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RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Art of Communicating Through Images: A Classification of Persian Memes

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Abstract

This paper presents a new taxonomy of memes based on a comprehensive analysis of the content, purpose, and discourse characteristics of memes in Persian cyberspace. The taxonomy identifies five main categories of memes: (1) Visually punctuated memes, which rely on wordplay and visual imagery to create humor, often employing juxtaposition, incongruity, or unexpected combinations of elements; (2) Culturally Allusive Memes which draw upon shared cultural knowledge, including historical references, literary allusions, or popular cultural tropes, to evoke humor and connect with a specific audience; (3) Socially Commentative Memes which use humor to critique or comment on social and political issues, often employing satire, irony, or exaggeration to highlight societal ills or promote social change; (4) Personally Anecdotal Memes which humorously share personal anecdotes or observations, often using relatable experiences to foster connection and shared understanding among viewers; and, (5) Hybrid Memes defy categorization and combine elements from different categories to create unique and creative expressions. This article also explores the role of memes in the meaning-making of internet humor in Persian cyberspace. Memes, this study shows, are a great way for Iranians to share humor, connect with others, and express their unique culture.

Keywords: Memes; Digital Aesthetics; Persian Cyberspace; Visual Communication; Laughter Culture

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Introduction

The development of human society is greatly influenced by *laughter* (Provine, 2000). Laughter culture serves various purposes during different stages of sociogenesis (Gervais & Wilson, 2005). In ancient societies, laughter had a magical function, whereas in modern society, it primarily serves as a means of entertainment, adaptation, and communication. The evolution of laughter culture within Persian/Iranian societies can be divided into distinct stages.

1) Before the 7th century AD, humor in the pre-Islamic era was marked by satire and playfulness. During this time, Gusans, who served as entertainers in the courts of the Ashkanid and Sassanid dynasties, played a significant role in shaping this cultural expression (Samini et al., 2014).

2) From the 7th to the 19th centuries AD, Persian literature underwent a significant transformation with the rise of Islam. During this period, humor became more refined and

sophisticated. Early Persian literature showcased humorous figures, such as the clever Nasreddin Hodja, who used his wit and cunning to outsmart his adversaries (Mojabi, 2015). Prominent Persian poets like Rumi, Saadi, and Hafez incorporated humor into their works through mystic anecdotes, parables, and allegories. These poets skillfully intertwined humor with spiritual teachings, employing wit and satire to convey profound philosophical messages. For example, Rumi's *Mathnawi*, a renowned mystical poem, often employs humorous anecdotes to illustrate spiritual concepts. Rumi's humor serves as a means to engage the reader and make complex ideas more accessible. Similarly, Saadi's *Gulistan* (The Rose Garden) and Hafez's *Divan* are filled with humorous verses that intertwine themes of love, wine, and spirituality, creating a unique blend of wit and wisdom. Obeid e Zakani (d. 1370 AD) is widely recognized as one of the early Persian satirists. His writings are characterized by their satirical nature and inclusion of obscene verses, often delving into political or bawdy themes. Among his notable works are the *Resaleh-ye Delgosha*, *Akhlaq al-Ashraf* (Ethics of the Aristocracy), and the renowned humorous fable *Masnavi Mush-O-Gorbeh* (Mouse and Cat), which serves as a political satire (Halabi, 2016).

3) Humor in the modern era (19th to 21st centuries AD) has continuously evolved and adapted to suit the changing times. Persian literature during this period witnessed a revival of humor, particularly in the works of satirists and social commentators. Notably, the Persian Constitutional Revolution coincided with the emergence of renowned satirists and literary figures like Iraj Mirza and Bibi Khatoon Astarabadi. Most satirists expressed their ideas through poetry. Additionally, the early 20th Century saw the rise of Persian journalism, which brought about a new wave of humor. Writers such as Ali-Akbar Dehkhoda and Sadeq Hedayat utilized satirical writings in newspapers and magazines to critique political corruption and social issues. Their humorous pieces entertained readers and served as a platform for social and political commentary. Alongside Persian satire, Azeri satire played a significant role during the revolution. Jalil Mohammad Gholizadeh, a legendary Azerbaijani satirist, published his renowned *Molla Nasreddin* weekly magazine in Tabriz during this period. He introduced the first-ever cartoons in the history of Iranian cartoon art (Kharabi, 2007).

4) With the advent of the digital world and the emergence of digital humor, Persian humor adapted to the country's changes. Social media and internet culture have given rise to new forms of humor. Internet memes and jokes spread across Persian digital sites (Razipoor, 2022). The new area of development of humor culture is called internet humor culture because its main boundaries of the world are defined around the internet space. Cyberspace also has an in-game quality because it represents the in-between world, where everything is amorphous and plastic, where everything shifts and changes. The online humor culture of modern digital society, built on the phenomenon of physical production, represents the "joyful relationship" of things, the chaos of life, and the nature of laughter. However, if the medieval class is limited by the limits of time and space, the culture of humor on the

internet seems universal and without borders. In modern digital societies, humor can be a punishable act. Humorous behavior in cyberspace often includes trolling (posting offensive messages on virtual communication platforms), astroturfing (hacking using sophisticated software to create fake accounts, bots, etc., for example), or cyberbullying. Cyberbullying is defined as assault, harassment, and crime, often accompanied by sarcasm and violence.

