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PRO-PALESTINE MEMES AGAINST THE 2023 ISRAEL INVASION: A SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS

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Abstract

This research examines pro-Palestine memes made during the 2023 Israeli invasion and explores how people use images and words online to show protest and support. Using a qualitative method, the study analyzes pro-Palestine memes through semiotic analysis by using Barthe's semiotic model to understand the hidden meanings behind pictures, symbols, and captions. The memes share strong messages while also challenging the way mainstream media presents the conflict. Many memes use humor, satire, and emotional images to spread awareness and encourage people to speak up. These online posts act as a form of digital resistance, giving voice to oppressed communities and highlighting ongoing colonial influence and political inequality. This study helps us understand how social media memes have become an important tool for activism and opens the door for future research on protest memes in other global conflicts.

Introduction

The conflict between Palestine and Israel is a complex and sensitive issue. It has been going on for a long time since the Palestinians claim East Jerusalem as the capital of their planned state, Israel keeps controlling the West Bank and claims Jerusalem as its whole capital. As Newman argued that "The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a supreme example of the significance of territorial and border conflicts in an era of globalization, countering many of the "borderless world" and 'deterritorialization' narrative of recent years" (Newman, 2006). The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is not a simple two-sided conflict, as if all Israelis have the same thought while all Palestinians have the opposite thoughts. From the point of view of the Palestinians, the conflict with Israel was always a "zero sum game between two national movements struggling for exclusive ownership of the same piece of land" (Waldman 2011). Siregar states that many people died and thousands were injured when an Israeli carried out an air attack on Gaza. On May 8, 2021, Israeli police broke into Al-Aqsa Masjid which is located in the East Jerusalem. When Israeli police attacked thousands of Palestinians were praying the last Friday of Holy month of Ramadan. Muslim countries and some NGO'S are still trying to stop the conflict between Palestine and Israel. (Siregar, 2021). This research aims to analyze and comprehend the utilization of Pro Palestine Memes during the 2023 Israel Invasion. The focus is on how these memes effectively communicate and express meaning through visual symbols and signs. By closely examining these memes, we can gain

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valuable insights into the semiotic aspects of the discourse surrounding the conflict.

Social media networks have grown into useful tools for sharing information, expressing emotions, and shaping public opinion in the digital age. "An Internet meme is an activity, concept, catchphrase or piece of media that gains popularity and spreads rapidly via the internet" (Techopedia, 2014). Memes have become an increasingly common type of communication, often used humour and effectively express complex ideas. As Reime states that through humour, memes may affect how individuals perceive and deal with tragedy. Sometimes, people switch to humour as an escape or cause of comfort when dealing with difficult or terrible circumstances. Memes can give people a humorous or lighter way to express their feelings with each other because of how quickly it can spread and be shared. It is important to remember that adding humour to grief can be delicate and personal. What one person feels hilarious, another may find rude or unpleasant. It's important to think about the context and feelings of individuals who were affected directly by the tragedy (Reime, 2019).

Defending the freedoms, welfare, and right to autonomy of the Palestinian people is what it means to be pro-Palestine. It involves informing people about the hardships that Palestinians endure in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and struggling for equality, justice, and human rights for them. Being pro-Palestine does not suggest anti-Israel attitude; rather, it means dealing with specific issues and problems associated with the Palestinian cause. It might involve encouraging interaction, supporting peaceful ways of conflict resolution, fighting for the end of the occupation, and looking for a just and permanent agreement which benefits both Israelis and Palestinians. Pro-Palestinian activists often question Israel's policies that harm the Palestinian citizens. Dart argues that "in response to expressions of pro-Palestinian solidarity, the Israeli state and its supporters are interpreting such activity as a 'new' manifestation of 'old' antisemitism" (Dart 2017). Their issues involve matters like the Israeli settlements being constructed in Palestinian territory and the restrictions made on Palestinians' freedom of movement.

