

DIGITAL HUMOR AND INFLUENCE: EXAMINING MEMES AS TOOLS OF POLITICAL PERSUASION AMONG GEN Z

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Abstract

In today times, as the internet has boomed and consequently there has been a sharp rise in social media platforms such as Tik Tok, Instagram, Twitter and Facebook, memes are now viewed as a potent means of digital political communication now incorporating humor, visuals and comprehension in a more effective manner to communicate the political messengers. This Study explores how memes, that circulates on the social media, make the complex political messages simpler, increase political awareness and measures the behaviors of the Gen Z towards those memes. The leaders are usually criticized using the political memes, to express the opinion, as well as inform the political event of the day in an entertaining manner. Another way in which the use of social media has altered the way Gen Z consume the political content is the way it is explained in this study. The research methodology (quantitative research) applied in this research applies to analyzing political memes and surveying Gen Z to learn their behavior and attitudes to the said memes. The results indicate that voting memes play a prominent role in the crucial of participation, provide awareness and as well of misinformation. The mass production of the fake and inaccurate information may influence the Gen Z and support their prior ideas, as they become viral quickly. In this study, the authors indicate that political memes are highly persuasive and potentially dangerous due to the risk of misinformation and fake news due to their virality.

Keywords: Political Memes, Social Media, Gen Z, Humor, Political Messages.

1. Introduction

In today times, as the internet has boomed and consequently there has been a sharp rise in social media platforms such as Tik Tok, Instagram, Twitter and Facebook, memes are now viewed as a potent means of digital political communication now incorporating humor, visuals, and comprehension in a more effective manner to communicate the political messengers. This Study explores how memes, that circulates on the social media, make the complex political messages simpler, increase political awareness and measures the behaviors of the Gen Z towards that meme. The leaders are usually criticized using the political memes, to express the opinion, as well as inform the political event of the day in an entertaining manner. Another way in which the use of social media has altered the way Gen Z consume the political content is the way it is explained in this study. The research methodology (quantitative research) applied in this research applies to analyzing political memes and surveying Gen Z to learn their behavior and attitudes to the said memes. The results indicate that voting memes play a prominent role in the crucial of participation, provide awareness and as well of misinformation. The mass production of the fake and inaccurate information may influence the Gen Z and support their prior ideas, as they become viral quickly. In this study, the authors indicate that political memes are highly persuasive and potentially dangerous due to the risk of misinformation and fake news due to their virality.

The digital media has even transformed political communication by altering the way political messages are produced, distributed, and understood in our day-to-day activity. Social media are already significant platforms of political dialogue, influencing, and connecting with people, especially those who spend most of their everyday time online (AlAfnan, 2025). Memes are now especially significant among the numerous types of digital content since they are concise, graphic and can be shared easily on numerous platforms (AlAfnan, 2025). They can merge

humor, satire, and commentary, which is why they can effectively convey political messages, which are easily understandable and include both emotional lines (AlAfnan, 2025).

This communicative influence is even greater when analyzed in connection with Generation Z. Gen Z has been raised in the context, in which social media is not just the means of entertainment but an everyday source of news, opinion, and political exposure (Saeed & Ali, 2025). The identical research observes that platforms like Instagram, Tik Tok, YouTube, and X are significant due to the influence they have on how the youth process information and develop political ideologies (Saeed and Ali, 2025). The results of the survey that the authors conducted also confirm the use of social media as a channel to engage with political discussion, with the vast majority of participants referring to social media political advertising as closer to them compared to traditional media (Saeed and Ali, 2025). This implies that political influence among youth audiences is being created more instrumentally via online platforms that are immediate, familiar, and personal.

