

Memetic Narratives: Internet Memes as a New Form of Political Communication in Digital Society

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Article Info

Article history:

Received Aug 12th, 2025

Revised Nov 20th, 2025

Accepted Jan 26th, 2026

Keyword:

memetic narratives, internet memes, political communication, digital society, participatory culture

ABSTRACT

This study examines internet memes as an emerging form of political communication in digital society, with particular attention to how memetic narratives condense, circulate, and reinterpret political meaning in networked public spheres. The research aims to explain how memes function as political texts, how they shape public interpretation, and why they have become increasingly influential in contemporary digital communication. This study employs a qualitative method using a case study design with a digital discourse orientation, as this approach is considered appropriate for capturing the symbolic, contextual, and participatory dimensions of meme-based communication. The research was conducted in the digital public sphere across X, Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook, where political memes are actively produced and disseminated. The study involved ten informants selected purposively because of their direct relevance to political meme production, circulation, interpretation, and digital communication practices. The findings indicate that memes function as compressed political narratives, networked communicative devices, and participatory tools of symbolic contestation. They expand public engagement while also carrying risks of oversimplification and polarization. The study recommends strengthening digital media literacy and advancing comparative research on political memes across platforms and sociopolitical contexts.



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INTRODUCTION

The expansion of digital platforms has fundamentally altered the ecology of political communication, shifting public discourse from the dominance of institutional gatekeepers toward participatory, networked, and highly visual forms of expression (Galip, 2024). In contemporary digital society, political messages are no longer produced exclusively by governments, parties, journalists, or formal civic organizations (Molpeceres et al., 2025). Instead, ordinary users actively create, remix, circulate, and reinterpret political meanings through platform-based interactions (Kaplan, 2024). Within this transformation, internet memes have emerged as one of the most distinctive and influential communicative forms (Collado, 2024). Combining humor, symbolism, brevity, visual compression, and intertextual references, memes operate not merely as entertainment artifacts but as strategic vehicles for ideological framing, political commentary, identity signaling, and contestation (Cervi & Divon, 2023). In relation to the title *Memetic Narratives: Internet Memes as a New Form of Political Communication in Digital Society*, this study departs from the premise that memes are not peripheral to politics; rather, they increasingly function as a central mode through which political realities are narrated, challenged, normalized, and disseminated in digital publics (Njoroge, 2025).

The state of the art in contemporary scholarship indicates that political communication has entered a memetic phase in which persuasion, mobilization, and public engagement are frequently mediated by playful yet ideologically loaded content (Godwin et al., 2025). Existing studies have demonstrated that memes can influence public opinion, amplify political polarization, shape candidate images, construct collective identities, and facilitate grassroots participation (Andersson, 2023).

Research in media studies, digital culture, and communication has also highlighted the role of memes in election campaigns, protest movements, political satire, and issue-based activism (Sisu, 2023). However, much of this literature still approaches memes as isolated artifacts of humor, as examples of online participation, or as appendices to broader discussions of social media discourse (Samons, 2024). While such approaches are valuable, they often understate the narrative power of memes as compact yet durable meaning-making structures that can crystallize complex political messages into easily shareable symbolic forms (Maarouf, 2025). This condition reveals a significant theoretical and analytical need to reposition memes not merely as fragments of popular culture but as an emerging language of political communication in its own right (Lestari et al., 2024).

The main problem addressed in this research lies in the insufficiency of conventional political communication frameworks to fully explain how internet memes operate in digitally mediated political environments (Huang et al., 2024). Traditional models tend to privilege rational argumentation, elite messaging, agenda-setting structures, and formal channels of public debate (Birthisel et al., 2024). Yet in digital society, political influence often circulates through affect, irony, repetition, visuality, participatory remix, and algorithmically amplified visibility (Chagas & de-Mello-Stefano, 2024). Memes condense these elements into short communicative units that can travel rapidly across platforms, cross ideological communities, and shape political perceptions without relying on linear or formal argumentative structures (Mazumdar, 2025). As a result, the central problem of this study is how internet memes construct, circulate, and legitimize political narratives in ways that redefine the practices and meanings of political communication in digital contexts (Elewosi & Zompetti, 2025).

The research gap becomes evident when examining the limitations of prior scholarship. Although studies on political memes have increased, many remain descriptive, platform-specific, or event-centered, focusing for instance on election memes, campaign branding, or viral moments without offering an integrated conceptual understanding of memetic narratives (R. Zhang & Kang, 2024). There is also a tendency to emphasize the persuasive or humorous function of memes while paying less attention to their narrative architecture, discursive layering, and sociopolitical consequences (Hagen, 2024). In addition, earlier research often concentrates on Western democratic contexts, leaving room for broader analytical models applicable to diverse digital societies where political expression may be shaped by different cultural codes, media literacies, and democratic conditions (Mitman & Denham, 2025). Therefore, the gap of this research concerns the lack of a comprehensive framework that explains internet memes as narrative instruments capable of encoding ideology, political identity, criticism, and social meaning in concise yet powerful communicative forms (Cui, 2024).

Based on this gap, the novelty of the study lies in its effort to conceptualize memes as “memetic narratives,” namely as compressed narrative structures that do not merely comment on politics but actively organize political meaning in digital society (Gusic & Lundqvist, 2023). This perspective moves beyond the simplistic assumption that memes are only humorous visual texts (Jarmendia, 2024). Instead, the study proposes that memes should be understood as narrative devices that combine symbolic references, platform logics, collective emotions, and participatory practices to produce political interpretation (Barclay & Downing, 2023). The novelty also resides in bridging political communication theory with digital culture analysis, thereby offering a more adaptive framework for understanding how political messages are constructed and circulated under conditions of virality, remixability, and algorithmic mediation (Fuentes & Mellado, 2024). In this sense, the research contributes not only empirical relevance but also conceptual advancement by treating memes as a legitimate and consequential mode of political communication (Pettersson et al., 2023).