In this article, we do not intend to analyze the behavior of laughter in its most aggressive expressions. Our goal is to analyze the properties of modern internet humor culture. Modern communication sphere is rich in such materials (signs, video blogs, internet memes, etc.). Internet memes are the main research topic (static and dynamic, e.g., GIFs, etc.). It is important to emphasize that the concept of internet memes spreads widely among Persian-speaking audiences. The concept of "meme" introduced by Richard Dawkins seems to be similar to concepts such as "viral virus" and "internet phenomenon". We will focus on the phenomenon of sharing emotions. Memes have become an essential part of internet culture for communication and expression. This paper aims to comprehensively classify memes in Persian cyberspace and emphasize their content and communication characteristics. Modern cyber-laughter culture can be well studied through the prism of internet memes as its primary objects (Rotanova & Fedorova, 2020).

What is a Meme?

Social media has become an integral part of our life (Zamani et al., 2021) and *meme* is a new form of content on social media. A meme contains sentiment towards a particular issue, product, person, or entity. Memes can be in the form of text, images, or images that contain text. Memes are entertaining, critical, sarcastic, and may even have political nature (Asmawati, Saikhu, & Siahaan, 2022). The concept of memes has become an integral part of internet culture, with funny and relatable content quickly spreading across various online platforms. However, what exactly is an internet meme? In social media settings, memes are considered a cultural unit of information shared and transmitted between individuals. It can be seen as a random entity encoded as a virus metaphor.

(A) Memes are cultural information units, according to Richard Dawkins, who coined the term "meme" in his 1976 book *The Selfish Gene*. He maintained that *meme* refers to a part of cultural transmission or comparison. This idea, behavior, or attitude is transmitted from person to person within a culture (Dawkins, 1976). In particular, internet memes are digital representations of these cultural elements shared and recombined online (Sorte, 2019). Memes, therefore, are mages, videos, or text that express a thought or emotion.

(B) Patterns that can be distributed (culture) are made between individuals. Memes are characterized by their ability to be easily distributed and replicated between individuals (Cannizzaro, 2016). Social media platforms like X, Facebook, and Instagram memes allow you to reach an audience quickly. The viral nature of memes comes from relevance and sharing. People find humor and connections in the ideas or situations depicted in memes, so they want

to share them with others with similar experiences and perspectives. Memes also show patterns of repetition and variation. Different people share and recombine memories, resulting in variations and adaptations. This iterative process allows memes to evolve and remain relevant in different contexts and cultural spaces. Memes can be a form of group expression that reflects the attitudes, beliefs, and values of a group or society (Kiela, et al., 2020).

(C) Fluke object in viral metaphor. The concept of memes as fluke objects is encoded in the form of a viral metaphor that emphasizes their ability to spread quickly and widely. Like viruses, memes can infect people's minds, forcing them to share them with others (Robertson, 2017). The contagious nature of memes is facilitated by the connectivity of the internet, which allows ideas to travel quickly across borders and time zones. The spread of memes significantly impacts social change and cultural development. Memes allow public discourse to influence political opinion and challenge social norms. They can promote essential issues, stimulate debate, and stimulate collaboration. Memes are not good or bad in nature. Memes may perpetuate negative stereotypes, promote misinformation, or promote cyberbullying, or memes might create a moment of a better mood. Therefore, any study on memes should examine their effects on individuals and societies according to their cultural contexts. Finally, internet memes are conventional information units shared and copied between individuals. A meme is used as a form of humor and social online commentary. Understanding the nature and importance of memes can help us understand the dynamics of internet culture and its impact on society. As memes evolve and adapt, more research is needed to examine their role in shaping the digital world.

History of Digital Memes

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, internet forums and photo boards became popular as platforms for sharing memes. One of the most popular memes is "Dance Baby." This is a 3D animation that appeared in 1996. This animation was simple but many found it funny and therefore it quickly spread through email chains and was one of the first internet memes to become widely recognized. With the advent of Web 2.0, social networking platforms such as Facebook, Twitter (now X), and YouTube have been steadily growing larger (Sarfi et al., 2021) and became hot beds for spreading memes. As access increased and information became easier to share, memes were able to reach a wider audience and spread at an unprecedented pace. Memes have become the universal language of the internet, crossing linguistic and cultural barriers. The early 2000s gave rise to several popular memes that became deeply embedded in popular culture. One notable example is the 'Rickroll,' which originated as a form of cross-baiting, tricking users into clicking a hyperlink that led to Rick Astley's music video. This meme gained immense popularity and eventually became an iconic symbol of internet humor. Another great meme that emerged during this period was "LOLcats." This funny picture is a cat with a caption written in broken English. The LOLcats meme celebrated the universality of cute animals and their humor to create a sensation in various online communities (Börzsei, 2013).

