

Representing Pakistani Current Economic Conditions through Social Media Memes: A Multimodal Analysis

Komal Ishtiaq¹

Easha Zainab²

Sara Ameer³

Zeast Arshad⁴

Abstract

Keeping in view the current economic crisis and rising inflation in Pakistan, the present study analyzes memes on this specific issue and keeps the public informed about the present circumstances. In Pakistan animations, comics, and memes are very much common these days, due to the rising influence of social media. These memes contain various issues, from ordinary daily life to the most complicated socio-political ones. These days, memes are also gaining the consciousness of researchers. For the present study, a total of twelve memes, are selected as a sample from Instagram on the topic of inflation under five distinct categories that are, budget (2022-2023), petrol hikes, a ban on imports, depreciation of the Pakistani rupee, and a relief scheme of 2000 rupees. These are studied using a framework of "Multimodal Discourse Analysis" presented by Michan (2007) which has its roots in Kress (2011) and Leeuwen (2004). The results tell that the memes are informing the public about Pakistan's current economic crisis and inflation in a humorous, yet sarcastic manner.

Keywords: Discourse, memes, social media, economic, multimodality

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the Research

The world is transformed into a global village with the help of media. We in this technological world are constantly bombarded with a great deal of information. People in this advanced technological world, are also using social media platforms, to share information. Hence, social media becomes a powerful tool. It is used extensively in our society. The feature

¹M. Phil Scholar, National University of Modern Languages, Islamabad

²BS Graduate, Fatima Jinnah Women University, Rawalpindi

³BS Graduate, Fatima Jinnah Women University, Rawalpindi

⁴BS Graduate, Fatima Jinnah Women University, Rawalpindi

that is trending on social media, in current times is a meme. Memes are like extracts that contain images and language to represent something serious in a humorous form (Syartani, 2021). The function of these memes is not only for the sake of amusement but to highlight the social ills of society, to inform, to criticize, and to persuade the minds of the people on particular issues prevalent in their society.

McCloud considers memes as “Amplification by Simplification”, as the memes have the potential to present a multifaceted issue in a precise and simple manner, but effectively (2016). Memes contain real-world problems and issues and inform the public about what is happening in the present.

1.2 Statement of Problem

Just like the other parts of the world, the Meme trend is also very common in Pakistan. Memes prove to be very powerful in gaining our consciousness about some particular issue present in society. These issues consist of both trivial and socio-political themes. Many studies have already been conducted on memes to highlight feminist issues, cricket, fashion, and others. Keeping in mind the current economic state and rising inflation in Pakistan, the existing study provides awareness of how memes are keeping the public informed about the current scenario in a humorous yet sarcastic manner.

1.3 Research Questions

- i. How do memes represent the rising inflation rates in Pakistan?
- ii. How do memes highlight the current economic conditions of Pakistan?

1.4 Research Objectives

The study intends to:

- i. Examine the role of memes in representing awareness about rising inflation in Pakistan.
- ii. Analyze the memes highlighting the current economic conditions in Pakistan.

1.5 Research Significance

The significance of the present study is that it analyzes the memes dealing with the current economic situation in Pakistan. So, it is informative and insightful in this manner.

This research is also significant because it fills the research gap. A lot of research has already been conducted on critical discourse analysis of memes on topics in general, feminist issues, cricket, and others. However, there is no current research in the database that specifically deals with the current economic turmoil in the country. So, this research helps in representing the current economic crisis in Pakistan through memes.

1.6 Delimitations

The present research is delimited to study social media memes as a tool for highlighting the current economic conditions and rising inflation in Pakistan.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Social Media

Social media in today's world become a larger part of peoples' everyday life. It helps people to converge, to interact with people all across the globe. It is not only just a source of communication but provides wide information on diverse subjects to its audience. During Covid-19, 2020, there were around 520 million new users who joined the social media platform. It was predicted that this figure would increase by 4.33 billion in 2021 (We Are Social, 2021).

Fatima (2020) stated social media is one of the most influential platforms. It also has a robust impact on political activities. A bundle of memes and comics surfaces on social media daily. Political memes and comics have the potential to gain the attention of not just the public but politicians as well. It gains the attention of some serious subject matter humorously, yet has a powerful underlying message. Richard Dawkins pioneered the term "meme" in 1976. It gives an insight into digital trends widely. Though, peoples' opinions on diverse matters are reflected through comics, illustrations, and particularly memes. People presented their opinions regarding socio-political issues, unfavorable outcomes in one or the other political party, and displeasure with prejudice. So, all of those opinions are highlighted on social media platforms through various tools and in various manners.

2.2 Internet Memes

Humor is one of the persuasive tools for ages. It has the power to change notions predominant in society. Much research on Internet memes

highlights that their purpose is to transmit certain ideas or information through slapstick humor (Kulkarni, 2017). Laineste (2016) also stated a similar point that Internet memes serve the purpose of transmitting information. It is evident because social media users, content creators, and consumers of the content deemed memes, as an interesting, humorous, and insightful medium for gaining information.