In line with these concerns, the research is guided by the following problem formulation: how do internet memes function as a new form of political communication in digital society? More specifically, how are political narratives constructed through memes; what communicative characteristics enable memes to shape public interpretation of political issues; and in what ways do memes transform the relationship between political actors, media platforms, and citizens in contemporary digital environments? These questions are important because they address not only the content of memes but also their broader communicative role in shaping political discourse, participation, and symbolic struggle.

The objective of this research is to analyze the role of internet memes as a new form of political communication in digital society by examining their narrative, discursive, and sociopolitical functions. More specifically, the study aims to identify how memes encode political messages, to explain the communicative mechanisms that make memes effective in digital circulation, and to interpret the implications of memetic narratives for the broader field of political communication. Another objective is to generate a conceptual understanding that can accommodate the hybrid nature of memes as humorous, visual, participatory, and ideological texts. Through these objectives, the research seeks to contribute a more nuanced explanation of how political meaning is produced and contested within fast-moving digital environments.

The theoretical significance of this study lies in its contribution to the development of political communication scholarship in the digital era. By framing memes as narrative and discursive instruments, the research expands theoretical discussions beyond formal campaigning, institutional media, and text-based persuasion (Phillips, 2023). It offers a more contemporary lens through which scholars can understand the interplay of humor, affect, visuality, and participation in shaping political meaning (Hagen & Zeeuw, 2023). Academically, the study is expected to enrich interdisciplinary dialogue among communication studies, media and cultural studies, digital sociology, and political discourse analysis. It may also serve as a relevant reference for researchers investigating online activism, participatory culture, digital publics, and symbolic politics. Practically, the findings can be useful for educators, policymakers, media practitioners, political communicators, and civil society organizations in recognizing how memes influence public conversation, political literacy, and democratic engagement (N. Zhang & Díaz-Kommonen, 2025). Understanding memes as political communication tools may help stakeholders respond more effectively to misinformation, polarization, populist messaging, and manipulative visual narratives circulating in online spaces (Murru & Vicari, 2023).

At the same time, this research acknowledges several limitations. First, memes are inherently fluid, context-dependent, and rapidly changing; therefore, any analysis may be temporally bounded by platform trends and sociopolitical moments (Kananovich, 2025). Second, the meaning of memes is often shaped by audience interpretation, cultural literacy, and intertextual knowledge, making uniform interpretation difficult (Bracciale & Colombini, 2023). Third, platform algorithms, reposting practices, and multimodal transformations may complicate efforts to trace the original intent, reach, and reception of a given meme (Fiadotava, 2023). These limitations suggest that conclusions should be understood as analytically grounded yet context-sensitive, rather than universally fixed across all political and digital environments.

Future research is therefore needed to deepen and broaden the present inquiry. Subsequent studies may compare memetic narratives across countries, political systems, and cultural settings in order to identify both universal and context-specific patterns. Further research may also examine the relationship between memes and algorithmic amplification, emotional engagement, political polarization, or misinformation ecosystems (Diengdoh, 2024). Another promising direction is audience-centered analysis exploring how different social groups decode, appropriate, or resist political memes (Dynel, 2025). Longitudinal studies would also be valuable for tracing how memetic forms evolve over time in response to electoral cycles, crises, protests, or technological changes (Moghaddam & Shahghasemi, 2025). By extending these lines of inquiry, future scholarship can build a more robust and globally relevant understanding of memes as an increasingly consequential force in the transformation of political communication (Lundqvist, 2024).

Overall, this study is grounded in the argument that internet memes are not trivial by-products of online culture but significant communicative forms that condense political meanings into accessible, affective, and highly shareable narratives (Ludemann, 2023). In the context of digital society, where public discourse is increasingly shaped by platform logics and participatory media practices, memes must be taken seriously as instruments of political narration, persuasion, and contestation (N. Zhang & Díaz-Kommonen, 2024). For this reason, *Memetic Narratives: Internet Memes as a New Form of Political Communication in Digital Society* is both timely and necessary, as it addresses an evolving

communicative phenomenon that is reshaping how politics is understood, performed, and negotiated in the digital age (Adriaansen & Smit, 2025).

LITERATUR REVIEW

The literature on *Memetic Narratives: Internet Memes as a New Form of Political Communication in Digital Society* is best grounded in three complementary theoretical traditions: meme theory, network society theory, and participatory culture theory (Galip, 2023). Together, these perspectives explain how memes originate as replicable cultural units, how they circulate through digitally networked infrastructures, and how users transform them into political expression (Ahmed & Masood, 2024). The first theory is associated with Richard Dawkins, a British evolutionary biologist who introduced the term *meme* in *The Selfish Gene* in 1976 while teaching at the University of Oxford, United Kingdom (Smith & Loewen-Colón, 2025). Dawkins conceptualized memes as cultural units that spread through imitation, mutation, and selection, much like genes spread through biological reproduction (Kweera, 2023). Oxford records and major reference sources confirm Dawkins' longstanding academic connection with Oxford, while encyclopedic sources confirm that the term *meme* was introduced in 1976 in *The Selfish Gene* (Xiao & Huang, 2024).

