Dissertation

Online Humour and Politics - Exploring the link between political memes and voting behavior in Mauritius

Submitted by:
Avinash Dhondoo
1810131

Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities

In partial fulfillment of the requirements
For the Degree of BSc Journalism (Minor Digital Media)

University of Mauritius
June 2021

Dissertation

Online Humour and Politics - Exploring the link between political memes and voting behavior in Mauritius

Submitted by:
Avinash Dhondoo
1810131

Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities

In partial fulfillment of the requirements
For the Degree of BSc Journalism (Minor Digital Media)

University of Mauritius
June 2021

ABSTRACT

Online Humour and Politics - Exploring the link between political memes and voting behavior in Mauritius

The digitisation of news and information has seen the rise of different types of social media along with the rise of various modes of communication. One such distinct mode of communication is the use of memes. While memes for different activities, events or even phenomenon have become viral across the social media sites, political memes have raised debates in the way that it is used to influence voting behavior of its people in a democratic country.

This dissertation has tried to find out the impact of political memes on the voting behavior of democratic countries which includes Mauritius. When analysing the secondary sources, it has been shown that traditional media and new media are different. Whether it is humor or satire, political memes do play an important role in influencing the behavior of people when they vote to some extent but not in the significant manner.

In a democratic country like Mauritius, political memes are shared a lot especially on Facebook questions arise as to whether these can have negative impacts on the minds of the people. A 'pragmatic' research philosophy was used in this dissertation along with an 'inductive approach' to perform a survey-based research strategy. A 'mixed-methodology' research approach was used where data from the 'primary surveys' were triangulated with that of the findings from the secondary sources. Two different survey questionnaires were used: one for the meme creators and one for the meme lovers which is common people who share memes on Facebook.

Responses from 10 meme creators and 177 meme lovers were gathered and analysed. Recommendations to avoid creating negative influence by becoming more responsible and accountable when engaged in meme creation was put forward to meme creators. It was deemed advisable to avoid direct attack to politicians and to do their utmost best to respect the freedom of rights.

For meme lovers, they should be responsible for making the memes viral only after efficacy and avoid direct attacks. Meme lovers should always keep an open mind instead of wrongly influencing others. The government should try to not focus on some of the memes instead of reacting to them. Hence, mutual collaboration and an understandable "ecosystem" are needed for political memes not to cause harm to the harmony of country. This will ensure a healthy environment and uplift the democratic rights of the citizens.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To begin with, I would like to thank the almighty for his blessings and sustanance that gave me the strength to go till the end of this dissertation. Nothing can be completed without his blessings.

I would like to say a special thanks to my supervisor, Mrs Christina Chan Meetoo for her guidance and support. Her overall insights in this field has made this an inspiring experience for me. She was always present whenever I needed her advice.

I also cannot forget my mother and sisters on whom I could always count for support.

I will end by thanking all those who participated in this dissertation by filling and sharing my questionnaires and all those who were involved directly and indirectly into completing this Dissertation.

DISSERTATION DECLARATION

On submission of my dissertation to the UoM, I solemnly declare that:

a. I have read and understood the sections on "Plagiarism and Fabrication and Falsification of Results" found in the University's Regulations Handbook (2020/2021) and certify that the dissertation embodies the results of my own work.

b. I have submitted a soft copy of my dissertation through the Turnitin Platform.

c. I have adhered to the "Harvard system of referencing" or a system acceptable as per "The University of Mauritius Referencing Guide" for referencing, quotations and citations in my dissertation. Each contribution to, and quotation in my dissertation from the work of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

d. I have not allowed and will not allow anyone to copy my work with the intention of passing it off as his/her own work.

e. I am aware that I may have to forfeit the certificate/ diploma/ degree in the event that plagiarism has been detected after the award.

f. Notwithstanding the supervision provided to me by the University of Mauritius, I warrant that any alleged act(s) of plagiarism during my stay as a registered student of the University of Mauritius is entirely my own responsibility and the University of Mauritius and/or its employees shall under no circumstances whatsoever be under any liability of any kind in respect of the aforesaid act(s) of plagiarism.

PROGRESS LOG

17/11/2020	General Meeting with the supervisor Mrs Christina Chan Meetoo
18/11/2020	A draft of the 1st intro sent to the supervisor.
25/11/2020	2nd meeting with the supervisor to discuss questions that can be asked to meme creators
29/11/2020	Questions that will be asked to meme creators have been sent to the supervisor for feedback before sending to those memes creators. Feedback about questions to meme creators received and ready to send
11/12/2020	Questionnaires sent to Memes creators for respond
05/01/2020	Questions that will be asked to memes fans have been sent to the supervisor for feedback before sending to fill
08/01/2020	Questionnaires sent back after verification from the supervisor
12/01/2021	Questionnaires sent to memes fans to fill
18/02/2021	156 responses were gathered. Response of Questionnaire for "Memes Creators" were closed with 10 responses
17/03/2021	Correction of 1st submission of draft were sent back by the supervisor along with comments
27/02/2021	Response of Questionnaire for those who share memes on social media were closed with 177 responses.
02/04/2021	A reworked introduction was sent again to the supervisor after her feedback on the 1st one
03/04/2021	Literature Reviews and Research Methodology Chapters were sent for feedback to the supervisor
05/04/2021	Feedback for Introduction, Literature

	Reviews and Research Methodology were sent back for perusal
08/05/2021	Chapter Research and Findings were sent to the Supervisor for feedback
09/05/2021	Chapter 1 to 4 sent to the supervisor after making the necessary adjustments advised from previous feedbacks
13/05/2021	Feedback again for chapter 1-4 from Supervisor
30/05/2021	Conclusion sent to the supervisor for Feedback
05/06/2021	Final Draft Submitted on Turnitin
12/06/2021	Feedback for the whole dissertation from Supervisor
26/06/2021	**SUBMISSION**

ENDORSEMENT

Christina Chan Meetoo
to me ▾

Sat, Jun 26, 3:33 PM (1 day ago) ☆ ↩

To: The PC
BSc (Hons) Journalism Yr 3

I hereby certify that the dissertation entitled "Online Humour and Politics - Exploring the link between political memes and voting behaviour in Mauritius" was undertaken by student Avinash Dhondoo under my supervision during the academic year 2020-2021.

--
Christina CHAN-MEETOO
chanssc@uom.ac.mu
Senior Lecturer in Media and Communication
Head of Mediacom Studio
University of Mauritius
Tel: 403-7938

Activate Windows
Go to Settings to activate V

RECEIPT OF TURNITIN REPORT

turnitin

Digital Receipt

This receipt acknowledges that Turnitin received your paper. Below you will find the receipt information regarding your submission.

The first page of your submissions is displayed below.

Submission author: Avinash Dhondoo

Assignment title: Final Dissertation

Submission title: Online Humour and Politics - Exploring the link between poli...

File name: Turnt_check.docx

File size: 3M

Page count: 48

Word count: 11,149

Character count: 57,504

Submission date: 26-Jun-2021 12:52PM (UTC+0400)

Submission ID: 1612365513

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF TABLES

Table of Contents

1. Introduction

Nowadays, the way we access news and entertainment is more digital (Kamlipur.R, Friedrichsen.M, 2017). In fact, social media have clearly become crucial drivers of this transformation. In the industry, "a 'new' dynamic of newsgathering, production and dissemination is taking shape that affects journalistic practices." (Heinrich, 2008). People is involved so much in the dissemination of information in such a way that they are prepared to create information themselves—for free (Beckett, 2010). However, little is currently known about how different kind of public content influence the people who view them, especially when the content deals with real-world issues like politics in Mauritius. A study by Pew Research in 2019 shows that nearly 60% of respondents find discussing politics with people they disagree "stressful and frustrating". Some might even block or unfriend those with dissimilar political views. (Klein, 2018).

According to Independent Fashion Bloggers, a community for fashion bloggers to share their experiences and create a resource so everyone can build a better blog, we are all looking to capture that special something that would make our content go viral through digital media. There are usually elements in viral content that are proven to seek a lot of attention. In 2019, a post from The Daily SEO Blog notes that studies done on content from The New York Times have showed that longer articles or content that elicits high-energy emotions like awe, anger, anxiety and humor tend to be shared more. When we talk about humor, internet memes is a great "tool" that is used to disseminate humor among people. These are contents which are created by common people that might influence other people. According to the evolutionary biologist, Richard Dawkins, "an internet meme is an idea, behavior, style, or usage that spreads from person to person within a culture." While most people consider memes as humoristic content on the internet, we should also not forget that it has now entered the political world and might influence the decision of people on the way they vote and the way they see politics and politicians. According to Wyer (2004), political memes change what issues people concentrate on, influences how they consume and process that information, shapes how they view the world, and ultimately, can change a range

of political activities. Today, political memes have become very prominent tools for political campaigning. According to a survey of Statcounter GlobalStats on the use of social media in Mauritius, 88.98 % of people use Facebook. Therefore, in order to push for the popularity of political issues, memes on social media are being used as the main tool.

The way the citizens consume media information and the way they make political decisions has been developed since long. A common sort of meme looks like a "hastily constructed cartoon, with block text and edited or combined images and the pictures of political figures, comedy actors or popular personalities are mostly used." (Shifman, 2014). There is always a message attached to these types of memes. These memes does not represent only the image but it "generally refers to the thought behind a selected collection of texts that are distinct but make reference to one another through use of common themes and/or tropes" (Shifman, 2014). As an example, the picture below can portray this kind of memes mentioned. It is a meme that is related to someone who has daytime sleepiness at work.
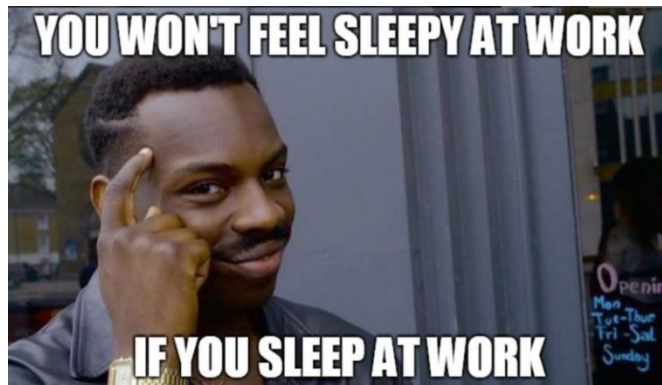
Figure 1: This meme contains words, a popular figure and carries a message

Some memes are meant to be used as templates to be adapted for different kind of situations whereby the image remains the same and only the text is changed to fit the context.

Despite the overall influences and humoristic side, memes being considered as a factor that can influence opinions have received many attentions in the world of politics. Till now, the effect of memes on political results has not been put forward among scholars in Mauritius as it remains debatable. Do voters turn a blind eye on political memes? Or, do political memes plays great roles in influencing voters? This dissertation will attempt to explore such questions in order to gauge the effects of political memes on voters.

