

A Semiotic Approach to Internet Memes: Trump as a Case Study

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Abstract

The present study aims to examine the memes that have globally been publicized through various social media. It draws upon the semiotic theory to analyze randomly selected internet memes concerning the US president Donald Trump's visit to Saudi Arabia. The study tackles the signifier–signified relationship between images, texts and meanings. In this regard, Internet memes not only communicate various meanings but also impart expressive political and cultural messages. Moreover, they display common reactions to the humor and entertainment created by the users on social media networks. By assessing what Internet memes mean and function, the study creates and delivers universally political and cultural messages and emotions. More specifically, the present study examines five randomly selected Internet memes to establish a connection between images, texts and meanings by adopting a semiotic analysis. It concludes that Internet memes affect the political standing, cultural concepts and thoughts of any nation.

Keywords: captions, images, Internet memes, political message, semiotics, Trump, King Salman

Introduction

Owing to the tremendous advance in technology, the prevailing media are no longer the only source of news and entertainment. Recently, other sources such as digital media and social networks have come into being, providing people with ample opportunities to participate in the general media environment through their online activities that can reach a large audience. In a culture where the rapid and wide spread of videos, images, stories, etc. is a measure of value, content from almost unidentified sources is likely to

be largely utilized by Internet users. Still, little is known at present about how diverse kinds of user-created media content affect the people who see them, particularly when the content involves political, social and economic questions.

In this regard, Internet memes are one form of user-created, digital media content that may actually impact its viewers. As Huntington (2017) notes,

Memes—often light-hearted, often referencing pop culture, usually created anonymously by regular people, and circulated online—matter for politics in part because they may influence how people feel about important political issues. How people feel is vital to engagement with information, especially political information, because it changes what issues they pay attention to, influences how they look for political information, affects how they process that information, shapes how they view the world, and ultimately, can change a range of political activities. (p.1)

Internet meme then has become a component of the popular culture. With the emergence of internet and digital technologies, the term has become widespread.

Defining Internet Memes

Generally, "meme" is a popular term that describes the intuitive and often fast absorption and dissemination of an idea particularly in the form of a written text, an image, or other pieces or units of cultural information. It was devised by the biologist Richard Dawkins in his 1976 book *The selfish Gene* to refer to small elements of culture which tend to pass around from one individual to another by means of imitation. It derives from the Greek root 'Mimeme' which means to 'imitate' (Dawkins, 2006, p. 192). Establishing a correlation between cultural and biological evolution, Dawkins believes that the transmission of cultural qualities is much like the transmission of genes: "Cultural transmission is analogous to genetic transmission in that . . . it can give rise to a form of evolution" (p. 198).

Merriam-Webster online dictionary defines meme as "an idea, behavior, style, or usage that spreads from a person to person within a culture" (Meme, n. d.). It also describes meme as "an amusing or interesting item (such as a captioned picture or video) or genre of items that is spread widely online especially through social media"

(Meme). Davison (2012) defines Internet meme as "A piece of culture, typically a joke, which gains influence through online transmission" (p.122). Similarly, Shifman (2014) defines Internet meme as "the propagation of items such as jokes, rumors, videos, and websites from person to person via the Internet" (p. 2). As a cultural product, the Internet memes may be defined as

a dimension of cultural production and transmission. Memes are contagious patterns of, 'cultural information' that get passed from mind to mind and directly generate and shape the mindsets and significant forms of behavior and actions of a social group. Memes include such things as popular tunes, catch-phrases, clothing fashions, architectural styles, ways of doing things, icons, jingles, and the like. (Knobel & Lankshear, 2007, p. 199)

In the same vein, Wiggins and Bowers (2014) offer the following definition of memes: [M]emes are remixed, iterated messages which are rapidly spread by members of participatory digital culture for the purpose of continuing a conversation" (p. 1886). According to Milner (2012), Internet memes are "amateur media artifacts, extensively remixed and recirculated by different participants on social media networks" (p. iii).

