

Decoding Philippine Facebook Memes: A Content Analysis of Their Cultural and Social Influence

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ABSTRACT

This study examined Facebook memes as cultural texts that mirror and influence Filipino popular culture, social values, and collective identity. Specifically, it explored meme-sharing trends among users, their contribution to pop culture and social discourse, and the messages, symbols, and ideologies embedded within them. Using a qualitative content analysis of purposively selected memes across six categories: showbiz, social, political, pop-culture mockery, ideological, and societal challenges and advocacies, the study interpreted the humor, critique, and cultural meanings expressed in these digital artifacts. Findings reveal that memes function as participatory and dialogic tools that encourage user interaction and shared expression. They allow people to transform everyday events, media moments, and social issues into satirical yet critical reflections. Showbiz and social memes nurture community engagement, political memes cultivate civic awareness, ideological memes preserve cultural beliefs, and societal challenge memes promote reflection and advocacy. The study deepens the multimodal and semiotic nature of memes in shaping Filipino digital discourse. Despite limitations related to qualitative scope and selected examples, the research contributes to understanding digital participatory culture, media literacy, and the role of humor in social commentary. The study recommends expanding future research to cover broader regions, platforms, and audiences. It also suggests integrating mixed methods and exploring the potential of memes for education and advocacy.

Keywords: Digital communication, Facebook memes, Filipino identity, popular culture, social discourse

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I. INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary digital age, technology has become an indispensable part of everyday life. It reshapes how people communicate, find entertainment, and participate in cultural discourse. Among these innovations, social media platforms, particularly Facebook, have become central spaces where individuals, especially younger generations, actively produce, share, and interpret content reflecting societal trends and personal perspectives. A prominent manifestation of this digital culture is the rise of memes as multimodal artifacts that entertain while reflecting social realities. They mediate shared understanding and encourage commentary on contemporary life. Likewise, memes combine visuals, text, and intertextual references to serve as influential tools for humor, critique, and reflection.

Originally conceived as simple humorous images, memes have evolved into multifaceted cultural expressions capable of representing collective emotions, opinions, and ideological positions (de Saint Laurent et al., 2021). Their participatory nature allows the audience to engage actively in content creation through imitation, modification, and reinterpretation. This practice promotes a culture of shared authorship and collaborative meaning-making (Qing, 2025). From a cultural semiotic perspective, memes function as visual and linguistic signs that convey meaning in socially situated contexts (Bezemer & Cowan, 2020). Their interpretive flexibility enables them to reach diverse netizens while simultaneously questioning social norms, values, and conventions.

Facebook's large user base and interactive features facilitate engagement, dialogue, and community-building. These characteristics make it a significant platform for meme circulation (Nazeer & Ashfaq, 2023). Memes on this platform address a wide range of topics, from politics and celebrity culture to everyday social experiences, creating spaces where humor and critique intersect (Koivukoski et al., 2024). Humor, exaggeration, and symbolic representation enable memes to communicate social commentary in accessible ways, reflecting emotions, values, and societal concerns (Zhang, 2023).

While existing studies have examined memes primarily in political, informational, or psychological contexts, research on their broader cultural significance remains limited. Prior scholarship recognizes memes as participatory cultural practices (Ajayi, 2020) and instruments of social commentary (Aminulloh et al., 2024), but much literature has focused on political messaging, misinformation, or cognitive effects (Masullo, 2023). There is a need to explore how Facebook memes operate as cultural agents that articulate, sustain, or transform public perceptions, social norms, and identity.

To address this gap, the present study framed memes as cultural texts embedded with social meanings that question norms and enrich collective identity. Guided by this perspective, the study sought to systematically examine Facebook memes to understand their role in shaping popular culture, transmitting social values, and constructing communal understanding within online communities. Specifically, it explored Facebook meme-sharing trends among users, analyzed the nature and contribution of memes to pop culture and social discourse, and identified the types of messages, symbols, and ideologies embedded within these digital artifacts. The study contributes to media and

cultural studies. It highlights how visual humor, creativity, and online interactivity serve as modes of communication and cultural production. The findings also offer insights that are valuable to educators, media practitioners, and cultural researchers.

Conceptual Framework

Filipino memes function as cultural texts that communicate meaning through semiotics, visual cues, and humor. They function as multimodal signifiers that integrate images, language, and cultural symbols within online environments. Memes can be categorized into three types: pop culture, political, and social. Each type reflects distinct aspects of Filipino life. Pop-culture memes highlight trends, media influences, and celebrity culture. Political memes convey critique, civic reflection, and engagement with governance. Social memes capture everyday experiences, values, and local customs.

