

A Critical Discourse Analysis of Ideology in Selected Iraqi Memes on Facebook

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ABSTRACT

Nowadays, people tend to use various ways of communication to communicate, deliver messages, express ideas and opinions and/or influence others. Due to the advancement of technology in general and social media in particular, using memes is considered one of easiest and most influential ways of spreading opinions that carry overt and covert ideologies. This study is aimed to reveal how Iraqi internet users employ these internet memes to spread their ideologies. The study takes into consideration the semiotic, linguistic and socio-cultural dimensions into consideration in analyzing the visual-textual aspects of these selected Iraqi memes to reach a better understanding of the purpose and the profound meanings of such memes that people might not fully grasp. The researcher tries critically, by using Fairclough (1989) and Wodak (2011) approaches, analysing the overt and covert ideologies implied in the language of internet memes and show how these ideologies can be used to affect others within its social-cultural context.

KEYWORDS

Critical discourse analysis; ideology; memes; Facebook; Stance

INTRODUCTION

Internet memes, as modern digital units cultural phenomenon that are rapidly spread through the internet among society members and carry overt and covert ideologies in one way or another. These memes are very popular for many reasons such as humor, irony, amusement, entertainment, advertisement, political and religious propaganda etc. in addition to their ease of formation, (re) production by users.

This paper aims at analysing the ideologies of Iraqi internet memes on Facebook under the umbrella of the critical approaches to examine whatever overt and covert ideologies reflected the intention of their producers and the inferences of their consumers. This analysis takes into consideration the socio-cultural context of these internet memes to reach their deep meaning(s). Moreover, the interaction between the text and images of those memes is also of great importance to detect any hidden ideologies.

The selected data includes seven internet memes chosen randomly by the researcher from the social network Facebook that is widely popular among Iraqi people. It is expected to explain any deep hidden ideologies intended by the producer of the memes for the aim of raising the awareness of the consumer or receiver of these memes.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Memes

Definitions and Nature

Memes, as a metaphoric coined term firstly in 1976 by Dawkins (2006) in his book “The Selfish Gene” to refer to the cultural evolution of internet cultural transmission and communication, are widely used nowadays by internet users all over the world with the features of fidelity, fecundity and longevity.

Distin (2005) views memes as information units which carry certain cultural representation(s) by using language as one of its representational systems while Chandler (2012) defines internet memes as a particular ‘netizen’ socio-cultural items of artifacts.

Milner (2012, iii) presents his definition of internet memes as “amateur media artifacts, extensively remixed and recirculated by different participants on social media networks.” This definition imply the aspects of multimodality and semiotics, which aims to create a “change in the circulation and flow of discourses across social and cultural” (ibid.)

Davidson (2009:122) defines memes as “a piece of culture typically a joke” that creates a certain degree of influence “through online transmission” such as social networks. Davidson’s definition concentrates on the cultural aspects of memes to recognize such usage of memes and to achieve the intended impact on receivers. Anugrah Putra and Triyono (2016:51) definition goes in line with Davidson’s (2009) concerning the cultural aspects of memes as “culture makers”, which reflect “the cultural background” of their socio-cultural contexts. This goes in line with Anugrah Putra and Triyono’s (2016: 49) view of that meme is “a form of digitization from the participatory culture of the internet”.

Shifman (2014: 41) sees internet memes as “a group of digital items sharing common characteristics of content, form, and/or stance, which were created with awareness of each other”. He (ibid.) also concentrates on the fact that memes are going to be “circulated, imitated, and/or transformed via the internet by many users” which represents an important factor of their spread. Dynel (2016: 662) definition matches the definition of (Shifman, 2014) as memes for him are “any artifact that appears on the internet and produces countless derivatives by being imitated, remixed, and rapidly diffused by countless participants in technologically mediated communication”.

These definitions are in line with Laineste and Voolaid (2016: 27) definition who see that memes have the property of mixing both pictures with text in creating memes, and also matches the definitions of Olszewska and Koczorowicz (2019:3) who that memes ultimately activating many relationships and connections in the minds of their receives as “an example of conceptual blends.”

From the above, internet memes can be defined as units of information, mostly combining pictures and texts, that are relatively easy to (re)produce and quickly spread among internet users. They carry their ideas, opinions and ideologies whether overt or covert as, in one way or another, they reflect the socio-cultural background that should be studied, analysed and understood within context.

Functions

Many scholars who study internet memes try to detect their different functions and uses manage to list many of them as follows. Barone and Eisner (1997) try to as exhibiting to a greater or lesser degree seven specific features:

- i. Creating a Virtual Reality (ies),
- ii. Ambiguity Existence,
- iii. Using Expressive Language,

- iv. Using Vernacular and/or Contextualized Language,
- v. The Empathy Promotion,
- vi. The Personal Signature of the Researcher/Writer,
- vii. The Presence of Aesthetic Form.