1.1. Political Memes as a tool to communicate

There have always been debates how the media influence voting behavior in the world including in Mauritius. Defi Media, L'express, MBC, Top FM, Wazza FM, Sunday Times, Inside News, The Times, Fox News, BBC, France 24 amongst others are some of those media in Mauritius and in the world who focus a lot on political news and which independently or being attached to certain political parties seem to have played a role to influence voting behavior. Nonetheless, technology has evolved and more people are now on social media and it seems like internet memes has taken over the internet. Media's political cartoons that was used before to add humor to political issues are not that famous than it was before. For example, memes are now more famous than caricatures. There are social media pages which are created by common people just to share memes. For instance, in Mauritius pages like Starter Pack Moris, UOM Meme Society, Grafika, Lokal amongst others. According

to Milner (2013), in order for most people to get involved in a political issues going around them, most of them uses political memes. It is same for those Facebook memers mentioned who created those pages to share their memes. In order for them to pass on a political message or simply to criticize a decision, many political observers have recourse to graphic memes rather than arguments in the form of structured text in order to transmit political messages or to criticise decisions taken by authorities.
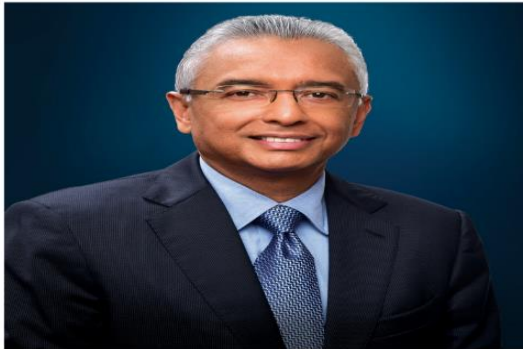
Figure 3: A meme from the Page Starter Pack Maurice criticizing the PM for being absent for many days
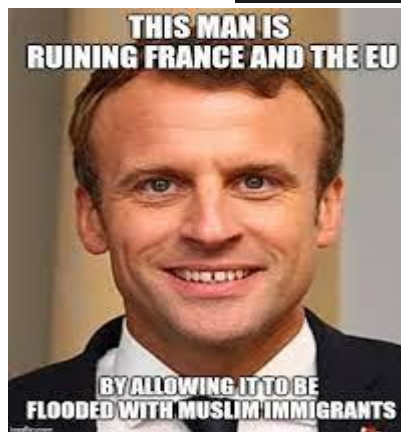
Figure 4: These images portray different political memes created about politicians in Mauritius and in other countries

1.2. Aims, objectives and research questions of this dissertation

1.2.1. Aims

Satire accompanied with humor has always been part of the world of politics. "When cynical distance and ironic posturing have become paramount to relate to life of political figures, political humor is no longer considered as subversive." (Brock, 2018)

The main aim of this dissertation is to put forward how there are many factors which are attached to someone before that particular person makes decisions how to vote, why to vote and for whom to vote. But, one of the factors that will be focused on in this dissertation will be political memes. Many scholars have considered memes to be one of the main factors that influence voting behavior and as from data gathered from many people on the social media, it has been clearly seen that one of the purposes of creating political memes is to convey certain messages to the people in a satiric and humoristic way about political issues of the country.

The people who has been aimed at for this dissertation is not only youngsters but all categories of people who are active on social media and who either create memes for their own entertainment or to entertain other people and also for those who consume those memes. Peculiarly, this study will explore responses from people who create political memes for the "consumers" of memes and their motivations and objectives behind the creation of those memes.

1.2.2. Objectives

The main objective of this research is to further explore:

(i)   the effects and influence of political memes on voting behavior
(ii)   role of politics and democracy
(iii)   how humor or satire are used as tools for political discourse
(iv)   how memes happened to be an important tool in politics and;
(v)   why political memes are so powerful in influencing opinions

1.2.3. Questions

(i)   What could be the plausible influence/ impact of political memes over the voting behavior as studied through Literature Reviews?

(ii)   What are the primary views of the meme creators & meme lovers on memes influencing political behavior for democratic countries like Mauritius?

(iii)   What are the suggested recommendations to the end stakeholders with respect to the influence of memes and their usages?

2. Literature Reviews

Literature review helps in assessing the related reports, journals and other secondary sources about any topic under consideration in order to understand the existing knowledge along with deriving insights out of the same, which further fuels the creation of the research questionnaire in order to find out the gaps in the knowledge.

Literature reviews are descriptive in nature, which entails to finding out information from secondary sources and thereby reporting the same by contextualizing it to the research question. The literature review aim was to gain necessary findings from research through secondary sources like journals, reports, blogs, websites, news-items, books, digital arts amongst others to find out more about the influence of political memes on the voting behavior of people. These findings were then analyzed to highlight the existing knowledge in alignment to research objectives. For this dissertation, research about media, politics, political memes and memes affecting voting behavior amongst others will be discussed in detail to understand the underlying theories, concepts, research methodologies and findings related to the topic under consideration.

2.1.Politics, democracy and related media

In the first place, when the concept of democracy came into consideration it was being defined as the system which is formed through the elected representatives of the people constituting the region (Diamond, 2004). For instance, in Mauritius

we have 3 main elections: the general election which include 21 constituencies and is conducted every 5 years, the Municipal elections for the towns which are conducted every 7 years and also the village elections for the villages only which are done every 6 or 7 years. While many countries have this kind of electoral system, many others fail to uphold democratic principles (Kulkarni, 2017). For example, for a democracy to function properly, "the role of media is extremely important as it brings with it, rich information about the happenings across the world." (Graber, 2003)

2.2. Traditional Media and New Age Media

Legacy media or traditional media refer to newspapers, radio talks, television shows, hoardings and many other offline contents like that of flyers, books, pamphlets amongst others. One of the major problems which exist with the traditional media is its restriction of circulation. All people across the region or country or a democratic unit/region are not able to get access to all such forms of media. Additionally, political parties have to spend huge in order to influence the media and to push the agenda of their parties to the different people (Gubbay, 2018), especially in terms of making the agenda to be heard to the last mile. As a result, many political parties have been trying to create their own media houses. In Mauritius for example we had the "Advance" newspaper which was for the Labour Party and "Le Militant" for the Mouvement Militant Mauricien (MMM). Today, we also have Inside News and Wazza FM which are for the Mouvement Socialiste Militant (MSM) and Sunday Times and Rising News for the Labour Party. Nonetheless, with the advent of new media, especially social media, internet, smart phones and digital hoardings, they are acting as the catalysts or rather enablers for the political parties and freelancers to use them as the channels for pushing their political thoughts or agenda.

2.3. Humor or Satire used as tools for political discourse

Humors, jokes or satires remain as one of the strongest instruments when it came to criticize the oppressive rule of the political parties or to criticize any wrong direction of the parties or deviations from the manifesto of democracy (Owen, 2017). Starting from the anti-Nazi comics, to Serbian movements, political

satires or humor remain one of the major ways of making the general public aware of the dynamics of the political world and to criticize the different actions of the ruling or the opposition political parties. Humor or satire does form a part of political discourse and even today, many such comments could also be found being made by the politicians themselves in their assembly or public speeches across the world (Huntington, 2017). Research has even found that this type of medium has been used in the past by the political parties themselves for engagements with the general public (Huntington, 2017).

2.4. Memes as an important tool of Politics & Media emanating through cultural transmission

A Meme could be defined as a piece of art or culture, which is typically manifested in the form of a satire or a joke and thereby gaining importance through the online transmission across different media channels (Wang, 2015). Researchers have even pointed out, that memes are the units of cultural transmissions in recent times, which has a lot of value compared to in the past. Memes have become even more famous as cultural transmission remains one of the most dynamic processes for transmitting intercultural technical or business practices. The word "meme" has been derived from a Greek term, which means "One which is being imitated".

Previously, political parties were only involved in pushing their content and that's why rise of memes or cartoons were limited. Apart from some random or specific thoughts, media was not at all influenced or motivated to publish memes. The picture below showcases an old meme from a 1920 newspaper, where a difference between progressive thinkers and moderate thinkers is being shown "to market a newspaper" called "The Morning Leader". This was an age of world wars, internal coups, civil wars and internal complex politics. Similar memes were common, though not on an everyday basis but they were restricted only to newspapers, radio shows and hoardings.
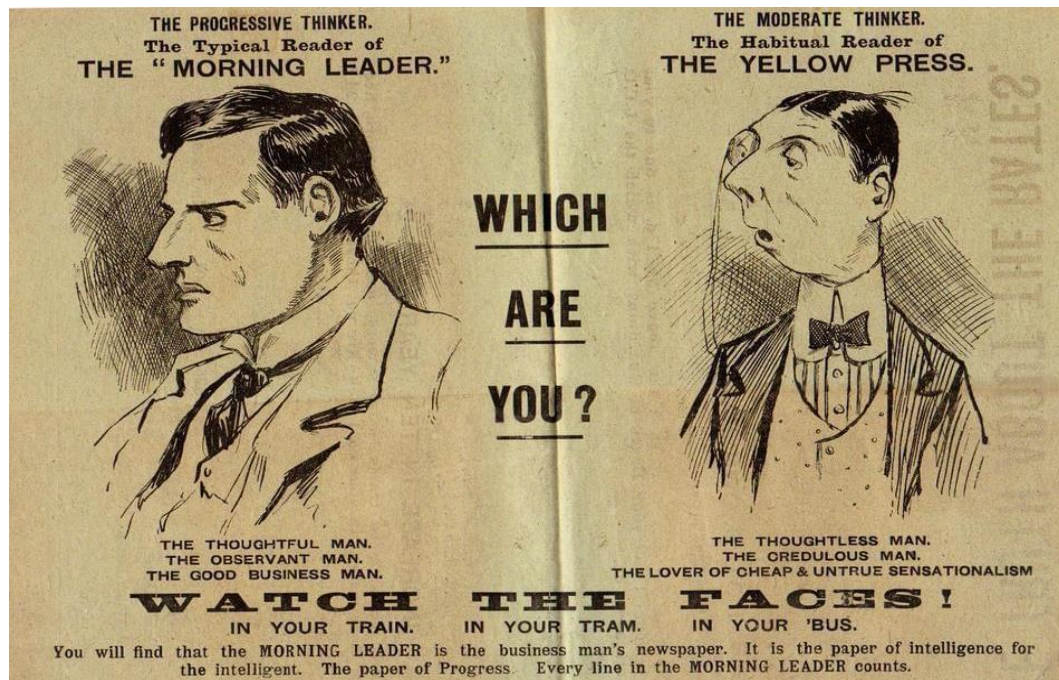
Figure 5: Political meme from an old newspaper of 1920, Source: (Reddit.com, 2020)

New media is not like the old age media, where stable formats were applicable and also visible through different manifestations. New media includes not only websites, but also different applications, video sharing platforms, social media, digital platforms, blogs and many others. While mass media is focused on delivering the regular news and major updates, new media complements the mass media not only in providing major updates and news but also with different viewpoints. In the old media, one of the major points is that there is many institutional gatekeepers who restrict the manifestations of sensitive materials or sensitive topic discussion from coming to the main stream (Corey, 2020). But the new age of globalization and digitization has called for more personalized opinions and personalized viewpoints not only from media people but also from certain sects of people who call themselves as influencers. The influencers could be from media but also could be from different other profession (Hodges, 2019). New media has increased freedom to the creators instead of limiting the concept of art only for the media personnel. This has resulted in the exponential increase in the creation of the memes, cartoons, and invention of new type of quotations through memes. As more and more people are getting access to the new media due to the increased of smart phones, the memes are becoming even more famous and timely.

