

I Did It My Way: A Cross-Sectional Survey on Political Memes and Its Influence in Malaysia's Political Marketing

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ABSTRACT

The emergence of digital communication technologies has significantly transformed political communication and political marketing worldwide. In Malaysia, the expansion of various social media applications has accelerated the dissemination of political information through visual and humorous content, particularly political memes. Political memes have become an influential form of political expression among young people due to their concise, entertaining, emotionally engaging, and highly shareable nature. This study examines the influence of political memes on political attitudes, perceptions, and political marketing among Malaysian youths. It also investigates whether memes influence political understanding, political support, party image construction, propaganda dissemination, and political participation. This study employed a quantitative cross-sectional survey design involving respondents aged between 18 and 35 years. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistical methods. The findings demonstrate that political memes are increasingly accepted as an alternative political communication medium and significantly influence political perceptions among respondents. It also found that respondents perceived memes as capable of shaping party image, increasing political support, functioning as propaganda tools, and influencing public understanding of political issues. Respondents simultaneously acknowledged the potential risks of misinformation, manipulation, and political misunderstanding associated with meme dissemination. This study concludes that political memes have become a significant component of contemporary political marketing in Malaysia, especially among digitally connected youths. Political actors, policymakers, and researchers must therefore understand both the persuasive strength and ethical implications of meme-based political communication in democratic environments.

Keywords: political memes; political marketing; social media; youth political behaviour; digital politics; Malaysia

INTRODUCTION

The development of digital communication technologies has transformed the structure of political communication globally. Political communication is no longer dominated solely by traditional media institutions such as newspapers, television stations, and radio broadcasting networks. Instead, political actors, citizens, influencers, and ordinary social media users now participate directly in shaping political narratives through various online platforms. This transformation has substantially altered the methods through which political information is disseminated, interpreted, and consumed by society.

In Malaysia, the transformation became increasingly visible after the 14th General Election (GE14) in 2018, which witnessed the unprecedented defeat of Barisan Nasional after more than six decades in power and still struggle until today. The election reflected the growing significance of online political communication, social media campaigning, and digital political participation. Since then, Malaysian politics has experienced continuous instability, coalition restructuring, leadership transitions, and highly polarized public debates. Political discussions increasingly shifted to social media platforms, where political memes emerged as one of the most influential forms of communication among young voters ((Mohd Nizah et al., 2024) .

Political memes refer to visual, textual, or audiovisual content distributed rapidly through internet-based platforms to convey political satire, criticism, support, propaganda, or commentary. Memes generally combine humour, symbolism, irony, and cultural references to communicate complex political ideas in simplified forms. Due to their concise and entertaining nature, memes are often easier to understand compared to conventional political texts or speeches. Originates from Dawkins (1976) seminal work *The Selfish Gene*, the term “meme” was introduced to describe units of cultural transmission. Although Dawkins initially referred to ideas and cultural replication, internet development transformed memes into visual communication tools widely circulated through digital media. In political contexts, memes evolved into mechanisms capable of influencing perceptions, mobilizing supporters, criticizing opponents, and shaping political identities.

Political memes have become particularly influential among younger generations due to their heavy reliance on digital media. Generation Z and millennials are highly dependent on mobile technologies and social networking applications for information consumption. According to the Reuters Institute Digital News Report (Newman et al., 2021), younger audiences increasingly obtain political information through online platforms rather than conventional news organizations. Similarly, the widespread use of WhatsApp, Facebook and Thread, TikTok, and Instagram in Malaysia has enabled political memes to spread rapidly across social networks.

The influence of memes in politics has become evident in many countries. During the 2016, 2020 and 2024 United States Presidential Election, political memes played a substantial role in shaping online political discourse (Ismail, 2025; Stewart, 2019; Wurst, 2021). In Indonesia, memes were actively utilized during presidential elections to criticize political elites, reinforce ideological positions, and shape public sentiment (Aminulloh et al., 2025; Belinda et al., 2024; Darlius et al., 2024; Syahrir et al., 2026; Ubaidillah et al., 2025) . Similar patterns have emerged in Malaysia, particularly during GE14 and GE15, where memes became part of political campaigning, satire, and digital propaganda. In Malaysian political contexts, memes are frequently used to ridicule politicians, criticize policies, simplify complex issues, and mobilize online political participation. Political parties and supporters strategically create and disseminate memes to influence public perceptions and political emotions. Memes therefore function not merely as entertainment but also as instruments of persuasion and political marketing (Awang Besar et al., 2025; Husain et al., 2024; Jalli, 2024; Mohd Nizah et al., 2024; Tapsell, 2023).