As social media continues to grow, platforms like Tumblr and Reddit emerged as essential places for creating and disseminating memes (Milner, 2018). These platforms have facilitated the creation of a community of meme creators who actively participate and create new content. Memes have become popular because the same formats and patterns are reused in different contexts. Internet memes have become more complex in recent years and often contain multiple components, including GIF video images and text. The advent of meme generators and editing tools democratized meme creation, allowing anyone with an internet connection to participate in meme culture. This democratization has increased specific slogans and social orientation programs for communities and interest groups. Internet memes have also played an important role in political and social discourse. Memes are a powerful way for nationalist movements to convey messages against the system and mobilize public opinion, for example, during the US presidential election in 2016. In this year, memes featuring candidates like Bernie Sanders and Donald Trump became popular for supporters and critics to voice their opinions (Moody-Ramirez & Church, 2016). The impact of internet memes on modern society cannot be underestimated.

Digital Memes in Iran

Despite general assumptions about issues like internet access and government control in Iran, Iranians are first and most active Middle Eastern nations on the internet. There is a rich academic literature on how people in the West have serious misunderstandings about Iranian culture and people (Shahghasemi, 2017). Iranians use internet extensively and for a variety of purposes (Nosraty et al., 2021; Shahghasemi, 2021). As mentioned above, memes have become an important part of internet culture, allowing individuals to express humorous and social content in a very concise manner. In Iran, the evolution of digital memes has followed a distinct trajectory, deeply influenced by the country's culture, societal norms, and political landscape. Our research delves into the history of Iranian digital memes, highlighting various phases of their creation and consumption. From the initial stage of copying and translating foreign memes to the contemporary era of leveraging artificial intelligence, Iranian memes have transformed into a unique blend of Persian cultural identity and global digital trends.

The Initial Phase: The early days of Iranian digital memes focused on copying and translating foreign memes. As the internet gained popularity in Iran, Iranian users began to consume and share memes from Western cultures, particularly those created by US users. These memes, which spread across the internet and pop culture, often featured humorous images or videos. However, it is important to note that many of these memes failed to resonate with the Iranian audience due to differences in language and cultural context.

In the early days of meme culture in Iran, memes were often called "trolls." This is because memes were often used to make fun of or satirize famous figures or topics and were graphically based on troll faces. For example, one popular meme genre in this period was memes comparing Iranian men and women. These memes were created by visually comparing two troll faces with

captions that often generalized the respective genders. Another popular type of troll meme at the time was the Persian translation of the Western memes. These memes featured images of popular English-language memes with Persian subtitles.

Although inactive, many Facebook pages with the name "Persian troll" still exist today. These pages are a reminder of the early days of meme culture in Iran.

Figure 1 In the early day of the internet in Iran, memes were called trolls

The Second Phase: The second phase of Iranian digital memes marked a movement to create memes based on Persian culture. Iranians began creating memes that included regional language references and humor. In this period, meme pages and groups that were dedicated to sharing and creating Persian memes emerged on social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook. These memes revolved around Iranian politics, social problems, and everyday experiences which were relevant and appealing to the Iranian audience.

The creation of cartoon characters for memes marked the second era of Persian-language meme culture. One of the first such characters was the "Angry Dad." Humorous content and memes featuring this character were produced and shared on numerous pages. Many of these memes were published in the form of comics. The main focus of the memes featuring the Angry Dad was criticism of the traditional Iranian family values and manners. Facebook was the leading platform for the spread of these memes.

The Angry Dad meme was created by an anonymous artist named "Amoo Ali." The artist's goal was to create a character representing the frustrations of many young Iranians with their traditional families. The Angry Dad is typically depicted as a middle-aged man with a mustache and a bald head. He is often seen yelling at his children or wife. The memes featuring the Angry Dad often poke fun at the strict rules and demands of traditional Iranian families. They also address issues such as gender roles, arranged marriage, and parental pressure.

The Angry Dad meme was a significant success in Persian-language meme culture. It was shared millions of times on Facebook and other social media platforms. The meme's popularity is likely due to its ability to resonate with various Iranian viewers. The Angry Dad is a relatable character who represents the experiences of many young Iranians. The meme's humor is also effective in making its critical points.

The Angry Dad meme is a significant example of the evolution of Persian-language meme culture. It marks the shift from simple image memes to more complex memes featuring cartoon characters. The meme's popularity also suggests that Persian-speaking users are becoming more interested in using memes to express their perspectives and experiences.

Figure 2 Angry Dad was one of the first purely Iranian meme charachters

The Third Phase: The third phase of digital memes in Iran is marked by the rise of memetic people and the use of memes as cultural weapons. Iranian meme creators started creating internet personalities, gaining popularity and recognition in the digital community. These new meme used new facilities to develop Persian-style memes in English, giving them greater reach and engagement with international audiences. Furthermore, memes became a powerful tool for social and political communication in Iran. Meme creators started using memes to protest and express opposition to social problems and communicate themselves worldwide. Memes became a way to bypass censorship and convey simple messages in a world where freedom of expression was considered limited -especially on social media. In this period, memes were shared and spread across various social media platforms, creating a sense of community and unity among Iranian internet users.