Destira, Hidayat, Alek, and Sufyan's (2021) research study is also based on Instagram memes. This study sheds light on the dynamic connection between text and visuals. In doing so, it also talks about the discrepancies between local Indonesian students and international students. The results of the study also pointed towards those differences in the literacy of the two modes. Overall, memes serve as a vehicle to give insight into literacy and education (Destira et al., 2021). In other words, it provides information to its audience on diverse subjects. Moreover, visuals are an interesting medium for capturing attention.

Memes are also helpful in political campaigns. These are utilized widely for these political activities and to persuade a wider audience. Shifman (2014) mentions in his book, about the US 2008 elections the usage of memes to persuade the public minds. These memes were utilized to gain greater votes as a possible outcome. He also mentions a very significant point most of those memes were generated by unpaid users on various social media sites, not by political elites themselves. Despite this, those memes have a resonance, as their appearance sounds professional. Though, those memes were developed by professionals. A lot of effort and research has been put into making that political campaign successful. Through this meme-oriented political campaign, the political views of people had also been expressed. Therefore, memes proved to be a significant tool in those political activities that involve the public in discussions, which otherwise is not possible through traditional modes (Shifman, 2014).

2.3 Memes Trend in Pakistan

Besides other parts of the world, memes culture is also immensely popular in Pakistan. The social media audience is widely consuming it. There are multiple content creators, as well in Pakistan, who are running various meme pages on Instagram. Similarly, it also gains an interest in the research area and is researched by various researchers. Hayat, Khan, Zahra, and Iqbal's (2021) research is on "Critical Discourse Analysis" of

memes in highlighting the social issue of gender manipulation and exploitation. The memes for the inquiry have been taken from the famous content creator page “Khabees Orat”. The theoretical bases for analysis include the CDA model. The results indicate that women are highly objectified in Pakistan which is exposed through memes. Moreover, memes also serve as a useful medium to bring forth gender abuse, violence, and crimes. Memes, therefore are substantial in exhibiting the repressed issues of the society both on political and social grounds.

Javed, Jameel, and Ahmed’s (2022) research are also based on the “Discourse Analysis” of Instagram memes. Their research investigated how society is represented on political and social grounds through memes. They used the “Multimodal Discourse Analysis” as their theoretical bases, which helps in evaluating those certain memes (Javed et al., 2022). This model also provides insights into investigating the general change in public perception.

2.4 Multimodality

Multimodality has been the subject of discussion for more than three decades, but multimodality is a highly used model these days because of the new emerging content and discourse on the Internet. According to Stockl (2004), Multimodality consists of various components of communication integrated within the discourse. Its purpose is not just to examine the text but all the various components that contribute to the making of the text (Yus, 2018).

Gunther (2011) compares the coherence of speech and writing with the weaving of threads. Moreover, he states that in “Multimodal Discourse Analysis”, there exist various kinds of threads in the form of visuals, colors, gestures, alphabets, speech, music, and others. In general, the text is an outcome of semiotics. Coherence in a text is achieved through the alignment of semiotic resources. Further, this coherence works on two levels; first internal where all the elements are aligned within the text, and second external where the alignment with the environment is also important in which the text appears (Gunther, 2011). So MMDA’s main focus is how various modes collectively provide the meaning of discourse. It does not focus on one feature which is speech or written form.

Similarly, Iedema (2011) focuses on a similar point that due to the rise of internet discourse, the focus is shifted from just a language to other semiotic resources embedded in the text that helps in the creation of

meaning. MMDA focuses on two particular aspects first to decenter the language, and second to focus on other components present in the text that include color, visuals, background, sounds, etc. Traditional mediums are no longer capable to discern the meaning because of the advanced internet discourse that entails various semiotic components in it.

In the present research, the researcher also wants to see how language and various semiotic modes are integrated into these memes to present the current economic crisis in Pakistan.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The present study is qualitative in nature. This research is about the multimodal analysis of memes, on inflation in Pakistan. The selection of the qualitative research type consists of the plausible reason that it gives a more in-depth analysis of the research questions to be investigated.

Kerlinger states research design is a type of design, plan, or approach to scrutinize and gives the researchers the required answers to the research questions (Peniel, 2016). This research design is descriptive-analytic, as it describes and analyzes the current economic state of Pakistan and rising inflation through memes.

3.2 Method of Data Collection

Data for the present study consists of memes on current economic conditions and inflation in Pakistan. These memes have been collected from social media i-e Instagram pages “Memes of Pakistan” with 419K followers, some memes from “Mangobaaz with 549K followers”, some memes from “Eastern Eye with 20K followers”, and some from “Gulf Today with 29.5K followers”, from the period of June 2022 to April 2023.

3.3 Population and Sample

The population of the present study is all the recently available memes on Instagram about the current economic conditions and rising inflation in Pakistan. The purposive sampling technique has been used here because we selected the memes on a specific issue of the current economic crisis and inflation.

