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# Meme-ology: Interpreting PBBM Memes through Semiotic Theory

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***Abstract****: This study examines political memes related to President Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr. (PBBM) through the lens of semiotic theory, highlighting their role as instruments of political communication, critique, and digital engagement. Using Charles Morris's framework of icons, symbols, and indexes, the analysis reveals how visual and textual elements combine to encode layered meanings—denotative, connotative, and mythological—within online discourse. The findings demonstrate that these memes function not merely as humorous artifacts but as participatory tools that allow citizens to express dissent, challenge authority, and articulate collective frustrations regarding governance, privilege, and accountability. Iconic imagery, such as BBM's caricatured expressions and pop-culture analogies (e.g., Superman, vampire, Homer Simpson), deconstructs political power by transforming the leader into an object of satire. Symbolic elements like rice price signage and tax references further amplify socio-economic critique, exposing unfulfilled promises and systemic inequality. At the mythological level, the memes subvert dominant political narratives, dismantling myths of dynastic loyalty, impunity, and wealth-based legitimacy. Overall, the study underscores the power of memes as contemporary political texts that democratize discourse and bridge humor with activism. They serve as a new mode of political participation in the digital public sphere, where critique and entertainment intersect. The study concludes that understanding the semiotic mechanisms of memes is essential for analyzing their influence on political perception, civic engagement, and public opinion formation in the digital age.*

**Keywords— political memes, semiotics, digital discourse, Bongbong Marcos Jr., political communication**

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The emergence of internet memes as a unique form of communication has transformed the way people express opinions, share humor, and disseminate information online. According to Shifman (2014), internet memes have evolved into a dynamic form of digital communication that reflects the cultural and social underpinnings of society. A meme is a cultural element or system that contains behavior usually shared by many people because it has a context considered representative (Lestari, Duwila, & Probowati, 2022). Shifman's work emphasizes that memes encapsulate shared cultural experiences and are often used to express public sentiment in humorous or satirical ways, making them potent tools for commentary on social and political issues.

Memes can spread rapidly from one individual to another through social media or the internet. Internet memes have become a popular format for expressing individual political opinions on social media. According to Johann (2022), the use of political internet memes is also positively related to users' motivations for political engagement and internal political efficacy. Moreover, the use of Internet memes to express political opinions is associated with users' online and offline political participation. Memes have recently become popular as a medium for expressing ideas.

In the Philippines, memes about political figures such as President Bongbong Marcos (PBBM) have gained prominence, reflecting diverse perspectives on governance, leadership, and national identity. Milner (2016) highlights the role of memes in political discourse, particularly their capacity to convey complex political ideas in accessible, humorous formats. Political memes, Milner argues, are instrumental in "vernacular creativity," in which ordinary citizens use them to participate in political dialogue, thereby influencing public opinion and reinforcing or challenging societal views (Milner, 2016). Roces (2015) discusses the emerging role of digital media in Filipino political culture, emphasizing how Filipinos actively engage in political expression through social media, including meme creation. Roces argues that memes offer an accessible format for social and political commentary, which resonates strongly in the Philippines, given the high level of internet penetration and social media engagement among Filipinos.

While the existing literature covers the general role of internet memes in political discourse and their semiotic interpretation, there is limited research on the Filipino context, particularly regarding political figures like PBBM. The unique socio-cultural dynamics of the Philippines, where social media plays a significant role in shaping public discourse, warrant a focused analysis of PBBM-related memes. This research aims to fill the gap by analyzing how PBBM-related memes are constructed to convey their intended meaning. Memes, as a medium for conveying ideas or messages, can certainly be studied more deeply.

For this study, semiotic theory, specifically the concept of signs in semiotics, as initiated by Charles William Morris (1901-1979) supported by Barthes (1972), will be used to decode the memes. Using the theory, the political memes posted online will be used as data for analysis. In this study, the researcher will analyze the signs and symbols found in the PBMM memes. This study focuses on the meanings of signs.