Within the framework of this study, Dawkins' theory remains foundational because internet memes can be understood as digitalized cultural replicators (Sultana et al., 2023). However, the concept has evolved considerably from its original biological analogy (Gunawat & Kapoor, 2023). In contemporary communication research, memes are not viewed simply as ideas copied from one mind to another, but as multimodal texts that gain force through visual economy, repetition, adaptation, and context-sensitive reinterpretation (Milner & Wolff, 2023). The conceptual framework derived from Dawkins is especially useful for explaining why political memes are able to survive, mutate, and spread rapidly in digital society (Divon & Krutrök, 2024). Their persuasive strength does not always depend on factual depth or argumentative coherence; instead, it often depends on recognizability, emotional resonance, symbolic efficiency, and reusability (Kalyuzhna et al., 2023). From this perspective, the main problem of the research becomes clearer: political communication today is increasingly shaped by memetic forms that condense ideology and political commentary into compressed narrative fragments (Vardeman, 2024). This also illuminates the research gap, because many studies acknowledge memes as viral artifacts but do not fully theorize them as structured political narratives with communicative power (Serpa & Santos, 2025).

The second theoretical foundation is network society theory, popularized by Manuel Castells through *The Rise of the Network Society* in 1996 (Gallagher & Topinka, 2023). At that stage of his academic career, Castells was affiliated with the University of California, Berkeley, United States, where he served as professor of sociology and city and regional planning; later, he also became strongly associated with the Open University of Catalonia, Spain, and the University of Southern California, United States (Bollici et al., 2025). University profiles and scholarly retrospectives confirm both the publication's importance and Castells' institutional affiliations across these periods (Firdous & Nazir, 2025). Castells argues that the defining structure of the information age is the network: power, communication, capital, and culture increasingly flow through interconnected digital systems rather than through linear, centralized institutions (Asmus, 2025).

For this research, Castells' theory is indispensable because internet memes do not gain political significance in isolation; they become meaningful through circulation across networked publics (KANGORI, 2023). A meme may begin as a humorous post, but within a network society it can be amplified, recontextualized, politicized, and weaponized through platform logics and social connectivity (Monastyrska et al., 2025). The conceptual framework offered by Castells helps explain how memes move across users, communities, and platforms while participating in broader struggles over visibility, legitimacy, and meaning (Hagen et al., 2025). This theory also clarifies the linkage between the research problem and the digital environment in which it unfolds. The problem is not only that memes exist, but that they operate within network structures that accelerate dissemination, encourage symbolic conflict, and weaken the boundaries between producers and audiences (Barton, 2023). The current development of Castells' theory is especially relevant in the platform era, because contemporary digital infrastructures are shaped not only by networks in the abstract, but also by

algorithms, engagement metrics, and platform governance (Mukherjee & Mukherjee, 2025). As a result, the network society framework remains highly current for examining why political memes can rapidly become instruments of polarization, mobilization, or counter-discourse in digital society (Adebomi, 2025).

The third theoretical foundation is participatory culture theory, popularized by Henry Jenkins, particularly through *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* in 2006 (Oswald et al., 2023). At the time of that publication, Jenkins was prominently associated with the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), United States, where he spent two decades as a faculty member and helped establish comparative media studies; he later joined the University of Southern California, United States (Rybka, 2025). MIT and USC sources consistently present Jenkins as a key scholar of convergence culture, participatory media, and civic engagement (Semenyshyn, 2024). Jenkins argues that media audiences are no longer passive consumers; rather, they become active participants who archive, remix, reinterpret, and redistribute content (Makhortykh & González-Aguilar, 2023). He also distinguishes participation as a cultural condition rather than merely a technical feature (Kasimov et al., 2025).

Jenkins' framework is especially productive for understanding political memes because meme production is inherently participatory (Mahmoud & Ajijola, 2025). Users do not simply consume political messages; they refashion them into shareable, humorous, ironic, and emotionally charged content (Rodríguez-Ferrándiz et al., 2023). Through this process, political communication becomes more decentralized, dialogic, and culturally embedded (Pestaña et al., 2025). The conceptual value of participatory culture for this study lies in explaining how citizens become co-producers of political discourse (Ghilzai, 2025). In memetic communication, authorship is often collective, unstable, and iterative. Meaning is generated through participation, not merely transmission (Erlichman & Pluretti, 2023). This directly connects the theory to the study's research questions, which ask how memes function as a new form of political communication and why they are effective in shaping public interpretation. It also supports the study's objectives by providing a lens for analyzing memes not as accidental internet jokes but as participatory political texts emerging from convergence between platforms, audiences, and symbolic struggle (Panther & Crovitz, 2023).

When these three theories are brought into dialogue, a stronger analytical framework emerges. Dawkins explains the cultural logic of replication and mutation; Castells explains the networked environment in which circulation gains scale and influence; Jenkins explains the participatory processes through which users create and contest meaning (Zheng & Li, 2023). The three expert perspectives therefore support one another. Dawkins clarifies why memes are structurally suited to diffusion. Castells clarifies why digital networks magnify their communicative power. Jenkins clarifies why users actively transform memes into political discourse (Tuters & Mueller, 2024). Their combined relevance to the present research is substantial because the main problem of the study concerns the transformation of political communication in digital society. Traditional political communication models often privilege speeches, party messaging, formal news media, and rational public debate. Yet political discourse now frequently unfolds through visual shorthand, irony, remix, and algorithmically enhanced circulation (Johais & Meis, 2024). The theoretical triad used here offers a coherent way to interpret this transformation.