The present study contains twelve memes on the current economic crisis and rising inflation in Pakistan. These memes have been taken from

“Memes of Pakistan with 419K followers”, “Mangobaaz with 549K”, “Eastern Eye with 20K followers” and “Gulf Today with 25.9K followers” with Instagram pages which entail different sections related to price hikes. These memes are, further, selected based on a greater number of likes, greater views, and how widely those memes are shared by people in Instagram groups. Further, four memes have been selected from “Mangobaaz” as it contains a huge number of followers, as well as their content is widely shared and viewed. Four memes have been selected from “Memes of Pakistan”, one reason is its greater followers, and secondly, a lot of content from “Memes of Pakistan” is reposted by “Mangobaaz”. Whereas, the other four memes have been selected from “Eastern Eye” and “Gulf Today”, which mainly develop the news content.

3.4 Theoretical Framework

Multimodal Discourse Analysis is a framework selected for the present study. The framework that is selected for memes analysis is given by Machin (2007) which has its roots in Kress (2011) and Leeuwen (2004). In Multimodality it is evident that semiotic codes function within and across various modes, therefore it is likely possible that images and visuals convey emotions as well. Machin’s (2007) framework focuses on the hidden and underneath meaning of the visuals. In this research, a qualitative analysis of memes is conducted which works on three various but interconnected levels “ideational, textual, and relational” which involves contributors, actions, and conditions, which have their roots in Halliday’s (2004) framework.

This research analysis of memes also highlights the underneath meaning of memes as a tool to convey people’s ideas and emotions about the current economic conditions of Pakistan. It is a known thing that “Multimodal Discourse Analysis” combines literal, visual, and other components present in the text and the third is socio-political conditions surrounding the text that lays the meaning of the text and reveal text underneath meanings (Kress, 2011).

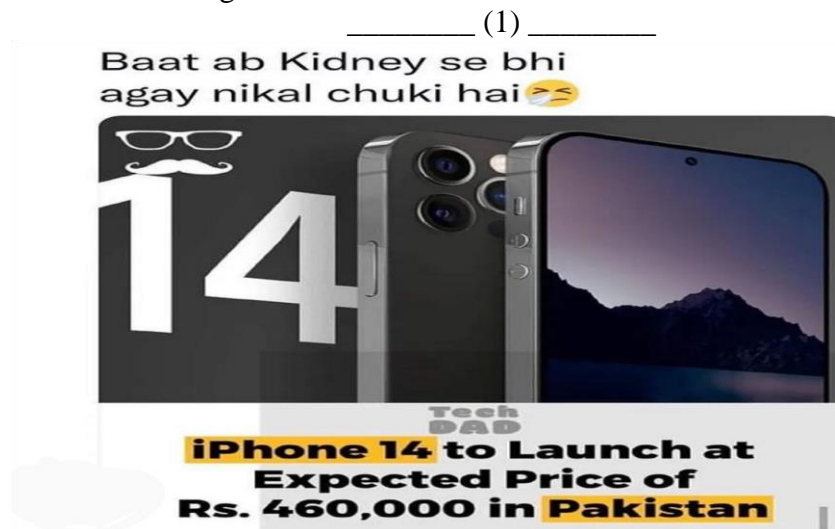
4. Findings and Data Analysis

In this part, twelve memes are analyzed, and all these twelve memes are related to the topic of inflation and economic crisis under five distinct but interrelated categories such as budget (2022-2023), petrol hikes, a ban on imports, Depreciation of rupee, and a relief scheme of 2000 rupees of the

current government by using Multimodal Discourse Analysis of David Machin (2007).

4.1 Budget (2022-2023)

On 10th June 2022, the current government announced the budget for 2022-2023. The finance minister of that time Miftah Ismail said to have provided all the financial assistance and relief to the poor but unfortunately, the outcomes have not been favorable. The inflation rate then grew up to 11.5%, therefore to deal with it budget increased the taxes and also increased the rates of everyday life utilities (Mumtaz, 2022). However, most of the people of Pakistan took to Instagram to express their frustration through memes.



In the above meme, there is an iPhone 14, and its predictable price in Pakistan, due to an increase in the price of the dollar and the devaluation of the rupee against it. In the image, there is a text on the top “Baat ab Kidney se bhi agay nikal chuki hai” with an emoji wiping its tear with tissue paper. Apple the world’s greatest technological brand produces its iPhone every year with advanced features. The price to be expected in Pakistan is in bold font in black “460,000” whereas iPhone 14 and Pakistan are also bold and black but they are highlighted with yellow color. Whereas, the colors used to present the iPhone is classic black, and three pictures are aligned to show its features the number “14” is also there in the picture in a huge size in white font. This phone is branded and costly, but its price is huge in Pakistan as compared to other countries, due

to the high tax price, as per mentioned in the budget in June 2022. Accordingly, the government of Pakistan announced that GST on luxury products would increase up to 17% due to which the prices of those products skyrocketed. This meme is funny but presents the grounded reality as well, hinting at the fact through sarcasm that the price of an iPhone is more than a human organ. So, it shows the rate of inflation and economic conditions are not even worth the human productive organs. This meme is informative as well, as it is updating people about the higher tax prices.