Political marketing refers to the application of marketing principles, branding techniques, communication strategies, and audience targeting in political campaigns and political image management. Political memes align strongly with political marketing due to their ability to simplify messages, create emotional engagement, encourage sharing behaviour, and amplify political narratives. Compared to traditional political advertisements, memes are cheaper, faster, and more effective in capturing audience attention. However, despite the advantages of political memes, concerns also exist regarding misinformation, manipulation, propaganda, and political polarization. Memes frequently oversimplify political realities and may distort facts through humour and emotional framing. Furthermore, because memes are designed for rapid consumption, audiences may accept or share them without verifying information accuracy (Nieuburt, 2021). Existing literature on political memes has mainly focused on various states with Malaysian political communication remain relatively limited. Furthermore, limited research specifically explores the relationship between political memes and political marketing among Malaysian youths.

This study therefore aims to examine the influence of political memes on political attitudes and political marketing among Malaysian youths. Specifically, the study investigates respondents’ attitudes toward political memes, their sharing behaviour, their perceptions of propaganda and political influence, and the role of memes

in shaping party image and political understanding. The study contributes to the growing body of literature on digital political communication in Malaysia by providing empirical insights into the role of memes in contemporary political marketing.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Political Communication in the Digital Era

The rise of digital technologies has substantially altered political communication structures worldwide. Traditional communication systems were largely hierarchical, where information flowed from political elites and media institutions toward audiences. Digital media, however, enabled interactive and participatory communication where citizens themselves became content producers (Nieuburt, 2021; Pratiwi Utami, 2023; Ting et al., 2024).

Boulianne (2015) argued that social media usage contributes positively toward political participation and civic engagement. Similarly, Jenkins, Ford, and Green emphasized that digital media environments encourage “spreadable media,” where information rapidly circulates across social networks (Mogensen, 2014). Political communication is therefore increasingly shaped by viral content, emotional engagement, and participatory culture.

In Malaysia, social media became increasingly influential after 14th General Election. (Nizah & Bakar, 2019, 2021) highlighted the role of WhatsApp in influencing political communication during Malaysia’s 14th General Election. The study demonstrated that instant messaging applications significantly shaped political information dissemination and voter behaviour. Political communication in contemporary society is no longer limited to speeches, manifestos, or official campaign advertisements. Instead, political messages increasingly appear through memes, videos, GIFs, satire, and short-form visual content designed for rapid online circulation.

Political Memes as Communication Tools

Internet memes are generally defined as digital cultural artifacts that spread rapidly online through imitation, modification, and replication. According to Shifman (2012, 2013), memes represent groups of digital items sharing common characteristics, created with awareness of one another, and circulated widely among users.

Memes possess several characteristics that contribute to their popularity. First, memes are concise and visually attractive. Second, memes are easily modified and reproduced by users. Third, memes frequently incorporate humour, irony, and satire, making them emotionally engaging. Finally, memes spread rapidly through social networking platforms.

Laineste & Voolaid, (2017) and Pratiwi Utami (2023) argued that memes transcend cultural and geographical boundaries due to their intertextuality and adaptability. Abd Kadir & Mohd Lokman, (2014) and Farhan Shahmi Abdullah, (2023) further noted that memes influence online political discourse by shaping perceptions and emotional responses. Political memes differ from ordinary memes because they specifically address political personalities, ideologies, elections, policies, or political events. Political memes frequently serve as tools of criticism, propaganda, or persuasion. According to Nieuburt (2021) political memes represent “leaflet propaganda of the digital age.” The study argued that memes have become contemporary mechanisms for ideological dissemination due to their simplicity and viral nature.

Political Marketing and Meme Culture

Political marketing refers to the strategic use of communication, branding, and persuasion techniques to influence voters and political audiences. Political marketing increasingly adopts commercial marketing approaches where political actors behave similarly to brands competing for public support.

Memes align strongly with political marketing strategies because they are inexpensive, easily disseminated, emotionally appealing, and capable of generating strong engagement. Ertanowska, (2021) argued that memes

function effectively within political marketing environments due to their viral characteristics and persuasive potential. McLoughlin & Southern (2021) demonstrated that political memes generated millions of views during the 2017 United Kingdom General Election, contributing significantly toward political exposure and engagement. Similarly, studies in Indonesia revealed that memes were widely used during presidential elections to ridicule candidates, strengthen ideological identities, and mobilize supporters.