Hofstadter (as cited in Wiggins & Bowers, 2014) offers a more literal concept of memes derived from Dawkins's metaphor. He argues that

[m]emes, 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. (p. 5)

However, Burman (2012) gives a more detailed description of memes and shows how they are "not the result of an immediate infection: the meme's 'virulence' took twenty years to engineer" (p. 77). Moreover, he points out:

When the 'meme' was introduced in 1976, it was as a metaphor intended to illuminate an evolutionary argument. By the late-1980s, however, we see from its use in major US newspapers that this original meaning had become obscured. The meme became a virus of the mind. (In the UK, this occurred slightly later.) It is also now clear that this becoming involved complex sustained interactions

between scholars, journalists, and the letter-writing public. We must therefore read the 'meme' through lenses provided by its popularization. The results are in turn suggestive of the processes of meaning construction in scholarly communication more generally. (p. 75)

The original definition of a meme by Dawkins relied on the notion of *replicator*. A replicator refers to a system which can make copies of itself, depending on the help of some other system. Examples include real and computer viruses, which demand correspondingly a cell and a computer processor to create copies of themselves. The essential example tackled by Dawkins is the gene that is copied with the help of the cellular machinery every time a cell divides. A meme, like a gene, is a replicator, since it is copied whenever information is communicated from one person to another by imitation. Since replicators can be reproduced in different amounts, they are subject to natural selection: the one that yields the largest number of replicas will win the competition with less productive replicators. To achieve this, according to Dawkins, a good replicator should display the following features:

Longevity: The longer any instance of the replicating pattern survives, the more copies can be made of it. A drawing made by etching lines in the sand is likely to be erased before anybody could have reproduced it.

Fecundity: The faster the rate of copying, the more the replicator will spread. An industrial printing press can churn out many more copies of a pamphlet than an office-copying machine.

Copying-fidelity: The more accurate or faithful the copy, the more will remain of the initial pattern after several rounds of copying. If a painting is reproduced by making photocopies from photocopies, the picture will quickly become unrecognizable. (Heylighen & Chielens, 2009)

It is worth mentioning that the concept of meme is not an inactive concept. Although the first definition of meme offered by Richard Dawkins is frequently used and widely quoted when dealing with social, cultural and internet phenomena analysis, it is a

concept that has yet to develop. Its former author altered the meme definition, and some theorists followed this transformation helping the formation of a new conception of the term meme. "This new definition," Díaz (2013) notes, "allows the characterization of memes for studies in fields like communication, humanities and social sciences, opening the path for a new research type in information and media content" (p. 102). Obviously, Díaz's view testifies to the vitality of Internet memes.

Types of Memes

Since memes are considered artifacts, they have virally spread in online communication. Subsequently, they are regarded as a separate genre. Wiggins and Bowers (2014) introduce three types of memes: meme, emergent meme and spreadable media. For them, spreadable media are messages of multimedia that are used up with no change. They are not confined to online spaces; rather, they can be disseminated widely. On the other hand, emergent memes are spreadable, changeable media and can be reproduced and satirized (p. 12). Memes, the third type, are created when the receivers in digital culture produce "imitations, remixes and further iterations of the emergent meme. [They] are rapidly diffused online especially via online social networks" (p. 7).

Importance of Internet Memes

Internet memes tend to pay attention to prevalent events, occupying people with political questions even if only for the sake of humor. They can arouse the curiosity of a reader in a way that an article cannot. In addition, the extensive experience of inaccurate political stories makes the political meme activity particularly useful. Not only can the activity stimulate critical thinking, but it can also help students examine content shared on the Internet (Wells, 2018, p. 241).

Furthermore, memes offer an effective means to integrate things such as, creativity, art, message, and humor in the internet culture. Public relations, advertising, and marketing specialists have efficiently employed Internet memes to propagate their artifacts. Internet memes are also utilized in education. For example, 'Rage comics,' one type of Internet memes, have proved an efficient way of teaching the English language. "Rage comics," as Kariko (2013) demonstrates, "are special because they consist of well-known faces and expressions—anger, shock, defeat, surprise, pleasure,

success, or horror, which therefore meant to show universal feelings or emotions of varying degrees under a variety of conditions" (paras.1–2).

Reasons why Internet memes are becoming virally used in social media and various communication trends include: First, memes have a sarcastic nature. Second, since memes evoke many emotions such as happiness, sadness, nostalgia or even shock, the attitude to share them creates happiness, not to mention the ability of memes to pass on a lot of information about events and philosophical contents, or offer social commentary.

Subsequently, it is almost futile to investigate social media without exploring the memes that tackle various topics, from humorous content to political ones. Humorous political memes enhance the awareness of political situations, draws the attention of young generations to current events and affect their political orientations and beliefs, and make the receptors of the memes understand and follow up political events, attitudes and positions in a way no other media—articles, news, speeches or even social media posts—can do.