_____ (2) _____

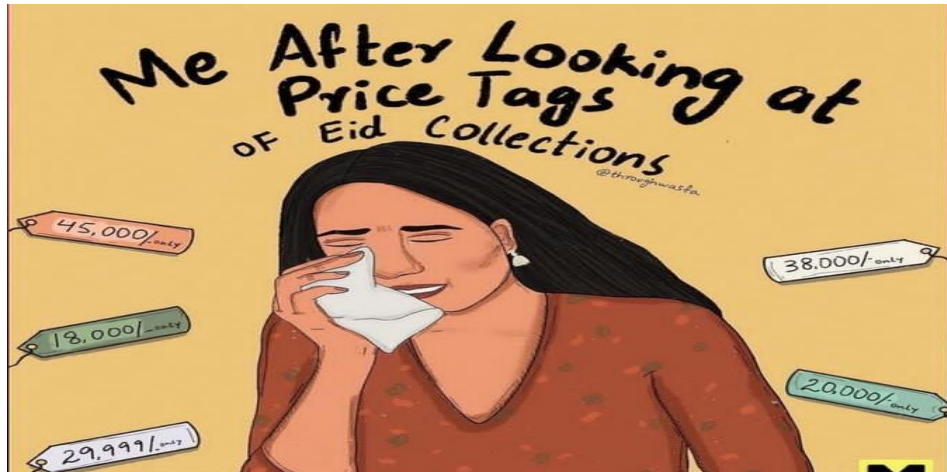
**Me washing \$200 worth of groceries
in 2022**



The above meme is about groceries and their increasing prices. There is a text written on the top of the picture “Me washing \$200 worth of groceries in 2022” in black font. Whereas, in the picture, we see there is a mini basket of colorful vegetables and fruits under the tap water. The hand that is holding that basket is huge in size as compared to the size of the basket itself. This huge hand, compared to the small basket, draws the viewers’ attention toward the picture. It may seem, funny, odd, and bizarre but it highlights the economic conditions as well as inflation. When both the written text and visual combined inform that 200 dollars a Pakistani 57,106 rupees a huge amount being spent on groceries an indication of extreme inflation in Pakistan. The middle class and the other working classes of Pakistan may not even have 200 dollars as their monthly salary. This mini basket may also highlight the fact that groceries are so expensive and beyond the reach of struggling classes that they may not be sufficient to satisfy their appetite. The only possibility for people is to

reduce their diet in comparison to the quantity as shown in the meme above.

_____ (3) _____

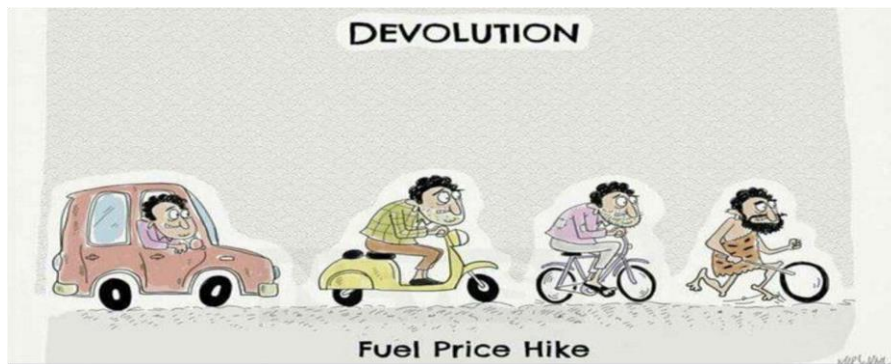


The above meme is about the increase in GST increasing the price of clothes as well. It is designed in the context of Eid, as Eid is an event where people especially women love to buy clothes. In the image, there is a woman in the center, who appears to wipe her tears with the tissue paper. On her right and left side, there are some price tags with a huge amount written on each of them. Whereas, on the top of the image, there is the text that is made prominent by using a bold black font with greater size and in upper and lower case "Me After Looking at Price Tags", which draws the viewers' attention toward those price tags instantly by reading it. Whereas, below the main text there is a text written "of Eid Collections" which is in smaller size as compared to the above text. Eid is a festival that is celebrated with great zeal in all Muslim countries including Pakistan. People, here spend huge sums of money on Eid shopping, and there is a huge profit from the ladies' collection. On a socio-economic level, in 2023, there is a sharp decline of about 20% to 40% in Eid shopping (Ahmed, 2023). This decline is the result of huge GST on clothes and other accessories that even prevent women to buy clothes on Eid as indicated by the above meme. It also represents the high inflation and bad economy of Pakistan.