### 1.1 Statement of the Problem

The major problem of the present study is to identify how political memes related to PBBM are constructed to convey their intended meanings. Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

a. How do PBMM-related memes utilize semiotic elements such as icons, symbols, and indices to convey political messages and critique societal issues?
b. What are the denotative, connotative, and mythological meanings embedded in PBBM memes, and how do these reflect public sentiment and discourse about governance?
c. How does the interpretation of semiotic elements and the meanings embedded in PBBM memes reveal the underlying political and societal issues being critiqued?

## METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 Research Design

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design utilizing semiotic analysis as the primary analytical approach. The qualitative method is appropriate because the research seeks to interpret and explain meanings rather than quantify data (Creswell, 2014). Through semiotic analysis, the researcher examined how visual and textual elements in PBBM-related political memes generate meaning and reflect social and political realities in the Philippines.

The study adopts Charles William Morris's (1938) semiotic framework, focusing on the three dimensions of signs—syntactics, semantics, and pragmatics—to decode how memes communicate meaning. This framework is complemented by Roland Barthes' (1972) levels of meaning —denotation, connotation, and myth —to reveal both the literal and cultural interpretations encoded in the memes.

Together, these theories enable the researcher to analyze political memes as complex cultural texts that mediate public discourse, humor, and critique.

### 2.2 Corpus of the Study

The data for this research consist of five (5) political memes featuring President Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr. (PBBM). These memes were selected because they prominently depict or reference the President, use humor or satire to express political views, and circulate widely among Filipino audiences.

The study's purposive sampling ensured that each meme directly references PBBM or issues associated with his administration, combines visual and textual elements, reflects Filipino socio-political contexts, highlighting national issues, governance, or public sentiment, and is publicly available online and accessible without infringing privacy or copyright.

The research focuses on digital social media environments where Filipino users frequently share and engage with political content. The memes were drawn primarily from Facebook, the most widely used social networking platform in the Philippines, with supplementary observations from Twitter (X) and Instagram. These online spaces represent modern arenas of political dialogue and satire, making them ideal sources for studying political meme culture.

### 2.3 Data Gathering Procedure

The data gathering followed these systematic steps:

The researcher manually searched Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram using hashtags and keywords such as #PBBMmemes, #MarcosJr, #PhilippinePolitics, and #BBM. Relevant memes were downloaded and stored with their posting context (e.g., captions, page type, and audience reactions).

Among hundreds of memes initially observed, five were purposively chosen based on clarity of visual symbolism, political relevance, and potential for semiotic interpretation. Memes containing explicit hate speech or offensive content were excluded.

Each meme was assigned a code (M1–M5) and documented in a data log that included its source, date, and brief contextual background. Themes (e.g., accountability, corruption, campaign promises) were noted to aid later interpretation.

Since all memes were publicly available, no direct consent was needed. However, usernames, comment sections, and identifiable personal data were omitted to maintain ethical integrity. Memes were used solely for academic analysis and not altered beyond necessary anonymization.

### 2.4 Theoretical Framework

The study employed Morris's (1938) semiotic theory as the principal framework, supported by Barthes' (1972) model of layered meanings. The integration of these frameworks allows for a multi-level analysis of visual and linguistic signs.

1. Syntactic Analysis

Examines how textual and visual elements are arranged in each meme—composition, color, size, and juxtaposition. This determines how these formal relationships guide interpretation.

2. Semantic Analysis

Focuses on how signs (icons, symbols, and indexes) represent political figures, issues, or actions. For example, the use of rice imagery signifies livelihood; the "red jacket" symbolizes political branding and unity.

3. Pragmatic Analysis

Explores how memes engage audiences and what responses they elicit—humor, criticism, or solidarity. This level interprets as tools of social commentary or political participation.