The present study discusses the memes that have widely been created by social media users, both Arabs and foreigners, regarding Donald Trump's visit to Saudi Arabia. It explores the connections between images, texts, and meanings, from a semiotic perspective. As demonstrated before, memes usually transfer different meanings and impart various social and political messages. Sometimes they express universal emotions, or are made to amuse and entertain users of social media. Every meme has its own theme; therefore, memes are likely to allow users to come up with innovative and more creative ideas. By analyzing these memes, the study serves to point out how images, texts and meanings are interconnected with each other, thus becoming a means of communicating new messages.

Internet Meme and Image Macro

Image macros are marked by the manifestation of a person, animal, object, or anything that can be ridiculed. The chief subject of the macro is located at the middle of the image and accompanied by humorous text on top and bottom of it. The text seeks to show the subject's features. The subject can embody anything as long as other people

make sense of it. These user-created images have become one of the most popular Internet phenomena today. Internet users describe these phenomena as memes. Although meme includes an image, an email or a video file, the most familiar meme exhibits a person's or an animal's picture with a humorous caption (Kavitha, 2018, p. 220).

Research Questions

The study raises the following questions:

1. Why have memes become virally used in social media and various communication trends?
2. Does the use of memes convey any political, philosophical or social connotative meanings about Trump's visit to Saudi Arabia in particular?
3. How far is the employment of the semiotic approach helpful in clarifying the messages imparted by memes?
4. How do Arabs and foreigners react to the memes about Trump's visit to Saudi Arabia?

The Semiotic Approach

There has been considerable work on the semiotic theory. The fundamental supposition of semiotics is that cultural objects communicate meaning, and can be interpreted as a text. Signs blend to operate on denotative and connotative levels. By considering the interaction of the denotative and connotative in the context of popular culture, scholars might investigate cultural artifacts as signifiers of myths about a particular culture. Therefore, gaining an understanding of semiotics might help in making sense of visual forms of communication (Huntington, 2013, para. 6).

De Saussure and C.S. Peirce are the first linguists to introduce semiotic theory. Other linguists who are known in the field include Noam Chomsky, Umberto Eco, R. Barthes and Jean Baudrillard. Chandler (2007) differentiates between what is called the Saussurean and the Peircean definitions of semiotics. Saussure's 'semiology' was a science which studies the role of signs as part of social life. Charles Peirce examined this domain of study which he called 'semeiotic' (or 'semiotic') and which was the

formal doctrine of signs, which showed a close association with logic (p.16). In order to understand the intended meaning created by the use of semiotics, one should decode the signs which are always hidden. "If the object could be known directly, there would be no need of a sign to represent it" (Saussure, 1914, p. 31).

Kariko (2013) points out that Saussure divides a sign into two elements: signifier (sound-image) and signified (concept). Unlike Saussure, Pierce concentrates on three elements of signs that include iconic dimension, indexes and symbols. Kariko also touches on Stuart Hall's view that semiotics helps in analyzing how visual representations communicate their meanings and that Roland Barthes's works contribute to the improvement and extension of Saussure's linguistic models through their applications to signs and other representations like advertising, photography, popular culture, travel, fashion, etc. (paras. 8-9).

Kariko (2013) demonstrates Peirce's view that signs point to something which represents something or refer to a certain meaning. If the meaning relies on a certain agreement or social tradition, that sign is called symbols. Consequently, every phenomenon prevailing in the society, whether it is an object, behavior, even a thought, is viewed as symbols that embody a specific meaning outside the sign itself (para.11).

In her article "A Study of Memes Using Semiotics," Kavitha (2018) argues that Barthes's Semiotic Theory provides insight into the process of reading signs and concentrates on their interpretation by different cultures or societies. According to Barthes, Kavitha adds, signs have both a signifier, which characterizes the physical form of the sign as we recognize it through our senses, and the signified, which indicates the meaning that is interpreted. In this sense, Barthes's Semiotics deals with signs as present in diverse forms including pictures, words, letters, objects, natural objects, gestures, phenomena and actions (p. 220).

Literature Review

The previous studies involving the examination of Internet memes in light of semiotics deserve attention. To begin with, Danesi (2004) points out that the term semiotics is

related to the signs that can represent colors, objects, gestures or anything that stands for anything but itself. For him, these signs have a logical reference. They can refer to concrete ideas, as in "a cat" stands for "animal," a thing that has a representation in the real world. They can also refer to the abstract "concepts" that represent the imaginary world, as in "bright idea." The significance of semiotics lies in its ability to answer different questions about meanings. However, defining these meanings is a difficult task since abstract concepts can assume more than one meaning (p.4).