In Malaysia, political memes became increasingly visible during periods of political uncertainty and coalition conflicts. Political supporters frequently use memes to attack opponents, defend party leaders, and frame public perceptions. Memes are therefore increasingly integrated into political branding and political campaigning (Azizuddin Mohd Sani, 2015; Mohd Nizah et al., 2024; Nizah & Bakar, 2021; Rahim, 2018).

Youth Political Behaviour and Memes

Youths represent one of the most significant demographic groups consuming digital political content. Generation Z and millennials spend substantial amounts of time on social networking platforms, making them highly exposed to political memes.

Azira & Yusof (2021) found that Generation Z actively uses memes as communication tools due to their humorous and relatable nature. (Kasirye, 2019, 2020) similarly argued that memes encourage political participation among millennials by simplifying political engagement. Studies also suggest that younger audiences are more likely to share political memes compared to older generations. Due to their digital literacy and familiarity with internet culture, youths frequently engage with political content through memes rather than formal political discourse.

However, concerns remain regarding misinformation and political manipulation. Political memes may oversimplify issues, distort facts, or reinforce partisan biases. Consequently, while memes increase political engagement, they may simultaneously contribute toward political polarization and misunderstanding.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This study conceptualizes political memes as independent communication variables that significantly influence political attitudes, political perceptions, and political marketing behaviour among Malaysian youths. The conceptual framework of this study is developed based on the assumption that repeated exposure to political memes through social media platforms contributes toward shaping respondents' political understanding, emotional responses, political participation tendencies, political support, and perceptions toward political parties and political actors.

In contemporary digital political environments, political memes no longer function merely as humorous online content. Instead, they operate as persuasive communication instruments capable of transmitting ideological messages, political narratives, satire, criticism, propaganda, and symbolic representations of political actors. Due to their concise, visual, and emotionally engaging characteristics, memes possess substantial communicative power within online political ecosystems, particularly among younger generations who are highly dependent on digital media consumption (Abd Kadir & Mohd Lokman, 2014; Aminulloh et al., 2022; Awang Besar et al., 2025; Beskow et al., 2020; Nieuburt, 2021).

The framework assumes that exposure to political memes stimulates several interconnected dimensions of political influence. First, memes function as political communication and political marketing tools that simplify political information into visually appealing content that is easier to understand and share. Second, memes influence political understanding by encouraging respondents to think about current political issues, political events, and political personalities. Third, memes affect political support by shaping attitudes toward political parties, political leaders, and ideological positions.

Furthermore, the framework also assumes that political memes influence online sharing behaviour among youths. Due to the participatory nature of social media, respondents are not merely passive recipients of political content but also active disseminators who contribute toward meme circulation and political narrative

amplification. In this regard, memes become highly effective viral communication mechanisms within digital political marketing.

The framework additionally incorporates dimensions concerning political propaganda, political image construction, and misinformation. Political memes can strengthen party branding, improving politicians' image, mobilizing supporters, and simultaneously damaging the reputation of opposing parties through satire, ridicule, and symbolic attacks. However, the framework also recognizes that political memes may contribute toward political misunderstanding, misinformation, emotional manipulation, and polarization due to the oversimplification of political realities.

Consequently, the conceptual framework positions political memes as multidimensional digital political communication instruments operating within six major dimensions, that is (1) Political memes as communication and political marketing tools; (2) Political memes and political understanding; (3) Political memes and political support; (4) Political memes and online sharing behaviour; (5) Political memes as propaganda and political image construction tools; and (6) Political memes and misinformation or political misunderstanding.

The relationship between political memes and these dimensions demonstrates that meme culture has become an increasingly influential component within contemporary political communication, particularly in digitally connected societies such as Malaysia. Below depict is a graphical framework of political memes and its dimensions.

GRAPHICAL FRAMEWORK OF POLITICAL MEMES AND ITS DIMENSIONS

A Conceptual Framework on the Influence of Political Memes in Political Marketing