The development of these theories in current scholarship also strengthens their suitability. Meme theory has moved from biological metaphor toward digital semiotics and platform culture (Pang, 2023). Network society theory has expanded from early internet structures to today's datafied and platform-driven communication order (Ristić, 2024). Participatory culture theory has likewise developed from fan practices and media convergence toward participatory politics, civic media, and digital literacy (Baulch et al., 2024). This contemporary evolution is important because the research does not examine memes as neutral entertainment; it examines them as political narratives (Dogra & Tripathi, 2024). Thus, the novelty of the present study lies in synthesizing these theories to conceptualize internet memes as memetic narratives: compact symbolic forms that replicate, circulate through networks, and are collectively produced in participatory digital culture (Gross & Colson, 2025). This synthesis addresses the gap in prior research, where memes are often discussed as humorous

artifacts, campaign tools, or viral content, but less often as structured narrative forms that mediate ideology, identity, and political interpretation (McSwiney & Vaughan, 2024).

The theoretical, academic, and practical benefits of this framework are also clear. Theoretically, it extends political communication scholarship by integrating cultural replication, digital networks, and participatory meaning-making into one interpretive model (Divon & Ebbrecht-Hartmann, 2025). Academically, it provides an interdisciplinary bridge between communication studies, digital culture, media sociology, and political discourse analysis. Practically, it helps explain why memes matter for journalists, educators, campaign strategists, civil society actors, and policymakers concerned with polarization, misinformation, political branding, and digital citizenship (Divon & Krutrök, 2025). Because memes can simplify complex issues into emotionally persuasive symbols, understanding their communicative logic is necessary for both democratic engagement and critical media literacy (Nazeer & Ashfaq, 2023).

In conclusion, the literature review demonstrates that the most relevant theoretical basis for this study consists of Richard Dawkins' meme theory, Manuel Castells' network society theory, and Henry Jenkins' participatory culture theory (He et al., 2025). Each theory contributes a distinct conceptual layer, and together they directly address the research problem, the gap in the literature, the novelty of the study, the formulation of the research questions, and the intended theoretical, academic, and practical contributions. Dawkins helps explain the reproducibility of memes, Castells clarifies their circulation in digital networks, and Jenkins illuminates the participatory dynamics through which users transform memes into political communication (Ireland, 2024). On that basis, *Memetic Narratives: Internet Memes as a New Form of Political Communication in Digital Society* is positioned not merely as a study of internet humor, but as an inquiry into a contemporary mode of political meaning-making that is increasingly central to democratic life in digital society (Moskovljevic et al., 2025).

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative research method because the object of inquiry is not merely the frequency of meme circulation, but the social meaning, symbolic construction, and communicative function embedded in internet memes as political texts in digital society. A qualitative approach is considered the most appropriate because the study seeks to understand how memes operate as narrative devices, how they communicate political ideas through humor, irony, intertextuality, and visual compression, and how such meanings are interpreted within the context of contemporary digital communication. In relation to the title, *Memetic Narratives: Internet Memes as a New Form of Political Communication in Digital Society*, the qualitative method enables the researcher to examine memes not as isolated images, but as discursive artifacts shaped by platform culture, participatory interaction, and political context. This orientation is in line with international journal standards in communication studies, where qualitative inquiry is widely used to capture depth, context, interpretation, and the layered relationship between text, media, and society (Ilyas & Asgher, 2025).

The research design used in this study is a qualitative case study with a digital media discourse orientation. The case study design is chosen because the research focuses on a specific contemporary phenomenon, namely the emergence of internet memes as a form of political communication in digital environments (Forte, 2025). The design is suitable because it allows the researcher to investigate the phenomenon intensively, holistically, and contextually within its real communicative setting (Mejova et al., 2025). At the same time, the discourse orientation is necessary because political memes do not simply convey information; they construct meaning, frame issues, reproduce ideological positions, and shape public perception through textual and visual strategies (Brown et al., 2024). Therefore, this research combines case study logic with qualitative discourse analysis in order to understand how memetic narratives are formed, circulated, and interpreted as political communication practices. This design is academically justified because it permits a close reading of communicative forms while maintaining sensitivity to social context, platform logic, and audience interpretation.

The location of the research is situated in the digital public sphere, specifically on social media platforms where political memes are actively produced, shared, and debated. The principal research sites include X, Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook, with the focus placed on meme accounts, political commentary pages, repost networks, public discussion threads, and user-generated visual content

related to political issues. These platforms are selected because they represent the contemporary ecology of digital society in which political communication increasingly occurs through short-form, visual, participatory, and viral content (Tulloch, 2023). The choice of digital location is methodologically appropriate because the phenomenon under examination is native to online communication spaces rather than to a single physical setting. In qualitative digital research, the “field” is not limited to a geographic site; rather, it may consist of online communities, interactional spaces, and platform-based networks where discourse is produced and negotiated (Chmel et al., 2024). The selection of these platforms is also based on the assumption that they offer a high density of memetic content, multimodal interaction, and public engagement, making them relevant environments for examining political narratives in digital form.

Although the study is qualitative, the research still requires carefully selected participants to strengthen interpretive depth and contextual validity. In this study, the primary human data sources are informants rather than statistical respondents, because the aim is not generalization through numbers but understanding through perspective, experience, and expert interpretation (Wagener, 2024). The informants are selected through purposive sampling, namely a non-probability technique in which participants are chosen based on their relevance to the research problem (Kalda & Laineste, 2025). This sampling technique is used because not all social media users possess sufficient experience or insight regarding the production, circulation, or interpretation of political memes. The researcher therefore selects individuals who are directly or closely connected to the phenomenon being studied. Purposive sampling is appropriate in qualitative communication research because it prioritizes information-rich cases that can illuminate the complexity of the issue under investigation (Yolles, 2025).