4.2 Petrol Hikes

In the year 2022, the Pakistani government broadcast an upsurge in petrol prices of up to 30 PRs. It has created extreme chaos in Pakistan and in the middle-class earning society, which was concerned about the price hikes in petrol and other accessories of everyday use. On the other hand, social media meme makers bombarded these platforms with memes on the related issue. It is one way of expressing their frustration as well as highlighting the government's mismanagement and flawed policies. These memes also highlight these hike's impact on a societal level.

_____ (1) _____



In the above meme, we see that on the top of the image, there is the word DEVOLUTION, in uppercase letters, and in the middle, it may be for the sake of emphasis and may indicate that in Pakistan technological advancement is heading back to the stone ages, whereas at the bottom of the image, the reason is clearly stated, "Fuel Price Hike", in which the first letter of each main word is capitalized and the rest are in the lowercase, which states the devolution in Pakistan is related to hikes in fuel prices. In the image background, two different shades of grey are used in contrast to the foreground where some colors are used, whereas all the fonts used in the image are black, this contrast may be to show how Pakistan is moving from advancement to backward. Further, the image shows the presence of four vehicles, the first vehicle is a Pink car with a well-dressed man sitting in it which moves towards another vehicle a motorcycle, a man sitting there is also well-dressed but less as compared to the one in the first. It then moves to another vehicle, a cycle with the man having torn clothes with patches, riding it. Last is a man who moves a wheel with a stick and is half-naked. We see a personality shift from one to another. Another thing evident in the image is the first man sitting in the car is clean-

shaven, the next with few hairs on his chin, it increases in the next and the last man with the beard might be referring to the primitive ages. The meme is ironic because it tells the economic crisis and inflation through devolution, where other nations are heading forward and Pakistan is moving in an inverted position.

_____ (2) _____



In the above meme, at the front of the image, an old woman is sitting, with her hand in an upward direction, indicating she is talking about something, which the text confirms at the bottom “Beta”. At the bottom, there is written text in a white font where the word “Petrol” is bold as compared to the rest of the text. The whole text is in Roman English. The text in the image is in inverted commas which shows that it is an utterance. In this image, it is said by the old woman, revealed through her gestures. In the background of the image, there are jars, bottles, and utensils inside the shelves and cabinets, which indicates the presence of a kitchen. Further, the tone of the text is sarcastic, “**Petrol** Toh Beta Kuch Dino Mein Itni Itni Thailiyon Mein Sonaar Ki Dukaan Pe Bikega”. This whole dialogue along with the gestures, and appearance of the woman is communicating the worst economic condition of her. The color contrast that is selected for the picture is black and white, which once again is an indication of primitive times. The text “Sonaar ki Dukaan”, is a shop where people buy expensive jewelry. The middle and working classes cannot afford to buy, therefore this text is used in the picture metaphorically to highlight the huge petrol hikes which are directly related to rising inflation. The availability of petrol in gold shops though sounds funny but the consistency in price hikes makes it unaffordable for Pakistani people who

are suffering from the worst economic conditions. In the end, an outcome may be giving up buying petrol as the only possibility.

_____ (3) _____

a car fainted after seeing the price of petrol



The meme above is regarding the petrol price hikes in Pakistan. In the visual, the scene is of the petrol pump. It is indicated by the presence of a gasoline pump and a car. On a flow measurement, there is an amount written not visible, but indicated by red light. Whereas, the car is upside down. On the top, there is the text written in lowercase, “A car fainted after seeing the price of petrol”. This meme is hilarious, humorous, and sarcastic. It is ironic because it is impossible for an inanimate object to faint. Whereas, the text says “A car fainted”. It is to draw the viewers’ attention toward the petrol hikes that have a relation with inflation, and its impact on the ordinary masses. This meme is hinting at the situation of the people right now, the car is symbolic of the Pakistani public condition. It is not just a meme to laugh, but to recognize the impact of the deteriorating economic circumstances and rising inflation. It is informing a lot in just capture and one-liner.

4.3 Ban on Imports

The government, along with presenting a new budget for 2023, also announced a ban on imports, due to the worst economic conditions, such

as cars, cell phones, and other items, as well as the most essential item which is tea. Tea is also something imported from foreign countries. Therefore, the Federal Minister of P&D, Ahsan Iqbal at that time stressed the financial and monetary policies and asked the nation to reduce tea consumption, as Pakistan may not be in a state to bear the burden of these imported items. Therefore, social media users developed a lot of memes on this specific issue as well as reducing other imports.