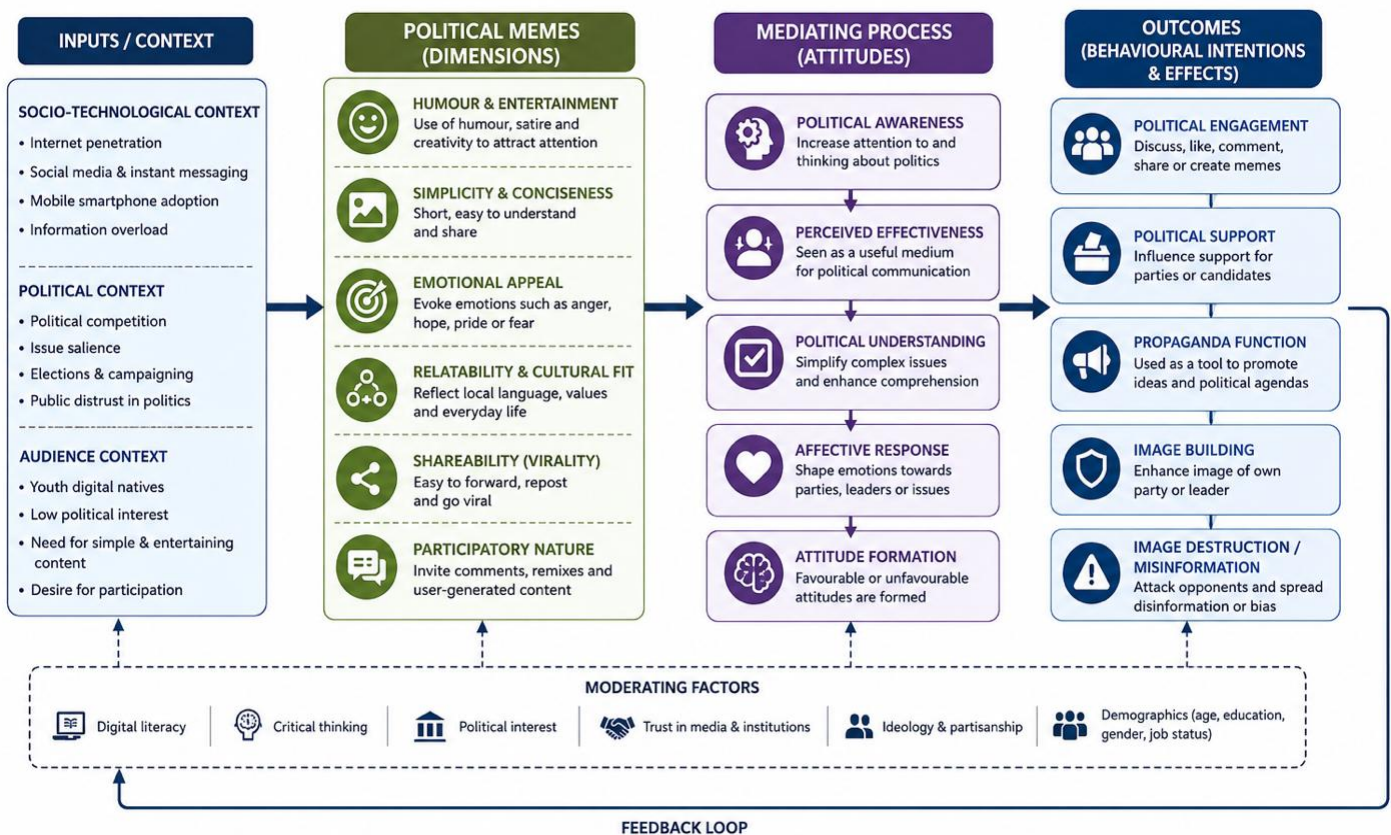


Figure 1 Graphical Framework of the Study. Illustration made using AI tools.

The graphical framework illustrates that political memes act as the central independent variable influencing multiple dimensions of political communication and political marketing among youths. The framework also demonstrates that memes operate simultaneously as persuasive, participatory, and potentially manipulative

communication instruments within digital political environments. The framework therefore positions memes as influential components within contemporary digital political communication.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative research design using a cross-sectional survey method. Quantitative approaches are suitable for examining attitudes, perceptions, and behavioural tendencies among large respondent groups. The survey method was selected because it allows researchers to systematically collect standardized data concerning respondents' perceptions toward political memes. The cross-sectional design enabled data collection at a single point in time, particularly during a period where political memes were highly visible within Malaysian online political discourse. The target population consisted of Malaysian youths aged between 18 and 35 years who actively use social media applications such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and X.

The study adopted random sampling techniques to ensure that respondents possessed equal opportunities of participation. Based on Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) sampling determination guidelines, a minimum sample size exceeding 384 respondents was considered adequate for large populations. A total of 435 questionnaires were distributed online using Google Forms through social media networks and messaging applications. However, only 400 responses were considered valid after excluding incomplete questionnaires. The respondent demographic composition reflected strong youth participation, particularly among university students and digitally active users. Most respondents were female, consistent with demographic patterns observed within Malaysian higher education institutions.