At the same time, the growing political role of memes and social media also raises important concerns. Memes can simplify complex political issues and make them easier to engage with but can also affect someone's reputation by spreading the fake news. Research further shows that memes may reinforce echo chambers, deepen ideological divisions, and contribute to the spread of misleading political narratives when they circulate rapidly within like-minded online communities (AlAfnan, 2025). A similar concern appears in work on Gen Z and political content, where the rapid spread of propaganda, half-truths, and manipulated information is identified as a serious challenge to informed political judgment (Saeed & Ali, 2025).

The importance of this issue is further strengthened by evidence showing how deeply social media is embedded in youth political life. In the Philippine context, Cadayday et al. (2024) report that 81% of Filipino Gen Zs use social media more than other platforms, reflecting a strong preference for digital communication in political contexts. Their study also argues that social media provides unmediated access to political content and creates spaces where young people can become informed and involved in political discussion (Cadayday et al., 2024). In addition, Behera (2025) emphasizes that political memes work through what the study describes as simplification, using humor and cultural references to make political messages easier for audiences, especially youth, to understand and share (Behera, 2025). Taken together, these studies show that memes are no longer marginal or purely humorous online content; they have become part of the way political meaning is produced and consumed by younger generations.

Against this background, the present study examines memes as a contemporary tool of political communication and explores how they influence political awareness, opinion formation, and engagement among young audiences. This focus is important because political communication is increasingly moving into informal digital spaces, where content is fast, visual, and emotionally appealing. Understanding the political role of memes can therefore offer a clearer picture of how young citizens encounter politics today and how digital culture is reshaping participation, persuasion, and public discourse in contemporary society.

The main objectives of the study are:

- To analyze the role of political memes on the behaviors, opinions and the beliefs of Gen Z.
- To examine the positive and negative impacts of political memes, including misinformation, engagement and understanding.
- To explore the role of political memes in the political engagement and awareness among Gen Z.

2. Literature Review

Social media has now become one of the most important tools for the political communication, especially among Gen Z. Social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and YouTube etc. are now playing a role as a main tool for conveying political messages, political campaigns and sharing public opinion. As the digital environment evolves, memes will be most appropriate in terms of a political message since they are concise and include humor that makes it easy to comprehend. Memes are not merely humor, according to Shifman (2014) they are significant in political participation and sharing of personal expression. Those identified articles demonstrate that memes have become a significant instrument of the digital age when it comes to engaging and influencing politics as well as the choice of, not only Gen Z, but also Millennials voters.

Among the key concepts, which one can find in the literature, is that memes can be used to reduce complicated political situations and make them accessible to the youth demographic. In the Indian context, Behera (2025) explains that political memes have now become an important tool in this age because it combines political opinions, humor, understanding and political participation. Gen Z spend most of their time on social media in the new digital age and therefore memes can provide them with quicker access and comprehension of political information compared to traditional media that displays lengthy speeches that are difficult to follow and take much time. According to Behera (2025), the act of engaging in such forms of memes can also influence your level of political knowledge, voter behavior and your political participation. This paper demonstrates that political memes are not only a source of humor and jokes; but also capture your interest and influence your mindset regarding an issue, leader and voting behaviors.

Similarly, AlAfnan (2025), discusses the role of memes in shaping public's political behavior and opinions on social media at a wider scale. He indicates that memes may be able to manipulate the behavior and opinion of the population since they can be propagated so fast through social media and resonates with the Gen Z generation. That is why the memes, being of a humorous character, were usually better comprehended by the Gen Z in comparison to any formal political material provided through the traditional media. Additionally, AlAfnan (2025) posits that memes further divide people ideologically, as they get the people with the same mindsets. In such a way, memes may reinforce the instance of echo chambers in which individuals are exposed to the content which they already endorse. By doing so, it is possible to inform and separate audiences simultaneously by memes.