4. Denotative, Connotative, and Mythological Levels
Following Barthes:

a. Denotation – literal meaning (e.g., BBM's facial expression, text captions).
b. Connotation – associated meanings or emotional undertones (e.g., avoidance, corruption, satire).
c. Myth – cultural or ideological significance (e.g., political dynasties, loyalty, impunity).

Each meme is analyzed across these levels to uncover how humor and symbolism encode social and political critique.

### 2.5 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were observed throughout the research. Only publicly available memes were analyzed, and no personal identifiers were disclosed. The researcher maintained neutrality and adhered to academic integrity standards.

## 3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the interpretation and analysis of five political memes featuring President Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr. (PBBM), guided by Charles Morris's (1938) semiotic framework—focusing on syntactics, semantics, and pragmatics—and complemented by Roland Barthes's (1972) tripartite model of denotation, connotation, and myth. The integration of these frameworks enables the analysis of how visual and textual signs interact to construct political meanings, encode critique, and reflect social realities within Filipino digital culture.

**Table 1: Semiotic Elements in PBBM Political Memes**

| Meme | Icon | Symbol | Index | Themes |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Political Figures<br><br>Feast Elements (Chicken, Champagne, Money Bags) | "UNITeam" Logo<br><br>Text "SOLID BBM PARIN KAMI" | Money Bags<br><br>Kneeling People | Accountability vs. Avoidance<br><br>Corruption and Privilege<br><br>Broken Promises |
| 2 | Vampire and Sunlight<br><br>Superman and Kryptonite<br><br>Bongbong Marcos (BBM)<br><br>Jessica Soho | Comelec Logo<br><br>Jessica Soho's Interview<br><br>Red Jacket Meme Pose | BBM Turning Away<br><br>Pairing Figures with Weaknesses | Public Scrutiny |
| 3 | Political Figure (Man in Blue Shirt)<br><br>Young Man (Bald Figure)<br><br>Signage of Rice Prices | Speech Bubbles<br><br>Signage with Prices | Rice Prices<br><br>Body Language | |
| 4 | Bongbong Marco's Face<br><br>Homer Simpson Character<br><br>Hedge | Meme Format<br><br>Text "Bongbong Marcos in Difficult Moments" | Retreat into the Hedge<br><br>Facial Expression | |
| 5 | Bongbong Marco's Image | Text "HINDI KAMI BAYAD NG TAXES"<br><br>Microphone and Fists | Clenched Fists<br><br>Facial Expression | |

At the syntactic level, the analyzed memes exhibit a deliberate arrangement of visual and textual signs that heighten irony, satire, and humor. The structure and spatial organization of each meme are not random but intentionally composed to communicate layered meanings. According to Morris (1938), syntactic relations refer to how elements are arranged in relation to one another, influencing how viewers construct meaning.

In these memes, the juxtaposition of icons (such as Bongbong Marcos's portrait or caricature) and textual captions (e.g., "SOLID BBM PARIN KAMI") establishes a direct visual link between the sign and its political referent. This connection immediately anchors the interpretation to the subject being critiqued—the President himself. For instance, Meme 1 depicts political figures seated at a lavish feast, with kneeling citizens below. The vertical composition visually enacts a class hierarchy, symbolizing privilege and exploitation. The syntactic contrast between those "above" and "below" the table strengthens the visual metaphor of political inequality and public subservience.

Similarly, Meme 4, which adopts the familiar "Homer Simpson retreating into the hedge" format, employs recognizable meme syntax to illustrate avoidance or withdrawal. By placing BBM's face in Homer's position, the meme reinforces the visual metaphor of evasion—a humorous yet critical commentary on the President's perceived avoidance of accountability. The use of an established meme format also enhances readability, as audiences can immediately infer the intended message through cultural familiarity. Thus, at the syntactic level, the interplay of layout, framing, and juxtaposition structures the satire and guides the viewer toward an ironic reading of political behavior.