The questionnaire consisted of three major sections, with Section A, which examined respondents' demographic characteristics such as gender, age, educational background, and employment status. Then followed with Section B which is on the visibility and exposure to political memes. The instrument then continues to Section C that aims at measuring the attitudes toward political memes.

The instrument underwent a comprehensive reliability assessment using Cronbach's Alpha analysis to determine the internal consistency and stability of the measurement items used in the questionnaire. Reliability testing is important in quantitative research because it ensures that the instrument consistently measures the intended constructs and dimensions across respondents. In this study, the reliability test was conducted after the pilot testing phase involving a smaller group of respondents who possessed characteristics like the actual study sample.

The findings from the reliability analysis demonstrated that the questionnaire achieved a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient exceeding 0.90. According to Hair et al., (2014), Cronbach's Alpha values above 0.70 indicate acceptable reliability, while values exceeding 0.80 demonstrate good reliability and values above 0.90 indicate excellent internal consistency. Therefore, the obtained reliability coefficient confirms that the items used in the questionnaire possess a high level of consistency and are suitable for measuring respondents' attitudes, perceptions, and behavioural tendencies concerning political memes. The high Cronbach's Alpha value also indicates that the questionnaire items measuring dimensions such as political understanding, political support, propaganda perception, meme-sharing behaviour, political image construction, and misinformation are strongly interrelated and capable of reliably representing the conceptual constructs of the study. Furthermore, the reliability findings suggest that respondents interpreted the questionnaire items consistently, thus minimizing measurement errors and increasing the credibility of the study findings.

In addition to reliability testing, the study also emphasized content validity by constructing the questionnaire based on extensive reviews of previous literature concerning political communication, political marketing, internet memes, youth political participation, and digital media studies. Relevant theories and empirical studies were referred to in ensuring that the questionnaire adequately captured the multidimensional influence of political memes within contemporary political communication environments. Expert reviews and pilot testing feedback were also considered to improve question clarity, relevance, and appropriateness before the final distribution of the questionnaire. Content validity was established through references to previous studies concerning political communication, political marketing, internet memes, and youth political participation.

Data collection was conducted online through Google Forms. Respondents voluntarily participated after receiving the survey link through social media platforms and messaging applications. The online distribution approach was considered appropriate because the study focused on digitally connected respondents highly exposed to online political communication.

Data were then analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 27. Descriptive statistical analysis was utilized to examine frequencies, percentages, mean scores, and overall response tendencies. The interpretation of mean scores followed standard descriptive statistical interpretations:

1.00 – 2.00 = Very Low Agreement

2.01 – 3.00 = Low Agreement

3.01 – 4.00 = Moderate Agreement

4.01 – 5.00 = High Agreement

The analysis focused on identifying respondents' attitudes toward political memes and their perceptions concerning political marketing influence.

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 presents the demographic profile of respondents involved in this study. A total of 400 valid respondents participated in the survey, consisting primarily of youths who were actively engaged with social media platforms and online political content.

Table 1 Demographic Analysis

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	152	38.0
	Female	248	62.0
Employment Status	Student	362	90.5
	Self-Employed	16	4.0
	Private Employee	15	3.8
	Civil Servant	7	1.8
Total Respondents		400	100

The demographic analysis revealed that female respondents constituted the majority of participants, representing 62.0 percent of the total respondents, while male respondents represented 38.0 percent. This pattern reflects broader demographic trends observed within Malaysian higher education institutions, where female student enrolment generally exceeds male participation. The higher female participation rate may also indicate greater responsiveness toward online survey participation and stronger engagement with social media interactions among female respondents.

In terms of employment status, the findings showed that students formed the largest respondent group, accounting for 90.5 percent of the sample population. This was followed by self-employed respondents at 4.0 percent, private-sector employees at 3.8 percent, and civil servants at 1.8 percent. The dominance of students within the sample is significant because younger and digitally active individuals are generally more exposed to internet culture, meme circulation, and social media communication practices. As digital natives, students are also more likely to consume political content through online platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, WhatsApp, and X.

The demographic findings further suggest that the respondents were highly connected to digital communication environments and frequently interacted with online political information. Such exposure is important in understanding the influence of political memes because social media platforms serve as the primary ecosystem through which political memes are created, disseminated, reproduced, and interpreted among young audiences in Malaysia.

Political Memes as Political Marketing Tools

The first statement examined whether respondents perceived memes as political marketing tools. Table 2 summarizes respondents' perception of political memes as political marketing tools.