Through the lenses of semiotics and humor, memes are understood as carriers of symbols, metaphors, and visual cues that communicate ideological, social, and cultural meanings. Parody, satire, and exaggeration enhance engagement. They allow users to address serious issues in accessible ways. Furthermore, this positions memes as active participants in digital culture. They serve not only as a source of entertainment but also as a form of cultural commentary. As they circulate online, memes shape public discourse and mirror shared experiences. As a result, they reinforce a sense of communal identity in contemporary Filipino life.

II. METHODS

A. Research Design and Data Collection

This study employed a qualitative content analysis to explore the meanings embedded in Filipino Facebook memes and their role in shaping popular culture. This approach allowed an in-depth examination of textual and visual elements. It uncovered the humor, social critique, and cultural values encoded in digital artifacts. A purposive sample of sixty publicly accessible memes was drawn from Facebook pages, groups, profiles, and websites recognized for active meme sharing. Selected memes reflected themes in pop culture, politics, social issues, and societal advocacies. Content with personally identifiable information or private communications was excluded to ensure ethical compliance. Engagement metrics such as reactions, shares, comments, and views were documented to contextualize the memes' popularity and resonance within the digital community.

B. Data Analysis

Memes were analyzed through systematic coding, categorization, and interpretation of both visual and textual elements. Researchers identified recurring patterns, symbols, and themes. They also examined communicative strategies and connected these findings to broader social, cultural, and political contexts. Each meme's cultural implications and ideological messages were explored alongside engagement data to provide insights into its visibility and impact. This multimodal approach

highlighted how memes function as sites of communication, identity formation, and ideological negotiation in online spaces.

C. Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to established ethical standards for digital research. Only publicly available memes were analyzed, and no personal or private information was collected. Sources were properly cited, and analyses respected the intellectual property and creative rights of meme creators. Deliberate attention was exercised to avoid misrepresentation or harm. This ensured ethical integrity throughout the research process.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Facebook Meme-Sharing Trends Among Users

The analysis of selected Facebook memes revealed that digital humor functions as a cultural text that both mirrors and shapes Filipino popular culture. Using qualitative content analysis, the study identified seven classifications of memes commonly shared on social media: showbiz memes, social memes, political memes, pop-culture mockery memes, ideological undercurrent memes, and societal challenges and advocacy memes. Among the collected sample, showbiz and social memes were the most frequently observed, together accounting for roughly half of the dataset. Political and pop-culture mockery memes represented approximately one-third, whereas ideological undercurrent and societal advocacy memes were less frequent yet carried deeper cultural and social meanings. This distribution indicates a trend in which Filipino users primarily engage with content that is immediately relatable and entertaining while still circulating memes that address societal values, critique politics, or highlight cultural beliefs (Ajayi, 2020).

Furthermore, showbiz memes focused on celebrity culture, employing satire and gossip to critique fame and public behavior. Similarly, social memes reflected everyday Filipino experiences, drawing humor from situations involving work, family, and community. Political memes confronted issues of governance and leadership through parody and irony. They stimulated reflection and invited critique by reframing public affairs in satirical form. In addition, pop-culture mockery memes featured familiar media figures and icons to create humor that resonated with the audience through shared entertainment references. Ideological undercurrent memes conveyed deeper cultural meanings by using humor and symbolism to express common beliefs, values, and traditions. Moreover, societal challenges and advocacy memes highlighted pressing social issues, such as environmental protection, health awareness, and human rights, often using humor or satire to raise awareness and promote civic engagement (Ajayi, 2020).

Overall, these observations suggest that humor and relatability dominate Filipino Facebook meme culture. In addition, the memes serve as instruments for critical engagement, cultural reflection, and social commentary as they demonstrate the dual role of humor as entertainment and as a tool for participatory discourse.

B. Nature and Contributions of Facebook Memes to Popular Culture and Social Discourse

Building on the observed trends, Facebook memes function as participatory cultural texts that reflect, critique, and shape Filipino popular culture. Across the dataset, humor, satire, parody, and visual storytelling consistently emerged as defining characteristics that engage the audience, nurture communal participation, and encourage reflection. While social and showbiz memes dominate in frequency, other types, such as political, ideological undercurrent, and advocacy memes, embody substantial cultural and social significance. (Ajayi, 2020; Bezemer & Cowan, 2020; AlAfnan, 2025). Consequently, these trends demonstrate how Filipino online communities employ memes to negotiate identity, social norms, and cultural meaning.

Specifically, showbiz memes transform television moments, celebrity images, and trending topics into humorous content. They frequently use satire, exaggeration, and visual incongruity to entertain while offering commentary on fame, media representation, and societal perceptions of celebrities. Their contribution extends beyond amusement as they mediate public sentiment, facilitate social dialogue, and encourage the audience to critically reflect on cultural values and national identity (Mihăilescu, 2024; Agrawal et al., 2025). As a result, showbiz memes convert passive media consumption into participatory interpretation and playful critique.