At the semantic level, meaning arises through the interpretation of symbols and indices that represent political issues, cultural references, and public sentiment. As Eco (2018) explains, symbols gain significance through collective cultural experience; they transcend literal representation and encode shared meanings.

In the corpus, symbols such as the red jacket and rice price signage carry powerful socio-political associations. The red jacket, a recurring visual marker linked to the Marcos' political identity and the "Uniteam" campaign, symbolizes unity, loyalty, and the continuity of dynastic power. Meanwhile, the rice signage in Meme 3 functions as a potent symbol of livelihood, reflecting the public's disillusionment with unfulfilled campaign promises—particularly the pledge to lower rice prices to ₱20 per kilo. This symbolic imagery transforms an everyday concern (food affordability) into a political critique of economic governance and leadership credibility.

The textual element "HINDI KAMI BAYAD NG TAXES" in Meme 5 extends this critique by satirizing the Marcos family's alleged tax controversies. Here, humor and sarcasm operate semantically to express frustration toward political impunity. By converting an accusation into a mock declaration, the meme exposes the disparity between public expectations of accountability and the perceived privileges of political elites.

The indices, on the other hand, function as contextual traces pointing to real-world social dynamics. The kneeling figures in Meme 1 index submission and exploitation, while BBM's act of turning away from Jessica Soho's interview in Meme 2 indexes avoidance of public scrutiny. These indexical signs link symbolic representation with lived experiences, illustrating the asymmetry between power and the people. Through these semantic layers, the memes crystallize complex socio-political commentaries into concise, accessible visual shorthand.

At the pragmatic level, the memes function as active instruments of participatory political discourse. According to Shifman (2014), memes are inherently social texts—they are designed to be interpreted, shared, and remixed, enabling the public to engage in discourse beyond traditional political arenas. The pragmatic dimension of these memes lies in their ability to transform political critique into humorous, viral content that circulates widely within digital spaces.

For instance, Meme 5's satire of tax evasion ("HINDI KAMI BAYAD NG TAXES") simultaneously amuses and provokes public awareness of perceived corruption and privilege. The humor softens the political tension while sustaining critical reflection. Similarly, the parody in Meme 2—equating BBM's fear of interviews with Superman's kryptonite—renders political critique more accessible and shareable. These humorous framings invite users to participate in dialogue, not merely as passive observers but as co-creators of meaning.

Pragmatically, the memes extend political discussion into informal digital spaces such as Facebook and Twitter, where engagement thrives through laughter, irony, and collective interpretation. In doing so, they democratize political communication, allowing ordinary citizens to express dissent, skepticism, or support through humor-laden commentary. The memes thus exemplify what Morris (1938) terms the behavioral dimension of signs—how signs elicit responses and influence interpretive behavior.

Across all five memes, recurring themes such as unfulfilled promises, privilege and inequality, avoidance of accountability, and public frustration with governance emerge as central narrative threads. These themes reflect a shared cultural consciousness of disillusionment and skepticism toward political authority.

Moreover, the memes' humor and irony transform criticism into a form of digital resistance, where laughter becomes a subtle mode of political expression. The synthesis of syntactic arrangement, semantic symbolism, and pragmatic engagement produces a layered discourse that both entertains and educates. This interplay of signs affirms Morris's assertion that meaning is not confined to the symbols themselves but arises through the interpreter's cultural and social context.

Ultimately, PBBM-related political memes utilize semiotic elements—icons, symbols, and indices—not merely to represent political issues but to mediate public discourse. Through their humorous yet critical tone, they expose contradictions between political imagery and governance realities, creating a cultural space where satire, critique, and social commentary converge. As Tifentale (2020) emphasizes, such memes embody the evolution of political communication in the digital age—where humor becomes a powerful rhetorical tool for reflection, resistance, and community dialogue.