Table 2 Political Memes as Political Marketing Tool

Item	Statement	General Finding	Interpretation
1	Memes can function as political marketing media.	High agreement among respondents.	Respondents generally accepted memes as a relevant and effective medium for political marketing.
2	Memes are effective in attracting attention.	High agreement among respondents.	The visual, humorous, and concise nature of memes helps capture audience interest, particularly among young social media users.
3	Memes simplify political messages.	High agreement among respondents.	Respondents recognized that memes can reduce complex political issues into short, accessible, and easily understood messages.
4	Memes influence public perceptions.	High agreement among respondents.	Memes were perceived as capable of shaping political opinions, party image, and audience attitudes toward political actors or issues.

This finding aligns with Ertanowska (2021) who argued that memes represent highly effective political marketing instruments due to their low production cost, high adaptability, emotional appeal, and viral dissemination capability. Unlike conventional political advertisements that require substantial financial resources, media placements, and formal campaign structures, political memes can be created quickly using simple digital tools and disseminated widely through social networking platforms within a very short period of time. The humorous, satirical, and emotionally engaging characteristics further enhance audience attention and interaction, especially among younger generations who are heavily dependent on social media for information consumption.

Furthermore, political memes possess strong persuasive capabilities because they simplify complex political issues into visually attractive and easily understandable content. In many cases, memes function as symbolic political narratives that shape public perceptions toward political leaders, political parties, and national issues without requiring lengthy explanations. The viral nature of memes also contributes significantly toward digital political marketing because once a meme resonates emotionally with audiences, users themselves actively participate in sharing, reproducing, and modifying the content across multiple online platforms. Consequently, memes operate not only as communication tools but also as participatory political marketing mechanisms capable of amplifying political messages organically through user engagement and online interactions.

Political parties increasingly utilize memes because memes possess several communication advantages, including simplicity of message delivery; rapid circulation through social media; emotional engagement through humour; high audience accessibility; and strong youth appeal. The findings therefore support the argument that memes have become integrated within modern political branding and political campaigning.

Meme Sharing Behaviour

The second statement investigated whether respondents frequently shared political memes. Table 3 summarizes respondents' meme-sharing behaviour and its interpretation within the context of digital political communication.

Table 3 Sharing behaviour

Item	Statement	General Finding	Interpretation
1	Respondents frequently share memes they receive.	Moderate to high level of agreement.	Meme-sharing is a common practice among respondents and reflects the active circulation of political content within digital networks.
2	Respondents share memes with friends.	Moderate to high level of agreement.	Peer-to-peer sharing suggests that memes function as informal political communication tools within personal relationships.
3	Respondents share memes in online groups.	Moderate to high level of agreement.	Group-based sharing through WhatsApp, Telegram, Facebook, or similar platforms increases the speed and reach of political meme dissemination.
4	Respondents share memes on social media networks.	Moderate to high level of agreement.	Social media sharing contributes to the viral spread of political messages and strengthens the participatory nature of digital political communication.

This behaviour demonstrates the participatory nature of digital political communication. Unlike traditional political advertising, memes rely heavily on user participation for dissemination. Citizens therefore become active agents within political communication ecosystems. The findings correspond with Niebuurt (2021), who found that younger users actively share memes as part of digital identity construction and social interaction. The high tendency to share memes contributes significantly toward viral political communication. Once political memes gain traction, they can spread rapidly across platforms, reaching audiences beyond the original creators.

Ignoring Political Memes

The third statement examined whether respondents frequently ignored political memes. Table 4 summarizes respondents' tendency to ignore or remain attentive toward political memes.

Table 4 Ignoring tendency

Item	Statement	General Finding	Interpretation
1	Respondents ignored political memes.	Mixed responses.	Some respondents chose to ignore political memes, suggesting that not all users perceive meme-based political content as relevant or credible.
2	Respondents remained attentive toward political memes.	Mixed but notable attention among respondents.	Many respondents continued to pay attention to political memes, indicating that memes possess strong visibility and attraction within digital political communication.
3	Political memes captured audience curiosity.	Moderate indication.	Humour, satire, visual appeal, and emotional framing made political memes difficult to ignore for many young users.
4	Political memes created incidental political exposure.	Moderate indication.	Even respondents who did not intentionally seek political information may still encounter and engage with political messages through memes.

This finding suggests that political memes possess strong attention-grabbing characteristics. Humour, satire, and emotional framing contribute toward audience curiosity and engagement. Political memes differ from conventional political messages because they are often disguised as entertainment. Consequently, audiences may engage with political content even without deliberate political intentions. McLoughlin and Southern (2021) argued that memes frequently generate "incidental exposure" to political information, where users unintentionally consume political content while browsing social media.