Figure 6: Famous Slogan meme of Barack Obama, (Hodges, 2019)

The above political meme is from the famous speech of former American president Barack Obama, and it emulates the confidence the ex-president has shown in the American people during his presidential campaign. Although it was not a satire, this was considered as a powerful meme to influence people and followers in the context of presidential elections in the USA (Huntington, 2017).

2.5. Reasons for the rise of political memes

The rise of political memes has become very common in recent times. Gone are those days where memes used to be rare. The rise of the memes could be attributed to some of the following major reasons, inter alia:

(i) Increased spending of the political parties

Increased spending of the political parties themselves as a way to gain influence among the followers and to retain these followers like that of any large corporate trying to influence their customers. Thus, there is an increased spending from the political parties to try to promote their parties and agenda thereby influencing their voters. For example, a political party has tried to bring out below meme in

order to display how internet is changing everything. This was part of the political influence meme in 2016 in the elections process in the USA. Such type of memes may help political parties to influence their end stakeholders which is the common people.

Figure 7: Meme showing internet changed everything, (Haddow, 2016)

(ii)   Aptness & Timeliness

One of the reasons for the political memes to become famous is the time it continues to be viewed, liked and shared on social media and the message present in the meme. This provides a way by which people could be made aware of certain facts & figures and at the same time be influenced in order to take part in the political activism. People could easily turn towards their favorite page or channel or media webpage for the political meme to understand the issue in its actual form and thereby make their opinions out of the same (Haddow, 2016). Due to the short and exact nature of the messages, the memes usually get more and from almost all the classes of the people across the world. One such example is shown below.

Figure 8: Political activism memes creating influence, Source: (Romano, 2019)

(iii)   Individuals or political fanatic

Another major reason which could be attributed to the rise of memes in the recent times could be traced to the individuals or political fanatics trying to impose their thought process upon others (Romano, 2019). There are many individuals who would usually not be able to express their opinions due to the presence of the institutional gatekeepers across organizations used to control the manifestation of the cartoons and political media. While the political alignment of those gatekeepers played an important role in the past, the recent explosion of the new digital media has removed such barriers. Now literally, artist, motivators, film makers, media personnel or anyone with an artistic mind could create political meme and could influence society.

(iv)   Political and societal implications

Memes are also having proper political and societal implications which are being manifested through the imagination of the meme creators, as the creators always try to imagine what their followers would want to have in the memes that are being created. Due to this, they tend to add texts, image and any other content which according to them is demanded by their followers.

Figure 9: Memes having political along with societal implications, Source: (Romano, 2019)

(v)   For the sake of becoming famous by being a memer

Nowadays, as it has been mentioned in the introduction, we're all looking to capture that special something that would make our content go viral (ifb, 2019.). One of the best ways by which this could be achieved is to get famous through viral posts across the digital media channels such as political memes and get connected across the people with similar mindshare. There have been instances in the past, through which people have become famous through political posts and memes being posted through them. In Mauritius, Facebook pages like Starter Pack Moris, Grafika, Lokal and many individuals also are indeed famous on social media because of their memes.

(vi)   Need of humour

Another reason for the political memes becoming famous in recent times is the fact that people nowadays are also asking for humor and satire from their end as part of the mind relaxation and also as a part of having a laugh at the

establishments. Hence, political memes are getting more & more famous for the fun it gives to the end customers and stakeholders.

(vii) Political Events Followups

Another reason is the happening of political events, workshops, coups, debates, voting and any other such events related to political parties – right or wrong. These types of events happen at all times and thereby give opportunity for meme creators to create more and more memes (González, et al., 2020). For any political events, speech or activity, there are people who support or oppose these and any one of the groups could go ahead and create memes to influence the other groups.

(viii) Freedom of Speech

Freedom of speech as being propounded by the democratic politicians across the world, could be related to one of the other reasons of "freehand and mind" these artists or meme creators have got in order to create more and more memes as a part of being bold or putting forward their thoughts or even influencing the end actions (Haddow, 2016).

(ix) Ease of Creation

Ease of creation is another major reason which is influencing the exponential increase of the political memes in the recent times. This is because meme creation has become extremely easy. As mentioned in 1.2 in the introduction, one needs to just take a format of cartoon or click any contextualized picture and thereby include the comments in the top or in the bottom of the memes and create memes. Some examples can be seen below.

Figure 10: These 2 images have been edited thousand times by memers

(x)   Digital Channels promoting memes

Many of the digital media channels or even official tools like Microsoft MS-Teams are now integrating features within their services for people and even the corporates to create memes and to share with their counterparts in their own network (Romano, 2019). This ease of usage also allows the memes to be created and circulated across groups and to the wider audience with ease. One of the quick and easy formats for the creation of memes is being is shown below.

Meme Top Text

Meme bottom text

Figure 11: Format for any memes

While memes tend to be targeted against the parties which are in power & their leaders, by definition, memes that target the opposition parties, their leaders and their members also do exist

2.6. Reasons and instances of political memes influencing politics and democracy

One of the major contexts on which the political memes have become famous and got ground in recent times could be traced to the democratic principles which protect freedom of speech and expression. There are many reasons and

instances which could be traced to political memes influencing decisions and politics:

Virality or engagements – Nearly two thirds of Americans are using social media as a source for their news due to the rapid increase of the different types of applications & the digital media exposure through smartphones. In the United States, viral messages or political satire in the form of memes become very famous instantly with many people sharing and replicating the same for influencing or sharing with others. Researchers have analyzed that elections do influence "Electability" or "Likeability" (Warner, 2020). This results in viral engagements with the end audience and thereby reaches to many unintended audiences also resulting in political influence.
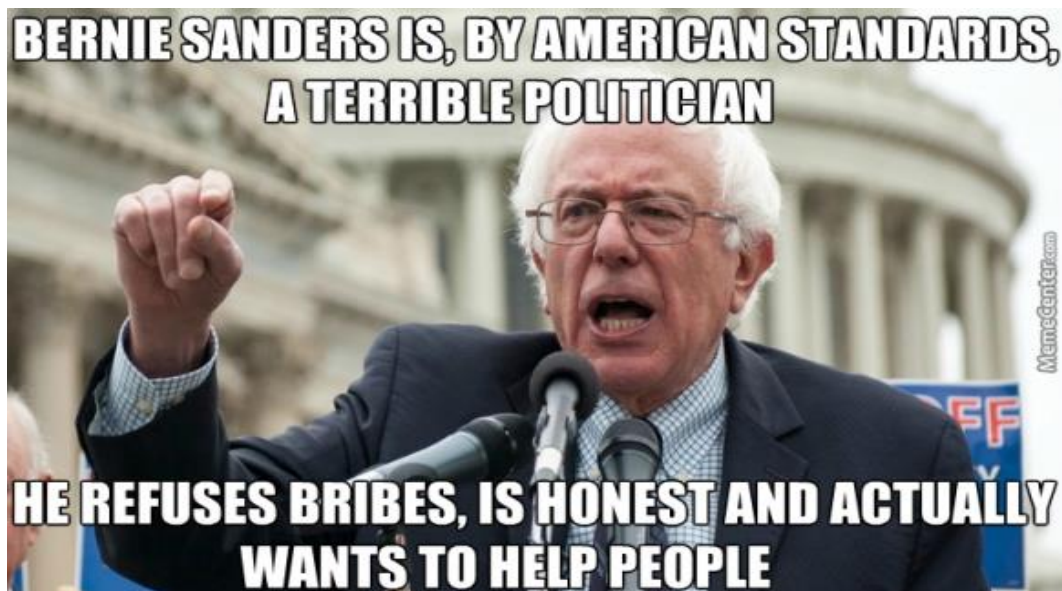
Figure 12: Political meme which actually influences voting decision by publicizing favorable opinions about a politician by criticism of sarcasm, Source: (Heiskanen, 2017)

Political Fandom – As per researchers Willmore and Hocking (2017), political fandom does not come from the manipulated messages and rather come from the instant on-the-go memes being created by the different meme creators and thereby influence the decisions of the voters going for their elections. Memes could result in rise or fall of the famous politicians (Corey, 2020). Words like "Viré Mam", "I order you out", "Kot mo'nn fauter" (words that were used by politicians in Mauritius) which means "Change your political party that you are supporting and come to us" "What is my fault?" "I order you out" which is a

famous sentence used by the speaker of the National Assembly of Mauritius when he expel members of the opposition from the parliament could be used against those political figures that used these words.

Figure 13: This meme is for the Prime Minister of Mauritius who has been criticized for a lot of bad decisions for different issues. He was the one who used the expression" Source: (Facebook page of Rachna Seenauth, a meme creator, 2020)

Also, memes are also created on candidates who are not "too popular" and who decide to join the mainstream political party or on certain candidates who say something before elections and do something else after having been elected. One such example is being given below, which shows one of the politicians promising to flip decision as per the corporates influence & the payments being received by the parties.

Figure 14: Politicians flip-flopping their decisions being influenced by corporates and memes influencing voters against such erratic actions, Source: (Heiskanen, 2017)

Decisions of voters getting influenced – One such example or instance in recent times could be attributed to the political career of ex-president of United States Donald Trump. According to Pew Research findings, many of the decisions being taken by Trump were appreciated by many Americans such as the biggest corporate tax cuts on record, the elimination of scores of environmental regulations and a reshaping of the federal judiciary. The democratic people started criticizing decisions of Trump to be too much nationalistic and thereby affecting the other nations. While the whole world is a global marketplace, the decisions of Trump were being criticized for hurting other nations and for work against their interests. This was one of the reasons which influenced voters against Trump to some extent and finally he lost the election in the last presidential election in United States in 2020. While there have been many memes, one of the memes which was viral at the time of Trump is being shown below.

Figure 15: Meme criticizing the foreign policy of Donald Trump

Criticism of actions – Memes have always played an important role in influencing people through the criticism of the others. There have been many activities of ex-president Bill Clinton which have been criticized by many (McLoughlin & Southern, 2020). When Hilary Clinton was continuing with her career in politics, several memes have emerged which have influenced the voters and thereby impacting negatively on the political prospects of Hillary. The case of Bill Clinton with his intern was politicized and criticized many times and

hence Hilary Clinton found it very difficult to actually come into the forefront of the political field.

Figure 16: Meme criticizing Hilary Clinton, Source: (Askideas.com, 2016)

In one such meme, before the presidential election of Donald Trump vs. Hilary Clinton, a meme came out with all those previous actions and publicized against vote of Hilary Clinton (Askideas.com, 2016).

2.7. Existing gaps in Literature Review

The environment related to new media and politics is somewhat complex and dynamic in nature. As it continues to evolve in unique ways and sometimes in a random manner, it could have serious consequences for the political world by twisting the democratic approach for any government. However, a detailed literature review has helped in identifying some of the key points. The areas identified for further probing through primary research are:

2.7.1. For People Enjoying Political Memes

- Concerns about government formation, political behavior and influence
- Interpreting political memes as accurate sources of information
- Influential features of political memes – Good or dangerous
- Sources of Political memes
- The value of political memes and influence

- Political memes as an abuse of democracy
- Frequency of political memes to affect voting behavior

2.7.2. For Meme Creators

- Inspiration behind political meme creation
- Areas of sharing of political memes
- Memes acting as influence & abuse for politics and democracy
- Reactions related to political memes
- Factors affecting creation of political memes

The above factors divided in two groups: meme creators and meme lovers will help in identifying some of the areas which are still not being explored in detail and thereby research questionnaire was created around those areas that have helped in collecting decisive data.