_____ (1) _____

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



The above meme is about, when the government announced the ban on tea imports in the year 2022. The minister of P&D, Ahsan Iqbal asked the nation to reduce tea consumption, as it may be helpful to deal with the economic catastrophe. In the image, we see there is a man with a weird expression saying “Yeh Kaam to mein hargiz nahi karunga” in a yellow font that draws the viewers’ attention toward his face. On the top, there is a text written “**Ahsan Iqbal** requests nation to cut down **tea** consumption”, where Ahsan Iqbal and tea are bold to emphasize the situation. Whereas, below this line, there is the text “Le **Tea** lovers”, and tea is written in upper case there is also a smiling emoji at the end, which brings us back to the visual. The text on the image says a lot, it is a very difficult thing that the government demanded from people to reduce tea intake, as in Pakistan it serves the purpose of therapy. The text along with the expressions of the man makes this meme funny. In Pakistan, tea seems to be a national drink, as there are people from all classes who love to consume tea. The announcement to cut tea imports and reduce its consumption generated anger among people. Many people created

hashtags against the government's poor strategies. To criticize and for comic relief, people designed memes on it as well. Tea is a vital component of many Pakistanis, so this meme also serves as a tool to express their feelings besides highlighting inflation and an unstable economy.

_____ (2) _____

Ahsan Iqbal: People should reduce **tea** consumption
Shehzada Saleem:



The second meme is also regarding the reduction of tea imports and its consumption. In the image, there are two individuals, the woman lying on the floor with a man holding his hand. It is a scene from an Indian Movie, “Mughal-e-Azam”, where the woman is Anarkali and the man is presenting Shehzada Saleem. There is also an animated image of a teacup, from which the steam is rising. On the top of the visual there is a text written in Roman English and bold, “**Utho Anarkali aaj nashtay mein chai nahi mile gi**”, due to which the visual captures more attention. On the top of the visual there is a plain text in a dialogue form, “**Ahsan Iqbal:** people should reduce **tea** consumption.” The words Ahsan Iqbal and tea both are highlighted in bold. It is funny to present the situation of Pakistan's economy and rising inflation through the movie scene which is very tragic, contextually. Pakistan's economy right now is also in a very tragic situation moving in an inverted gear and becoming the cause of extreme inflation. Moreover, this tragic picture selected for the meme is up to the mark, where tea is a necessity for Pakistanis. Most Pakistanis start their day with a cup of tea. On the other hand, the government is cutting its import develops frustration and anxiety among people. Most Pakistani thinks that this strategy would not bring any positive change in the economic circumstances (Suliman, 2022).

(3)



The above meme is a quadrant, divided into four equal planes. The two upper and lower planes on the left contain images of some person with text written on them in white font, “Govt. of Pak”. Whereas on the right side, there is plain text without any image, the upper plane consists of the text “Increase exports” and the lower one “Ban imported products”. The colors used on the left side of the plane consist of bright yellow background, where the man is wearing an orange jacket, this color scheme is drawing attention to the text written on it. In both images, we see the man is the same that is presenting the government of Pakistan, but in both the images their reactions are different and aligned with the statement to the right plane text, both upper and lower. Overall, this meme is funny and sarcastic at the same time, it tells the government of Pakistan wanted to ban “imported products” and wanted to increase the export of local products.

The socio-political significance of this meme is that it is developed in the context to highlight that this government policy failed because of the imbalance in export and import. Moreover, at that time the exports in Pakistan even did not bring any favorable outcome. The government not only badly failed to generate revenue from these exports, but at the same time banned imports depriving the public of some necessities of life, for which the government of Pakistan is liable, to provide them either by importing them or generating them locally.

4.4 Depreciation of Pakistani Rupee

The rupee in Pakistan is continuously devaluing against the International dollar. The situation instead of getting improved after the new government

took hold, has gotten worse. Though, this instability and low currency value also activated the memes developers. Several memes were generated on that specific issue.

_____ (1) _____

Ishaq Dar is stopping the dollar at 200



The meme in this section is highlighting Finance Minister Ishaq Dar's failure of stabilizing the economy by preventing the depreciation of the rupee. At present, the price of the US dollar is 285 PRs. It shows the instability of Pakistan's economy. In the image, there is a man who is hammering the needle at the edges of the shore but futile, as the water is surpassing those needles. On the top of the image, a text says, "Ishaq Dar is stopping the dollar at 200." When Ishaq Dar took charge after Miftah Ismail, he promised the nation to reduce the dollar price from 260 to 200. Instead of moving downward, the dollar climbs the ladder, from 260 to 280 and 285 PKR and there is an upsurge in inflation of up to 27 % (Shehzad, 2022). This image at its best presents the futility of the government and its policies. So, the text combined with the image is representing the depreciation of the Pakistani rupee each day. Inflation along with the interest rates on the products, both local and international is deemed as one of the causes for this depreciation and economic instability. So, this meme indicates that it is the result of government negligence and mismanagement.

4.5 Relief Plan of Two Thousand Rupees

There came a sudden transition in the ruling government from PTI to PML-N in April 2022. Due to that transition, the general masses underwent a lot. Sudden rises in inflation and deteriorating economic conditions make the ordinary masses vulnerable. The government

considers those situations and decided to give relief of two thousand rupees to those, whose monthly income is less than 40,000 PRs. This became the subject of mockery among the public. Therefore, many meme designers developed memes on this specific topic.