Dawkins (2006) lists some of the most important aims of using memes by internet users as follows:

- i. cultural transmission process
- ii. language,
- iii. custom,
- iv. ceremonial practices,
- v. art,
- vi. architecture,
- vii. Advertisement,
- viii. Political propaganda,
- ix. Ideologies.

These functions match the observations of many scholars such as Milner (2012) and De la Rosa-Carrillo (2015) Putra and Triyono (2016), Zubaidah and Ardelia (2018).

In a nutshell, the wide array of functions offered by internet memes allows different internet users to employ them to include their overt and covert ideologies in an easy and accessible way for all. This includes producing and reproducing these memes in a way that reflects social and cultural values and political orientations in one way or another.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

Fairclough (1995:133) sees CDA as a part of the field of discourse analysis that aims to detect and identify the concealed ideologies using the linguistic elements in discourse to denaturalize discourse and raise the awareness of lay people. This increasing of people's awareness help them resist any kind of ideological abuse that might affect their ideas, opinions and positions which is something that van Dijk (1991:252; 1998: 1) agrees upon. What distinguishes CDA from other forms of discourse analysis is its element of 'critical' (Costales, 2021). Fairclough (1995, 2001) indicates that the nature of CDA approach to discourse is a multidisciplinary, which considers language use as "a form of social practice". Raising the awareness of people of the hidden ideologies is one of the aims of CDA approaches as Pennycook (2001:191) observes when he states "it aims to make the social ideological systems and representations transparent and to show how they are related to the broader social order."

Van Dijk (2003) defines that CDA is a type of the approaches discourse analysis research, which primarily aims to study the system of how "social power dominance abuse and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context."

CDA as an analytical approach takes advantage of whatever methods, tools, approaches and theories and put them in the hands of researchers to form a complete picture of the discourse under scrutiny for the aim of demystifying natural discourses and uncover the overt and covert ideologies. That is why CDA is a multidisciplinary approach.

Critique and Stance

Critical, in Wodak's (2001:12) words, basically means:

“not taking things for granted, opening up complexity, challenging reductionism, dogmatism and dichotomies, being self-reflexive in one’s research, and through these processes, making opaque structures of power relations and ideologies manifest”.

Fairclough (1989:5) indicates that ‘critical’ refers to the process of detecting and uncovering any ideologies that ordinary people do not or even cannot realize, i.e., critique in CDA means not to “observe and interpret” but to “judge and prescribe”

Therefore, critical means that putting discourse under deep investigation and analysis to detect and uncover any hidden ideologies, which demands the position and opinions of the researcher himself to promote people’s thinking and awareness.

Anyone who wishes to conduct a critical analysis of any kind can should take into consideration the following points to reach a valid productive analysis:

1. Finding ties and connections between the posted memes and their socio-cultural contexts from a critical point of view to both the form and the content of the memes (Knight, 2010).
2. This contextual connection helps the researcher show how culture, values, knowledge, norms, ideology and digital creativity to the receivers and their effects on them (Lehdonvirta, 2010).
3. This knowledge presented to the readers will eventually help them increase their awareness of the overt and covert ideologies that memes carry (Lessig, 2008).
4. Stance can provide the researcher with ability of detecting the ways new virtual technology and media tools follow and ultimately define them accordingly. Moreover, how these new virtual technology communication work on spreading political, social and cultural ideologies, i.e., producing, reproducing and interpreting ideologies by both the producers and the receivers. (Decker-Maurer, 2012)

Ideology

Van Dijk (1995:21) states that ideology is “a specific basic framework of social cognition with specific social structures and specific and social functions”. This is demonstrated during in language and discourse during communication, i.e., it establishes “links between discourse and society” and indicates to the mental representations shared of social groups Van Dijk (2006:115) which are “acquired, confirmed, changed and perpetuated through discourse” (ibid).

Wodak (2015b:8) claims that ideology for CDA is

“not that explicit type of ideology that interests CDA, it is rather the more hidden and latent inherent in everyday-beliefs, which often appear disguised as conceptual metaphors and analogies, thus attracting linguists’ attention”

Memes as an Ideology

Hofstadter (1983,18) sees memes act ideologically as follows:

"Memes- like genes, are susceptible to variation or distortion – the analogue of mutation. Various mutations of a meme will have to compete with one another, as well as with other memes, for attention, that is, for brain resources in terms of both space and time devoted to that meme."