This research aims to explore the impact of pro-Palestine memes against the 2023 Israel invasion. I find my research gap from the article; "Pro-Ukrainian Memes Against the 2022 Russian Invasion. A Cognitive Linguistic Perspective" as this research explores the use of pro-Ukrainian memes in response to the 2022 Russian invasion from a cognitive linguistic perspective. It suggests that the research examines how these memes are created and shared, and how they may influence public opinion or discourse. Adding this information to my research article could help highlight the role of memes in shaping narratives and responses during the invasion. Memes that support Palestine are a strong and creative way for people to express their devotion for the Palestinian cause. Memes supporting Palestine are easily accessible on social media, where they are shared to encourage justice and equality, challenge dominant opinions, and increase the public's awareness. They offer people a place to show their support for Palestine and add to the ongoing debate on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. I am going to fulfill this gap in my research "Qualitative Study of Pro-Palestine Memes Against the 2023 Israel Invasion: A Semiotics Assisted Visual Discourse Analysis" by doing the semiotic analysis on memes of Pro-Palestine.

Problem Statement

It is commonly perceived that thorough understanding of cognitive processes is required for the analysis of visual code (including memes as well). It puts relatively more stress on observers as compared to receivers. Resultantly, this genre is neglected by most researchers. Despite this notion, a number of researchers have explicated memes related to diverse social, religious and political issues yet, no special attention has been given to the memes related to Palestine. Majdzińska-Koczorowicz and Ostanina-Olszewska (2023), discussed memes with reference to Ukraine and Russian invasion, but Palestine and Israel invasion has not been taken into consideration by the researchers. The

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current study provides a deep insight into the pro-Palestinian memes against the 2023 Israel invasion. The study of memes is a quite emerging topic and has become the focal point of researchers, but the conflict between Palestine and Israel with respect to memes has been neglected so far. The present study focuses on this aspect by employing semiotic analysis and fills the gap by adding insightful addition in this particular domain.

Research Objectives

- To analyze the denotative and connotative meanings of signs in Pro-Palestine memes.
- To examine the role of these memes in the construction of ideological myths that promote Pro-Palestine narratives.

Research Questions

1. What are denotative and connotative meanings of signs in Pro-Palestine memes?
2. What is the role of these memes in the construction of ideological myths in Pro-Palestine memes?

Significance of the Study

This research holds great significance in understanding the impact of memes during the Israel invasion in 2023. By focusing on pro-Palestine memes, this research sheds light on how individuals express their support and convey their opinions on the conflict. Memes have a unique ability to capture complex ideas and emotions in a concise and relatable manner. By employing a semiotic analysis, this study uncovers the hidden meanings and messages within pro-Palestine memes. It helps to bridge the gap between visual communication and academic analysis, providing valuable insights into the ways in which memes shape public opinion and contribute to the larger discourse. This research holds significant importance in the field of communication and media studies. By exploring the impact and meaning of pro-Palestine memes during the Israel invasion, this research provides valuable insights into the cultural, social, and political dynamics surrounding the conflict.

Literature Review

The term meme was first coined by Dawkins (1976), an evolutionary biologist, in his book "The Selfish Gene". Charles Dawkins also established the science of "memetics". According to Charles Dawkin, the beliefs and ideas of people can be identified through memes. Dawkins argued that memes are symbols, ideas and acts which can be transmitted in diverse forms such as languages, music, art, architecture, behavior, etc. In the same realm, according to Aunger (2002), the ability of memes to construct cultures cannot be neglected. He argued that memes play a significant role in the construction of cultures through its strong impact.

Burman (2012) describes memes as being active and non-metaphorical. Taecudyharungroj and Nueangiamnong (2014) states that memes can not only be characterized as self-replicating, but they are also regarded as contagious. According to Blackmore (2010), the traditional beliefs, values, etc get stored in the memory cells of individuals. These are then transmitted from one individual to another. Blackmore (2010) argues that the way through which memes are adapted in the environment is quite different.