Memes and Political Understanding

The fourth statement investigated whether memes encouraged respondents to think about current political issues. Table 5 summarizes respondents' perception of political memes in stimulating political reflection and awareness.

Table 5 Political Understanding

Item	Statement	General Finding	Interpretation
1	Political memes encouraged respondents to think about current political issues.	Strong agreement among respondents.	Respondents acknowledged that memes stimulated political reflection and encouraged them to pay attention to political developments.
2	Political memes increased political awareness.	Strong agreement among respondents.	Memes were perceived as capable of raising awareness about political events, personalities, parties, and public issues.
3	Political memes simplified political issues.	Strong agreement among respondents.	The visual and humorous nature of memes helped respondents understand political issues in a more accessible and less formal manner.
4	Political memes encouraged political discussion.	Strong agreement among respondents.	Memes created opportunities for informal political conversations among peers, online groups, and social media users.

This suggests that memes function as alternative educational tools within political communication. Through satire and symbolism, memes simplify complex political issues into understandable visual narratives. For younger audiences, memes may therefore increase political awareness and encourage political discussion. However, while memes stimulate awareness, they may also oversimplify political realities. Complex policy debates are frequently reduced into emotional or humorous representations. Therefore, although memes contribute positively toward political engagement, they may simultaneously weaken nuanced political understanding.

Memes and Political Misunderstanding

The fifth statement examined whether political memes could cause misunderstanding. The findings revealed strong agreement among respondents that memes can indeed create misunderstanding. Table 6 summarizes respondents' perception of political memes as a source of misunderstanding and communication risk.

Table 6 Political memes as source of misunderstanding

Item	Statement	General Finding	Interpretation
1	Political memes can cause misunderstanding.	Strong agreement among respondents.	Respondents were aware that memes may distort political information or lead audiences to interpret political issues inaccurately.
2	Meme-based communication carries communication risks.	Strong agreement among respondents.	The simplified, humorous, and emotional nature of memes may reduce factual accuracy and encourage selective interpretation.
3	Political memes may manipulate images, quotations, or narratives.	Strong indication.	Political memes can be edited or framed in ways that serve persuasive objectives rather than balanced political understanding.
4	Political memes may contribute to	Strong indication.	Respondents recognized that political memes can intensify confusion, partisan

misinformation and polarization.	bias, emotional reaction, and negative perceptions toward political opponents.
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Political memes frequently manipulate images, quotations, or narratives to achieve persuasive objectives. Because memes prioritize humour and virality, factual accuracy is sometimes sacrificed. This creates risks of (1) political misinformation; (2) political manipulation; (3) character assassination; (4) emotional polarization; and (5) simplification of complex issues. The findings support concerns raised by (Huntington, 2017) regarding the persuasive and emotional influence of memes within online political discourse.

Memes and Political Support

Table 7 summarizes respondents' perception of the influence of political memes on support toward political parties.

Table 7 Political memes on support towards parties

Item	Statement	General Finding	Interpretation
1	Political memes influenced support toward political parties.	Moderate agreement among respondents.	Respondents perceived that political memes may influence their support toward certain political parties, although the level of influence may vary according to prior political preference, party identification, and trust in the meme content.
2	Positive memes may strengthen support for political parties.	Moderate indication.	Memes that portray a party positively may improve emotional attachment, increase visibility, and reinforce favourable perceptions among audiences.
3	Negative memes may weaken support for political opponents.	Moderate indication.	Memes that ridicule, criticize, or frame opposing parties negatively may reduce trust and contribute to unfavourable perceptions.
4	Political support may be shaped by emotional digital narratives.	Moderate indication.	Political support is increasingly influenced by symbolic, humorous, and emotionally framed content circulated through online communities.

The findings indicated moderate agreement that memes influence political support. This suggests that political memes can shape perceptions concerning political parties and politicians. Positive memes may increase support, while negative memes may weaken trust toward opponents. Political memes therefore function similarly to political advertisements, although in less formal and more entertaining formats. This finding aligns with political marketing theories emphasizing emotional engagement and branding. Political support is increasingly influenced not only by manifestos or speeches but also by emotional digital narratives circulated through online communities.

Understanding Politics Through Memes

Table 8 summarizes respondents' preference for understanding politics through political memes.