Kasirye (2019) conducted research in the Ugandan study as well. This study focuses on millennials specially and discusses the relationship of the political memes and the behaviors and opinions of the people. This paper indicates that the more people are exposed to political memes, the more they develop political knowledge, awareness, behavioral involvement, and political attitude. Kasirye (2019) suggests that memes are an effective way to link with people because they attract attention, connect emotionally with the people, and present complex political ideas in a direct way. This paper presents a thesis that memes are not merely inert communication devices. Rather, they make people engage in political activity and express their views in an open forum. Memes are the entry point of Gen Z who enjoy the short and humorous content to participate in the political discourse.

Philippine study by Garcia and Luces (2019) also examined the role of memes in voting among Gen Z. Their research was based on the fact that how political memes have the power to affect the thinking of youth and their opinions. The research concurs that memes assist Gen Z to convey their political views in a more interactive, intelligible, and engaging manner. Political memes are said to work well when they are extremely simplistic, funny, and related to a succinct message. The fact that memes can be positive and negative is also touched on by Garcia and Luces (2019). On the one hand, they make the people participate. However, on the

flip side, they can disseminate information and misconception and can induce individuals to hasty generalizations in ignorance of facts.

Although memes constitute a big portion of digital political communication, in the literature, the more general content of social media and advertisements have a very significant influence on the opinion of Generation Z, and views of online political content have become very significant in opinion formation. According to their research, young users tend to perceive social media as a large source of political discourse and that it is more relatable than traditional media. This implies that the political messages conveyed on the internet have a more impactful way on youths since they resonate with their day-to-day media habits. Simultaneously, Saeed and Ali (2023) express worries regarding biased information spearheaded by half-truths and misinformation and persuasive content, which researchers argue might influence the way Gen Z perceives political issues. That is why social media can be taken not only as the source of information but also as the place where the opinions can be formed both positively and negatively.

The idea is also the focus of the paper by Suhardi (2025) that examines the utilization of social media by young political candidates in this digital period to attract the attention of Millennial and Gen Z voters. The paper emphasizes that there is a direct engagement of the youthful political aspirants with the audience, campaigns, their feedback as well as winning the hearts of the audience. They do not employ formal political campaigns rather they employ the digital media to achieve all their political objectives. The problems of education, equality, social justice, feminism, etc., are typically more significant when it comes to winning younger voters (Suhardi, 2025). SO, there is no more one-way communication in political communication, it became two-way communication.

These studies reveal that Gen Z is not completely dissociated with the political affairs rather they are associated with it digitally due to the digital age. Traditional assumptions explore that youth is often uninterested in politics, but according to the literature, they relate to it in more advanced ways that also encourage them to actively participate in it. Gen Z is not a direct subject of discussion or even party meeting, yet they are directly involved in the creation of the memes and their distribution, response to political posts and discussion of issues over the internet (Kasirye, 2019; Garcia and Luces, 2019; Cadayday et al., 2024).

Another critical point that is made in the literature is that digital political communication is two sided. On the one hand, memes simplify and make the political messages easier, clearer, and reachable to Gen Z. On the other hand, they also can be a misleading source of information, lead to the creation of emotional bias and political polarization. The memes are often short in length and funny so that makes them easier methods to pass complex political messages that are also easy to share yet hard to create issues and questions.

Overall, the literature shows that memes have now become an important tool of political communication among Gen Z and millennials too. Memes are effective as they are brief, pictorial, funny, simple to comprehend and simple to disseminate. In this way, they enhance political awareness and knowledge, understanding, participation, and tend to manipulate even political views and voting (Behera, 2025; Kasirye, 2019; Cadayday et al., 2024). Concurrently, their impact is not necessarily good, on the contrary, they propagate falsehoods, enhance the presence of prejudice, and exaggerate the cultural gap. (AlAfnan, 2025; Saeed & Ali, 2023). Therefore, the literature suggests that digital political communication is powerful, but it must be understood critical.