Generally, the term discourse is associated with written and spoken language. It was globally accepted during 1970s and 1980s, but with the passage of time, visual code of language became the focal point instead of spoken and written codes. The importance of visual discourse has been discussed by many historians. Stafford is one of the most prominent historians of the scientific images. The construction of the scientific knowledge was started in the beginning of eighteenth century. Stafford (1991), argued that this process of scientific knowledge was based more upon the visuals rather than the written texts.

In the current era, the contemporary societies are paying more attention towards the visual narratives. Rorty (1979) discussed the importance of association between knowing and seeing different ideas. He suggested that the understanding of people increase to an exponential level when come across any term in

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the form of visuals. This stance pays more focus on images in comparison to oral or written text. The analysis of visuals or visual discourse requires a theoretical framework. To fulfil this requirement, semiotics is considered as the most suitable theoretical framework. It is an important aspect of the current research. The word "semiotics" has been derived from the Greek term *semeiotikos* which means "the study of observant signs". It forms the basis of semiotic theory. Barthes (1967) states that semiotics is the study symbols and signs, and how they are used to create meaning in a diverse range of contexts such as art, culture, language and communication. The word "Semiotic" refers to any system of signs, irrespective of its boundaries, objects, visuals, gestures, musical sounds, and the intricate connections between all of these elements comprising the content of public entertainment (Barthes, 1967).

According to Saptura (2023), semiotics refers to the analysis of how meanings are formed and how meanings are transmitted. It investigates the role of signs on images to analyze the sign system used in wide range of platforms. Peirce (1974) states that this universe is coaxed with signs, if it is not completely made up of signs. Semiotics become highly essential if each and everything in the universe is a symbol. He provided more philosophical logic of signs and sign processes. The theory given by Peirce is somewhat different from the formulated by Ferinand de Saussure. According to Saussure (1916), semiotics deals with the study of role and impact of symbols and signs on social psychology, social life and in somewhat broader sense as a part of general psychology. Saussare is more concerned with the theory of semiology. He argues that the laws which are considered to be applicable for linguistics are rea andl those laws which are formulated by semiology. Pavlik and Mclntosh (2004) states that the power of sign to affect our thinking should not be underestimated.

Thus, keeping in consideration the above discussion, the research gap in the existing understanding of the Pro-Palestine memes lies in the lack of focus on memes related to 2023 Israel invasion that how memes create meaning through their visual signs, symbols, and images. This research uses semiotic analysis to explore the meanings of memes in detail and aims to fill this gap by showing how these memes represent symbolic resistance.

Methodology

This section provides an overview and justification of the research methodology. The methods used to gather information and examine the research topic of this qualitative study is described in this section. It contains the study's research design, a description of the population from which the samples were taken, and an explanation of the sampling method. It further continues on to detail the methods and tools used for gathering data as well as the framework that was applied in this investigation.

Research Design

The research implements a descriptive qualitative research design. To better understand how consumers, extract meanings from memes, a qualitative study approach considers acceptable for the current study. According to Creswell (2017), "A qualitative method is the one in which the researcher frequently bases knowledge claims on constructivist, participatory, or both viewpoints". This will be a qualitative study specifically combining visual discourse analysis and semiotic analysis. By using semiotic analysis, we may investigate the pictures, signs, and symbols found in the pro-Palestine memes and interpret their deeper connotations. Memes with respect to Palestine and Israel are examined in the study to disclose the hidden meanings and ideology behind the memes on social media.

Data Collection

The study attempts to explore semiotic elements, cultural symbols and signs that prevails in Pro-Palestine memes and their impacts on society are collected as main source. Regarding the data collection procedure, researcher do it in various stages. The researcher has selected particular memes related to Palestine- Israel conflict. These memes use humor, satire, and visual symbolism to convey

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messages of support for the Palestinian cause. Pro-Palestine memes can be found across various social media platforms, where they are shared, liked, and reshared by individuals who align with the cause.

Population and Sampling

The population denotes the entire group of individuals, objects, or occurrences with a shared trait that forms the focal point of the study. It encompasses all elements that the researcher intends to investigate and draw inferences about (Garg 2016). The population of the current study contain memes from different social media platforms. All the memes which represent the population are the samples of the study.