**Table 2: Signified Elements: Levels of Meaning**

| Meme | Denotative Meaning (Literal) | Connotative Meaning (Implied or Associated) | Mythological Meaning (Cultural Significance) |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | The image literally shows a group of political figures (represented as caricatures) enjoying a lavish feast with bags of money, champagne, and food. They are seated at a table with a visual contrast to the people kneeling | Wealth and Power<br><br>Subjugation and Loyalty<br><br>Blind Loyalty | Political Dynasty and Patronage<br><br>Subjugation in Filipino Politics<br><br>Wealth as a Symbol of Legitimacy |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | under the table, who appear to be poor or marginalized.<br><br>The phrase "SOLID BBM PARIN KAMI" is boldly written to convey loyalty to Bongbong Marcos, with a clear depiction of wealth and subjugation. | | |
| 2 | The image is structured in a comparison format, showing various figures (a vampire, Superman, BBM) and their respective fears or weaknesses (sunlight, kryptonite, Jessica Soho's interview). It uses humor and juxtaposition to imply that BBM avoids accountability or tough questions. | Avoidance of Scrutiny<br><br>Vulnerability<br><br>Perception of Authority | Media as a Watchdog<br><br>Politicians and Accountability<br><br>Good vs. Evil Archetype |
| 3 | The cartoon shows a young man sarcastically congratulating a political figure on reaching a "milestone" where rice prices are at ₱40 per kilo, contradicting the promise of ₱20 per kilo. The young man points to different signage displaying variations of the promised price (e.g., ₱20, ₱40) to emphasize the | Broken Promises<br><br>Public Frustration<br><br>Economic Struggles | Campaign Promises as Political Tactics<br><br>Rice as a Symbol of Livelihood<br><br>Public Accountability |
| | unfulfilled pledge. | | |
| 4 | The image portrays Bongbong Marcos using a meme format where Homer Simpson disappears into a hedge. It humorously suggests that BBM retreats or avoids the spotlight in moments of difficulty, as illustrated by the text at the top. | Avoidance of Accountability<br><br>Critique of Leadership<br><br>Public Perception of Inaction | Political Avoidance in Leadership<br><br>Memes as Modern Satire<br><br>The Marcos Name and Expectations |
| 5 | The image shows BBM speaking emphatically, with the text "HINDI KAMI BAYAD NG TAXES" added to humorously imply his family's unpaid estate tax controversy. It visually mimics a political rally or statement but flips the context for comedic effect. | Tax Evasion Critique<br><br>Public Frustration<br><br>Political Mockery | Power and Impunity in Politics<br><br>Tax as Symbol of Citizenship<br><br>Memes as Social Commentary |

Table 2 highlights the signified —specifically the denotative, connotative, and mythological meanings — of the PBMM political memes.

At the denotative level, each meme presents visually recognizable elements—such as caricatures, textual captions, and familiar pop culture references—that directly point to real-world entities associated with President Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr. (BBM) and his administration. The use of humor, parody, and exaggeration makes these images easy to understand and relatable to audiences.

For instance, Meme 1 depicts a lavish banquet scene where political figures feast at a grand table while citizens kneel beneath them. This literal image of indulgence and hierarchy directly represents the socio-economic divide

between the ruling elite and the general populace. The text "SOLID BBM PARIN KAMI" ("We are still solid for BBM") reinforces this scene by emphasizing loyalty, despite the visible inequality. Similarly, Meme 2, which employs the "Homer Simpson hedge" format, shows BBM retreating from confrontation, a direct visual cue symbolizing avoidance of accountability.

Other memes adopt symbolic yet straightforward representations: Meme 3 centers on a rice price signage referencing BBM's campaign promise of ₱20 rice, while Meme 5 uses the phrase "HINDI KAMI BAYAD NG TAXES" ("We don't pay taxes") as a humorous but explicit nod to the Marcos family's controversial estate tax issue. The literal depictions of rice, price tags, and tax statements lay the visual foundation for deeper connotative and mythological meanings.