3.Research gap

Majority of the authors focused on the positive and negative impact of memes, but a very few explained how these effects differ across cultures, political system and education level. For example, the role of memes in India, Uganda, Pakistan, Kuwait, and the Philippines may be

similar in some ways, but local political culture can shape how young audiences understand and respond to them. Secondly, no research explores the long term influence of memes on the mindset and opinions of audience. All the studies show that memes attract attention and shape opinions in the short term, but it is extremely important to understand whether it is creating a long term impact or if it just attracting attention for a short period of time. Third, there I a need to study how fact checking and credibility works in political communication to avoid misinformation and inconvenience.

4. Research Questions

RQ1. Do political memes influence the behaviors, opinions and beliefs of Gen Z?

RQ2. What are the positive (participation, engagement) and negative (misinformation) impacts of political memes on Gen Z?

RQ3. How do political memes play a role in shaping the political engagement and awareness among Gen Z?

5. Research methodology

5.1 Research Design

A quantitative research was employed in this study to check the persuasive effects of political memes on the Gen Z. We conducted the research through survey which consisted of 100 respondents.

5.2 Population and Sample

The survey was conducted from the Gen Z of the age group between 18-29. This age group completely relies on social media so they consume almost everything on online platforms. The sample size was 100 people who frequently use social media.

5.3 Sampling Technique

The participants for this survey were selected on the basis of their willingness and accessibility. Mostly, university students participated in that because it was easy to access them and they were also fulfilling the criteria of the age limit.

5.4 Data collection tool

The data was collected by the survey made on Google forms which consisted of structured questions which were designed to capture

- Persuasive effect of memes on Gen Z
- Political participation among Gen Z
- Effects on their opinions

The questions consisted of multiple-choice questions and Likert scale.

5.5 Variables

Independent Variable:

The persuasive effect of the political memes shown on the social media

Dependent Variable:

- On the behavior of Gen Z
- Political Participation
- Opinion making
- Understanding of the message

5.6 Procedure

The survey was shared via online platforms like Instagram and WhatsApp directly to people and by also sharing the link on the Instagram's story. The survey took 10 days to complete. Participants were informed that honest answers had to be provided so we can make the results according to the genuine opinions.

5.7 Ethical Considerations

The participation in the survey was totally voluntary. No personal information was collected at any stage. We assured them their data would only be used for the research, not for any other purposes.

6.Results

6.1 Demographic information

The survey was conducted from 100 people of the age group between 18 to 29. Many of the participants belonged to the age group (33%) belonged to the age group 18-20, followed by 21-23 (31%), 24-26 (19%) and 27-29 (17%).

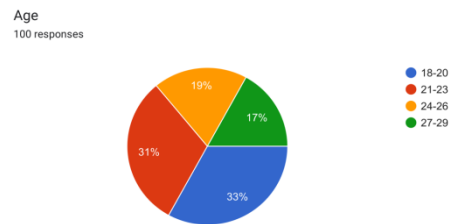


Figure 1: Age

6.2 Political problems

Results show that majority of the people 46% agree with the opinion that political memes makes problems easier to understand. While 16% strongly agree, 16% disagree, 17% remained neutral and 5% of the people strongly disagreed with that.

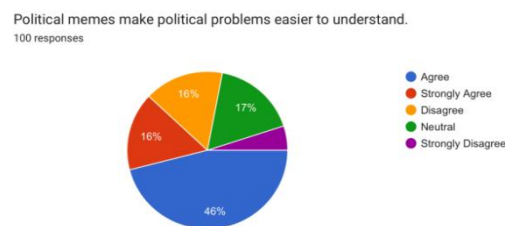


Figure 2: Political memes are easier to understand

6.3 Political memes on online platforms

Figure shows that most of the people 42% agree that they usually see political memes on social media platforms. Due to the rise of digital technologies they solely rely on social media now. 24% strongly agree, 17% neutral, 13% disagree while the rest of the people strongly disagree with that they see political memes on online platform.