Sampling technique are of two major types that are probabilistic sampling and non-probabilistic sampling (Bhardwaj 2019). The researcher has selected purposive sampling for this research. This kind of sampling is already used. The purposive sampling technique is also known as judgment sampling. It is a non-random technique that does not need underlying theories or a set number of participants. Oliver (2006) emphasizes that purposive sampling is one in which researchers select specific samples based on importance, capacity, and research question in this approach the researcher chooses units of sample on knowledge basis and specifically for this research study (Oliver and Jupp 2006). In present study identification of research population through purposive sampling technique helps to underline the meanings of memes and its impact on society. Moreover, application of Barthes's semiotic model aids in uncovering the denotative and connotative meanings in Pro-Palestine memes.

Research Instruments

A systematic online meme collection process has employed as the primary research tool for this qualitative study in order to collect data on pro-Palestine visual content. Memes were gathered from publicly available social media sites, such as Facebook, Instagram, Threads, and Twitter/X, by looking for relevant hashtags, posts, and public pages that shared pro-Palestine memes. To assist in visual and semiotic analysis, each meme will be stored along with its source details (date and platform), visual content, and any text that is included. This way ensures consistency and relevance in the data set by assisting the researcher in collecting and organizing visual data that reflects public opinion and symbolic meanings related to the 2023 Israel invasion.

Theoretical Framework

Memes is a medium that enables individuals to understand serious and complex issues in a lighter and humorous way. Memes serves as a type of discourse and thus can be included in the category of visual discourse. It is because of the availability of both the image and text in them. As mentioned above, the researcher has used the technique of visual discourse analysis for interpreting the meanings of memes. Thus, this research has used the semiotic theory of visual discourse analysis for analyzing the memes related to Palestine and Israel. Among many different models of semiotics, Barthes model (1957) is used by the researcher for extracting the meanings from the selected memes. According to this model, there are different orders to distinguish between the two kinds of signs denotative and connotative. Denotative meanings refer to the real or literal meaning and is also referred as first-order signifying system. On the other hand, connotative meaning is the one related to the hidden or additional cultural meaning. It is also referred as second-order signifying system. On the basis of this model memes associated with Palestine and Israel will be analyzed by the researcher. The first step in analysis is concerned with the denotative meanings and types of signs are identified. Second step deals with the connotative meanings of the signs and images. Thirdly, the mythological meanings of memes are interpreted by the researcher.

Data Analysis

For data analysis in this study, the collected memes examined using visual discourse and semiotic analysis to understand how meaning, messages, and ideas about the 2023 Israel

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invasion are created and communicated through images and text. Memes have been analyzed denotatively, connotatively and mythologically by using semiotics analysis. This method helps to understand how these memes communicate ideas beyond just their surface context.



Denotation: The meme depicts a face that is split between saying "I support Israel" and "I support Palestine," with burning Israeli and Palestinian flags in its eyes. The actual picture of a face torn between two contradictory claims.

Connotation: The burning flags represent strong feelings and disagreements regarding the matter.

Mythological: It captures the larger cultural narrative of being caught up in the complicated Israel-Palestine conflict.



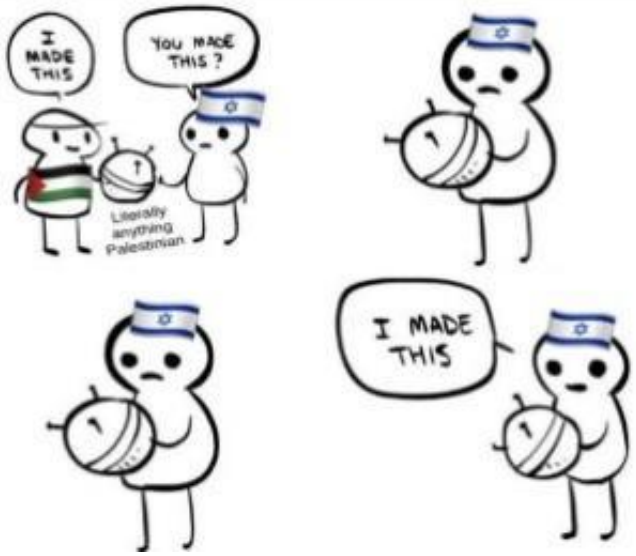
Denotation: "I stand with Palestine" is written on the box, which is a straightforward checkmark.