For example, the GIF meme of the "Že" is a popular Persian-language meme that originated in the early 2020s. The meme features a picture of an Arab looking animated character with a shocked expression and the caption "Že." The "Že" meme is now used for the presentation of being surprised or shocked.

The meme was initially used to mock Arab-speaking users on social media. The "Že" sound was used to represent the perceived stupidity or ignorance. The letter "Ž" does not exist in the Arabic alphabet. As a result, Arab speakers often struggled to pronounce the sound. This was seen as a sign of their inferiority by some Persian-speaking users.

However, the meaning of the meme began to change in the mid-2020s. As Persian-speaking users became more exposed to global meme culture, they began to use the "Že" meme more ironically or self-deprecatingly. For example, the meme began to be used to express surprise or shock at something that was happening in Iran. It was also used to make fun of Persian stereotypes or cultural practices.

For example, in Figure 3 the meme expresses surprise or shock at a recent political event. The man in the picture looks at a corner of the GIF with a shocked expression. The caption "Že" conveys the sense of surprise or shock that the man feels. Using the "Že" meme in this way suggests that the meme is becoming more complex. It is no longer simply a tool of Arab-bashing but can also be used to express a variety of emotions, including surprise, shock, and even self-deprecation.

Figure 3 GIF of the "Že" meme, a popular Persian-language meme that originated in the early 2020s

The Fourth Phase: Artificial intelligence is shaping many aspects of our modern life (Shahghasemi, 2025). In the current state of Iran's digital meme era we can see the introduction of AI into meme creation. Advances in artificial intelligence technology give meme creators access to tools and systems that can automate meme creation, making the process faster and more efficient. The AI-powered meme generators can examine popular cultural references and visuals to generate shareable and meaningful memes. AI is also being used to improve customization and personalization of memes. Meme creators can use artificial intelligence algorithms to create personalized memes based on individual preferences, ensuring a targeted and engaging meme experience. The introduction of AI into meme creation has increased the reach and influence of Iranian memes, as they can reach a broad audience and adapt to ever-changing situations. The history of digital memes in Iran shows the evolution of the country's internet culture. Memes have powerful connection to humor (Milner & Wolff, 2023) and from the early days of copying and interpreting foreign memes to the modern era of using artificial intelligence, Iranian memes have become a powerful medium for personal humor and social commentary.

Methodology

Data Collection

We used a multi-method approach that included various internet sources to collect a comprehensive set of Persian memes. We collected our memes during the January and Febrary 2024. Our main sources were:

Social media platforms: We investigated popular social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and X, focusing on groups and pages dedicated to memes. This strategy helped us to find several memes that were frequently circulated in Persian online communities.

Online meme-sharing communities: We explored various repositories of Persian memes hosted on platforms like Telegram and Twitch. These communities together consist a central hub for meme creation and sharing, providing a rich source of diverse memes.

Special meme websites: We also explored websites dedicated to Persian memes such as mimfarsi.com and memez.ir. These platforms focus on the Persian audience and offer a unique perspective on memes related to this cultural context. This comprehensive data collection process compiled nearly 1,000 Persian memes representing various categories and genres. We gathered and categorized these memes for subsequent content analysis.

Content Analysis

To examine the characteristics of Persian memes, we used a systematic content analysis approach to carefully examine each meme based on its content, themes, and discourse characteristics. This multifaceted analysis includes the following steps:

Visual Analysis: We carefully analyzed the visual aspects of each meme, paying attention to the images, colors, symbols, and other elements used to convey meaning and create humor and how these visual and textual elements interact to create the experience of memes.

Text Analysis: The textual parts of each meme were carefully examined, including captions, comments, and other textual elements. We considered the type of language used that reflect each meme's purpose: entertainment, social commentary, political criticism, and other forms of communication.

Purpose Analysis: We carefully determined the primary purpose of each meme, identifying whether it was humorous, made a social statement, engaged in political criticism, or performed another communication function. This analysis allowed us to understand the motivation behind the creation of the meme and the purpose of the message it conveys.

Dissecting Discourse: We examined the communication strategies that memes used and we examined how they employed irony, slapstick, and other rhetorical devices to enhance humor, make social statements, or challenge social norms. We examined how these communication strategies work with video and text components to create engaging memes. Through this comprehensive content analysis, we uncovered the main patterns and characteristics of the Persian memetic world.

Data Validation

The taxonomy was validated using an inter-coder reliability process in which two independent researchers independently classified meme subcategories and compared their rankings. The high level of agreement (92%) indicated the validity of the taxonomy.