— (1) —

***me walking around my mohalla
after getting 2000 rupees from
Government***



In the above meme, we see the man in an orange pant coat walk on the street, with style. He is putting on black glasses and his appearance in the image is prominent above all others. The background in the image is presenting a filthy site, indicating an area of poor society. On the left side of the image, two small girls are standing looking at the boy, excitedly. His style and walk indicate that he has attained something great. The text written on the top of the image is between the asterisks symbol, which is used instead of the inverted commas. It is one of the unique ways to capture attention. Moreover, it is also used to mark something that is unacceptable in a language, particularly, but here in general. However, the text is, “me walking around my mohalla after getting two thousand rupees from Government.” This meme takes a dig at the government and its policies. It is a fusion of humor and cynicism. It also reveals that two thousand rupees are not a huge sum for any betterment in the lives of poor segments of society. In the vilest economic conditions and rising inflation, 2000 PKR is not sufficient to improve the living situations of people. The image along with the text collectively present an irony that people living in dirt, filthy areas with extreme poverty cannot change their situation with the government’s 2000 PKR relief policy.

(2)
 الحمد لله شهباز شريف کے 2 ہزار روپے سے
 یہ گھر لیا ہے کچھ پیسے بچے ہیں اس سے
 گاڑی شاڑی لوں گا۔



In the above meme, a luxurious mansion is seen. It seems like a huge bungalow with a swimming pool and a garden. Bright colors are utilized in the picture to emphasize the mansion and its surroundings. Further, the text that is written on the top is in the Urdu language. It states “Alhamdulillah, with the two thousand PKR given by Shehbaz Shareef, I have bought a house, still there is some money left, and I will buy a car from it.” This meme is hilarious and ironic. Buying a house and a car with just a small amount is impossible. This meme is designed to mock the government scheme and its policies. On a socioeconomic level, Pakistan right now is highly unstable. The government and its policies are unable to provide any monetary security to its people. Therefore, the government initiative of 2000 PKR has become a subject of mockery, and frustration among people has come in the form of memes.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The political chaos and regime change in Pakistan resulted in economic instability and rising inflation. It also generated a lot of memes on the topic of the poor economy and rising inflation, as it is quite impactful on the lives of ordinary masses, and memes have the potential of not only mocking but to inform the people about the situation. Fatima (2020) and Laineste (2016) stated memes have the potential to transmit a great deal of information and to capture the attention of viewers. Just like in other parts of the world, in Pakistan, a lot of memes are developed by its users daily. Similarly, to highlight the issue of current economic instability several memes have been developed related to petrol hikes, GST increase on goods in a budget of 2022-2023, ban on imports, depreciation of the rupee, and government relief plan of 2000 rupees. These all are related to the major issue that is the economic crisis and rising inflation.

Starting from the first section are the memes related to the budget and increase in GST on goods. The GST increase on products on both local and foreign products is due to the economic instability reflected in the memes, though humorously and sarcastically. These memes serve not only to generate laughter among people but to reflect on the situation as well (Destira et al., 2021). Moreover, all of these memes are designed by keeping in view the context of the socio-economic conditions prevalent in the country. The memes related to the GST increase also highlight the rising inflation through the depictions of several characters, situations, and text highlighted in those memes.

Similarly, the memes that are created to show the petrol hikes and their impact on people's lives are also developed by keeping in view the socio-economic context. Several memes surfaced on Instagram pages related to the issue. Mostly those memes highlighted the fact that Pakistan is moving ahead toward the primitive ages because they are unable to utilize modern technology and vehicles. The reason is people may give up using petrol and diesel due to increases in their prices every day as it is compared to gold in the second meme. These memes are funny but deep as well, as they highlight how people are suffering in their lives due to the economic crisis and rising inflation.

The third section represents the ban on imports of not only luxury items but necessary items of daily use as well. Memes on this specific issue have also been created, as memes are one of the influential tools that change the perception of people regarding some issues and help them to express their views (Javed et al., 2022). Similarly, memes designed to ban imports are hilarious but express people's frustration, anxiety, and thoughts on the topic as well. The memes are mostly regarding the reduction of tea consumption. People disregard that idea, as it would not prove productive in improving the economic conditions or lessening inflation (Suliman, 2022).

The fourth section represents the rupee's depreciation against the dollar. Ishaq Dar when took charge as Finance Minister, he promised the nation to reduce the value of the dollar from 270 to 200 PKR. Instead of reducing it climbs the ladder up, increasing the inflation up to 27% (Shehzad, 2022). Memes were also generated on this subject, where Ishaq Dar and government policies to stable the economic conditions and control inflation were highly criticized.

The fifth and final section represents the relief plan of 2000 rupees. Memes generated on this topic were both hilarious and ironic. The government decided to give a relief of two thousand rupees to people having low income but in this rising inflation and economic crisis, these 2000 rupees are not sufficient to meet even the basic needs of people. Therefore, it becomes the subject of mockery among people. Further, the government has also been roasted through these memes.