Hofstadter (1983) also adds that memes compete to reach receivers through all means of communication and interaction to draw people’s attention beyond the aims of memes per se. Distin (2005) observes that using language in creating memes represents an ideological concepts which the targeted society to reject or accept.

Stryker (2011) defines memes as “a new visual way” that internet users “succinctly communicate opinions and emotions”. This definition focuses on two important features of memes, which are their nature of visuality and succinctly by using images to deliver the message, opinions, emotions and carrying ideologies. Moreover, memes serve their users to form and deliver the intended messages beyond their primary immediate humor and amusement.

Shifman (2014:18) observes certain ideological qualities of internet memes such as:

- i. their “gradual propagation from individuals to society,”
- ii. their “reproduction via copying and imitation,”
- iii. their “diffusion through competition and selection,”
- iv. their contextual and historical nature,
- v. their ironic, quasi dada ethos,

Shifman (2014) concentrates on the fact that memes cannot be understood without their original socio-cultural contexts, which is a feature that might differentiate such tool from other digital imageries. Moreover, memes; after posting on the virtual network; are accessed, consumed and shared by countless number of users who actively engage in the processes of “remixing, recontextualizing and repurposing” of them. These processes lead to the widespread of overt and covert ideologies, ideas and values among internet users and receivers.

Anugrahputra and Triyono (2016: 51) recognize the fact that both producers and receivers use memes as a means to spread ideological knowledge, ideas, positions and propaganda because of their efficiency and the ease of access. Ostanina and Majdzinska (2019: 2) see that internet memes serve multiple ideological functions such as entertainment, criticism or commentary by different network users.

Wiggins (2018) concentrates that memes have a profound conceptual and cognitive effect on their receivers. This affect ultimately lead to alter, change or even distort facts and receivers’ opinions and stances as memes “spreads much like a disease”. Internet memes are a combination of both phrases and images aim to create a humorous jokes about a topic whether social, religious or political as kostadinovska and Shalevska (2018: 159) indicate "jokes that are presented through ‘image text’ or ‘gif text’ or just ‘a plain text’” by using different internet social platforms.

Therefore, it is difficult to underestimate the role of memes as just internet phenomena because their role goes beyond that to the creation of influence on others within the social world due to the fact that memes are an ideology (ies) carrier. Memes have a great importance and value because it contributes in the formation of, or at least reflect modern culture and change their audience minds, or at least alter or affect them.

The Model of Analysis

Fairclough (1989) Critical Model of Analysis

Fairclough (1989) provides scholars with a three-dimensional model to analyze critically any texts and discourse. Fairclough is considered the pioneer of presenting contribution to the field of CDA to detect any overt and covert ideologies embodied in these texts and the effect they make on others.

The model consist of three stages yet they are related to each other. The researcher applies this model in analysing internet memes as follows:

The first stage will deal with the description of the contents of the internet memes whether the language verbal content or the visual content of the pictures. Selecting any linguistic tools in any discourse fragment is up to the researcher as long they achieve the aim(s) of his study.

The second stage aims to interpret the process of production and consumption of both contents of the memes pragmatically by the means of speech acts and their kind, presuppositions, relevance maxims, taking into consideration whatever contextual information provided by the memes that might affect their the processes of understanding and interpretation by receivers.

The third stage of the model aims at the explanation of critical interpretation taking into consideration whatever historical and sociocultural dimensions or backgrounds or aspects of the internet memes that might be helpful to understand the discursive ideological aspects behind producing those internet memes.

Discourse Historical Approach (DHA)

Reisigl (2017: 44) argues that DHA is one of the most prominent critical approaches of studying discourse. It is “a flexible and productive variety” of CDA approaches that tends to be “a problem-oriented perspective” (ibid: 47).

In spite the definition of van Dijk (2003: 356) of context as “mentally represented structures of those properties of the social situation that are relevant for the production or comprehension of discourse”, DHA tries to systematically analyze making of situational meaning of discourse within its context that is historical in nature (Reisigl, 2017: 44).

Wodak and Ludwig (1999:21) strongly claim that:

“discourse (...) is always historical, that is, it is connected synchronically and diachronically with other communicative events which are happening at the same time or which have happened before”.

This means that DHA approach tries to make use of whatever available background knowledge and historical sources of ‘the social and political fields in which discursive events’ are occurred to reach a complete picture of the produced ideological discourse and their effect on receivers. Moreover, DHA tend to use “wherever integration [that] leads to an adequate understanding and explanation of the research object”

DHA approach, according to Wodak (2011: 628), aims to explore the ways of discourse “change over time by integrating the different social theories to explain the socio-cultural context” to reach transparent, clear systematic and explicit analysis of the *intertextual* historical dimension of the ideological discursive practices of discourse. This leads to the adaptation of the process of reconstruction of the functions of recontextualization to link texts and discourses interdiscursively and intertextually over time.