Kariko (2013) uses semiotics to explore the nature and function of Internet memes in his "Analysis on Internet Memes Using Semiotics." He points out how images, text, and meanings combine with each other to create social and political messages, universal emotions, or even just to provide entertainment to its users. Kariko chooses five random samples of internet memes to interpret the relation between images, texts, and meanings involved in these memes.

Osterroth (2018) attempts to study the semiotics of the internet memes from a semantic and pragmatic point of view. He argues that internet memes are not fully investigated across all disciplines. Furthermore, he asserts that internet memes come into existence because social media users share, alter and vary them in many ways. He also contends that internet memes emerge from collective semiosis. Memes, as he claims, need a semantic frame to be understood. In addition, Osterroth suggests the term "Memesphere" which he defines as "a very closed semantic/pragmatic net; it is when the memes are comprehended by other outsiders of the culture" (p. 3). Internet memes can therefore be applied to various contexts. Although they are banned in different countries due to their effective power of delivering satiric messages, political memes are widely used and easily shared.

It is argued that internet memes are still in their infancy. This is the conclusion which Cannizzaro (2016) has reached after introducing various ideas by Davison (2012, 2014); Goriunova (2014); and Knobel and Lankshear (2007). In her "Internet Memes as Internet Signs: A Semiotic View of Digital Culture," Cannizzaro suggests a clearer framework of internet-based memes. She points out that the science of memes assumes that memes remain copying units according to Richard Dawkins's *The Selfish*

Gene. However, Peircean semiotics and biosemiotics, she claims, can challenge this philosophy of information transmission. While reassuring an exact and discursive framework for internet memes, semiotic approaches, she continues, can reconfigure present-day formulations to the deeply-rooted conception of memes. Therefore, by drawing upon "biosemiotics, Tartu-Moscow semiotics, and Peircean semiotic principles," Cannizzaro "proposes a working outline for the definition of internet memes and its applicability for the semiotic analysis of texts in new media communication" (p. 562).

Sayani (2013 as cited in Kavitha, 2018) examines the two memes of www.9gag.com, "Poker Face" meme and "Okay" meme in his "Semiotic analysis of meme in 9gag.com." He explained that from the signifiers of each meme, the signified of each of them can be known, resulting in the meaning of each meme. When it is used in the posts, the meme exhibits different signifiers leading to different signified and diverse tasks. This study focuses on the signifier-signified relationship, and the purpose of each meme used in 9gag.com. It makes use of the semiotic perspectives of Saussure and Chandler (p. 220).

Calimbo's study "Deconstructing Myths via Humor: A Semiotic Analysis of Philippine Political Internet Memes" (2016) is a descriptive analysis of 12 randomly selected Philippine political Internet memes. It utilizes Berger's Semiotic Theory of Humor and Barthes's concept of myth to show how the humorous signifiers in the political internet memes deconstruct prevalent political ideologies of modern (Philippine) society which appear natural and normal. Calimbo comes to the conclusion that contrasts and binary oppositions in both images and captions depicting code violations are the humorous signifiers in the memes. Humor in the memes is, as he maintains, essentially belligerent, as it disparages representatives of power, the political elite, for their disagreeable traits and practices which utterly contradict the moral slogan of the present administration. Humor in the internet memes, as Calimbo contends, lays bare certain political ideological concepts which are normalized in the Philippine society. "Through humor," Calimbo maintains, "such ideologies are unmasked and the public is brought to awareness of what is really behind seemingly normal or natural events in the Philippine political arena" (p. 1).

In her "A Study of Memes Using Semiotics," Kavitha (2018) demonstrates how, owing to the technological progress, communication between people and their society becomes faster and easy thanks to the Internet, social media websites and the social network applications, where the users can share and exchange their thoughts and ideas. The meme has become familiar among these digital users, allowing them to be updated on what happens in the society. Kavitha makes use of "semiotics" to "analyze how the memes are created and how the reality is represented in the memes" (p. 219).

Ibnu Sulhar (2016 as cited in Kavitha, 2018) examines the denotative and connotative meanings of "Scumbag Steve" memes in his study "Internet meme Analysis: Interpretive semiotic analysis on 'Scumbag Steve'". Drawing on a mythological approach, he interprets the phenomena of "Scumbag Steve" and Internet memes as a myth in today's society. He demonstrates that the "Scumbag Steve" and other Internet memes in general are both forms of entertainment and a means of communication. Ibnu Sulhar also utilizes Barthes's Semiology theory in his study (p. 220).