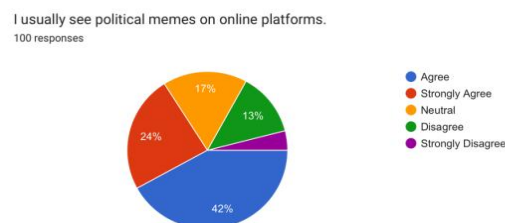


Figure 3: Exposure to political memes on online platforms

6.4 Beliefs about Political leaders:

Majority of the people (35%) remained neutral about the fact that political memes persuade their beliefs about political leaders or parties while 29% respondents agree with that they make their opinions about political leaders according to the memes, while a very few respondents disagree with that.

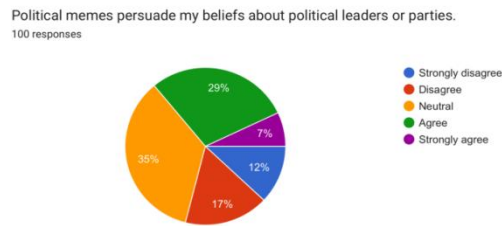


Figure 4: *Political memes persuade beliefs about political leaders*

6.5 Memes are a best way to communicate political messages

This pie chart represents respondents' views on whether memes are a best way to communicate political messages or not. The majority of the respondents (30%) agree with the statement, while 18% of respondents strongly disagree by expressing negative views. Similarly, 29% of respondents selected a neutral stance.

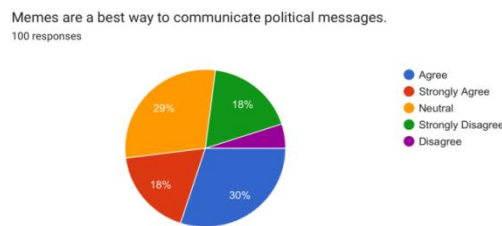


Figure 5: *Best way to communicate political messages*

6.6 Memes boost my curiosity in political decisions

Majority of the respondents 32% agree with the fact that political memes boost their curiosity in political discussion. While 31% of respondents remained neutral, that represents that they are not sure about whether memes boost their curiosity or not. Furthermore, 15% respondents strongly agree, 14% disagree and 8% strongly disagree with that.

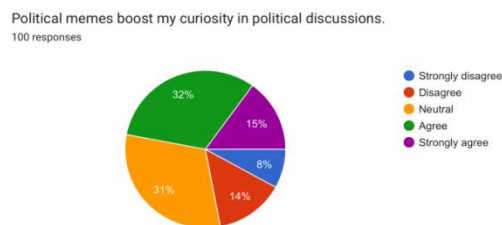


Figure 6: *Memes boost curiosity in political discussions*

6.7 Memes make political communication more interacting for Gen Z

The question was that whether Memes make political communication more interacting for Gen Z. So, a very large number of respondents 40% agree with it, while 24% strongly agree which overall (64%) represents the positive views. The exactly same percentage of people 11% overall (22%) disagree and strongly disagree, which represents the negative views.

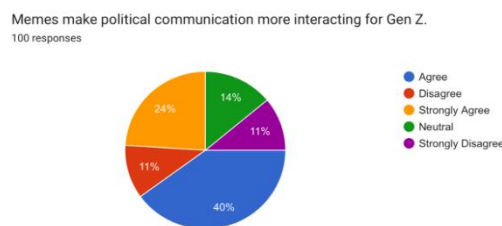


Figure 7: *Memes make political communication interactive*

6.8 Political memes can change people’s Political mindset

A large number of respondents 47% agreed with the fact that Political memes can change people’s political mindset. While 23% remained neutral which overall (70%) shows the positive feedback. 15% disagreed, 8% strongly agreed and 7% strongly disagreed which reparents a very little percentage of people are not satisfies with the fact.