Similarly, social memes depict everyday Filipino experiences, including teacher-student interactions, family life, and neighborhood relationships. These memes combine humor with visual storytelling to further community cohesion, strengthen cultural norms, and encourage reflection on behavior, etiquette, and societal roles (Bezemer & Cowan, 2020; AlAfnan, 2025; Koivukoski et al., 2024; Akhter, 2017). Moreover, they bridge private and public spheres. They enable the audience to negotiate modernization, intergenerational differences, and social responsibility within digital spaces.

In contrast, political memes use parody, satire, and visual exaggeration to make abstract political issues accessible and relatable. They allow the audience to engage critically with governance, civic duties, and socio-political norms (Nieubuert, 2021). Although less frequent than social and showbiz memes, they play an important role by integrating political critique into daily digital interactions. They promote civic reflection and stimulate dialogue about leadership and accountability. Nevertheless, the viral nature of these memes also reveals potential risks, including the inadvertent spread of misinformation or reinforcement of partisan biases.

In addition, pop-culture mockery memes employ exaggeration and playful ridicule to comment on public figures, media events, and social behaviors (Zhang et al., 2025; McSwiney & Sengul, 2023). These memes encourage public engagement while challenging dominant media narratives and societal expectations. Their contribution includes shaping perceptions of social norms, provoking reflection on ethical behavior, and providing alternative avenues for cultural commentary. Despite being less frequent, their viral potential reveals the capacity of humor to influence collective attitudes.

Furthermore, ideological undercurrent memes blend cultural symbolism, humor, and media references to express Filipino beliefs, traditions, and values (Sultana & Khalid, 2023). They incorporate folklore, religious practices, and moral narratives into contemporary digital formats. In the process, they sustain cultural identity, transmit norms, preserve collective memory, and engage the audience in participatory reflection. Although less frequent, these memes hold substantial cultural significance.

Finally, societal challenges and advocacy memes address pressing issues, such as education, health, and governance, through humor, satire, and symbolic imagery (Bezemer & Cowan, 2020; Ismail, 2025; Leiser, 2022). They remix familiar visual and textual content to communicate social critique, stimulate reflection, and encourage public dialogue. Therefore, they transform individual observations into public discourse, as it promotes civic engagement.

C. Messages, Symbols, and Ideologies Reflected in Facebook Memes

Drawing from their nature and contributions, the selected Facebook memes exhibit layered messages, symbols, and ideologies that illuminate how humor operates in Filipino online culture. Across showbiz, social, political, pop-culture mockery, ideological undercurrents, and societal advocacy memes, humor functions as a medium for reflection, critique, and identity negotiation. Certain meme types, including social and showbiz memes, dominate in frequency and emphasize entertainment and relatability, whereas others, such as ideological and advocacy memes, convey deeper cultural and social significance (Beck, 2024; Lamba & Jain, 2025; Alsaleh, 2024; Nieubuurt, 2021; de Saint Laurent et al., 2021). Collectively, these memes transform personal, social, and political experiences into participatory cultural texts. They allow online communities to negotiate values, social norms, and collective identity (Ajayi, 2020; Bezemer & Cowan, 2020).

For instance, showbiz memes often remix celebrity images, trending topics, and television moments into humorous content. They entertain while reflecting societal perspectives on fame, media representation, and national identity (Mihăilescu, 2024; Agrawal et al., 2025). Similarly, self-deprecating humor about aging turns personal insecurity into shared amusement. This example illustrates how humor can function as a social equalizer (Beck, 2024). Additionally, memes featuring pageant costumes convey pride and creativity. They symbolize the connection between individual achievement and collective cultural identity.

Likewise, social memes translate everyday life into humorous narratives that are widely relatable. Common scenarios, such as minor mistakes, household interactions, or intergenerational contrasts, communicate resilience, humility, and continuity of cultural practices (Lamba & Jain, 2025; Alsaleh, 2024). These memes further emphasize the negotiation between tradition and modernity. They portray how humor advances reflection on behavior, community values, and cultural adaptation.

In a similar manner, political memes distill public sentiment into accessible visual narratives. For example, photoshopped images of Miriam Santiago alongside other senators humorously convey public dissatisfaction, while memes contrasting the Marcos

and Aquino political legacies depict intergenerational political consciousness (Nieubuert, 2021). These memes show how humor facilitates participatory democracy and encourages critical reflection on governance and civic responsibility.

On the other hand, pop-culture mockery memes exaggerate behaviors or controversies to create shared humor and cultural reflection. Examples include memes lampooning Coco Martin's speech mannerisms as "Cardo Dalisay" or portraying feuds between Cristy Fermin and Vice Ganda, which critique celebrity conduct and societal perceptions of gender norms and inclusivity (Zhang et al., 2025; McSwiney & Sengul, 2023). These memes emphasize the ideological dimension of humor in digital spaces while engaging the audience in cultural critique.