In her article "Memes as Speech Acts," Grundlingh (2018) stresses the importance of pragmatic and semiotic approaches in analyzing and gaining an understanding of Internet memes. She claims that memes could function as speech acts. She also points out that this unconventional method of making sense of memes is indispensable since memetics is not constantly an effective approach. For her, semiotics and pragmatics help in interpreting memes from a linguistic standpoint. Whereas "Semiotics offers information on how the media and modes that memes consist of can be interpreted and how the characteristics of semiotic resources apply to memes[,] [p]ragmatics offers information on how memes could function as speech acts (p.166)".

Based on the above argument, understanding memes requires that both pictures and language content need to be analyzed. In dealing with memes, creativity emerges from the interpretation of signs, especially those related to a specific culture. Furthermore, memes are open to multiple interpretation, the thing that makes them a rich material for studying, and that is the main objective of this study.

Design & Methodology

Given the fact that the semiotic theory investigates the political, social, philosophical, religious and cultural contents of any given memes, that memes are exposed to numerous explanations, and that they are a combination of pictures, signs, colors, ideas, images, styles, behaviors, and texts, the need for a theory analyzing all these constituents emerges. Therefore, this study adopts a semiotic approach to the memes concerning Trump's visit to Saudi Arabia.

In particular, the study involves a political, social, and humorous analysis of randomly selected samples of Internet memes about Trump's late visit to Saudi Arabia, two with Arabic captions and three with English ones. The memes have been publicized by many social media networks as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc. The images which the memes involve show Trump and the humor-based captions that describe him. Since Internet memes are viewed as signs, a semiotic analysis of the selected samples will be carried out to show how those memes in question and their captions have been utilized to impart political messages and give entertainment to the readers.

Discussion

As pointed out above, it is well-known that modern semiotic analysis has become so popular due to the efforts of Ferdinand de Saussure and Charles Sanders Pierce. Saussure coined the linguistic term sign which serves as a unifying agent that brings together what he called "the signifier (sound-image or word) and the signified (concept)" (Hatim & Munday, 2004, p. 17). More significantly, he emphasizes that the word sign is a mere arbitrary word and that it can only create its meaning through being contrasted with other signs within the same language. Through semiotics, one can understand the association between signs and the meanings they communicate to interpreters (Bradley, 2018).

Kavitha (2018) argues that Barthes's Semiotics investigates the content of signs, their use and the creation of their meanings at the level of a single sign and that of the broader systems and structures created by signs. She illustrates the model provided by Barthes about the signifier-signified relationship as follows:

According to Roland Barthes:

Barthes's Model

Language	1.signifier	2. signified
	3. sign	
Myth	Signifier (form)	Signified (concept)
	Sign (signification)	

Level 1. The sign. The signifier and the signified, and the “associative total of the two” which is the sign.

Level 2. Myth: the “second-level” sign, or "second level" semiological system.

The sign in such a system involves a signifier and a signified. The signified is added on top of that present structure. The figure1, 2 and 3 represents the image macro format of memes. For Saussure, the signified is a symbol of a concept, while the signifier represents the sound-image of that concept. The theory of Semiotics from Saussure and Roland Barthes's model aim to analyze the three image macro memes. (p. 221)

The above argument about signs and the signifier–signified relationship is basic to the analysis of the Internet memes under study.

As it will unfold, the following figures describing *Trump's visit to Saudi Arabia* involve three memes with top texts and images and two with top texts, images and bottom texts. Therefore, the researcher has analyzed the top texts, the images and the bottom texts individually, pointing out how meaning or messages are created or interpreted when all elements are combined together.

Meme 1:

Analysis of Meme 1:

As the figure above shows, the meme consists of a caption in Arabic placed on top of an image.

The Arabic text — "الشيخ المجاهد أبو إيفانكا الأمريكي يبلغكم لا تتسونه من الدعاء تحت ميزابي الكعبة" — means: The Muslim warrior, Ivanka's American father, requests you to pray for him at the Kaábah (The Holy Mosque).

a) Top Text: The caption on top of the image is the signifier which is a sentence in Arabic meaning that Alsheikh Almujaahid (the holy warrior), Ivanka's father, requests people (Muslims) to invoke the blessings of God upon him at the Kaábah. The signified is the concept behind the signifier. It implies laughing at or mocking the American president.

b) Image: The signified in the image is the American president, Donald Trump. He is depicted as a Saudi sheikh (chief) wearing a traditional Arabic dress consisting of a white gown, a cloak and a head cover (ghutra). His facial expression indicates the strictness of tribal chiefs. The signified is the concept intended to be a harsh satire of Trump.