Any textual and discourse Ideologies and/or tools and categories are not fixed once and for all. Their proposed framing and aims for each analysis is exceptionally recognized and determined by the targeted problem(s) under study and investigation.

The adopted critical model of analysis is explained in Figure (1).

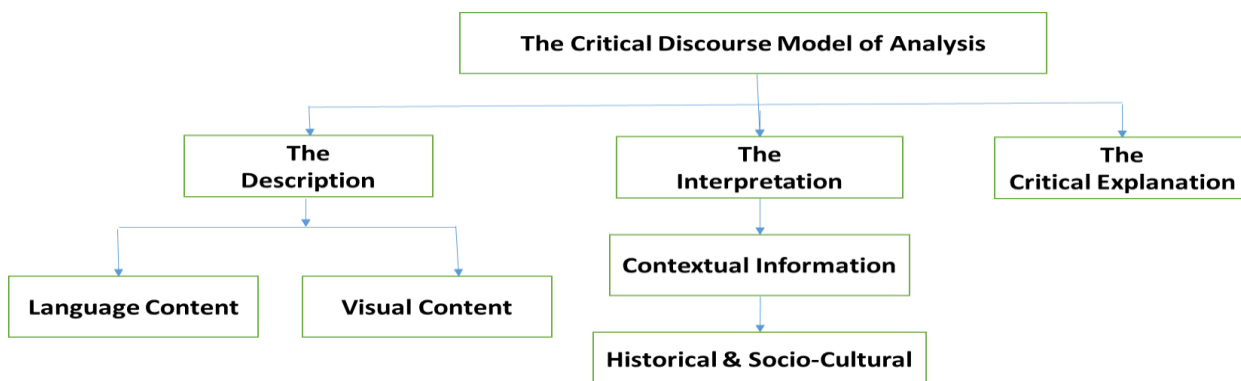


Figure 1. The Adopted Critical Model of Analysis

RESEARCH METHODS

Data selection

The researcher here uses ‘image macros’ internet memes as data for analysis for many reasons. One reason is that they are the most common type of internet memes (re)produced and received by internet users. Moreover, according to Milner (2012, 89) image macros memes are also “one of the clearest examples of interplay of imitation and transformation in the process that guides the construction of memes.”

Brown (2012:96) (cited in De la Rosa-Carrillo, 2015: 18) describes image macros as:

“Captioned images that typically consist of a picture and a witty message or a catchphrase. The structure of an image macro usually consists of a picture with text above and below the image in the macro [...] the macro is applied to offer a representation of social cues that accompany a response during a conversation.”

Grundlingh (2017) indicates that an image macro:

“becomes standard when the image or the image and the catchphrase are used over and over again. Standard image macros (a stable image with variations in text) are in my opinion the most popular memes. Standard image macros can become so popular that they get named by internet users.”

As typical memes consists of two element, i.e., pictures and texts, it is important to take both of them into consideration in any study or conducting analysis to reach a better understanding of their aims, power and affect

This researcher conducts qualitative study that aims to explore how internet memes can be analyzed under the umbrella of critical approaches. Therefore, the researcher randomly, based on the needs of the requirements of the research, chooses seven internet memes that deals with different political, social and educational issues.

The selected data are internet memes that consist of one or multiple of images, words, phrases and sentences. The data is taken from the social network of Facebook only, as the title of the research suggests, because it is the widely known and used by Iraqis in comparison with other types of social networks.

The researcher adopts the qualitative approach rather than quantitative to show how critical theories are applied to such internet memes and to what extent such analysis can produce valid, sound, deep and productive analysis.

The Method of Analysis

Firstly, the researcher describes the selected internet memes components such as the linguistic and semiotic elements and/or their combination in addition to the translation of the words, phrases and sentences from Arabic into English.

Secondly, it is important to identify the wider socio-cultural political contexts of the internet meme to conduct a valid critical analysis. Then, moving forward to examine how such memes do help construct and reinforce certain ideologies whether overt and covert that ultimately create social power relations, hierarchies, dominance and inequality.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Meme No. 1



Description:

This meme consists visually from the main picture, which is a car, an emoji, and the written content, which is also, contains a three successive emojis. The picture itself, i.e., the car, also contains a written content.

The translation of written content of the picture is “Women are the main cause of heart diseases...however; Smoking is innocent from this accusation”.

The comment is “It is obvious that the Haj/the man is fed up”

The written content is an analogy or an imitation of the warning Cigarette Warning Labels found on cigarettes packages all over the world. To understand this meme and interpret it fully, the receiver should resort to the concept of intertextuality to relate the meaning of this meme with the Cigarette Warning Label text.