Connotation: It involves combining a political statement with a typical online exam, making support for Palestine seem like a necessary demonstration of humanity.

Mythological: It promotes the notion that online users must support Palestine in order to be good or human, making activism a widespread online practice.

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Denotation: The image depicts a Palestinian holding a flag and saying, "I made this," in reference to a Palestinian issue. "You made this?" asks an Israeli-flagged individual. The Israeli then declares, "I made this," while holding the identical object.

Connotation: It indicates that the Israeli side is attempting to claim credit for something that is Palestinian property, demonstrating identity theft or claim-taking.

Mythological: The myth is that the dispute is solely about who made what, leading people to believe that ownership is the only issue instead of the real bigger issue.



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Denotation: It shows a fight between two stick figures, one holding the Israeli flag and the other the Palestinian flag on a television that a person with a BBC label is watching.

Connotation: It conveys that the media (BBC) is portraying the conflict as a show or form of entertainment, turning the serious conflict into a spectacle for viewers.

Mythological: The myth is the widespread perception that news outlets transform complicated real-world disputes into straightforward dramatic performances, influencing people's perceptions of the matter.



Denotation: The image depicts a man labeled "Israel" shooting another labeled "Palestinians in their homeland," followed by the question, "Why are Palestinians always so angry?"

Connotation: It implies that Israel is oppressing and unfairly blaming Palestinians by using force against them and then accusing them of being angry.

Mythological: The notion that Palestinians are inherently violent, the fact that they are responding to an attack and casts the victim in a negative light.



Denotation: A surfboard flying an Israeli flag is attacked by armed men. "DEATH TO THE WEST!" exclaims one. "THOSE ZIONISTS," a woman wearing a Palestinian shirt declares.

Connotation: It criticizes anti-Israeli aggression and draws a comparison between it and the passive response of civilians. The conflict between militant action and commentary is symbolized.

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Mythological: It symbolizes an uneven conflict between the oppressor and the outsider. The conflict is framed as occupation versus resistance using symbols.



Denotation: The meme depicts a sobbing man slapping his face in exasperation while wearing the Israeli flag on his forehead. "After we stole their land, house, and killed their family, they threw a rock at us," the caption says.
Connotation: This satire a viewpoint that justifies violent acts (such as killing or seizing land) but views retaliatory acts (such as tossing a rock) as excessive victimization.
Mythological: The victim-oppressor reversal myth, in which the aggressor claims martyrdom, is evoked. It is related to stories that mythologize conflict by reversing causality and presenting oneself as the victim of aggression.



The three panels of the meme show Jews (with Stars of David) confronting anti-Zionist demonstrators, culminating in wild slogans regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

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Denotation: It depicts anti-Zionist confrontation, Jewish figures, and protest phrases like "Free Palestine" and "From the river to the sea."

Connotation: It highlights controversial political rhetoric, implies confusion between political criticism and antisemitism, and suggests a conflict between Jewish identity/Zionism and anti-Zionist activism.

Mythological: It frames the conflict in terms of collective memory and victimhood by using symbols (such as the Star of David and the Palestinian flag) and expressions that suggest to historical and territorial myths about promised land and national identity.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study will show that pro-Palestine memes during the 2023 Israel invasion are more than just pictures or jokes; they are powerful tools for expressing opinions, raising awareness, and influencing how people think about the conflict. By analyzing the signs, symbols, and messages in these memes, the research will highlight how social media allows individuals to take part in activism and share their support for a cause. Overall, the study will demonstrate the important role of digital visuals in shaping public understanding and discussions about global issues.

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