Interpretation:

The collective meaning of the image and the text will become clear after combining all the signifiers and the signified. The Arabic text on top of the image is the signifier, and the signified is a sarcastic comment on the degraded political situation of the Arabs following Trump's visit to Saudi Arabia. The signified creates entertainment as it evokes laughter about the way Trump is dressed, and about the sternness of his face, a feature characterizing Saudi religious people. The present meme is meant to be entertaining; however, it imparts a serious political message: the Arabs are in illusion if they think that Trump will someday become a Muslim sheikh siding with the Arabs and minding their causes. Politically speaking, Trump will never give up his American identity for the Arabs, who have to wake up to this reality.

Meme 2:**Analysis of Meme 2:**

As the figure indicates, the meme involves a text in Arabic and an image of Trump. The Arabic text —فتوى الشيخ أبو إيفانكا الترامبي: إن إيران عدو لكم فاستعينوا بنا وافتحوا خزائنكم لنا لردعهم فإن الاستعانة بنا جائزة شرعا؟؟— means: a religious verdict given by Ivanka's father, Trump, stating, "Iran is your enemy. Therefore, seek our assistance and open your treasures for us, since seeking our assistance is religiously approved.

- a) **Top Text:** The caption on top of the image represents the signifier which is a sentence in Arabic translated above. The signified is the concept which is a mockery of Trump, who is depicted as a Muslim sheikh engaged in preaching a religiously political sermon.
- b) **Image:** The signifier in the image is Trump shown as an Imam (leader) of Muslims wearing a traditional Arabic dress (called Abaya) that is usually worn by Imams. Trump is depicted letting his beard as do Muslim Imams. On his chest there is a small black microphone. There is also a white ghutra (head cover) on his head. The concept behind the image is that it is utterly ironic to believe that Trump can be a Muslim Imam.

Interpretation:

The meme under discussion is an ironic comment on the deluded Arabs who are willing to trust a non-Muslim like Trump and seek his assistance. As the meme suggests, Trump has been delineated as a Muslim Imam, which is meant to ridicule him. Ironically, Trump declares that Iran (which is a Muslim country) is the enemy of Saudis,

thus turning a Muslim country against another Muslim country. Consequently, Saudis should act upon Trump's advice and seek the aid and protection of the Americans in order to be able to fight Iran. It is also ironic that Trump asserts that Islamic laws (Sharia) permit seeking the assistance of the Americans (non-Muslims). Trump also asks Saudis to open their treasures for the Americans in return for their assistance. In this regard, the meme above means to convey an important message to the Arabs warning them not to get aided by non-Muslims to fight their fellow Muslims (Iranians). It also implies that the Arabs should wake up to the bitter reality that the Americans want to drain their money.

Meme 3: Trump and King Salman



Analysis of Meme3:

As the figure above indicates, the meme involves two texts in English and an image of Trump and Salman, King of Saudi Arabia.

- a) **Top Text:** It represents the signifier which is a mini-dialogue in English between Trump and King Salman. The signified is the concept which is meant to make fun of Trump.
- b) **Image:** The signifier in the image involves King Salman and Trump. The Saudi King is shown hosting the American president in his palace in Riyadh. Trump is shown bowing as he receives a gold medal offered by the King. The signified is the concept associated with Trump's hypocritical behavior.

- c) **Bottom Text:** "Come over" is a phrasal verb which is the signifier. The signified meaning behind this verb is a ridicule of Trump.

Interpretation:

The meme above, as well as its English captions, is, like the other aforementioned memes, taken from an internet source. It shows Donald Trump following his visit to Saudi Arabia. In particular, it depicts King Salman hosting the American president and the latter bowing as he is being awarded a golden medal by the former. The mini-dialogue serves to point to and communicate some political and satirical comments about Trump's initial and later responses to Salman's attempt to make Trump accept his offer of a gold medal. As the exchange between the two leaders demonstrates, King Salman asks Trump to come over, but Trump rejects King Salman's invitation at first replying that Saudis are condemned for the events of 9/11/2001. However, when Salman, knowing that Trump is a successful businessman, suggests that Saudi Arabia will buy weapons from the USA costing 110 billion US Dollars, Trump immediately shows no reluctance and bows as he receives the medal awarded by the Saudi king. There is a political message conveyed to the public through this sarcastic meme. Trump is exhibited as a political leader, who can be bought by money, and who shows no regard for any codes of ethics. As soon as he finds out that he, as well as his country, will benefit by this transaction, he hurries to get the medal awarded by the king. Trump's strange behavior asserts his hypocritical attitude towards the Arabs in general and the Saudis in particular. He is ready to do anything for the sake of money. King Salman's offer to buy weapons from the USA at such a high price makes Trump forget about the tragic consequences of the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in New York City.