The meme here, with its written content dominates the written comment. This means that the picture is enough to reach a valid suitable interpretation of the aims and ideology of the meme.

Critical Analysis

This meme confirms and asserts, wrongfully, the idea that women are the main cause of diseases in the world in contrary to the common known scientific fact that smoking is the main cause of diseases. Such kinds of offensive and misleading connotations represent a perpetuation to the damaging gender stereotyping.

The aim of this meme is to accuse women and make men victims, which imply that men are suffering from women, their troubles, their wickedness, etc. furthermore, such memes help depict women as deceitful, manipulative while men are helpless victims due women’s actions.

Moreover, as such memes help perpetuating harmful gender stereotyping and contribute creating blame and shame against women. This hidden ideology, of suggesting that women are the main cause of the dangerous disease of cancer, can create a culture where women are blamed for all the troubles and problems the men and society face on daily basis. This resulted ideological stereotyping can contribute creating socio-cultural atmosphere of misogyny and gender-based orientation, where women are mainly blamed for the problems of men rather than being seen as supportive, partnership and understanding.

In conclusion; such harmful memes, in spite of their aim of joking and creating humor affect, are harmful, inaccurate and perpetuate damaging gender stereotyping that should be

noticed by the public in order to reduce their damaging effects to women's rights and to the whole progress of gender equality.

Meme No. 2



Description:

This meme consists of two parts, the first, at the upper half of the picture, is a group of people, and each one represents a governorate of Iraq, while the lower part represents the governorate of Basra at the south. The upper governorates are Mosul, Karbala, Anbar, Baghdad, and Duhok at different parts of Iraq.

The visual meaning of the picture is that all the residents of those governorates are happily playing with snow during the summer while the residents of Basra are suffering from the very hot atmosphere during the months of summer.

From a social and cultural perspective, this meme is a strong reflection to the significant differences climate and weather patterns among the regions of the Iraq. This meme reinforces a power dynamic in which some regions Iraq are seen as more comfortable, i.e., the north or/and desirable than others, i.e., the south.

Critical Analysis

The picture here dominates the interpretation of the meme leading the receiver to relate the meme with its social-cultural context to reach its intended hidden message and meaning.

To produce such memes about cold and hot places in Iraq during summer, this particular meme uses only images to imply humor and political agenda. It implies a severe criticism to the successive local Iraqi government(s) and the local government(s) of Basra due to their incompetence in offering services such as electricity and clean water during the hot months of summer. This leads to strong protesting and demonstration to claim services which eventually led to clashes with the security forces and broke into some governmental institutions and buildings.

Challenging this political corruption through humor and satire, the meme can be seen as an active method of attacking, destabilizing and questioning dominant political narratives to justify the failure of providing services and particularly electricity to people.

In conclusion, adopting a critical approach of analysing such internet memes, about hot and cold places in Iraq during the season of summer, can also reveal how the usage of only semiotic imagery without any text constructing and reinforcing any hidden ideologies and aims. This kind of analysis helps exam the meme in their wider context and dimensions to

reach a better deep understanding of how to shape people’s perception of political hidden aims.

This meme; within its wider contexts; reflects to some degree the long complex economic, territorial and political conflict between the Iraqi government in Baghdad and the Kurdistan Regional Government. Such meme reflects two directions of accusations, which are: the people accusations against the central government of the spread of corruption and the faltering government plans to address the electricity infrastructure and the poor development of southern cities, compared to the Kurdistan government, which has largely succeeded in developing the northern cities which become a safe and stable tourist destination for the rest of the Iraqis. The other accusation is; according to what the majority of the Iraqi people think; is directed against the government of Kurdistan, which does not actively participate the central government budget from the region's revenues while demanding and obtaining its politically and parliamentary percentage of about 17% within hidden partisan political understandings and agreements.

Meme No. 3



Description:

This memes consists of three pictures compounding together as follows:

The first picture is of a white cat represents the students of the scientific section of the preparatory (high) schools in Iraq. The translation of the text is as follows **“The Students of the Scientific Section: You are donkeys, you do not understand anything”**.

The second picture of the two western actors who are crying and yelling. The translation of the text is as follows **“The Students of the Literary Section: No, You are the donkeys”**.

The third picture represents the students of the two sections are working as builders in the same place. The translation of the text is as follows **“After graduation, The Students of the Scientific Section, The Students of the Literary Section”**.

Critical Analysis

Such internet memes, about literary and scientific section students, can perpetuate destructive stereotypes and create a sense of psychological partition between students. These social and cultural stereotypes can be damaging to the students’ self-esteem of and create antagonistic and hostile learning environment.