3. Research Methodology

Research Methodology for any research could be defined as the set of processes or methods or ways by which information about a research topic could be collected, collated and analyzed in order to come out with specific insights related to the research objectives, questions and aims. Research methodology provides the guideline which helps in carrying out the varied steps related to a research topic under consideration. By defining the appropriate philosophy, approach, strategy, choice and procedures for analysis, research methodology has act as an overarching guide for my research and has help me to select the correct or the most suitable path. In order to ensure validity and reliability of the research processes, it is extremely important to delve deep into the positive and the negative aspects of the different sub-sections of the research methodology so that the most apt parametric considerations could be chosen.

3.1. Research Philosophy

Research philosophy could be defined as the set of beliefs by the help of which data about any phenomenon could be collected, collated and further analyzed. While there are different types of research philosophies for researches, some important ones are positivism, interpretivism, realism and pragmatism. While positivism is more suited for quantitative research data points, interpretivism is more suited for qualitative data points only (Brannen, 2007). When it comes to realism it is mainly relied on the concept of independence of reality from that of the human mind. The best suited research philosophy for the purpose of this research is pragmatism as this considers the existence of multiple data points or multiple realities for any event or phenomenon (Saunders, et al., 2016). Pragmatism research philosophy also helps in mixed data methods research strategy, which is more suitable for this research as it makes sure that information from gathered focus in participants' experiences and point of views.

3.2. Research Approach

Research approach could be defined as the steps or the processes which are responsible for carrying out or guiding the research towards completion. The

plan or the procedures as lay out by the research approaches could be divided into two broad categories: deductive approach and inductive approach. The deductive approach follows the step of generating hypothesis from that of the theories present about the research topic (Khan, 2014). This is followed by collecting observations and therefore generating insights to prove or disapprove the hypothesis. Deductive approach is a bottom-down approach. In contrary, inductive approach study is the bottom-up approach which starts with the research questions followed by generating patterns from the observations which ultimately results in creation of paradigms. Out of the two, inductive approach is most suited for the purpose of this research which would help in generating questionnaire from the literature review in accordance with the research questions and thereby follow the path of generating insights from the collected responses (Long, 2014).

3.3. Research Strategy

The research strategy could be defined as the overall plan or the steps which has help in guiding the research as a whole. There are different types of research strategies like that of experiment, survey based, case study based, ethnographic based, archival based, action oriented, grounded theory being the main ones (Bryman, 2016). For the purpose of this research, where the views of the meme creators and the meme lovers are important to understand, survey-based research strategy was the best suited research strategy as this has help in collecting information from both the meme lovers and the meme creators.

3.3.1. Tools and instruments

For the purpose of carrying out the research, the research tool used was a survey-based questionnaire which was prepared from the pivotal points being found from the literature review. These pivotal points being further objectified have helped in forming the research tool, the instrument and the survey questionnaire. A Google Form has been used in order to create the questionnaire (Hammarberg, et al., 2016). The two types of research questionnaires are given in the appendices 1 & 2, for ease of referencing.

3.4.Research Choice

Research choice could be of mono-method when singular types of data points are to be collected for the purpose of any research or could be multi-method when the data collection takes place in phases or could be mixed method where the data collection happens over both qualitative and quantitative data points. For the purpose of this research, the data were collected with the help of survey questionnaire which a combination of both closed and open-ended questions (Brannen, 2007). The closed and the open ended-questions resulted in both qualitative and quantitative data points that was collected and analyzed. Hence, mixed method was considered the most appropriate research choice for this research under consideration.

3.5.Time Horizon consideration for research

There are basically two types of time horizons. The first one is cross-sectional and the other longitudinal. In longitudinal time horizon, data are collected over a long period of time and time plays an important role in the variation of the data being collected (Brannen, 2007). Time is relevant from the data points being collected at frequent pre-determined intervals over the long time period. For the cross-section time horizon, data are collected at a singular point in time. That singular point could vary from one week to one month or even more, but the data represent the views or the opinions of the respondents over a limited time period and assumed not to be varying. For this research, the data have been collected over a one-month period and hence cross-sectional time horizon was best suited for this research.

3.6.Data Collection and Analysis

3.6.1.   Data Collection

Data collection was carried out with the help of the survey tool and the research questionnaire prepared for the purpose of the research. The survey tool consisting of both closed & open-ended questions acted as the base to collect the responses from the participants identified for the purpose of the research (Gill & Johnson, 2010). The use of a Google Form to create the questionnaire helped in

sharing the link of the questionnaires to the two sets of people, one for the meme creators and the other for the meme lovers or the general people who come across memes on a regular basis. The participants were asked to respond to the different questions. The responses collected were recorded in the back-end servers of the Google Forms and were exported in the form of an Excel sheet.

Demographics of the Meme Creators include

1. **Name or the name of your page where you share memes (You can skip if you don't want to reveal)**

Most of the respondents have preferred not to mention their names and even if they have mentioned, that is limited to only few.

2. **Age range**

When it comes to the age group, out of the 10 respondents, 40% of the respondents belong to the age group of 18 to 21, while 30% in the age group of 22 to 25, 10% or 1 respondent from the age group of 26 to 30 and 20% respondents above 30.

3. **Profession**

The occupation spans across a wide variety, starting from educator on one side to even students, engineers, entrepreneurs, agents and many others.

From the demographics of the respondents it is clear that age range varies as well as their professions. There is also no fixed profession or age group who are mainly into the activity of creating memes. It is also true that almost 80% of the meme creators are young and below the age group of 30 and this might explain the popularity of the memes among the new generations.

Demographics of the Meme Lovers include

Please indicate your age group
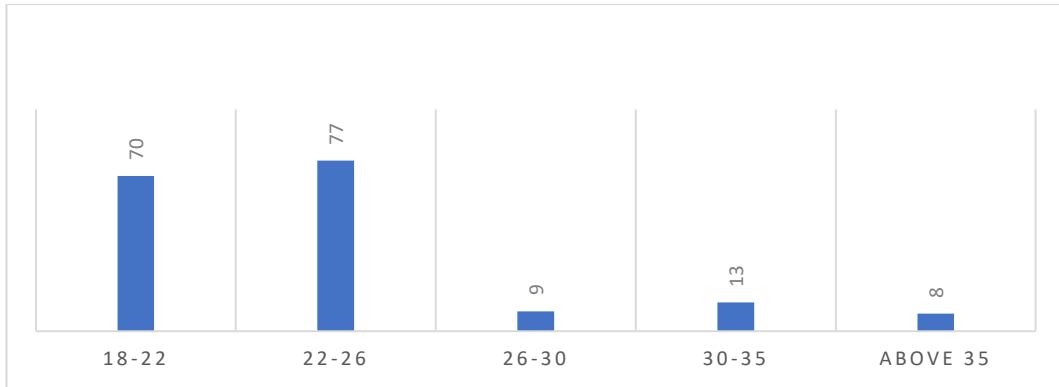
Figure 17: Age Group of Meme Lovers

The age group indicates a greater number of meme lovers in the young age range.

Please indicate your profession

The range of profession varies from educator to students to nursing profession, bar tenders, unemployed, salesman, journalist, engineers and many more profession.

Please indicate your gender
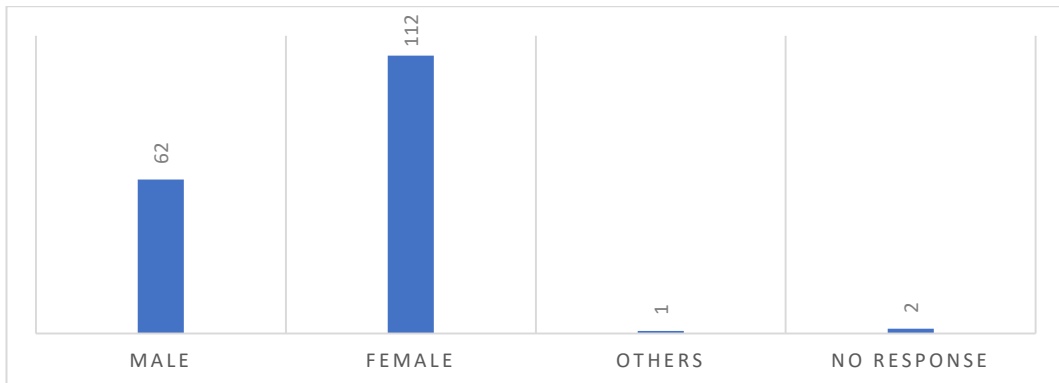
Figure 18: Gender of Meme Lovers

The gender indicates a variation in responses, while more female members responded.

A wide variation can be seen when it concerns demographics but little inclination could be seen towards female gender. Also, person from different professions responded which means that they are familiar with memes the age group represents mostly the young population.

3.6.2. Sampling Process

For the purpose of collecting data from two different target groups, two types of sampling method were followed. As meme creators are very less in number, non-probabilistic method of purposive sampling was followed to collect responses from them which allowed for sharing of the questionnaire to the target people who generally create memes and publish on social media (Palys, 2008). The fact that the list of meme creators was very small in my social media connections, the number of responses was also very limited and only 11 in number. However, for the meme lovers' sampling, probabilistic random sampling method was followed. Hence, this resulted in getting responses from more than 100 respondents (Bryman, 2016).

3.6.3. Data Analysis

Two types of data were collected with the help of the research questionnaire: quantitative and qualitative. Some qualitative data was collected through previous research and data from past authors whereas the quantitative one was collected through the close ended questions in the research survey questionnaire. The quantitative data which was collected and collated was subjected to statistical analysis by using univariate and bivariate methods. The presentations were done in the form of charts, tables, graphs and figures. While for the qualitative data, these were subjected to thematic analysis. The thematic analysis helped in generating explanations from the collated qualitative data. Thus, this helped in understanding the underlying context.

3.7. Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations play an important role for any research. Some of the important ethical considerations for this one are:

- Ensuring anonymity for all the respondents who have participated in the survey
- Ensuring application of no force or coercion or no harm to the respondents to ensure unbiased data collection (Nhmrc.gov.au, 2016)
- Ensuring creation of unbiased questionnaire from the side of the researcher

- Ensuring data validation, efficacy and reliability through data triangulation
- Ensuring acknowledgement of all the secondary sources (Williams, 2012)
- Ensuring data protection by storing in strongly protected machines or systems.

3.8.Timeline for research activities

The timeline for the research is being represented with the help of Gantt chart below.

Table 1: Gantt chart showing the research activities

Research Activities	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Proposal Creation	■											
Professor feedback & approval		■										
Creation of Research Introduction		■	■									
Finalizing the Research Literature Review			■	■								
Professor feedback & approval				■								
Writing the Research Methodology				■	■							
Professor feedback & approval					■							
Data Collection and collation					■	■	■	■				
Data Analysis							■	■	■			
Professor feedback & approval									■			
Writing the Findings and Presentation chapter										■		
Professor feedback & approval										■		
Conclusion and recommendations finalized											■	
Draft prepared											■	
Professor feedback & approval												■
Final Submission												■

Some of the assumptions for the above timeline representation are:

- The research timeline constitutes of 12 weeks or approximately 3 months, as represented by numbers in the columns from 1 to 12.
- The first research activity is that of the proposal creation.