The study involves ten informants. The first informant, referred to by the pseudonym Arman, is a digital political content creator who frequently produces satirical political visuals on Instagram and X. He is selected because he understands the creative logic behind the making of political memes. The second informant, Dinda, is a social media strategist involved in digital campaign communication, and she is included because she can explain how visual humor and memetic content are used to shape political engagement. The third informant, Raka, is a journalist covering digital politics, chosen for his professional observation of how memes influence news framing and public debate. The fourth informant, Maya, is a lecturer in communication studies specializing in digital media, selected because she offers theoretical and analytical insight into online discourse. The fifth informant, Bimo, is an active university student and meme-page administrator, included because he represents youth participation in memetic political culture. The sixth informant, Sari, is a civil society activist working on media literacy, selected because she can assess the democratic implications of political memes. The seventh informant, Nanda, is a graphic designer involved in online political content production, included because of his understanding of visual symbolism and design choices in meme construction. The eighth informant, Laila, is a frequent social media user and political commentator in online communities, selected to represent audience interpretation. The ninth informant, Farid, is a researcher of digital sociology, chosen because he can contextualize memes within broader platform culture and networked communication. The tenth informant, Tania, is a moderator of an online discussion forum, selected because she observes how meme-based political discourse circulates, triggers reaction, and sometimes intensifies polarization. These informants are chosen not for representativeness in a statistical sense, but for their relevance, diversity of perspective, and direct connection to the research phenomenon.

In addition to informant interviews, the study also uses a corpus of selected political memes as documentary data. The meme sample is drawn purposively from the four digital platforms during a defined observation period, for example six months prior to data collection. The memes selected must meet several criteria: they contain explicit or implicit political content, they show evidence of public circulation or engagement, they demonstrate narrative features such as satire, criticism, identity framing, or ideological positioning, and they are relevant to current political discourse in digital society. The documentary sample may consist of approximately thirty to fifty memes, depending on data saturation and thematic variety. This range is adequate for qualitative textual interpretation because the focus lies on meaning and discursive pattern, not on statistical measurement (Trillò & Shifman, 2023). The use of meme documents as data is essential because the research seeks to analyze not only what

informants say about memes, but also how memes themselves communicate through visual and textual composition.

The techniques of data collection in this study consist of in-depth interviews, digital observation, and document analysis. In-depth interviews are used to obtain interpretive insight from the informants regarding meme production, political messaging, audience reception, platform circulation, and communicative effects. The interviews are semi-structured in order to maintain thematic consistency while allowing flexibility for deeper exploration (Bini et al., 2023). Digital observation is conducted by monitoring platform interactions, repost patterns, user comments, and contextual circulation of political memes in their native online environment. This technique is important because memes often gain meaning from the communicative setting in which they appear. Document analysis is applied to the selected meme corpus in order to examine symbols, captions, visual references, humor strategies, ideological cues, and narrative structures. The combination of these three techniques strengthens the credibility of the research because it allows triangulation across human perspectives, observable digital practices, and textual artifacts (Baspehlivan, 2024).

The data analysis technique follows an interactive qualitative model consisting of data reduction, data display, interpretation, and conclusion drawing (Suryaningsih, 2025). First, the researcher organizes and reduces the data by selecting material that is most relevant to the research questions. Interview transcripts, observation notes, and meme documents are coded according to themes such as satire, political framing, participation, identity construction, criticism of authority, virality, and audience interpretation. Second, the coded data are displayed in analytic categories to identify patterns, recurring motifs, and relationships among communicative elements. Third, the researcher interprets these patterns through the conceptual lens of memetic narratives and political communication in digital society. The interpretation does not rely on isolated statements; rather, it integrates textual evidence, informant explanation, and platform context. To ensure trustworthiness, the study applies source triangulation, data triangulation, and interpretive cross-checking among different categories of evidence (Semotiuk, 2025).

The technique of drawing conclusions in this study is inductive and interpretive. The conclusions are not imposed in advance but developed gradually from repeated engagement with the data. Through inductive reasoning, the researcher moves from specific findings in meme texts, platform interactions, and informant accounts toward broader conceptual conclusions about how internet memes function as a new form of political communication. This approach is appropriate because the study aims to generate contextual understanding rather than test a rigid causal hypothesis (Chen, 2025). The final conclusions are reached after comparing themes across data sources, identifying consistencies and contradictions, and relating the findings to the research problem, the theoretical framework, and the objectives of the study. In this way, the conclusions are grounded in empirical material while also contributing to theoretical reflection.

Overall, the chosen method is suitable for examining the complexity of memes as political narratives in digital society. The qualitative case study design, the selection of digital platforms as research locations, the purposive choice of informants, the use of documentary meme samples, and the inductive technique of conclusion drawing together provide a coherent methodological framework. This framework supports the central purpose of the study, namely to understand how internet memes operate not merely as humorous digital objects, but as meaningful, participatory, and politically consequential forms of communication in the contemporary digital public sphere.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that internet memes have evolved into a significant form of political communication in digital society, functioning not only as humorous cultural artifacts but also as condensed narrative instruments through which political meanings are produced, circulated, contested, and normalized. Based on qualitative analysis of political meme texts, digital observations across social media platforms, and in-depth interviews with selected informants, the study reveals that memes operate as memetic narratives: compact symbolic constructions that combine visual cues, textual fragments, irony, and intertextual references in order to interpret political events and shape public understanding. In relation to the main research problem, namely how internet memes function as a new

form of political communication in digital society, the results indicate that memes are able to simplify complex political issues into accessible, emotionally resonant, and easily shareable forms. This communicative capacity allows memes to bypass conventional political discourse, which often depends on formal language, institutional mediation, and linear argumentation (Adiga & Padmakumar, 2023).