This meme reflects the conflict and competition between the students of the two sections; i.e., the literary and the scientific in Iraq. The nature of the Iraqi educational system imposes the students of the preparatory schools to choose one of the two section in

the academic schools. The scientific section prepares the students to go to colleges such as medicine, pharmacy, engineering, etc. as well as the colleges of human sciences while the literary section prepares the students to go only the colleges of human sciences. Therefore, most Iraqi families encourage their boys and daughters to join the scientific section which ultimately most of the students prefer and do.

The meme reflects the hidden conflict as the students of the scientific students see themselves more intelligent and superior comparing with the students of the literary section. This feeling of superiority is resulted from the great amount of time, effort and money they spent on studying in public and private schools or in tutoring cycles of private sessions or institutions. Moreover, they think that the students of the literary section do not spend the same.

The meme also carries a criticize to the reality of the students after graduation as they both face the same result and destiny which is the fact that they will both work in jobs that do not match their field of study which ironically means that whether they make these efforts or not they will face the same destiny. This is reflected in the third picture where there are two men in the same face that is an Egyptian actor.

Moreover, in its wider context, such memes carry a hidden attack against the different Iraqi cabinets as their governments programs failed drastically to solve the problem of the youth especially the unemployment of graduate ones who resort to work in such jobs that are far from their field of study. At the same time, some young people resort to the drugs or the life of crime to gain money or escape from their reality.

Meme No. 4



Description:

This meme consists of the picture of the Iraqi Prime Minister Mr. Mustafa Al-Kadhimi (7th May 2020 – 13th October 2022) who was chosen after October protest against the political system, corruption and unemployment.

The picture of the prime minister is presented in this way with pictures of oil whose international price jumped from 40 \$ to 90. At the same time, the Iraqi dinar currency is downed from 1200 Iraqi Dinars per one US dollar into 1480 Iraqi Dinars while the cooking oil and flour are downed from 1500 Iraqi Dinars into 3000 Iraqi Dinars and 15000 Iraqi dinars into 40000 Iraqi dinars respectively.

From a pure linguistic perspective, the meme producer uses a mixture of four different pictures that represent the semiotic component of the meme, with number of prices only

that create, sent and deliver strong message. This meme tries to invoke certain type of stereotyping of political incompetence with humor

Critical Analysis

To conduct a valid and sound critical analysis of internet memes about the Iraqi Prime Minister, it is vital to first identify this meme and detect its wider context. Then, the analysis advances by investigating how such memes can build, reinforce and strength particular discourses, power relations and stereotypes. Therefore, this meme can be viewed and analyzed from a number of different perspectives, including its use of language, semiotics and humor.

For example, such memes are used to attack the protesters whose protests resulted in the resignation of the previous Iraqi Prime Minister Adil Abdul-Mahdi as critics argue that in spite of the international low price of oil, he managed to keep the prices of basic needs of the Iraqi families low.

So such memes carry two main hidden ideologies, the first is against the new government programs and the second is against the opponent political parties or individuals. Furthermore, creating such kinds of memes can be seen as a form of subversion and/or resistance against political power exercising of political authorities and leaders. People can use such technique to direct their dissatisfaction against the status quo such as the questioning of the level of effectiveness of the political leadership of the country by using semiotics, discourse and humor. They are used to resist the official political discourse and destabilizing such dominant narratives, i.e., politically speaking, the meme is seen as an echo of broader political struggles, conflicts and tensions in Iraq.

Meme No. 5



Description:

This meme represents an official document with many clerks signatures and the comment is **(Thank God, two (more) signatures to complete (the official process of) the document).**

Critical Analysis

This meme carries, in spite her simplicity, a heavy attack on official routine of the process of Iraqi institutions and departments. This exhausting process of ordinary citizens in the Iraqi official departments pushes people to take crooked ways to go about their affairs, such as nepotism and bribes.

To reach a sound critical analysis, the researcher should take in consideration not only the semiotic and linguistic components but also the cultural and social dimensions and contexts of the meme.