- Each highlighted cell or groups or cells or bars represent the corresponding research activity timeline, where the data collection is considered to have the highest timeline or at least 4 weeks requirement
- After each major step, there is another step of supervisor's approval which acts as the milestone for the purpose of the research.

3.9. Data Validation, Reliability and Efficacy

Data validation, reliability and efficacy play a very important role for any type of research. Both the quantitative data and qualitative data were collected from the primary research surveys, However, after generating the insights from the same, they were subjected to data triangulation and validation checks with findings present in the literature reviews. This data triangulation method has helped in filtering out the outliers and to come out with more relevant findings. Also, non-biased approaches were followed from my side in order to ensure quality data and efficacy of these data collected.

At the end, the research methodology has helped in finding out the steps which are suitable for the purpose of this research. Pragmatism research philosophy, inductive research approach and mixed method research strategy were used in order to collect data from the meme creators and the meme lovers by the help of the research questionnaire. This will be further used for analysis & presentation in the next chapter.

4. Research Findings, Analysis and Presentations

The chapter on research findings, analysis and the presentations will focus more on the point of view of people through the help of the questionnaires being put up both for the meme lovers and for the meme creators. The analysis will be done in two parts.

4.1. Research Findings & Presentations

4.1.1. Meme Creators

For the meme creators, most of the questions which have been asked and answered were mainly qualitative in nature. However, due to the clause of anonymity, the exact responses could not be given in the dissertation and abstract of the responses was given.

Views of Meme Creators on Memes influencing politics

1. **What is your definition of memes?**

There is no specific definition or understanding of the memes by the meme creators. While some believe that memes are for cracking jokes or simply humor, some believe that it is a concept to spread beliefs or phrases or stories.

2. **What inspires you to create/share political memes?**

In most cases, the respondents have replied that memes are being created either for fun or for criticizing the government or to enable critical thinking or different approach in the perception of politics.

3. **Where do you share most of your memes and why choosing this/these platform?**

Most of the meme creators (More than 70%) stated that Facebook is their preferred platforms where they can form groups or share it through their page for influencing

people or their followers by sharing their own opinions on political issues.

4. **Why and how do you think it really influence/d or will influence people?**

As per the responses, some respondents think that political memes can be used as important parameters to measure the influence, while some think that creating memes is an effective method to convey specific message or making available viral news to the general public in the form of fun and humor and at the same time to open a debate about political issues.

5. **Have you ever thought that your memes sometimes are insulting or a form of harassment to the one they are directed to?**

Almost 60% of the respondents believed that memes could be received as a form of harassment or insult to many, and the rest (40%) have responded that they try not to hurt the feelings of others while creating those memes.

6. **What would be your reaction if someone creates memes directed to you?**

70% of the respondents have stated that they will brush it off, ignore it or would not mind at all while some did not deny responding accordingly through other memes.

7. **Do you think that memes may sometimes constitute an abuse of democracy?**

Around 50% of the respondents think that memes could be an abuse to democracy while 30% says otherwise. The rest believed that it can be an abuse or it is the privilege to have the freedom to express political views.

8. **Would you say that your memes are mostly aimed at the ruling party? Why?**

Most of the meme creators have mentioned that their memes are not related to the ruling party only but politics in general as they are mostly neutral.

9. **What are the factors you consider before making a political meme?**

While there are no definite factors, the meme creators take care that the memes do not harm the feelings of the ones for whom or for which the memes are being created just like mentioned for question 5

10. Do you have any further comments that you would like to share about memes and meme makers in Mauritius?

Meme creators identify memes to be of great importance for a small country like Mauritius as it helps to express opinions and feelings in a humoristic way.

4.1.2. Meme Lovers

The responses are in quantitative inputs with closed ended questions and also with open-ended which included qualitative responses.

Views of Meme Lovers on Memes influencing politics

1. Do you believe that memes are generally an accurate source of information?
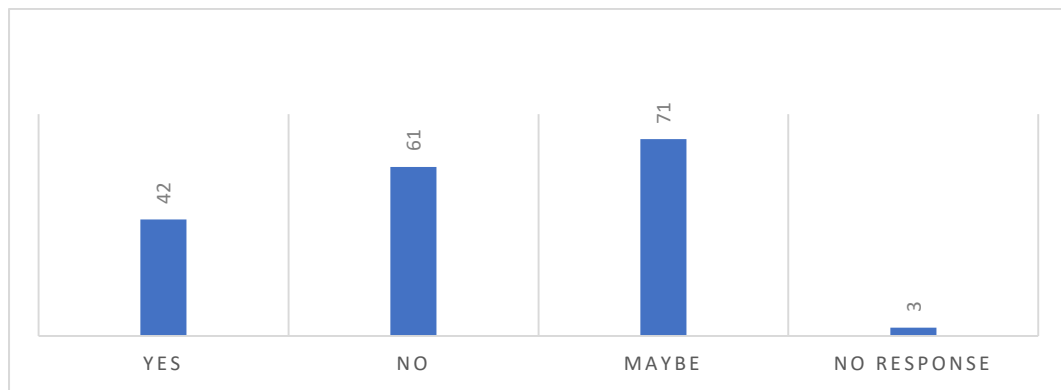
Figure 19: Accuracy of information from memes

Only 42 said yes, 61 said no and others were not sure.

2. In general, from where do you get most of your political information? (more than 1 answer allowed)

This was a multiple-choice question, with options to answer more than one. Most of the responses were social media as one of the important sources followed by Radio/TV, newspapers and memes.

3. How likely are you to vote in the next elections (whether local or general)?
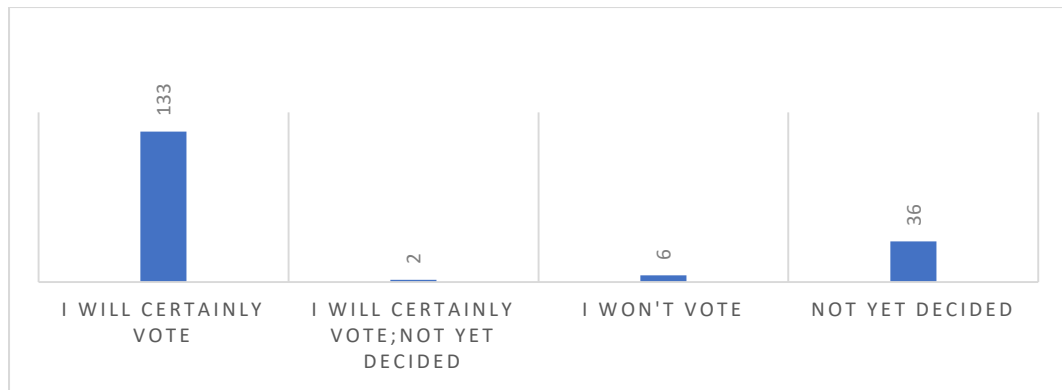
Figure 20: Willingness to vote in next election

133 respondents are willing to vote in next elections and 36 has still not decided.

4. **Would you say that political memes played a part in your choice in the last elections that you voted?**
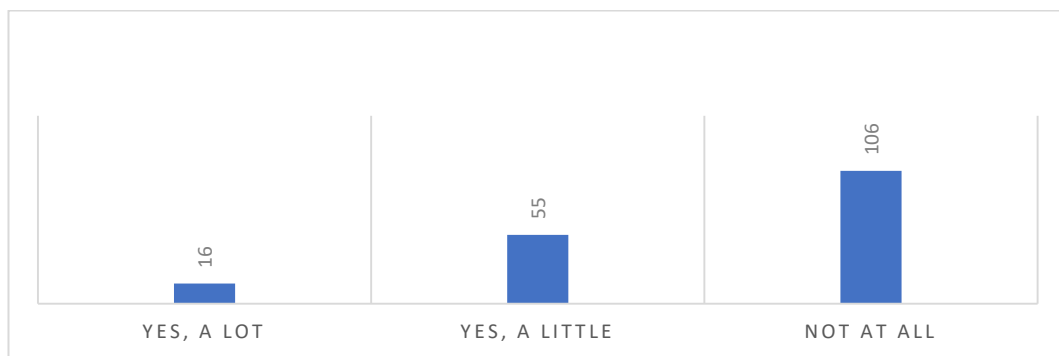
Figure 21: Memes influencing voting

Most of them denied that memes influenced their voting behavior in the last elections.

5. **Does this image seem familiar to you?**

The picture below which is a very famous meme "The distracted boyfriend" was used so that to be able to know, how people remember famous memes.
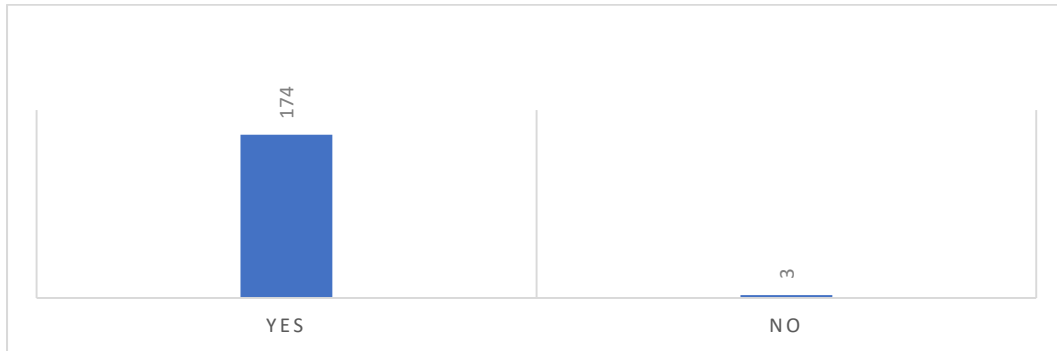
Figure 22: Familiarity in a famous image

174 of the respondents were affirmative. Thus, practically everybody who is familiar with memes knows about this picture.

6. **What do you like most with political memes? (more than 1 answer allowed)**

The language followed by tone and images were voted most.

7. **How much do you think political memes influenced the results of elections 2014 and 2019?**
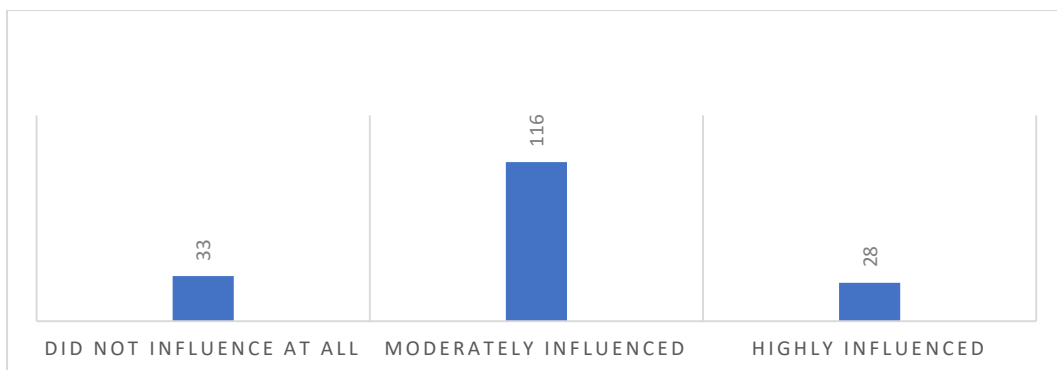
Figure 23: Political memes influencing the results of election

The majority voted for moderately influenced.