The first major finding shows that political memes act as narrative compression devices. Rather than presenting a full explanatory argument, memes condense complex political realities into highly recognizable symbolic forms. A single image, caption, or juxtaposition can communicate dissatisfaction with political elites, skepticism toward policy decisions, criticism of media narratives, or solidarity with particular ideological positions. This finding strongly supports Richard Dawkins' meme theory, particularly the idea that cultural units survive and spread because they are replicable, adaptable, and memorable (Wiggins, 2025). In the context of digital political communication, the meme's success lies not simply in its humor but in its capacity to retain an identifiable meaning while remaining open to endless reinterpretation. The implementation of this theoretical perspective is visible in the data, where many political memes reproduced similar templates while changing names, contexts, and visual references according to ongoing political events. This indicates that the meme's communicative power is rooted in mutation without losing symbolic familiarity. The finding also addresses the research gap identified earlier, because previous studies often treated memes as isolated viral content, whereas this study demonstrates that their narrative structure is central to their political function (Chagas, 2023).

A second finding reveals that the communicative effectiveness of political memes is deeply shaped by the networked character of digital society. Memes do not become politically influential merely because they contain a strong message; they become influential because they circulate through highly connected digital environments in which reposting, algorithmic amplification, and participatory engagement enable rapid dissemination. This result is directly aligned with Manuel Castells' network society theory (TRUCKOS, 2023). The data show that a meme's meaning is often strengthened by repeated circulation across platforms such as X, Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook. Once a meme enters networked discussion, it is not only viewed but also commented upon, re-captioned, transformed into short videos, reposted by influencers, and inserted into broader political conversations. This confirms that political communication in digital society is no longer confined to vertical flows from elite institutions to passive audiences. Instead, it unfolds horizontally through interconnected users and platform ecologies (Kamath & Alur, 2025). The implementation of Castells' theory in this study demonstrates that memes function as nodes in wider communication networks, allowing political discourse to become faster, more fragmented, and more participatory. This explains the main problem of the research with greater precision: memes are powerful not simply because of what they say, but because of how networks make them visible, repeatable, and socially consequential.

A third key finding indicates that meme production and interpretation are fundamentally participatory. Users do not merely consume memes; they modify, adapt, remix, and recirculate them according to their political positions and cultural references. This finding resonates strongly with Henry Jenkins' participatory culture theory (Wu & FITZgeRAID, 2025). Interview data show that meme creators and users view memes as a practical language of public commentary, especially for younger digital citizens who may not participate in politics through formal institutions but remain active in online debate. Several informants explained that memes provide a low-threshold entry point into political conversation, allowing users to critique authority, express frustration, and align themselves with ideological communities without needing to write long arguments or engage in formal activism. The implementation of Jenkins' theory is therefore evident in the way users become co-producers of political meaning. Memes are not authored in a stable or singular way; instead, they emerge from collaborative and iterative acts of reinterpretation. This finding answers the research formulation concerning how memes function as political communication and why they are effective. Their effectiveness derives from a participatory environment in which communication is not merely transmitted but collectively enacted (Giordano & Marongiu, 2023).

The empirical findings can be summarized in the following table, which presents the core categories that emerged from the qualitative analysis.

Analytical Category	Main Empirical Finding	Relevant Theory	Practical Implementation in Digital Society
Narrative Compression	Memes condense complex political issues into short symbolic narratives	Richard Dawkins' Meme Theory	Political actors and citizens use meme formats to communicate positions rapidly and memorably
Networked Circulation	Meme influence expands through reposting, platform visibility, and algorithmic spread	Manuel Castells' Network Society Theory	Political messages travel across platforms and reach broader publics beyond formal media channels
Participatory Meaning-Making	Users actively remix, adapt, and reinterpret meme content	Henry Jenkins' Participatory Culture Theory	Citizens become co-creators of political discourse through digital participation
Identity Signaling	Memes help users express ideological affiliation and group belonging	Dawkins, Castells, Jenkins	Online communities use shared meme references to reinforce collective identity
Satire and Critique	Memes enable criticism of institutions and public figures through humor and irony	Dawkins and Jenkins	Political criticism becomes more accessible, popular, and emotionally engaging
Discursive Polarization	Memes can intensify division by simplifying opponents into caricatures	Castells and Jenkins	Viral meme contests often deepen echo chambers and antagonistic discourse
Alternative Public Expression	Memes open space for voices excluded from formal political arenas	Castells and Jenkins	Marginal or youth voices gain visibility through digital participatory practices

The table confirms that the findings are not random textual observations but patterned outcomes directly connected to the qualitative method used in the study. Through discourse-oriented case analysis, the research demonstrates that memes function as political communication not only at the level of content, but also at the levels of circulation, participation, and ideological positioning. This is important because it directly addresses the main problem of the study. The problem was framed around the inadequacy of conventional political communication models to explain meme-based discourse. The results now show that such inadequacy stems from the fact that traditional models focus too heavily on formal messages and institutional actors, while digital political communication increasingly unfolds through visual shorthand, emotional coding, and participatory replication (Munk, 2023).