Results

A study of over 1,000 memes extracted from social media, websites and message groups showed that over 74% were in the form of photos, about 24% in the form of videos, and about 2% in the form of GIFs. Of these, about 65% of the memes were in English, although only about 30% had a foreign origin. The remaining 70%, despite their English language, were produced in the Persian social media space. In addition to this group of English-language memes, two groups of 20% Persian and 15% language-free memes were identified.

Based on the analysis of popular social networks in Iran, Telegram, Instagram, and X, we can provide a map of the presence of memes as a media object in social sphere. Undoubtedly, memes are one of the mainstays of modern Iranian humor culture on the internet. People's stories are told concisely and meaningfully, but above all, memes create a powerful effect by combining verbal and non-verbal (written, visual) techniques such as hyperbole, metaphor, mage macros, reaction images and gifs, symbolism, visual puns etc.

Technological advancements and progress in digital technologies have played a significant role in merging visual and verbal elements, thereby expanding the diversity and scope of memes. Drawing on research findings, we propose a classification framework for memes, which can be populated and organized based on those created and shared within the Iranian digital community. Through content analysis, we have identified and developed a classification of Persian memes into five distinct types.

Visually Punctuated Memes

Visual punctuation memes create humor with puns and images. They often use juxtapositions, contradictions, or unexpected combinations of elements to elicit laughter. For example, a popular visually conveyed meme in Persian cyberspace is a "Confused John Travolta" meme, where an image of John Travolta looking confused is superimposed over several unrelated scenarios. This meme exploits the absurdity of placing an out-of-context image in different situations, creating humor through unexpected visual associations. Another popular form of visually communicated memes in Persian cyberspace involves image macros, in which a humorous caption is applied to an unrelated image. These memes capitalize on the element of surprise and playfulness to evoke laughter.
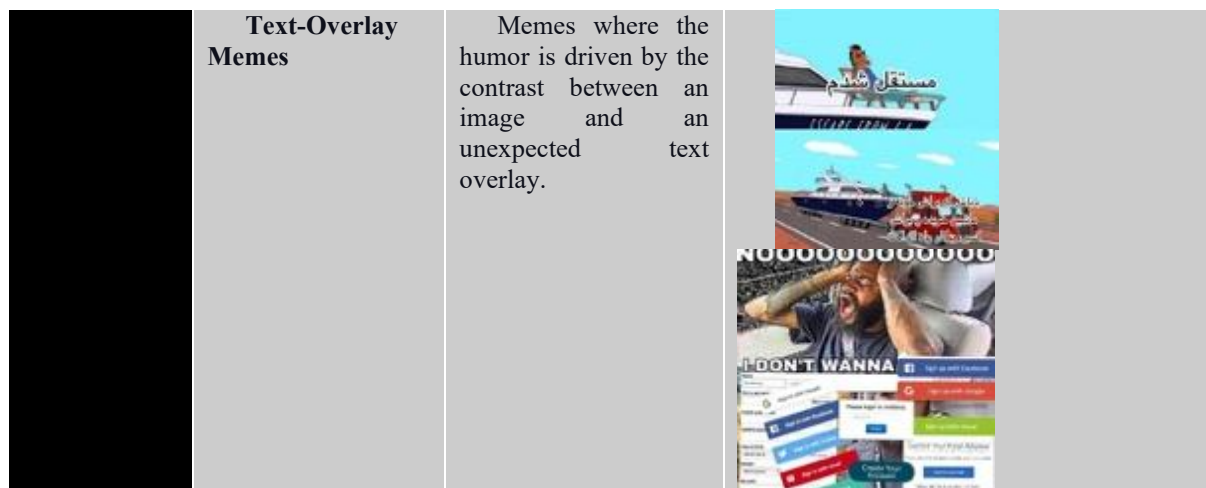
Figure 4 A small part of the vast collection of Confused Travolta memes in gif format that are used on Persian Telegram

Table 1 Subcategories of Visually Punctuated Memes

Main Category	Subcategory	Definition	Examples
Visually Punctuated Memes	**Juxtaposition Memes**	Memes that create humor by placing unrelated elements together for a surprising effect.	

	Absurdist Memes	Memes that rely on surreal or nonsensical humor, often defying logical interpretation.	
	Reaction Image Memes	Memes using popular images or GIFs to express emotions in specific situations.	
	Exaggeration Memes	Memes that amplify a small detail, emotion, or action to an extreme level for comedic effect.	
	Contrast Memes	Memes that compare two vastly different subjects to highlight humor or irony.	

	Text-Overlay Memes	Memes where the humor is driven by the contrast between an image and an unexpected text overlay.	
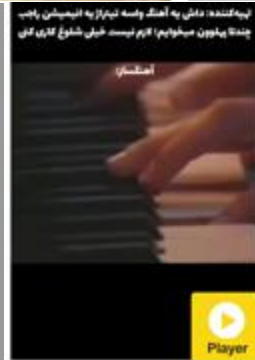
Culturally Allusive Memes

Culturally allusive memes draw upon shared cultural knowledge to evoke humor and connect with a specific audience. These memes often incorporate historical references, literary allusions, or popular cultural tropes. In Persian cyberspace, these memes often use iconic figures from Persian history or employ references to traditional Persian literature. These memes create a sense of belonging and shared understanding among viewers by tapping into cultural symbols. Memes based on postcolonialism and anti-western cultural views in a humorous and relatable way allow viewers to learn about the cultural heritage while being entertained.