8. Do you think political memes were the key factor that influenced the elections results of 2014 and 2019?

The response for this question was quite moderate as the gap between "No" and "No Sure" was not that huge.

9. If your answer to Question No 8 is "Yes", please skip this question. If you answered "No", then tell us what other factor/s do you think influenced the results? (more than 1 answer allowed)

While political memes might have been one of the factors influencing the results, it was not necessarily the key factor as the choice of Prime Minister, media propaganda and religion played a very important role in those results. This was confirmed by the responses from question 8 and 9 respectively.

If you answered "Other", can you please explain?

Caste and the promises that were made also played an important role as per the respondents.

10. Do you consider political memes as powerful to influence opinions or do you consider that they are just used or shared for fun?
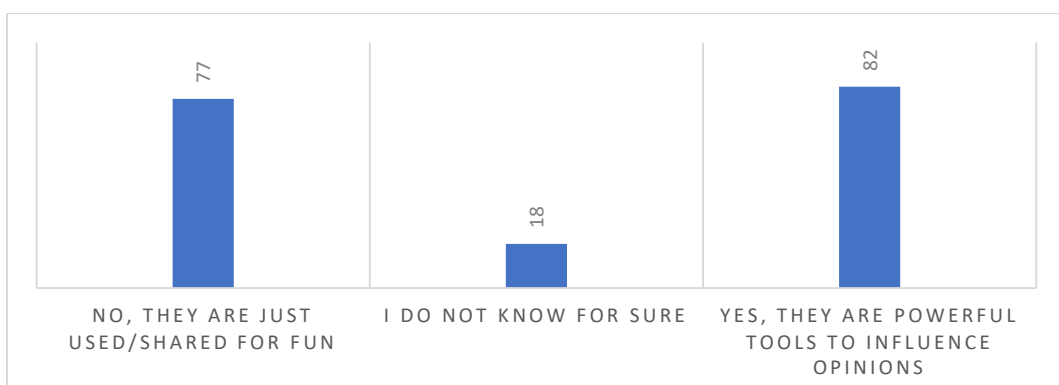
Most respondents believed that political memes are indeed powerful to influence opinions while others consider it to be only funny and some not even sure.

11. Do you think political memes can be dangerous for politicians?
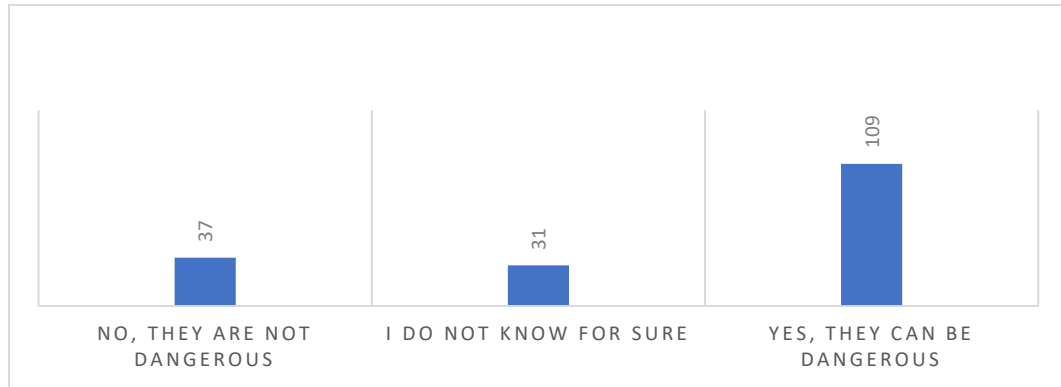
Figure 26: Perception of Political memes being dangerous

Most of the respondents consider political memes to be dangerous.

12. Do you think political memes can be a form of abuse of democracy?
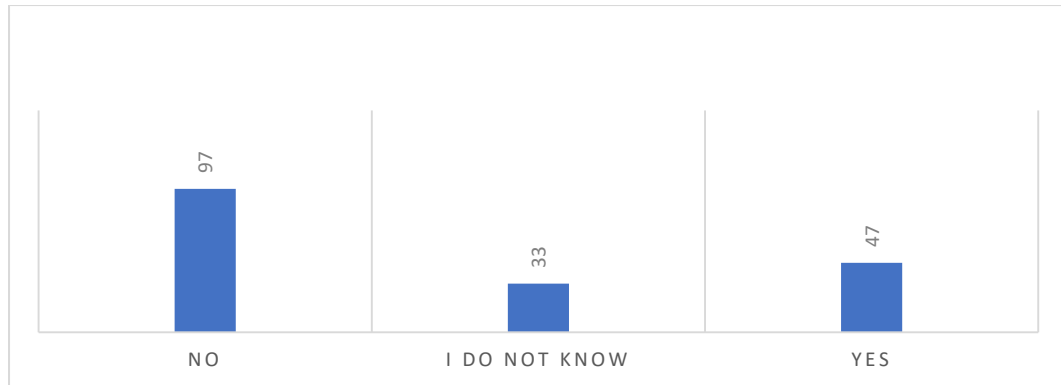
Figure 27: Political memes being abuse to democracy

The majority consider that sharing of memes is not an abuse of democracy.

13. How often do you share political memes?
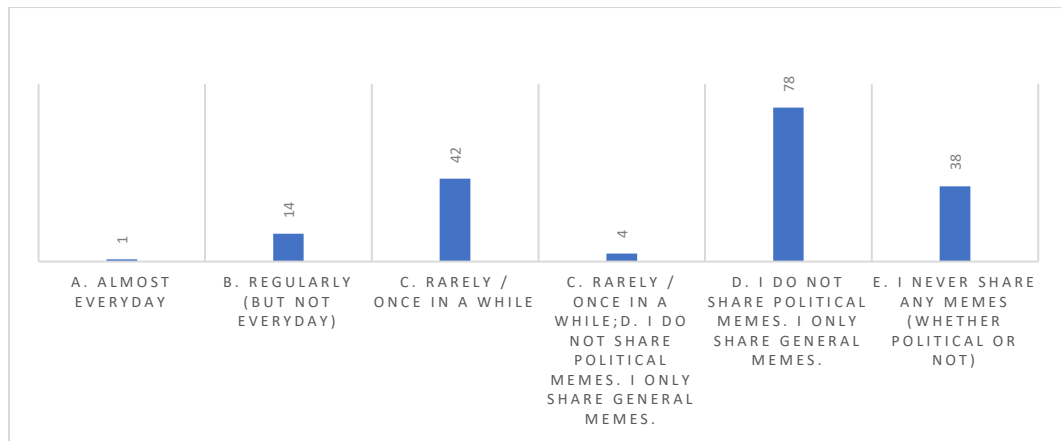
Figure 28: Frequency of Political memes being shared

Most people do not restrict themselves to political memes, but they also share general memes.

14. If your answer is a, b or c for Question 13, then please tell us why you share or even create memes? (more than 1 answers allowed)

Most of the respondents stated that they share memes for being popular, to have fun and to convey a message.

If you answered "Other", can you please explain?

"People not being interested with politics" was the most popular answer among respondents.

15. How concerned are you in what is going on in government and public affairs?
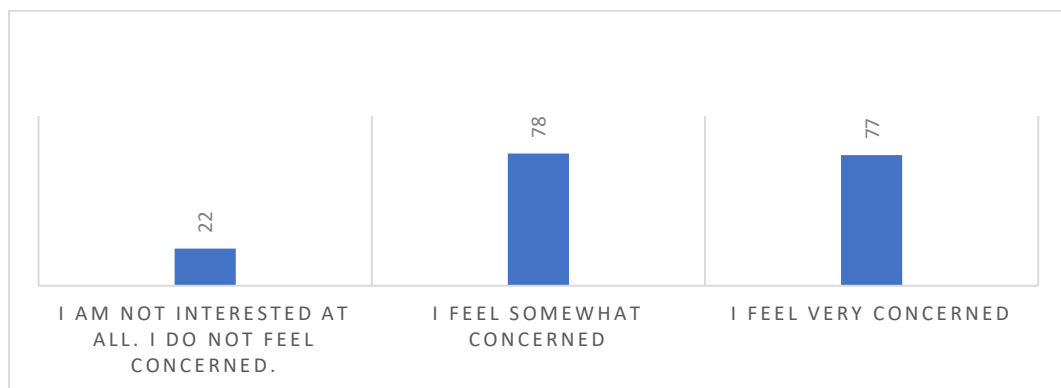
Figure 29: Concerns about government & public affairs

The majority of the respondents feel concerned about political affairs of Mauritius.

16. Do you think political memes shared on social media are an important way people can be involved in political issues?
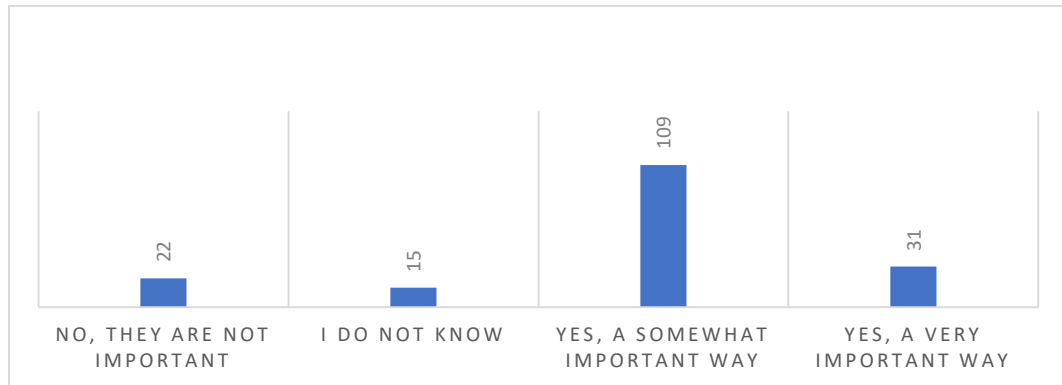
Figure 30: Perception of political memes on social media being important way of involving people

Most believed that it is indeed an important way.

17. Do you also think that most memes are directed to the ruling party and the persons in it? (more than 1 answers allowed)

There is a mixed reaction to this question. Many people think that they the memes are focused towards ruling parties, while some also believed that it is for politics in general.

4.2.Analysis of the Findings

4.2.1. Meme Creators

Demographics
Views of Meme Creators on Memes influencing politics

In most of the cases, the meme creators believe that memes is a way to elicit funny reactions from their followers or anyone on social media by spreading their own opinions on stories or recent events. Most of them say that they do not have the intention to criticize the authorities concerned. Facebook followed by other famous social media remain one of the major platforms for sharing memes as they could help in reaching a maximum people.

Those meme creators also believed that memes could play an important role in influencing people across the world or Mauritius as memes are produced to make

news become viral and construct different perceptions significance of the way people think about or react to political matters. While memes have an important role in influencing opinions, most of those meme creators do not mind that memes are created about themselves. Most of them have maintained that meme creation is not an act of abuse to democracy, but if not taken care of, it could result in eventually an act of abuse. Most meme creators also remain sensible when it comes to creating political memes and they try not to insult or harm anyone's feelings. Meme creators reiterate that memes is mainly a source of entertainment and humor.