Meme 4: Trump and the other side of Trump

The meme above involves two captions in English and an image of Trump while talking to his imagined self.

- a) **Top Text:** It represents the signifier which is a mini-dialogue in English between Trump and himself. The signified is the concept which is meant to expose Trump's hypocrisy and dishonest nature.
- b) **Image:** The signifier in the image involves Trump and his imagined self. As the image demonstrates, the American president is engaged in a chat with his wicked duplicate version whose head cover is black (a symbol of his dark self). The signified here is the concept associated with the hypocritical and deceptive nature of Trump.
- c) **Bottom Text:** "And people still believe he's gonna be different" is a sentence acting as the signifier. The signified implies how people are deluded by Trump's apparently good nature.

Interpretation

Regarding the fourth meme, it depicts Trump speaking to his devilish self. Implicitly, this exchange involving Trump and his duplicate version has a sarcastic, political and economic connotation, which, if explained or communicated to the public, would stimulate a lot of comments and remarks by the Arab critics, particularly those interested in political issues. As the meme suggests, Trump represents the realistic president who initially rejects King Salman's invitation to visit Saudi Arabia on the grounds that Saudis are declared by the US government responsible for the event of 9/11. Later, however,

Trump's devilish self entices him to accept invitation to "Go to Saudi Arabia on your first foreign visit and give them \$ 350 billion in weapons anyways." The image and its accompanying texts impart a political message about Trump featuring him as a malevolent person who acts in a friendly manner until he gets what he wants. The meme displays Trump as a cunning president who stoops to conquer while at the same time illustrating how people are still deceived by his seemingly friendly attitude. The situational irony and the funny remarks figuring in the image communicate two apparently different personalities which are in fact the same: the good character, represented by the American president, Donald Trump, and the evil character, represented by the other Trump. Trump seems to be a good American president; therefore, he acts for the good of America by first refusing to accept the Saudi King's invitation. Nevertheless, the other Trump lures the good Trump to visit Saudi Arabia and drain it of its wealth by selling them weapons that cost 350 billion US Dollars. Ironically, the present meme shows that both versions of Trump are identical and have the same attitude although people still believe they are different.

Meme 5: Trump dancing Ardha



The meme above indicates a caption in English and an image involving Trump, King Salman and many Saudi notable officials while dancing Ardha (a traditional dance of the central region of Saudi Arabia).

- a) **Top Text:** "When your white friend smokes dokha for the first time thinks he is Arab" is the signifier which is just a group of words in English. The signified meaning behind those words suggests an ironic attitude towards President Trump as well as the Saudis.
- b) **Image:** The signifier in the image involves President Trump, King Salman and a lot of Saudi notables dancing Ardha in celebration of the occasion of the Kingdom's National Day. The signified concept here is most likely to be a burlesque of both Trump and the Saudi dignitaries.

Interpretation

The fifth meme shows Trump along with Saudi King Salman and other Saudi VIPs. Trump is surrounded by the Saudis who perform Ardha. This dance is held annually on September in celebration of the Kingdom's National Day. The dance is politicized in this meme, particularly when Trump visits Saudi Arabia. On this occasion, Saudis, as the picture shows, wear a special dress. Although Trump wears his formal costume, he, like the other Saudis participating in the festival, holds a sword, which is part and parcel of this dance. The caption above the picture is contributed by a person called Talal, who offers a sarcastic comment saying, "When your white friend smokes dokha the first time thinks he is Arab." Talal wants to communicate a public message: when non-Arabs come to visit Arab countries, or their Arab friends, they behave like Arabs. Trump, as the image features, shares Saudis their Ardha dance, thus attempting to materialize the saying that goes, "When in Rome, do as the Romans do." Trump's hypocritical attitude is highlighted by the picture. In the same way, Trump has shared Saudis their habit of smoking 'dokha' (a special product of Arabian tobacco), which consists of superbly dried tattered tobacco bits mixed with some spices and herbs. Ironically, having smoked this 'dokha,' Trump begins to behave like Saudis on this special occasion. Again, this is intended to arouse laughter at Trump's dishonest stance. Surprisingly, when a person finds himself in a foreign country, he has to behave like those people of the strange country. This is what Trump has done. Such a conduct is both hilarious and ironic as it serves to impart the following political message: If someone wants to get something from others, he should act like them so that he may get what he wants. Ironically, this is

what has been communicated by the present meme about Trump. Trump behaves like Saudis and therefore manages to get what he wants from them easily. It is through flattery and deception that Trump has achieved his wicked aims. It is ironic that a deceptive enemy behaves like a good friend and snatches away whatever he lays his hands on. It is also sarcastic that Saudis still have illusions about Trump's seemingly honest attitudes. Saudis are fooled by Trump's flattery and his deceptive behavior when he shows his willingness to share them their iconic dance.