Figure 5 A popular video meme that satirizes Hollywood stereotypes of the Middle East

Table 2 Subcategories of Culturally Allusive Memes

Main Category	Subcategory	Definition	Examples
Culturally Allusive Memes	Historical Reference Memes	Memes incorporating historical figures, events, or cultural symbols to evoke humor or commentary.	
	Literary Allusion Memes	Memes referencing classic Persian literature, poetry, or philosophical themes for humorous or intellectual engagement.	
	Pop Culture Adaptation Memes	Memes that take elements from Persian pop culture, such as movies, TV shows, or celebrities, and transform them into meme formats.	

Religious & Mythological Memes	Memes using elements of Persian mythology, folklore, or religious themes for humor or satire.	
National Identity Memes	Memes that play with Iranian identity, patriotism, and national pride, often contrasting traditional vs. modern perspectives.	
Linguistic & Proverb Memes	Memes that use Persian idioms, proverbs, or unique language quirks to create humor and cultural commentary.	

Social Commentary Memes

Social commentary memes use humor to criticize or comment on social and political issues. They use satire, irony, or exaggeration to highlight social issues or promote social change. In Persian cyberspace, sometimes these memes have important effects on political discourse and activism. They provide a platform for people to voice dissent, challenge authority, and raise awareness of pressing social issues. One example of a social commentary meme is the "The Great Kurdistan Map" which is sometimes also called "Kurdistan't" memes. These memes,

which are anti-separatist, mock the maps published by pan-Kurdish activists and exaggerate them, thus criticizing the issue of separatism. Social commentary memes use humor to address serious issues, encouraging critical thinking and raising viewer awareness.

Figure 6 Anti-separatist memes against pan-Kurdism

Table 3 Subcategories of Socially Commentative Memes

Main Category	Subcategory	Definition	Examples
Socially Commentative Memes	Political Satire Memes	Memes that criticize or mock political figures, policies, or ideologies, often using irony and exaggeration.	

Social Issue Memes	Memes highlighting social injustices, gender roles, economic challenges, or cultural shifts in Persian society.	
Protest & Dissent Memes	Memes used as a form of digital activism to spread awareness about protests, civil rights, or government policies.	
Economic & Inflation Memes	Memes addressing issues like rising prices, unemployment, and the fluctuating value of currency, which are major concerns in Iran.	

Personal Anecdotal Memes

Personal anecdotal memes humorously share personal anecdotes or observations, often using relatable experiences to promote connection and understanding between viewers. These memes allow people to express their unique perspectives and experiences in a light and relatable way. In Persian cyberspace, personal anecdotal memes often revolve around family relationships and cultural quirks, creating a sense of community and camaraderie among viewers. The "Teatr-e Shahr Metro Station" meme is a famous example of personally anecdotal memes. This meme features humorous illustrations or captions depicting the chaotic traffic situation in Tehran, a symbolic experience for many Iranians. These memes allow people to find comfort in shared experiences and create a sense of community.

Figure 7 Teatr-e Shahr Metro Station according to a Twitter (X) meme

Table 4 Subcategories of Personally Anecdotal Memes

Main Category	Subcategory	Definition	Examples
Personally Anecdotal Memes	Relatable Experience Memes	Memes depicting daily life situations that resonate with a broad audience.	

	Family Dynamic Memes	Memes humorously portraying generational and cultural differences within Persian families, especially between parents and children.	
	Student & Exam Stress Memes	Memes focusing on the struggles of school, university life, exams, and academic pressure.	

	Workplace & Boss Memes	Memes that capture office humor, frustrating bosses, and workplace dynamics.	
	Relationship, Marriage & Dating Memes	Memes about love, dating struggles, breakups, and the complexities of romantic relationships.	
	Daily Struggles & Adulting Memes	Memes reflecting the pains of paying bills, cooking disasters, laundry piling up, and the struggles of being an adult.	

Hybrid Memes That Defy Categorization

The final category of memes in Persian cyberspace is hybrid memes that defy categorization. These memes combine elements from different genres to create unique and creative

expressions. These memes transcend traditional classifications by combining elements from different categories. They create unique and creative stories that defy easy categorization. They challenge the limits of traditional meme formats and push the boundaries of creativity. Hybrid memes often incorporate elements such as visual text images and animation to convey a message. Because of their diversity, providing specific examples of hybrid memes is hard because they are constantly evolving and adapting to new situations and contexts.

Figure 8 Complex and hybrid memes that defy categorization

Table 5 Subcategories of Hybrid Memes

Main Category	Subcategory	Definition	Examples
Hybrid Memes That Defy Categorization	Mixed-Genre Memes	Memes blending elements from multiple categories to create unique humor styles.	