4.2.2. Meme Lovers

Views of Meme lovers on Memes influencing politics

Meme lovers indicate that memes does not necessarily provide accurate information and they get more political information from social media, followed by TV/Radio and newspapers and those meme remains a secondary source. Despite many opinions which put forward that youngsters are not really interested in voting, it has been noted that many people are interested in voting. However, when it comes to the influence of memes on their decisions, many have responded that these do not influence them as such. Moreover, political memes are more valued for the language, tone or the image used. It has been also seen that 2014 and 2019 elections results were not necessarily affected by political memes as much as the choice of political candidates and Prime Minister, propaganda by specific media house, religious/ caste sentiments and promises made during electoral campaigns were some other factors influencing election results. Mixed opinion exists when it comes to the perception of the power of memes, but almost two-thirds of the respondents think that it can dangerous for politicians. Most meme lovers refrain from sharing political memes, but even if they do so, they do it for fun without any hidden agenda. But they are really concerned about happenings in the government or public affairs. Political memes are indeed considered to be an important factor that involves people into political discussions. When it concerns the focus of political memes on ruling parties, the opinions differ. Many believed that it is on the ruling parties but there are also who believed that memes are created on politics and politicians in general.

4.3. Insights - Alignment with Literature Review

4.3.1. Meme Creators

The age group of the meme creators truly signifies one point: that the meme creation is mainly within the young age group of people who more or less follow the trends or rather wants to go against the trends in comparison to their high age counterparts. Hence, the younger generations do play an important role in influencing the meme landscape as also identified from the literature reviews on political memes, which highlights the influence of memes over young generation voters (González, et al., 2020).

The Literature review is also in alignment with the thinking that memes are mostly created to have fun, but with the positive intent of criticizing the establishment or something which is glaringly wrong but being portrayed in a different way (Romano, 2019). While the literature review has not specified any particular social media, it has referred to the role of social media to be an important parameter for meme creators (Corey, 2020). While meme creators have mixed opinion on the way memes influence people, increased views or followers definitely remains one of the major ways to track the influence. Researchers have also opined along similar lines, as they think that memes on social media influence thinking of people (Gubbay, 2018). Meme creators have highlighted that they think memes could be a source of harassments for the establishments or leaders for whom memes are being created, while some think otherwise. Similarly, the literature review also opines the same and considers memes to be a way by which the people could be influenced or even be harassed (Hodges, 2019). Meme creators have put forward that in most cases they will try to ignore any meme created for them, but in some cases, there could be annoyance. While this is not that much evident from literature review, for obvious reason this remains an important consideration in general as some people might definitely come across things which annoys them. The literature review has not covered the concept of abuse to democracy, but researchers have mentioned memes to be one of the weapons of modern-day politics which could result in democracy abuse (McLoughlin & Southern, 2020). However, it is also true that the meme creators believe that they do not have any have any biases when it comes to ruling parties or oppositions as mostly all politicians are victims of memes. Literature

review also speaks of this unbiased nature so that they remain neutral and does not hurt feelings.

4.3.2. Meme Lovers

The meme lovers are mostly young, with 83% of the respondents below 26 years and less but the gender variation across response remains high (with high female percentage), although this should have been gender agnostic (Corey, 2020), as memes are not meant for any gender. The responses also remain popular across multiple job roles, which highlights the fact that memes are not popular for only certain kind of people in particular profession. People are still not sure about the accuracy of the information from the memes; this is also being highlighted in literature. Meme lovers have stated social media followed by Radio/TV and newspapers to be important sources of political information (Gubbay, 2018) which influence them to vote for in next elections also (Corey, 2020).

While survey says, that memes in most cases do not influence voting decisions, but 40% also say that it does and thereby it contradicts the majority. This is also supported in the literature (Romano, 2019). It is considered that "Language, tones and the images" make the memes even livelier and easier to remember. It is also noted from the responses that political memes is a key factor in influencing election results (Wang, 2015) in 2014 and 2019. Just like many researchers consider memes to be powerful (González, et al., 2020), according to the responses from the questionnaires, most of the respondents also agree on this. The responses of political memes being dangerous is also being supported by literature (Corey, 2020), but remains silent on the question of abuse to democracy, which is still debatable among respondents. "Fun" remains one of the major reasons for sharing political memes, driven by their concerns for state affairs. This is also considered as one of the main reasons for political memes (McLoughlin & Southern, 2020) along with the widespread reach across social media, enabling people to get more involved in political discussions. However, people still remain confused on whether political memes are generally focused towards ruling parties or their members. Literature review also does not highlight this part.

4.4. Conclusion

4.4.1. Identified areas of probing

- Meme is indeed famous among the younger generation as seen from the age group of the meme creators, but also depends on how people react or take the memes in good faith. Like meme creators, meme lovers mainly constitute the young generation with majority being women. However, the respondents are spread across a wide range of job roles.

- Mostly memes are created for fun but with intent to mimic people or to bring out the burning issues in the world or country but could also be a source of harassment for many.

- The role of social media and digital channels in the sharing of memes

- While memes are created with good intention to raise critical thinking, sometimes it could also result in democracy abuse when not handled carefully. In most cases, meme creators remain unbiased while creating memes so that no one's feelings are hurt and to provide only humor.

- Question still remains about the efficacy of the memes in providing information. Also, it is still considered a secondary source of information for political information but plays at least some role in influencing voting decisions, mainly due to its value arising out of the language, tone and images.

- Some people do agree about the role of memes in influencing 2014 & 2019 political election results other than choice of candidates, PM, religious/ castes sentiments and others and hence, it can also be considered as powerful tool.

- While political memes are perceived as less abusing to democracy, they still are considered to be dangerous for politicians.

- People are really concerned about politics and current state of affairs and therefore political memes in social media could be a good way of spreading awareness.

- Still, respondents could not affirm that political memes are targeted mainly towards the ruling parties as there are several instances against the same also.

5. Conclusion & Recommendations

5.1. Conclusion

This chapter is the final chapter of the research dissertation which aims to collate the final point of views as obtained across the different chapters and thereby helped in culminating the research as a whole. The introduction chapter set the context and helped in identifying the key words or the phrases for the next chapter. The next chapter on the literature review helped in understanding the views of the researchers and thereby analyse the instances of memes influencing the voting behavior. This chapter was instrumental in creation of pivot points. These pivot points helped in forming the survey research questionnaire. The third chapter was on research methodology, which helped in understanding the ways by which the research is to be carried out and the ways by which each step logically follow the other to derive insights out of both the secondary sources and primary responses. The next chapter was on findings and analysis, where primary was collected and collated from both the meme creators and meme lovers represented in the form of analysis. For quantitative data, graphs were drawn and for qualitative data, thematic analysis was done to derive insights out of the same. These findings when compared & contrasted with that of the literature review helped in identifying some of the major areas of recommendations. The final chapter illustrates those recommendations across two categories of meme creators, meme lovers and for government. This will be followed by a discussion on the objectives being met along with the final way forward section.

5.2. Discussion on Political Memes Affect Voting behavior in most democratic countries including Mauritius – A recommendation perspective

5.2.1. Recommendations for Meme Creators

It is evident that creation of memes does not come with any legality or any such enforcements, until unless there is a direct attack being targeted towards any of the political parties or politicians. However, this democratic right should not be misused to create influence in the wrong direction. Some of the recommendations are:

- **More Responsibility** - Memes generally attract young people and hence, meme creators should be "mature" to handle the audience only with fun and not to try to influence people out of the same.

- **No fake information should flow** - While politicizing any event or activity is bad, it is equally bad to promote any wrong doing or to target for the sake of opposing. While creating political memes is not bad, but efforts towards demeaning should be replaced with the effort towards criticism. Hence, any form of harassment or embarrassments arising out of the memes should be avoided. Hence, remaining unbiased from the point of view of creating no controversy is very important.

- **No Misinformation & misguidance** - Digital channels including social media plays an important role in order to influence people and mostly young adults as most of them are actively connected with the same. While meme creators could use the channels for spreading or influencing people, but misuse should not be done in the form of spreading wrong messages. Many young minds could get distracted from the skewed messages and thereby it might jeopardize the very stability of any country.

- **No Personal Harrasment** - For any memes to be made viral, plenty amount of research should be done by the meme creators and avoid ways to show other personnel or political parties in low rated manner. Rather memes should be designed to showcase facts as manifested through critical thinking & representation.

- **Spreading Awareness** - Memes could be used by the creators to spread awareness, as could be seen from many memes. Taking up any issue and highlighting the same would also help meme creators become responsible citizen. While, meme creators can create a meme for fun, care should be taken by the meme creators in having an unbiased opinion to prevent far-reaching effects.

5.2.2. Recommendations for Meme Lovers

For the people of Mauritius, memes do act as an important source of information as it includes both fun and politics material. However, people of Mauritius have important responsibilities towards their own country in terms of uplifting their democracy and to remove biase. Hence, recommendations for them arise out of caution, responsibility and efficacy.

- While meme creators should practice constraint, meme lovers should also have an unbiased approach when appreciating a meme. Keeping an open mind would help in rejecting biase and would also prevent from getting influenced. They should always try to judge the efficacy & the validity of the claims as made through memes.

- While some memes generate fun and people forward it or share it for the sake of taking credits, but the meme lovers should also exercise caution and should be careful enough to filter the unwanted content and thereby stop the chain of wrong influence, when it comes to political memes. This would help in cutting short the effect of memes by breaking the chain.

- Meme lovers should be able to distinguish between the false and positive memes and thereby should take steps in people spreading hatred by requesting for ban from social media or groups.

- Meme lovers should always keep an open mind, as memes could be redirected towards them for their support for a political party or politicians, hence should let go off the hatred, rather than creating a scene out of the same. This might affect mental stability and could also cause physical harms.

5.2.3. Recommendations for Government of Mauritius

While meme creators and meme lovers spread fun and unwillingly influence voters, role of government is bifold.

1. It should not take very seriously those negative memes and thereby let go off those memes which target the government or politicians. However, warning could be issues publicly in order to raise conscience about memes that can

cause harm to any individuals.

2. The government should not try to control social media or digital channels or anything on that sort. Rather it should focus toward building awareness campaigns in order to stop memes from spreading hate messages or messages towards demeaning political parties and politicians.

5.3.Meeting Research Objectives

The dissertation or the research was done exhaustively in order to come out with some definite points and thereby to suggest recommendations for the different stakeholders related to meme.

First of all, a detailed literature review was done, which helped in curating some of the pivot points to be used for the creation of the survey questionnaire. The detailed literature review helped in understanding the influence of memes on the voting behavior by studying the view points of the varied researchers and also by studying some of the instances. This helps in meeting the objective one.

Secondly, the primary research done to collect data from both the meme creator and the meme lover has helped in curating some of the areas of recommendations for both types of stakeholders. On the other hand, the dissertation has helped in wonderfully capturing the primary views of the respondents. This satisfied objective two.

Finally, a set of recommendations were given to both the meme creators and the meme lovers on the basis of the findings through the primary research. This satisfied objective three.

5.4.Way Forward

The dissertation has been carried out with the aim of finding out the influence of memes on the voting behavior of the people for a democratic country like Mauritius. The research has used a mixed methodology approach and thereby the use of primary data was supported or complemented with that of the secondary ones. Hence, this research helped in formulating a strong framework of analysing the way by which influence of memes could be determined. While the secondary research was done from a global to a democratic country like Mauritius, the primary research

was only restricted to Mauritius only. Hence, going forward, there are many ways by which this research could be extended.