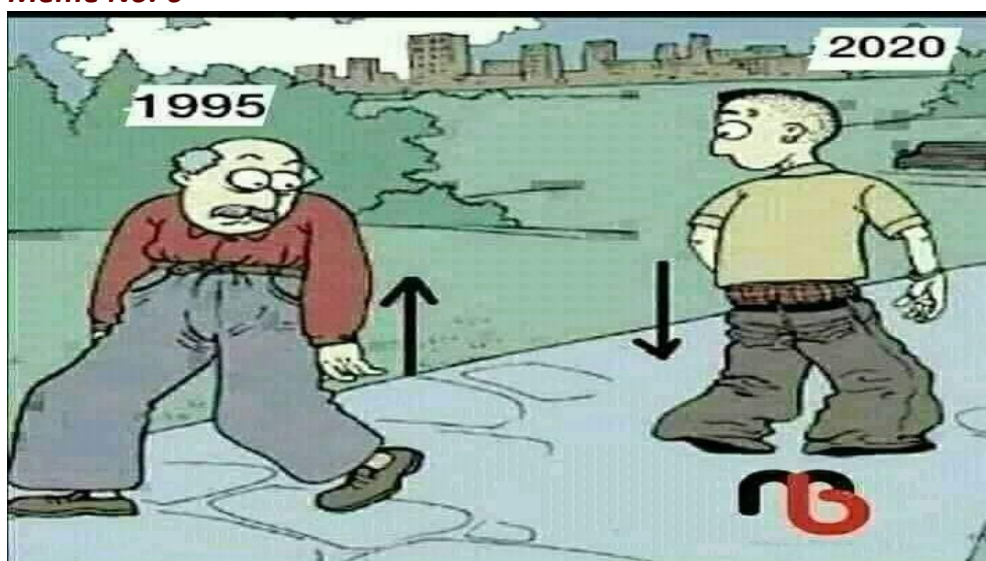
This meme represents a symbol attacks the long bored traditional schedule of finishing official documents. It also attacks the boredom nature of finishing monotony office jobs in addition to the lack of control, productivity, success, uncaring, incompetent, and flexibility in routine transactions in Iraqi government departments and official institutions. Moreover, it carries an attack against the slow, inefficient, corruption and frustrating associated and resulted from such long processes and oppressive and rigid routine,

Furthermore, this meme reinforces social power relations as it assumes that the official clerks and government employees; who are unresponsive, unhelpful, apathetic; possess power over ordinary people who comes to governmental institutions to finish their official documents. In other words, it reflects the taken for granted social norms or standards by both powerful and common people, which means that any violation for these norms will be considered challenging authorities and society rules, values and beliefs.

So, internet memes offer an easy way of destabilizing, challenging and questioning any kind of dominant ideologies and culture; that shape people's perceptions and view of the world and their place within it; which ultimately opening up new ways of thinking, possibilities and criticizing for acting against and/or the society, authorities, bureaucracy, government, civic responsibility and the world as a whole.

Overall, such kinds of internet memes is a manifestation of protest against the mentioned above reasons and reflect people's dissatisfaction with the status quo in Iraq. This meme helps people imagine new ways of living, working, claiming rights against the corrupted situation and the long way of official routines. Moreover, such critical analysis can explain how linguistic, social, and cultural aspects and/or dimensions are knotted and intertwined together to construct, build and reinforce particular discourses and power hierarchies and relations.

Meme No. 6



Description:

This meme, that contains side by side two images, shows an old man whose trousers are too much high on his waist while the trousers of the young boy are too much down. On the picture of the old man is the year 1995 while on the young boy is 2020. This meme shows an attack on both generations in a way that reflects the younger person dressed in trendy and modern clothing with strange bad taste for Iraqi society while the ones of an older man dressed in an outdated conservative and traditional clothing.

In spite of the fact that this meme is typically shared as a joke about how fashion changes over time and generation. However, it carries an attack and criticizes against both generations as the new young generation as they went too far from the Iraqi conservative traditions concerning clothes and behaviour while the old generation is not able to cope with the new fashion trends.

Critical Analysis

Such memes presuppose that there are essential and inherent differences between men and young concerning clothes and the view each one has towards the other in an exaggerated or amplified way for comic effect.

In spite of the fact that this meme distorts the differences of generation clothes fashion trends and styles as it wrongly reflects the adopted fashions of both generations. Old generation fashion is usually characterized by highly formal, conservative and structured clothing, with emphasis on traditions and society costumes, culture and appropriateness in addition to the inherited past limited access to manufacturing techniques and materials.

Trends of young clothing fashion usually tend to be modern, colorful with unique patterns in unconventional designs, which are affected by sport players, actors and celebrities, which are constantly changing due to the advancement of social networks, advertisement and media. Moreover, the mass production of clothes, which resulted in the ease of accessibility and affordability, makes them factors to produce new designers and brands that appeal the young individuality and diversity.

This meme perpetuates the negative stereotyping conflict between the two generations and the aggressive disgusting views and disrespect towards each other. This reinforces the false expectation and norms of society that both old and youth are undesirable, less valuable and less relevant.

In overall, a critical analysis of the differences between old generation and new generation concerning clothes fashion and trends requires a wider social, cultural, and economic examination of the factors that have shaped these changes and a deep consideration of their impact on both individuals and society as a whole.