	Internet Ugly Aesthetic Memes	Memes deliberately using low-quality, distorted visuals, weird fonts, and chaotic designs to create humor.	
	Multi-Format Memes	Memes that mix images, GIFs, videos, and text elements in a single meme for layered humor.	

| | Crossover Memes | Memes that mix characters, references, or visual styles from completely different pop culture sources or internet trends. | |
| | AI-Generated & Deepfake Memes | Memes created using AI tools, including deepfake videos or AI-generated text/image manipulations. | |

Discussion

This taxonomy provides a systematic framework for understanding the diverse landscape of Persian memes, highlighting the creative and ironic techniques used in this cultural context. It is also a useful tool for further research on the role of memes in the construction of social discourse and cultural identity in Persian cyberspace.

The ranking of internet memes we publish and present cannot be considered exhaustive. It primarily reflects the culture of humor and the capacity to diversify internet content. Furthermore, the integrated nature of memes, which combine multiple elements and are disseminated through various channels, should be acknowledged. It is also important to recognize that cyberculture, characterized by the communicative and technological dimensions of virtual spaces and the interactive logic of internet communities, differs from both the broader

internet and the specific internet culture of Iran's digital society. Factors such as personal culture, aesthetics, political and professional interests, as well as age and gender characteristics, influence the level of choice, interest, and demand for this form of internet humor culture (memes).

The high percentage of English-language memes is also notable. This suggests that Persian-speaking social media users increasingly engage with the global meme culture. However, it is also important to note that many of these memes are produced locally. This suggests that meme culture is also developing independently in Iran.

Meme Aesthetics, Rise of the Internet Ugly

Memes mobilize resources which are easy to share and reproduce, while reducing and essentializing sensations and thoughts in simple grapho-textual or videographic units. Thus, a lot of cultural references are mixed in memes and GIFs: medieval tapestries, historical paintings, classic art, pop culture references, and hip-hop lyrics all gather through a specific esthetics, while obeying a form of conventional grammar (Aharoni, 2019). In short, they function to a seemingly wild yet obviously structured culture of bricolage.

Memes' aesthetic logic, rooted in digital practices of participation, re-mediation, and bricolage (Deuze, 2006; Milner, 2016), establishes an engagement through which "historical modes of culture production meet the new affordances of Web 2.0" (Shifman, 2014). Memetic distribution thus exacerbates the tension between the social prestige of resonant texts and the mundane ability to copy, disseminate, and even change them ((Milner, 2016; Phillips & Milner , 2017; Wiggins & Bowers, 2014)

Within the vast realm of online culture, a unique aesthetic sensibility has emerged, characterized by its intentionally amateurish and often jarring appearance. Dubbed "Internet Ugly," this style has become a hallmark of meme creation, reflecting the medium's decentralized and bottom-up nature.

Internet Ugly memes often feature crudely drawn characters, nonsensical captions, and a general disregard for conventional aesthetics. This deliberate subversion of artistic norms serves several purposes. Firstly, it democratizes meme creation, allowing anyone with basic technological skills to participate in the meme-making process. Unlike traditional art, which often requires specialized training and tools, Internet Ugly celebrates everyday users' raw and unrefined creativity (Douglas, 2014).

Secondly, Internet Ugly memes embody a sense of irony and self-awareness, poking fun at the perceived elitism and pretension of mainstream art and culture. By embracing imperfection and chaos, Internet Ugly memes challenge the notion that art must be aesthetically pleasing or polished. They celebrate authenticity and originality, even if they appear unconventional or even unappealing to some.

The popularity of Internet Ugly memes is further fueled by their adaptability and ability to evolve. While some aspects of the style remain consistent, such as low-quality images and humorously nonsensical captions, new creators and platforms constantly reinvent Internet Ugly memes. This dynamic nature allows Internet Ugly to stay fresh and relevant, continually evolving to reflect the ever-changing landscape of online culture.

Despite its widespread popularity, Internet Ugly has not escaped the clutches of corporate and political interests. Some companies and political groups have attempted to co-opt the style

to market their products or promote their agendas. However, this commercialization often backfires, as the core values of Internet Ugly – authenticity, originality, and anti-elitism – clash with the profit-driven motives of corporations and political campaigns.

When Internet Ugly is co-opted, its creators often respond with public outcry or abandon the style altogether. This resistance reflects the deep-seated commitment of Internet Ugly practitioners to maintaining the integrity of their aesthetics. They view Internet Ugly as a form of cultural expression that commercial interests should not dilute or exploit.

With its embrace of imperfection and its rejection of mainstream aesthetics, Internet Ugly has become an essential element of online culture. It reflects the decentralized and bottom-up nature of the internet, where anyone can participate in creating and disseminating content. Moreover, the Internet Ugly is a powerful tool for social commentary and cultural critique, allowing users to express their thoughts and feelings humorously and subversively.

Understanding the aesthetic of Internet Ugly is crucial for comprehending the dynamics of online culture. It reveals the values and attitudes of online communities, their resistance to traditional hierarchies, and their embrace of authenticity and originality. As online culture continues to evolve, Internet Ugly will likely remain a significant force, reflecting the ever-changing moods and aspirations of the digital age.