First of all, the research could be extended in terms of including more participants, including both meme creators and meme lovers. While meme lovers were large in number, meme creators were only 10 in number. Increasing the number of participants in both the categories could help in increasing the volume of responses, which in turn could help in increasing the greater number of points for analysis.

Secondly, the research could have include more democratic countries. Hence, this research provides a platform for the future researchers to work on the same framework and when it concerns the questionnaire to either improve upon the questions to make it more exhaustive.

References

Askideas.com, 2016. *50 MOST FUNNY BILL CLINTON MEME PICTURES AND PHOTOS.*
[Online]
Available at: https://www.askideas.com/50-most-funny-bill-clinton-meme-pictures-and-photos/
[Accessed 2 April 2021].

Berg, B. & Lune, H., 2014. *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences.* 8th Edition ed. Essex: Pearson.

Brannen, J., 2007. Mixing Methods: The Entry of Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches into the Research Process. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology,* pp. 173-184.

Bryman, A., 2016. *Social research Methods.* International Edition ed. London: Oxford University Press.

Corey, S., 2020. *Memes Turned Politics Into Fandom.* [Online]
Available at: https://gen.medium.com/memes-turned-politics-into-fandom-34f5e0a1b292
[Accessed 2 April 2021].

Gill, J. & Johnson, P., 2010. *Research Methods for Managers.* London: Sage.

González, E. M., Daza, J. E. F. & Meyer, J.-H., 2020. MEMES AND POLITICS. WHY SOME POLITICAL MEMES GO VIRAL AND OTHERS DON'T. *IC Journal,* 101(18), pp. 579-613.

greenheroninfo.com, 2014. *Importance of Literature Reviews.* [Online]
Available at: http://www.greenheroninfo.com/uncategorized/importance-of-literature-reviews/
[Accessed 2 April 2021].

Gubbay, M., 2018. *The Rise of Political Memes Could Have a Major Effect on America.*
[Online]
Available at: https://www.teenvogue.com/story/the-rise-of-political-memes-could-have-a-major-effect-on-america
[Accessed 2 April 2021].

Haddow, D., 2016. *Meme warfare: how the power of mass replication has poisoned the US election.* [Online]
Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/nov/04/political-memes-2016-election-hillary-clinton-donald-trump
[Accessed 2 April 2021].

Hammarberg, K., Kirkman, M. & Lacey, S. d., 2016. Qualitative research methods: when to use them and how to judge them. *Human Reproduction,* 31(3), pp. 498-501.

Heiskanen, B., 2017. Meme-ing Electoral Participation. *European Journal of American Studies,* 12(2), pp. 1-26.

Hodges, A., 2019. *"Yes, We Can" and the Power of Political Slogans.* [Online]
Available at: https://www.anthropology-news.org/index.php/2019/10/21/yes-we-can-and-the-power-of-political-slogans/
[Accessed 2 April 2021].

Huntington, H. E., 2017. THE AFFECT AND EFFECT OF INTERNET MEMES: ASSESSING PERCEPTIONS AND INFLUENCE OF ONLINE USER-GENERATED POLITICAL DISCOURSE AS MEDIA. *Colorado State University,* 5(1), pp. 1-264.

Khan, S. N., 2014. Qualitative Research Method: Grounded Theory. *International Journal of Business and Management,* pp. 224-233.

Kulkarni, D. A., 2017. Internet meme and Political Discourse: A study on the impact of internet meme as a tool in communicating political satire. *Journal of Content, Community & Communication,* 6(3), pp. 13-17.

Long, H., 2014. An Empirical Review of Research Methodologies and Methods in Creativity Studies (2003–2012). *Creativity Research Journal ,* 26(4), pp. 427-438.

McLoughlin, L. & Southern, R., 2020. By any memes necessary? Small political acts, incidental exposure and memes during the 2017 UK general election. *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations,* 23(1), pp. 60-84.

Nhmrc.gov.au, 2016. *ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS SPECIFIC TO RESEARCH METHODS OR FIELDS.* [Online]
Available at: https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/book/section-3-ethical-considerations-specific-research-methods-or-fields
[Accessed 17 April 2021].

Olsen, F., Abelsen, B. & Olsen, J. A., 2012. Improving response rate and quality of survey data with a scratch lottery ticket incentive. *BMC Medical Research Methodology,* 5(1), pp. 12-52.

Owen, D., 2017. *The New Media's Role in Politics.* [Online]
Available at: https://www.bbvaopenmind.com/en/articles/the-new-media-s-role-in-politics/
[Accessed 2 April 2021].

Palys, T., 2008. Purposive sampling. In: Sage, ed. *The Sage Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods.* Los Angeles: Sage, pp. 697-698.

Reddit.com, 2020. *Political meme 1920s.* [Online]
Available at:
https://www.reddit.com/r/PropagandaPosters/comments/hhdfta/political_meme_1920s/
[Accessed 2 April 2021].

Romano, W., 2019. *Memes are popular and increasingly significant. But why?.* [Online]
Available at: https://medium.com/swlh/memes-are-popular-and-increasingly-significant-but-why-2de4a84e7746
[Accessed 2 April 2021].

Saunders, M., Lewis, P. & Thornhill, A., 2016. *Research Methods for Business Students.* Pearson: London.

Wang, J., 2015. From A Marketplace to a Cultural Space: Online Meme as an Operational Unit of Cultural Transmission. *Journal of Technical Writing and Communication,* 45(3), pp. 261-274.

Williams, C., 2012. Research Methods. *Journal of Business & Economic Research,* 5(3), pp. 65-72.

Appendix 1 – Question for Meme Creators

Online Humour and Politics - Exploring the link between political memes and voting behavior in Mauritius

Dear respondent,

I am currently a year 3 student following the undergraduate programme BSc Journalism (minor: Digital Media) at the University of Mauritius. I am conducting a survey for my dissertation about memes. As I have noticed that you create and share a lot of memes on social media, I would like to collect your views. Thus, I would be grateful if you could participate in this survey.

Note that you can choose to be anonymous.

Thank you in advance for your time and collaboration.

Best regards, Avinash Dhondoo

Questions

1.   1. What is your definition of memes?

2.   2. What inspires you to create/share political memes?

3.   3. Where do you share most of your memes and why choosing this/these platform ?

4.   4. Why and how do you think it really influence/d or will influence people?

5.   5. Have you ever thought that your memes sometimes are insulting or a form of harassment to the one they are directed to?

6.   6. What would be your reaction if someone creates memes directed to you?

7.   7. Do you think that memes may sometimes constitute an abuse of democracy ?

8.   8. Would you say that your memes are mostly aimed at the ruling party ? Why?

9.   9. What are the factors you consider before making a political memes ?

10.   10. Do you have any further comments that you would like to share about memes and meme makers in Mauritius?

Demographics

11.   1. Name or the name of your page where you share memes (You can skip if you don't want to reveal)

12.   2. Age range

Mark only one oval

- 16-18
- 18-21
- 22-25
- 26-30
- Above 30

13.   3. Profession

Appendix 2 – Question for Meme Lover

Online Humour and Politics - Exploring the link between political memes and voting behavior in Mauritius

Dear respondent,

I am currently a year 3 student under the undergraduate programme BSc Journalism (minor: Digital Media) at the University of Mauritius. I am conducting a survey for my dissertation through this questionnaire in order to collect your views. I would be grateful if you could participate in this survey by filling same.

Kindly note that all responses will be kept confidential and anonymous. Thank you in advance for your time and collaboration.

Best regards, Avinash Dhondoo

Questions

1.   1. Do you believe that memes are generally an accurate source of information ?

Mark only one oval.

- o   Yes
- o   No
- o   May Be

2.   2. How likely are you to vote in the next elections (whether local or general)?

Check all that apply.

- •   I won't vote
- •   I will certainly vote Not yet decided

3.   3. In general, from where do you get most of your political information? (more than 1 answers allowed)

Check all that apply.

- •   Social Media
- •   Radio
- •   TV
- •   Newspapers
- •   Through Memes
- •   Other:

4.   4. Would you say that political memes played a part in your choice in the last elections that you voted?

Mark only one oval.

- o   Yes, a lot
- o   Yes, a little
- o   Not at all

5.   5. Does this image used seem familiar to you ?

Mark only one oval.

- o   Yes
- o   No

6.   6. What do you like most with political memes ?(more than 1 answers allowed)

Check all that apply.

- •   Language/Tone used
- •   The images used in the memes The text used
- •   The meme in general

7.   7. How much do you think political memes influenced the results of elections 2014 and 2019 ?

Mark only one oval.

- o   Highly influenced
- o   Moderately influenced
- o   Did not influence at all

8.   8. Do you think political memes were the key factor that influenced the elections results of 2014 and 2019 ?

Mark only one oval.

- o   Yes
- o   No
- o   I do not know for sure

9.   9. If your answer to Question No 8 is "Yes", please skip this question. If you answered "No", then tell us what other factor/s do you think influenced the results ? (more than 1 answers allowed)

Check all that apply.

- •   Religion/Castes
- •   Choice of candidates by different parties constituency wise Choice of Prime Minister
- •   Propaganda for the government from some media

- Difficult to say
  Other:

If you answered "Other", can you please explain?

----

10.   10. Do you consider political memes as powerful to influence opinions or do you consider that they are just used or shared for fun ?

Mark only one oval.

- o   Yes, they are powerful tools to influence opinions
- o   No, they are just used/shared for fun
- o   I do not know for sure

11.   11. Do you think political memes can be dangerous for politicians ?

Mark only one oval.

- o   Yes, they can be dangerous
- o   No, they are not dangerous
- o   I do not know for sure

12.   12. Do you think political memes can be a form of abuse of democracy ? *

Mark only one oval.

- o   Yes
- o   No
- o   I do not know

13.   13. How often do you share political memes ? *

Check all that apply.

- Almost everyday
- Regularly (but not everyday)
- Rarely / once in a while
- I do not share political memes. I only share general memes.
- I never share any memes (whether political or not)

14.   14. If your answer is a, b or c for Question 13, then please tell us why you share or even create memes ? (more than 1 answers allowed)

Check all that apply.

- To convey a message related to the memes For fun only
- To provide a glimpse about my political choice
- To be popular Other:

If you answered "Other", can you please explain?

15.   15. How concerned are you in what is going on in government and public affairs? *

Mark only one oval.

- o   I feel very concerned
- o   I feel somewhat concerned
- o   I am not interested at all. I do not feel concerned.

16.   16. Do you think political memes shared on social media are an important way people can be involved in political issues ? *

Mark only one oval.

- o   Yes, a very important way
- o   Yes, a somewhat important way No, they are not important
- o   I do not know

17.   17. Do you also think that most memes are directed to the ruling party and the persons in it ?(more than 1 answers allowed) *

Check all that apply.

- •   Yes, mostly the Prime Minister
- •   Yes, mostly the members of the ruling party including the PM No, all politicians are "victims" of political memes"
- •   No, they tend to be directed to the opposition party mainly No, they merely target political affairs in general

Demographics

18.   1. Please indicate your age group

Mark only one oval.

- o   18-22
- o   22-26
- o   26-30
- o   30-35
- o   Above 35

19.   2. Please indicate your profession

20.   3. Please indicate your gender

Mark only one oval.

- o   Male
- o   Female
- o   Other