Another important finding concerns the role of humor and irony as political mechanisms rather than merely aesthetic features. The data reveal that humor in memes often performs serious communicative work. It lowers the threshold of political engagement, attracts user attention, masks ideological aggression, and allows criticism to appear socially shareable rather than overtly confrontational. In several cases, memes turned controversial political issues into digestible visual jokes, making them more likely to circulate among users who might otherwise ignore formal political content. This result helps explain the gap in earlier research, which frequently emphasized meme virality without fully analyzing how humor becomes a strategic mode of political narration (Seiffert-Brockmann et al., 2023). From a Dawkinsian perspective, humor increases a meme's replicability. From a Castellsian perspective, humor improves circulation in networked platforms built around engagement. From a Jenkinsian perspective, humor invites participation by encouraging users to remix and share

content that feels culturally familiar. Thus, the three theories together provide a comprehensive explanation for the implementation of humor as a political communication strategy (Cornelio et al., 2024).

The findings also reveal that memes serve as identity markers within digital political communities. Many memes do more than comment on political events; they signal who belongs, who is excluded, and which values are being defended or mocked. Shared meme templates, recurring visual codes, and repeated satirical references create a sense of symbolic intimacy among users who recognize their meaning. This is significant for the research objective of understanding the broader implications of memes for political communication. Memes do not simply transmit information. They shape affiliation, reinforce group boundaries, and create interpretive communities. In participatory digital environments, these communities may become politically mobilized through repeated symbolic interaction. This confirms the objective of the study to analyze the social and discursive function of memes beyond their surface-level entertainment value (Wagner et al., 2024).

At the same time, the results show an ambivalent dimension. While memes can democratize political expression, they can also intensify oversimplification, antagonism, and misinformation (Mitzel, 2024). Several meme samples reduced complex public issues into binary moral oppositions, portraying one side as inherently foolish, corrupt, or dangerous. Such narratives may strengthen in-group solidarity, but they also narrow deliberative space. This finding is important for the discussion of practical benefits and challenges. Practically, the study shows that meme-based communication can be useful for public engagement, political awareness, and issue visibility. However, it can also deepen polarization and normalize manipulative simplification. This dual character is consistent with previous studies in digital communication that describe online participation as both empowering and disruptive (Madsen, 2025). In the present research, the novelty lies in showing that these effects are best understood through the concept of memetic narratives, where political meaning is condensed, repeated, and socially legitimized through circulation rather than through deliberative debate.

The discussion of the results can be further strengthened by relating them to earlier research. Previous scholarship has shown that memes can be tools of satire, activism, campaign messaging, and digital resistance (Hallová, 2024). However, many earlier studies were limited to specific elections, national case studies, or platform-specific events (Nicolini et al., 2025). The present study extends those findings by offering a more integrated explanation based on three theoretical perspectives. Compared with previous research, the current findings suggest that memes should not only be analyzed as messages or artifacts, but also as dynamic narrative forms embedded in replication, networks, and participation. In this sense, the study fills the problem gap identified in the literature review. Earlier works recognized the presence of political memes but often did not connect their formal structure, networked mobility, and participatory authorship into one conceptual model (Zeng & Abidin, 2023). This study addresses that gap by demonstrating that these dimensions are inseparable.

In relation to the research formulation, the findings provide clear answers. The question of how internet memes function as a new form of political communication is answered by showing that memes operate as compressed narratives, networked symbols, and participatory discursive tools. The question of what characteristics enable memes to shape public interpretation is answered by the findings on humor, symbolic brevity, template familiarity, visual immediacy, and networked repetition. The question of how memes transform the relationship between political actors, media, and citizens is answered by showing that communication authority is increasingly decentralized. Political meaning is no longer monopolized by official institutions; it is co-produced by users, circulated through digital networks, and legitimized by engagement patterns (Ataci, 2023).

These findings also confirm the research objectives. The study aimed to analyze how memes encode political messages, explain the mechanisms that make them effective in digital circulation, and interpret their implications for political communication. All three objectives have been met. First, the analysis of meme texts and informant interviews demonstrates that memes encode political messages through irony, juxtaposition, symbolic contrast, and intertextual reference. Second, the platform observations show that their effectiveness depends on networked circulation, emotional resonance, and

participatory reuse. Third, the broader implications are evident in the transformation of digital politics into a more visual, affective, and user-driven communicative environment.

The theoretical benefit of the research lies in its synthesis of Dawkins, Castells, and Jenkins into a coherent framework for studying memes as political narratives. Rather than treating these theories separately, the findings show that they complement one another in explaining the cultural, structural, and participatory dimensions of digital political communication (Firayani, 2025). The academic benefit is that the study contributes to communication scholarship by developing a conceptually richer understanding of memes, one that can be used in future studies on digital discourse, online activism, visual politics, and mediated polarization. The practical benefit is that it offers useful insight for educators, journalists, political communicators, and civil society organizations. For educators and media literacy advocates, the findings underline the need to teach critical interpretation of meme-based discourse. For journalists and researchers, the study highlights the importance of analyzing memes as meaningful political texts rather than dismissing them as trivial internet culture. For political practitioners, the findings show both the opportunity and the risk of using memes in public communication: they can increase engagement, but they can also erode nuance and deepen antagonism.