Overall, all of these memes representing different sections are related to the current economic crisis and rising inflation in Pakistan. In all those memes, text, colors, visuals, spatial relations, and other components are organized to convey the meaning. Therefore, “Multimodal Discourse Analysis” is applied for the analysis of these memes, as it is a known thing that “Multimodal Discourse Analysis” combines literal, visual, and other components present in the text and the third socio-political conditions surrounding the text that lays the meaning of the text and reveal text underneath meanings (Kress, 2011). Similarly, all of these memes are analyzed in a context to present the current economic crisis and rising inflation in Pakistan and also hint toward the government’s mismanagement and flawed policies. Yet, at the same time, these memes also serve the purpose of comic relief.

5.1 Recommendations

Due to time constraints, the present research study has been done on a small scale consisting of only twelve memes. Hence, the results of which cannot be generalized to the entire population. So, in the future researchers may conduct similar research on a larger sample, to generalize the results to the entire population.

References

- Ahmed, K. (2023, April 21). Record inflation dampens festive mood as Eid shopping drops by over 40% in Pakistan. *Arab News Pakistan*.
- Destira, Y., Hidayat, D. N., Alek, A., & Sufyan, A. (2021). A Discourse Analysis of Education Memes on Instagram. *Loquen: English Studies Journal*, 14(1), 48-57.
- Fatima, K. (2020). Manipulation of Political Discourse of Pakistan on Social Media. *Research Journal of Language and Literature*, 5, 137-161.

- Gunther, K. (2011). *Multimodal Discourse Analysis: The Handbook of Discourse Analysis*. England: Routledge
<https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9780203809068.ch3>
- Halliday, M.A.K. (2004). *An Introduction to Functional Grammar*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Hayat, A., Khan, I., Zahra, M., & Iqbal, Z. (2021). Persuasion and Ideological Representation in Facebook Page Khabees Orat; A Critical Discourse Analysis. *PalArch's Journal of Archaeology of Egypt/Egyptology*, 18(08), 1809-1828.
www.archives.palarch.nl/index.php/jae/article/view/9026
- Jahedi, M., Abdullah, F. S., & Mukundan, J. (2014). An overview of focal approaches of critical discourse analysis. *International Journal of Education and Literacy Studies*, 2(4), 28-35.
- Javed, M., Jameel, M. B., & Ahmed, S. (2022). Memes as a Tool of Social and Political Commentary: Discourse Analysis of Memes in Pakistani Social Media. *Pakistan Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, Vol. 5(2), 3-11.
- Kulkarni, A. A. (2017). Internet Meme and Political Discourse: A Study on the Impact of Internet Meme as a Tool in Communicating Political Satire. *Journal of Content, Community, and Communication*, Vol. 6, 13-17.
- Laineste, L., & Voolaid, P. (2016). Laughing Across Borders: Intertextuality of Internet Memes. *European Journal of Humor Research*, Vol. 4 (4), 26-49.
- Machin, D. (2007). *Introduction to Multimodal Analysis*. London: Hodder.
- Machin, D., & Mayr, A. (2012). *How to Do Critical Discourse Analysis: A Multimodal Introduction*. SAGE. DOI: 10.1080/07268602.2015.1033673
- McClure, B. (2016). "Discovering the Discourse of Internet Political Memes," Adult Education Research Conference.
<https://newprairiepress.org/aerc/2016/roundtables/12>
- Mumtaz, H. (2022). Pakistan Budget 2022-23. *LinkedIn*.
www.linkedin.com/pulse/pakistan-budget-2022-2-hamna-mumtaz
- Peniel, B. (2016). Research Design. *Research Gate*.
- Rahardi, H. R., & Amalia, R. M. (2019). Meme as Political Criticism towards 2019 Indonesian General Election: A Critical Discourse Analysis. *Studies in English Language and Education*, 6(2), 239-250. e-repository.unsyiah.ac.id/SiELE/article/view/14020
- Shehzad, A. (2022, September 28). New Pakistani Finance Minister Vows to Tame Inflation and Cut Interest Rates. *Reuters*.

-
- Shifman, L. (2014). *Memes in Digital Culture*. London: The MIT Press.
- Suliman, A. (2022, June 16). Pakistan Urges Citizens to Give up Tea to Help the Economy. *The Washington Post*.
- Syartani, N. I. (2021). Humor amid Pandemic: Critical Discourse Analysis on Covid-19 Related Memes. *LWSA Conference Series 4(2)*, p. 50.
- Van Leeuwen, T. (2015). 21 Multimodality. *The Handbook of discourse analysis*, 447. We Are Social (2021) *Digital 2021 April Statshot Report*. DataReportal – Global Digital Insights. <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2021-april-global-statshot>.
- Yus, F. (2018). Multimodality in Memes: A Cyberpragmatic Approach. In P. Bou-Franch, & P. G.-C. Blitvich, *n book: Analyzing Digital Discourse: New Insights and Future Directions*. San Vicente del Raspeig: Palgrave Macmillan.