Additionally, the meme reinforces the false idea that fashion is the sole or important domain that reflects the relationship between the two generations. This old generation, according to the meme, wants the young generation to stick to the old traditional conservative clothing. Moreover, the meme perpetuates the harmful assumption and stereotyping that older people should not or even cannot experience trendy modern fashion, which indicates falsely the limitation of people's individuality and scope.

Meme No. 7



Description:

This meme shows a mother who has one boy and one girl. The boy is lying down in his mother lab playing with her mobile while the girl is standing with her simple toy. The mother commands her daughter to bring water to her brother. The meme also shows that the girl is thinking of the result, as her brother is number one while she is number two.

Critical Analysis

This meme reflects and perpetuates the harmful masculinity stereotypes of the Iraqi society, as most families tend to prefer boys to girls in everyday situations. Moreover, this reinforces the traditional assigned gender roles of Iraqi domestic duties and tasks to girls from their early lives and suggests that boys are not indulged in performing these tasks inside houses.

Additionally, this meme also reinforces the societal expectation that girls are responsible for serving the boys and then when they became women and housewives their duties basically means that they serve their brothers, husbands and children only. This indicates the unequal distribution of domestic, inside houses labor and tasks, which indicates unequal relationships between men and women, i.e., dominance, inequality and power.

This is reflected in the preference of families to have boys rather than girls. Of course, such criticisms are increased due to the voices calling for equality and promoting women's rights.

Moreover, the meme focuses the psychological fact that both girls and boys in this age tend to have similar tendency to spend their time playing, while focusing on the different preferences which is mainly boys prefer to play with electronic devices while girls with classical traditional toys. This makes boys in frame as more equipped with technological development rather than girls are which ultimately reinforces the harmful gender stereotypes that limit girls' individuality and scope.

In conclusion, this meme perpetuates a harmful gender stereotyping by reinforcing traditional assigned gender roles, assuming that all girls' women are inferior and subservient rather than independent individuals, and ignoring any individual preferences and styles in life. It is important to critically detect, recognize, analyse and review such

types of internet memes for the sake of promoting gender equality, and challenge any societal expectations and norms concerning gender roles and responsibilities.

CONCLUSION

The conducted study has proved that using internet memes, as the more perceived form of transmitted content, goes beyond the mere funny spontaneous jokes, but rather the complex loaded multi-level aims of spreading the ideological ideas and propaganda. These ideologies try to affect other positions stance and understanding of the world socially, politically and culturally.

1. Due to the nature of remixing, producing and reproducing internet memes within the digital world in addition to their ever-changing dynamic units, their quick and rapid spread make them a favored tool to many internet users for different purposes to spread their emotions, feelings and ideas.
2. (Re)producing internet memes is done according to certain styles, conventions and rules which in one way or another deduce certain associations, intertextuality concerning the targeted figures, political and socio-cultural events. The processes of commenting, reacting, criticizing and re-creating these internet memes reflect this.
3. Understanding, explaining and interpreting internet memes should be within their social, political and cultural context(s) in addition to paying attention to their multimodality, semiotics and pragmatics aspects. So, analysing any potential cultural, social, and political messages of internet memes should take all these aspects into consideration to reach a better understanding of any overt and covert ideologies that serve influencing public opinions and directions in any particular society or reflecting their beliefs and attitudes.
4. In creating internet memes, producers use different types of linguistics or/and semiotic tools as means for implying their overt and covert ideologies as well as to reflect their intentions and provoke inferences whether they are positive or negative thoughts.
5. Internet memes producers resort to different linguistic tools such as presupposition strategies and triggers to direct the targeted audience into creating more effective and deeper influence upon them.
6. Such kinds of analysis does not detect the extent of their impact on individuals and society, the degree of promoting any positive and negative changes and influences, their contribution to the spreading and promoting any ideologies and ideas, stereotyping, (mis)information,
7. Approaching and adopting critical theories and methods in analysing internet memes is of great importance and advantage to detect any potential drawbacks, harms, negative, positives and benefits within their wider cultural-social context.
8. Social, cultural and political memes should be tackled, analysed and seen within their wider contexts in a particular context to reach sound and valid interpretation and effective deep analysis. Moreover, using critical approaches help other gaining deeper understanding of the way language and culture shape people's perceptions of imposed norms of society and politics as a step to challenge any subvert dominant ideologies.
9. Using critical approaches targeting such social networks, i.e. internet memes, helps raising the awareness of lay people of the overt and covert ideologies by offering linguistic and mental tools to analyse such detect such political, social and cultural ideologies.

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