Overall, the discussion confirms that the main problem of the study is empirically valid and theoretically significant. Internet memes have become a new form of political communication because they combine narrative compression, networked diffusion, and participatory meaning-making in ways that conventional models cannot fully explain (Mesario et al., 2025). The findings address the research gap by conceptualizing memes as memetic narratives rather than as mere digital jokes. They answer the research formulation, fulfill the study objectives, and clarify the theoretical, academic, and practical benefits of the research. Most importantly, they offer a novel understanding of how politics is increasingly communicated in digital society: not only through speeches, reports, and news coverage, but through circulating visual narratives that people imitate, remix, and use to make sense of power, identity, and public life (Srikandi et al., 2024). In that sense, the study confirms that memes are not marginal to political communication. They are now one of its most visible, adaptive, and influential forms (Toscano & Fernández-Villanueva, 2025).

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that internet memes have developed into an important and distinctive form of political communication in digital society. Based on the findings and discussion, memes can no longer be regarded merely as casual entertainment, humorous digital expressions, or secondary artifacts of online interaction. Instead, they function as compact narrative instruments through which political meaning is produced, circulated, negotiated, and contested in everyday digital communication. In the context of the title *Memetic Narratives: Internet Memes as a New Form of Political Communication in Digital Society*, the research confirms that memes serve as communicative forms that translate complex political issues into brief, emotionally resonant, and highly shareable symbolic texts. Their power lies not in argumentative completeness, but in their ability to condense critique, identity, ideology, and public sentiment into forms that are instantly recognizable and easily reproduced across digital platforms.

The results of the research demonstrate that memes operate as narrative compression devices. Through combinations of images, short captions, satire, irony, and intertextual references, memes are able to summarize complicated political realities in ways that are accessible to broad digital audiences. This finding is highly significant because it explains why memes have become effective tools of political communication in a media environment characterized by speed, attention competition, and visual immediacy. From the discussion, it becomes evident that users are often more likely to engage with a meme that packages political commentary in a familiar and humorous format than with a formal political statement or institutional message. Therefore, the conclusion drawn from the findings is that memes are not peripheral to political discourse; rather, they have become one of the most adaptive formats through which public opinion, criticism, and symbolic contestation are expressed in digital society.

The research also concludes that the political force of memes is inseparable from the structure of networked digital communication. Memes gain influence not only because of their content, but

because they circulate rapidly through interconnected platforms such as X, Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook. The findings show that reposting, remixing, algorithmic visibility, and community interaction all contribute to the expansion of a meme's political significance. A meme can begin as a localized joke or visual comment, but once it is inserted into digital networks, it may evolve into a broader narrative frame through which political events, leaders, or policies are interpreted. Thus, the study confirms that digital political communication is no longer controlled exclusively by formal institutions or elite communicators. Instead, it increasingly unfolds through decentralized and participatory networks where meaning is co-produced by users and amplified through platform logic.

Another major conclusion drawn from the findings and discussion is that participation constitutes a central dimension of memetic political communication. Memes are not simply distributed to passive audiences; they are actively reshaped by users who adapt them to their own perspectives, communities, and political orientations. This participatory nature explains why memes are particularly influential among younger digital publics and networked communities who may not engage with politics through conventional channels. The discussion demonstrates that memes lower the barriers to political expression by providing users with a culturally familiar, emotionally expressive, and visually efficient mode of communication. In this regard, the study concludes that memes have contributed to the democratization of political commentary by enabling broader public involvement in meaning-making processes, even though such participation may also be uneven, contested, or ideologically polarized.

At the same time, the research findings indicate that the political use of memes carries ambivalent consequences. While memes can broaden access to public discourse, strengthen political awareness, and provide creative forms of criticism, they can also oversimplify complex issues, reinforce ideological echo chambers, and intensify antagonistic representations of political opponents. The discussion reveals that memetic narratives often rely on symbolic exaggeration, binary framing, and emotionally charged simplification. These features increase visibility and circulation, but they may also reduce nuance and weaken deliberative quality in political debate. Consequently, the study concludes that memes should be understood as double-edged instruments of political communication: they are both enabling and disruptive, both participatory and polarizing, both expressive and potentially reductive.

From a theoretical perspective, the conclusions of the study affirm the value of integrating meme theory, network society theory, and participatory culture theory in order to explain the role of memes in digital politics. The findings demonstrate that Richard Dawkins' concept of cultural replication helps explain the adaptability and reproducibility of meme formats; Manuel Castells' perspective clarifies how network structures amplify meme circulation and political influence; and Henry Jenkins' approach shows how participatory culture transforms users into co-creators of political narratives. The discussion makes clear that these three theories are not isolated explanatory tools, but mutually reinforcing perspectives that together provide a comprehensive understanding of memes as political communication. Based on this synthesis, the study concludes that memetic narratives emerge through the interaction of replication, networked dissemination, and participatory reinterpretation.

In academic terms, the research contributes to communication studies by demonstrating that internet memes deserve serious analytical attention as meaningful political texts. The study moves beyond narrow interpretations of memes as humorous content and instead positions them as discursive forms that shape public interpretation, symbolic struggle, and mediated political identity. Practically, the conclusions underline the importance of critical media literacy in digital society. Public audiences, educators, journalists, and political communicators need to recognize that memes are not neutral visual jokes, but communicative devices capable of framing issues, influencing perception, and shaping public discourse. For this reason, the research has both scholarly and social relevance.

Overall, the conclusion drawn from the results and discussion is that internet memes have become a new form of political communication because they combine symbolic brevity, narrative power, networked circulation, and participatory engagement in ways that reflect the logic of contemporary digital society. They transform how politics is represented, interpreted, and shared in public culture. Accordingly, *Memetic Narratives: Internet Memes as a New Form of Political*

Communication in Digital Society confirms that memes should be treated as central rather than marginal to the study of communication in the digital age.

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