Connotatively, these memes communicate ideological and emotional undertones that reflect public dissatisfaction with political leadership. They embed satire and irony within culturally recognizable symbols to critique corruption, unfulfilled promises, and social inequality.

In Meme 1, the contrast between opulence (money bags, champagne, lavish food) and subservience (kneeling citizens) connotes the persistence of class disparity and the moral detachment of leaders from the suffering of ordinary people. The phrase "SOLID BBM PARIN KAMI" becomes ironic—it appears as support but, in context, ridicules blind political loyalty, a recurring theme in Philippine dynastic politics (Vihma, 2021).

Meme 2, which employs superhero and vampire analogies, amplifies the idea of avoidance. BBM is depicted as a figure who retreats from accountability, echoing Barthes' (2018) notion of mythic representation—where symbols of strength (the superhero) paradoxically reveal vulnerability and cowardice. Likewise, the "Homer Simpson" meme reinforces the image of BBM evading scrutiny, humorously reflecting the public perception of an unresponsive leader.

In Meme 3, the exaggerated sarcasm about rising rice prices ("congratulating" BBM for higher costs) embodies economic disillusionment and frustration over unmet promises (Morales, 2020). Meanwhile, Meme 5's humorous declaration about taxes masks public anger over systemic privilege and inequality. Through these connotations, private sentiments of frustration, anger, and cynicism are transformed into shared social critique, aligning with Barthes' (1972) idea of connotation as the space where ideology becomes visible.

At the mythological level, the memes deconstruct and challenge dominant political narratives, revealing how humor operates as a tool of ideological resistance. According to Barthes (1972), myths function by naturalizing power relations and making ideology appear as common sense; in this context, political memes expose and subvert such myths through irony and satire.

One recurring myth in the analyzed memes concerns political dynasties and patronage. The slogan "SOLID BBM PARIN KAMI" reaffirms the myth of unconditional loyalty, suggesting that devotion to political figures persists even amid corruption and inefficiency (Vihma, 2021). This reflects how Filipino political culture often valorizes allegiance over accountability.

Another myth exposed by the memes is that of wealth as legitimacy. The imagery of feasting elites surrounded by money and luxury (Meme 1) perpetuates the idea that economic power equates to political right. This visual association aligns with the enduring perception that political authority in the Philippines is tied to social status and material privilege (Morales, 2020).

The myth of the evasive leader also emerges strongly. Meme 2 and Meme 4 (Homer Simpson hedge meme) embody this trope, presenting BBM as the archetype of a leader who avoids scrutiny and difficult questions—reviving a familiar cultural narrative of unaccountable governance. Similarly, the rice price meme (Meme 3) alludes to the myth of unfulfilled promises, portraying campaign pledges as political tools rather than genuine commitments.

Meme 5, centered on tax evasion, recontextualizes the controversy as a myth of impunity, in which elites transcend accountability and remain untouchable by law. This resonates with the broader public belief that political power often shields individuals from justice.

Finally, the circulation and virality of these memes themselves create a new digital myth—one where online satire becomes a form of collective political engagement. As Tifentale (2020) notes, memes act as modern folklore, democratizing political discourse by allowing ordinary citizens to participate in critique through humor. In this way, PBBM-related memes not only dismantle existing political myths but also construct new narratives of public dissent, resistance, and awareness.

The findings demonstrate that PBBM-related political memes function as multimodal texts that blend humor, symbolism, and satire to critique power structures and governance in the Philippines. Using Morris's framework, the syntactic organization of visual and verbal signs orchestrates layered meanings; semantically, these signs symbolize political issues and public sentiment; pragmatically, they mobilize digital participation and sociopolitical critique. Barthes's denotative, connotative, and mythological dimensions further reveal how memes translate complex political realities into culturally resonant forms of communication.