The study also found that the distribution of image memes is relatively evenly spread across the three social media platforms studied. This suggests that image memes are a cross-platform phenomenon not limited to any specific platform.

We believe this will contribute significantly to memetic research from a data and text mining perspective. The flow of information in multimedia elements (memes) of various types and styles is significant to social media activities' content and cultural context. Cyberhumor is characterized by a transition from multichannel to omnichannel. Information and communication systems, internet sites, social networks, and messengers transfer communication culture and humor between individuals to other browsing platforms. In our opinion, these social spaces (social, cultural, technological) are also research topics for the culture of humor on the internet.

Conclusion

Humor has been an essential part of Persian literature throughout history, reflecting each period's cultural, social, and political aspects. It has evolved into various forms of humor, from the humor of pre-Islamic times to the wit of medieval poets, from the satire of modern writers to the humor of modern Persian literature. By examining the historical classification of humor in Persian literature, we can understand the cultural and social changes that shaped the comic landscape of this literary tradition. Internet Ugly memes, with their crude and unrefined aesthetic, embody the democratic, anti-elitist, and authentic values of online culture. This distinct style is also popular in Persian social media, where it can be found in a variety of categories. This paper presented a taxonomy of memes in Persian cyberspace, showing five

main categories. Visually punctuated memes are based on wordplay and visual images, while culturally punctuated memes refer to shared cultural knowledge. Social commentary memes use humor to critique social and political issues, and inherently anecdotal memes promote connection through relatable experiences and hybrid memes that defy categorization. By understanding the different types of memes, we can understand the characteristics of internet humor culture in Persian cyberspace. memes shape online communication and serve as a powerful tool for communication and social media that reflect society, its values, and concerns. In particular, the development of social media and the internet is the basis for discussing digital humor, a new area for developing humor culture.

This study provides insights into the nature and distribution of image memes in Persian social media. The findings suggest that image memes are a popular form of communication in this context, with various formats and languages used. The predominance of English-language memes is notable, but the finding that a significant proportion of these are produced in Persian social media spaces is also substantial. This suggests that Persian-speaking users actively engage with and create English-language memes, which may reflect the growing global influence of Iranian culture.

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هنر ارتباط گرفتن از راه تصویر: طبقه‌بندی مِیم‌های فارسی

حسین مقدم ۱، **احسان شاه‌قاسمی** ۲٭

چکیده

این مقاله طبقه‌بندی نوینی از مِیم‌ها ارائه می‌دهد که بر پایه‌ی تحلیلی جامع از محتوا، هدف، و ویژگی‌های گفتمانی مِیم‌ها در فضای سایبری فارسی تدوین شده است. در این طبقه‌بندی، پنج دسته‌ی اصلی از مِیم‌ها شناسایی شده‌اند: (۱) مِیم‌های تصویری‌ـ‌زبان‌باز، که با اتکا بر بازی‌های زبانی و تصویرسازی دیداری به آفرینش طنز می‌پردازند و اغلب از تضاد، ناهماهنگی یا ترکیب‌های غیرمنتظره بهره می‌برند؛ (۲) مِیم‌های اشارت‌ـ‌فرهنگی، که با ارجاع به دانش فرهنگی مشترک——از جمله اشارات تاریخی، ارجاعات ادبی، یا قالب‌های فرهنگ عامه——طنز می‌آفرینند و با مخاطب خاصی پیوند برقرار می‌کنند؛ (۳) مِیم‌های انتقادی‌ـ‌اجتماعی، که طنز را برای نقد یا واکنش به مسائل اجتماعی و سیاسی به کار می‌گیرند و غالباً از طنز گزنده، کنایه یا اغراق برای برجسته‌سازی نارسایی‌های اجتماعی یا پیشبرد تغییر بهره می‌برند؛ (۴) مِیم‌های روایی‌ـ‌شخصی، که تجربه‌ها یا مشاهدات فردی را به‌شکلی طنزآمیز بازگو می‌کنند و با اتکا بر تجربه‌های آشنا، حس همدلی و درک مشترک میان مخاطبان می‌سازند؛ و (۵) مِیم‌های ترکیبی، که قابل دسته‌بندی نیستند و با ترکیب عناصری از دسته‌های گوناگون، بیان‌هایی خلاقانه و منحصربه‌فرد خلق می‌کنند. این مقاله همچنین نقش مِیم‌ها را در معناآفرینی طنز اینترنتی در فضای سایبری فارسی بررسی می‌کند. یافته‌های پژوهش نشان می‌دهد که مِیم‌ها ابزاری مؤثر برای ایرانیان در همخوان‌سازی طنز، برقراری ارتباط و ابراز فرهنگ منحصربه‌فردشان هستند.

کلیدواژگان: مِیم؛ زیباشناسی دیجیتال؛ فضای سایبری فارسی؛ ارتباط تصویری؛ فرهنگ خندیدن.