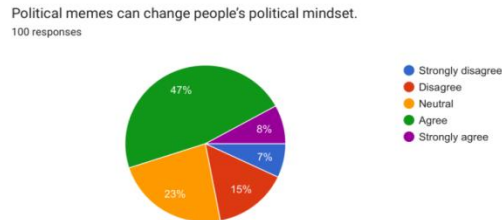


Figure 8: Memes change people’s political mindset

6.9 Memes play an important role in shaping Political Literacy among Gen Z

A large number of respondents 44% agreed and 23% strongly agreed with the statement that memes play an important role in shaping political literacy among Gen Z. 15% remained neutral while rest of the people have the opposite response.

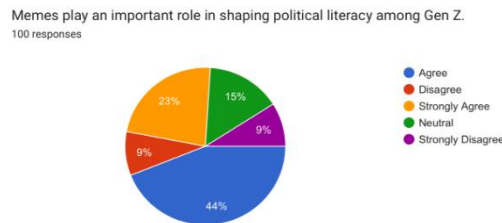


Figure 9: Memes shape political literacy among Gen Z

6.10 Political memes sometimes spread deceptive or false information

Majority of the respondents 37% agree with that fact that political memes sometimes spread deceptive or false information. While 29% strongly agree which shows most of the people are agree with the fact. 16% remained neutral, while the same amount of people 9% are disagree and strongly disagree with that.

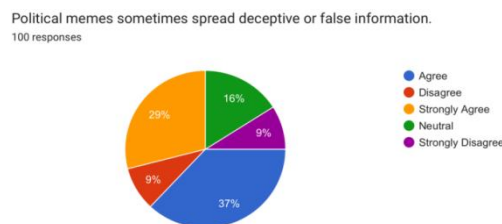


Figure 10: Memes spread deceptive or false information

7. Discussion

The findings of this study, based on 100 respondents, show that political memes play an important role in how Generation Z engages with political content. A majority (66%) reported frequent exposure to political memes, highlighting their strong presence in everyday digital life. About 62% of respondents agreed that memes make political issues easier to understand, while 67% believed they contribute to political literacy. This shows that memes simplify complex information and act as a source of informal political learning. In terms of influence, 55% of participants agreed that memes can change political mindsets, although 35% remained

neutral, indicating that their impact varies among individuals. Memes also increase engagement, as 47% said they boost curiosity, 49% share them, and 64% agreed that memes make political communication more interactive. However, a major concern is misinformation, with 66% of respondents agreeing that memes can spread false or misleading information. This shows that while memes are engaging, they can also create biased or inaccurate perceptions. This study is based on the Uses and Gratifications Theory, which explains that people use media for information, entertainment, and social interaction. It also reflects Framing Theory, as memes present political issues in ways that shape audience perception.

In conclusion, political memes are a powerful but double-edged tool, enhancing awareness and engagement while also posing risks of misinformation.

8. Conclusion

The research examined how the politics of memes shapes political awareness, opinion making, and participation among members of Generation Z. The results of the study by using 100 participants reveal that political communication online is extensively shaped by the power of memes. The findings reveal that memes reduce the complexity of political matters, making them comprehensible, and enhance political awareness, as well as trigger involvement by means of sharing and talking. Many respondents also agreed that memes can influence political mindsets, although this effect varies among individuals. Nevertheless, another significant issue of spreading misinformation and false news is also put into the limelight of the study. Many participants were of the view that memes may spread false or misleading information, which can result in biased views and lack of critical thinking. On balance, political memes are a two-sided sword, providing both benefits and dangers, and this is why media literacy should become a requirement, ensuring the responsible political knowledge of Gen Z.

9. Limitations and Future Research

As we focused on a small group of people therefore, the results might not get applied to a wider and diverse population. A wider and diverse population can be used for future research. Moreover, we focused only on a few platforms like Instagram and TikTok. So, a wider study can be done in future by focusing on other platforms too. It may help to explore how different platforms can impact opinion formation and perception of building differently.

Conflict of Interest

The authors showed no conflict of interest.

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