which political individuals and ideologies are interpreted and assessed. Political leaders often transcend themselves in these political memes, becoming iconic pieces that touch on broader ideas or trends. This is to say, for example, due to the context provided by the creator of this political meme, even if a depiction of a political innovator may stand for such thoughts as emissions, trust, discrimination or the more cynical, a system where the majority rules: they join a political consideration with a visual depiction. In this manner, political memes can convey difficult political ideas quickly and efficiently using already known political symbols to create a strong one. Symbolism or imagery of political memes is fundamental to their strength and durability. For instance, when political memes portray national flags or historical personalities, they might create opposition or patriotism. Additionally, the application of a particular type of scheme can subtly incite fidelity to political ideologies/groups. All the components are not chosen at random but are extensively researched and presented deliberately so that the meme can speak to the perspective viewers in a deeper and more usually emotional way. Additionally, to start unconscious tones, it may be necessary to have knowledge of the underlying common and mental contexts. As political memes frequently reflect common minds, it is crucial to separate humble regulatory implications. While the shared concept of cultural codes remains humble, political memes re-imagine the factors of community feeling. Shared horror, desire, and judgment might come from modern times and live inside ideological codes in a multilayered icon. Party interpretations profoundly impact and adjust these symbols; society and political ideas including generation classes — this shows the effortful nature of general meme theory and the necessity for background reading to interpret them. This is the frame for more precise political memes that would try on common meme theory, serve familiar background viewpoints, offer a summary of presumed and articulated meanings that they present, and show how these are known viewers all rely on participant presentation.

*“Political meme has different meanings: it can be a source of satire or even one to ridicule us if we are not familiar with it. At the same time, there is an extensive discourse of political memes about current events, ideologies, and sociopolitical aspects. Political memes are a cultural platform that enables young people to access difficult political ideas. Political memes function as a force in the unconscious or thinkable of a time spirit. Rooted in thoughts, it has the capability to convey authentic political truths to young crowds – but embedded in comedy and memes, it can*

*actually speak to an emotional level. Political memes may influence people's beliefs or convictions, even without being aware of it. Political meme is a youth's resource for surviving the complex world... where political memes provide a fun and enthusiastic outlet for irritation and exasperation. This allows youth to outwardly communicate their strength and camaraderie (sociability). In addition, it allows individuals to express their anxiety and uncertainty about their role in society.*

### **Discussion**

The Qualitative analysis of this study contributed important new critiques of the persuasive capacities of political memes and their utility to youth in their means of relieving pressure from acutely oppressive circumstances. Exploring how youth perceive, use, and interact with political memes reveals the multifaceted nature of memes in modern sociopolitical reality.

This study probed the cultural meanings of contemporary meme genres based on memes. The analysis examined the broad dimensions of truth and temporality, as expressed in three prominent genres: reaction Photoshop's, stock character macros, and photo fads. The researcher found that present-day political memes are tools that influence political persuasion among youth audience members. The research work done on political memes testified to this assertion when the researcher explained that through memes, communications portraying even the most intricate political questions into pure and informative conclusions can pass through, and people identify themselves (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017).

Other recent studies have also examined how political memes influence public discourse from another perspective. Their research indicates that craftiness created through humor, satire, and irony not only captures attention but also provokes reflective thoughts and promotes active engagement. Memes have the potential to evoke feelings in target audiences, give them a common experience in the online space, foster a sense of community among youth, and strengthen their communicative persuasiveness (Rossini et al., 2018).

Political memes' considerable effect on how public conversations are created and how a large number of youth can engage in politics was well achieved. Today's political and social spaces respond to complex ideas using simple and easily relatable image platforms. Therefore, a meme creator and everyone using Internet platforms contribute to persuasion. The explanation of meme creation, spread, and reception among recipients will further improve your ability to understand its wider contribution to creating vested interests and attitudes in people during political conversations. This study confirmed that memes are essential. A high level of persuasive power ensures that crucial political ideas can be dissolved into short, sweet words. The discovery of this alignment of the present research on memes' influence ensured that essential conversations transformed society in this era (Vraga Bode, 2021).

The persuasive and adaptive nature of political memes has far-reaching uses for understanding how youth interact with complex media and socio-political discourse. For instance, understanding the concept can help politicians, academics, and media professionals devise appropriate strategies to engage with the youth on relevant social and policy issues (Chandler, 2013).

This study focused on the role of Internet memes in the communication of two far-right groups in Finland. The material consists of 426 memes posted by Finland First and the Soldiers of Odin between the years 2015 and 2017 on Facebook. This study provides valuable insights into how online memes can serve as a persuasive tool for far-right groups in Finland (Hakoköngäs et al., 2020).

### **Recommendations:**

This line of inquiry has several implications for research and policy. First, because political memes have a significant impact on youth engagement in politics, the government may consider incorporating a critical analysis of media and digital literacy into the school curriculum. Second, in the hands of policymakers, memes may become an effective communicative tool to unlock new ways of change by reducing barriers created by “seriousness.” Therefore, policymakers could leverage meme’s negotiating strength for the noble cause of positive change, including encouraging the enforcement of policies by ensuring political debates are peaceful and respectful.

Another potential line of inquiry might be a comparative examination of the use of political memes across different political and cultural settings. Since they are created and distributed within a social and cultural framework, researchers might find it useful to map the dominant global crossroads of humor and political discourse by comparing the use of such a coping mechanism across divergent cultural environments. In doing so, the research could also determine how such memes are used to foster participation or exclusion, as examples of both phenomena could be found within the same analytical framework, thus deepening our understanding of their role in global digital culture. Ultimately, some practical benefits might be derived from empirical research designs that study interventions that support digital literacy and critical engagement. Such research might, for example, investigate the efficacy of different pedagogical approaches in teaching students how to interact critically with digitally mediated content, including political memes.

### **Implications:**

This research has crucial implications for researchers and policymakers. Indeed, in light of the strong impact of political memes on young individuals’ political participation, the government should consider including critical media analysis and digital literacy in the school curriculum. If youth have the necessary skills to critically analyze Internet content, they can engage better in political debates and prevent the proliferation of lies and extreme content through memes. In addition, some ways policymakers may use memes’ negotiating power include encouraging respectful political conversations and civil and responsible engagement.

## Conclusion

Memes on social media, which are part of today's digital culture, have sparked much debate over the ability of political communication to persuade people to support political candidates, particularly youth. Nonetheless, the study looks at how memes might be used as a stress-reduction strategy for youth to highlight their persuasive qualities on social media. The study marked a common framework that facilitates the dissection of the various functions that political memes fulfill, ranging from amusement to negotiating and combating the peculiar complexities of sociopolitical debate. The study attempted to comprehend youth's position in a comprehensive idea of political participation and healthy well-being by examining how these political memes are a way of laughing things out and a channel for dealing with complex topics.

This study aims to recognize political memes as entertaining or engaging solely in digital objects. Instead, people are increasingly realizing that they are effective tools for navigating and making sense of the unstable political terrain, particularly in a setting where social and political unrest are rampant. Through qualitative analysis, this study sought to identify the fundamental mechanisms through which political memes support coping techniques in youth dealing with a range of social and political conflicts. The study also aims to shed light on how these political memes of collective identity work together to create and mold virtual communities, which in turn influence how youth interact with and comprehend modern political concerns.

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