Ultimately, these memes act as instruments of digital resistance, enabling citizens to voice dissent through

humor. Their effectiveness lies in transforming everyday online spaces into arenas of symbolic protest—where laughter and irony conceal deep frustration, and where semiotic play becomes a subtle yet powerful act of political engagement.

## 3. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The semiotic analysis of PBBM-related memes reveals the dynamic role of digital humor as a powerful medium for political expression and public engagement. Rooted in semiotic theory, the findings demonstrate that memes function not merely as sources of entertainment but as multimodal texts that encode complex ideological messages through the interplay of visual and textual signs. As Burgess and Green (2018) and Shifman (2013) emphasize, internet memes have evolved into participatory tools that allow citizens to engage in socio-political discourse beyond traditional media platforms.

The memes analyzed employ icons, symbols, and indexes to critique political leadership and expose societal issues. Iconically, the exaggerated portrayals of Bongbong Marcos Jr. (BBM)—whether as a superhero avoiding kryptonite, a vampire evading sunlight, or a retreating Homer Simpson—visually dismantle the authority of the political figure. These images reduce the distance between politicians and the public, transforming the leader into an object of satire and scrutiny. The humor embedded in such caricatures simultaneously entertains and provokes reflection, inviting audiences to question political behavior and accountability.

Symbolically, recurring elements such as the rice price signage, red jacket, and tax references encapsulate public frustration over economic disparity, unfulfilled promises, and the perceived impunity of political elites. The rice imagery, for example, signifies both livelihood and disappointment, reflecting the broken campaign promise of lowering rice prices. Meanwhile, the text "HINDI KAMI BAYAD NG TAXES" humorously recontextualizes a serious controversy, signaling collective resentment toward systemic injustice. These symbols, as Eco (2018) asserts, acquire meaning through shared cultural experience—transforming everyday objects into political commentaries that resonate widely across social media spaces.

From a pragmatic perspective, these memes act as participatory discourse, fostering dialogue, resistance, and community-building among online users. Humor becomes a rhetorical strategy that diffuses tension while amplifying critique, making sensitive political issues more approachable. Through likes, shares, and remixes, audiences contribute to meaning-making, embodying what Shifman (2014) describes as the "collective production of political culture." The virality of these memes underscores their communicative power: they democratize political critique and provide a channel for civic engagement in ways that traditional journalism or institutional communication often cannot.

The results also indicate that memes operate at multiple semiotic levels—denotative, connotative, and mythological—to encode critique and reconstruct dominant political narratives. Denotatively, they reference real-world figures and events; connotatively, they articulate emotional responses such as frustration, irony, and disillusionment; and mythologically, they dismantle enduring myths of political dynasties, wealth-based legitimacy, and impunity. By recontextualizing political myths into humorous digital forms, memes invite audiences to see governance through a critical, self-aware lens. These findings affirm that memes have become significant agents in shaping public perception and political discourse. They allow citizens to challenge authority, question promises, and expose contradictions in leadership within the accessible, humorous format of online communication. The dual role of political memes as both instruments of critique and reinforcement of ideology underscores their complexity as cultural artifacts in the digital age.

Building on these results, future studies could examine how demographic variables—such as age, education, and political orientation—affect the interpretation and reception of political memes. Understanding these interpretive differences can deepen insights into how humor, symbolism, and ideology interact across social groups, particularly in Philippine political culture.

Moreover, recognizing the communicative power of memes has practical implications. Political strategists may incorporate meme-based strategies to connect with younger, digitally active audiences. However, such use must be balanced with authenticity and ethical communication to avoid manipulation or misinformation.

Finally, the findings highlight the importance of media literacy education in fostering critical awareness of digital semiotics. Educational programs that teach the analysis of signs, symbols, and ideological framing can help individuals discern the implicit messages in memes, empowering them to engage thoughtfully with political content online. As memes continue to blur the line between humor and critique, developing these analytical skills becomes crucial for sustaining informed and democratic participation in the digital public sphere.

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