Results and Conclusion

The definitions, types and importance of memes have been underscored to serve the aims of this study. The study has made use of Saussure's, Peirce's and Barthes's definitions of semiotics and their views of signs and the signifier–signified relationship. Other linguists who have explored memes and their communicative approach have also been included in this study. A good deal of literature review about the semiotic analysis of memes and their communicative meanings has been handled.

The study's argument has answered the questions raised by the present study. For example, the study has provided enough reasons why memes have largely been used in social media and various communication trends. The study has also managed to impart messages, particularly political ones, about Trump's visit to Saudi Arabia. Regarding the third question raised by the study, it is evident that the use of the semiotic approach, particularly the issues related to signs and the signifier–signified relationship has been helpful in and essential to the interpretation of the messages communicated by the memes in question. Further, the study has answered the fourth question by shedding light on the attitudes of the Arab and the western worlds towards the American President's late visit to Saudi Arabia. Both Trump (as well as the Americans) and the Saudi King (and the Arabs, too) have undergone harsh criticism; the former for his hypocritical attitude towards the Arabs, greed for money and wicked nature, and the latter for his illusion about Trump's seemingly good will and his inability to recognize Trump's intolerant outlook of the Arabs, particularly after the event of 9/11.

The researcher finds that the semiotic approach, which has been applied and followed in this study, not only contributes to the exploration of the political and cultural

contents of any given memes but also assists in communicating their multiple meanings to any culture all over the world. He also finds that internet memes are political, humorous ways capable of imparting funny and sarcastic remarks or messages to people, thus crossing all linguistic barriers.

Recommendations

The current study has been limited to the internet memes related to Trump's visit to Saudi Arabia. The researcher suggests that further research could be conducted to investigate the applicability of semiotic analysis to the images featured in religious books including the Holy Quran.

Appendix

List of Figures Used in this Study

In this study, the researcher has used five Internet memes with captions in both Arabic and English. Below are a list and a brief description of the figures used in this study:

Figure 1: Leading Muslim Mujahid named the American Mujahid Sheikh Abu Ivanka salutes everyone

<http://www.bbc.com/arabic/trending-39538468>

Figure 2: Trump as a Muslim Imam

<https://twitter.com/almhal1982224>

Figure 3: Trump and King Salman

<https://me.me/s/trump%20in%20saudi>

Figure 4: Trump and the other side of Trump

https://www.reddit.com/r/MarchAgainstTrump/comments/6denq9/trumps_first_foreign_trip/

Figure 5: Trump dancing Ardah

<http://www.e227.info/talal-memes.html>

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ملخص

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى دراسة "الميمات" التي تم نشرها على مستوى العالم من خلال وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي المختلفة. وهي تعتمد على النظرية السيميائية لتحليل الميمات المختارة عشوائياً من شبكة الإنترنت فيما يتعلق بزيارة الرئيس الأمريكي دونالد ترامب إلى المملكة العربية السعودية. كما تتناول الدراسة علاقة الدال والمدول بين الصور والنصوص والمعاني. وفي هذا الصدد، لا تتقل "ميمات الإنترنت" معاني مختلفة فحسب ، بل تتقل أيضاً رسائل سياسية وثقافية معبرة. علاوة على ذلك، فإنها تعرض ردود فعل مشتركة على الفكاهة والترفيه التي أنشأها المستخدمون على شبكات التواصل الاجتماعي. و بنقيض ما تعنيه "ميمات الإنترنت" ووظائفها، تقوم الدراسة بإنشاء وتوصيل معاني ومشاعر سياسية وثقافية تنصف بالعالمية. تتناول هذه الدراسة خمساً من "ميمات الإنترنت" تم اختيارها عشوائياً لإقامة صلة بين الصور والنصوص والمعاني من خلال تبني منهج سيميائي. وتخلص الدراسة إلى أن "ميمات الإنترنت" تؤثر على الأوضاع السياسية والمفاهيم الثقافية والأفكار المتعلقة بأى أمة.