Furthermore, ideological undercurrent memes combine humor with cultural and spiritual symbolism to express shared beliefs, traditions, and values. Instances such as the *Simbang Gabi* meme humorously depict early morning devotion, while memes featuring butterflies symbolize the spirits of departed loved ones, referencing religious practices and folklore (Sultana & Khalid, 2023). These examples nurture communal cohesion and preserve moral continuity through playful yet meaningful imagery.

Finally, societal challenges and advocacy memes address social issues such as education, governance, and social responsibility through humor, satire, and symbolic imagery. For example, memes about the K-12 program depict crowded classrooms alongside familiar figures like former President Aquino, while others humorously illustrate coping with rapid inflation using relatable visuals (Bezemer & Cowan, 2020; Ismail, 2025; Leiser, 2022; de Saint Laurent et al., 2021). These memes convert personal observations into collective discussions. They promote reflection and stimulate public engagement.

In summary, the trends demonstrate a clear distribution of frequency and impact. Social and showbiz memes dominate due to their relatability and entertainment value, whereas political, pop-culture mockery, ideological, and advocacy memes, although less frequent, contribute significant social, cultural, and ideological insights. Across all types, recurring strategies, including humor, exaggeration, visual storytelling, and intertextual references, illustrate how Filipino Facebook users negotiate identity, values, and cultural meaning through participatory engagement and digital humor.

IV. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study explored how Facebook memes reflect Filipino users' active participation in digital culture. The findings revealed trends that intertwine humor, identity, and social commentary. Meme-sharing practices, particularly in showbiz, social, political, pop-culture mockery, ideological, and societal challenges and advocacy categories, illustrate how users creatively transform everyday events, media moments, and social issues into expressions that both entertain and provoke reflection. Consequently, these trends highlight the participatory and dialogic nature of online communication, where humor functions as a tool for connection, negotiation of meaning, and reinforcement of social norms, values, and civic awareness.

In examining the nature and contribution of these memes, the study found that they play a significant role in shaping popular culture and social discourse by converting shared experiences into relatable digital narratives. Specifically, showbiz and social memes cultivate community engagement and celebrate ordinary life, political memes enrich civic awareness and encourage critical evaluation of governance, ideological memes preserve cultural beliefs, spiritual practices, and collective identity, and societal challenges and advocacy memes raise awareness, critique systemic issues, and inspire reflection or action. In light of this, it is recommended that content creators, educators, and communication specialists strategically utilize memes to promote cultural appreciation, civic awareness, social responsibility, and advocacy for societal improvements while adhering to ethical guidelines and promoting media accountability.

Moreover, the study uncovered recurring messages, symbols, and ideologies embedded within these memes. These ranged from humor and faith to social critique, national pride, and advocacy for social improvement. Visual and textual symbols, such as the butterfly representing remembrance, pageant imagery reflecting patriotism, or classrooms highlighting educational inequities, convey multifaceted cultural and societal meanings that strengthen communal bonds and provide insight into collective sentiment, identity formation, and civic engagement. Therefore, further research could examine how the audience interprets and emotionally responds to these narratives across generational, regional, and cultural contexts to enhance media literacy, critical consumption of digital content, and civic engagement through humor.

Theoretically, these findings extend discourse analysis into multimodal digital communication, cultural semiotics, and participatory media studies. Practically, they support the potential of memes as tools for education, advocacy, and community involvement. Accordingly, future studies should broaden their scope to encompass diverse regions, age groups, and online platforms. This expansion, using quantitative or mixed-method approaches, can provide a more comprehensive understanding of digital humor, participatory culture, and civic engagement. Special attention may be given to memes reflecting advocacy and societal challenges, such as education, environmental concerns, and economic issues, to assess their potential impact on public discourse and social awareness.

Despite these contributions, the study's qualitative focus and reliance on selected examples limit its capacity to capture the full diversity of meme-sharing behaviors, audience interpretations, and regional or generational variations. Nevertheless, these limitations do not diminish the insights gained into the social, cultural, and ideological significance of memes in Filipino digital environments. Consequently, policymakers and digital platforms are encouraged to support initiatives that promote responsible meme usage, particularly when addressing social challenges, to prevent misinformation and cultivate respectful online discourse.

Overall, the study emphasizes that Facebook memes function as cultural texts that entertain, inform, and enrich reflection. They enable Filipinos to articulate values, social perspectives, and resilience within a globalized media environment while maintaining local relevance. Ultimately, these findings foreground the potential of memes as tools for

cultural expression, advocacy, and ideological negotiation, and they invite educators, researchers, and practitioners to harness their creative and participatory power to nurture inclusivity, critical thinking, and social consciousness in digital spaces.

V. DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

The authors affirm that they have no financial, personal, or professional relationships that could be perceived as affecting the research, analysis, or conclusions of this study. No conflicts of interest are declared.

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