Table 8 Memes as source of political knowledge

Item	Statement	General Finding	Interpretation
1	Respondents preferred understanding political issues through memes.	Moderate agreement among respondents.	Respondents indicated that memes can serve as an accessible and informal medium for understanding

			political issues, although they may not fully replace formal political information sources.
2	Memes were easier to understand compared to formal political communication.	Moderate agreement among respondents.	The visual, humorous, and concise format of memes makes political information more digestible, especially for younger audiences.
3	Memes reflected changing political communication preferences.	Moderate indication.	Younger users increasingly prefer short, visual, and emotionally engaging political content rather than lengthy speeches, manifestos, or formal political texts.
4	Overreliance on memes may weaken deeper political analysis.	Moderate concern.	Although memes increase accessibility, excessive dependence on meme-based political understanding may reduce critical evaluation and nuanced interpretation of political issues.

The findings demonstrated moderate agreement. Many respondents found memes easier to understand compared to formal political communication. This reflects changing communication preferences among younger generations. Visual communication, humour, and concise messaging are increasingly preferred over lengthy political texts. Political memes simplify political information into digestible content suitable for fast-paced digital environments. However, this trend also raises concerns regarding declining critical political literacy. While memes increase accessibility, excessive reliance on meme-based political understanding may weaken deeper political analysis.

Memes and Party Support

Table 9 summarizes respondents' perception of whether political memes can increase support toward political parties.

Table 9 Memes and party support

Item	Statement	General Finding	Interpretation
1	Political memes can increase support toward political parties.	General agreement among respondents.	Respondents perceived that political memes may strengthen public support for political parties by increasing visibility, emotional connection, and message recall.
2	Memes may reinforce existing political preference.	Moderate to strong indication.	Respondents who already favour a political party may become more supportive when exposed to memes that affirm their existing beliefs or political identity.
3	Memes may attract undecided or less politically engaged audiences.	Moderate indication.	The humorous, visual, and simplified format of memes may attract audiences who are less interested in formal political messages.
4	Memes contribute to political mobilization.	Moderate to strong indication.	Political memes may encourage users to discuss, share, and engage with party-related content, thereby expanding campaign reach and online visibility.

Respondents generally agreed that memes influence party support. This demonstrates that memes contribute toward political persuasion and audience mobilization. Political parties increasingly recognize meme culture as strategic communication tools capable of influencing younger voters. The findings reinforce the growing importance of digital political branding within contemporary election campaigns.

Memes and Party Image Construction

The ninth statement examined whether memes help shape party image. Table 10 summarizes respondents' perception of political memes in shaping party image.

Table 10 Memes shapes party image

Item	Statement	General Finding	Interpretation
1	Political memes can help shape party image.	Strong agreement among respondents.	Respondents perceived political memes as capable of constructing, reinforcing, or changing public perceptions toward political parties.
2	Memes can portray parties as youth-friendly and relatable.	Strong indication.	The humorous, informal, and visual style of memes may help political parties appear closer to younger audiences and digital communities.
3	Memes can strengthen political branding.	Strong indication.	Political memes may support party branding by repeatedly associating parties with specific values, personalities, slogans, emotions, or political narratives.
4	Memes can create symbolic political identity.	Strong indication.	Memes help simplify and symbolize party identity, making political images easier to remember, circulate, and reproduce within online communities.

The findings showed strong agreement among respondents. Political image construction represents a major component of political marketing. Through memes, political actors may portray themselves as (1) youth-friendly; (2) humorous; (3) relatable; (4) modern; and (5) emotionally connected to audiences. Conversely, memes may portray opponents negatively through ridicule and satire. This finding demonstrates that memes increasingly influence symbolic political identity construction.

Memes and Destruction of Opponent Image

Table 11 summarizes respondents' perception of political memes as tools that may damage the image of opposing political parties.

Table 11 Memes as psych war tools

Item	Statement	General Finding	Interpretation
1	Political memes can destroy the image of opposing parties.	High agreement among respondents.	Respondents perceived that political memes can negatively influence public perceptions toward political opponents through ridicule, criticism, and symbolic attacks.
2	Memes may function as attack communication tools.	High indication.	Political memes can be strategically used to weaken opponents' credibility, reputation, and public trust.
3	Satire and ridicule are common in negative political memes.	High indication.	Humour, exaggeration, irony, and humiliation are often used to portray opposing parties unfavourably.
4	Negative memes may contribute to political polarization.	High concern.	The use of memes to attack opponents may intensify partisan hostility, emotional reactions, and toxic political communication.

The findings revealed high agreement among respondents. This suggests that political memes frequently function as attack or psych communication tools. Political satire and ridicule are common within meme culture. Opponents are often portrayed negatively through exaggeration, irony, or humiliation. Such practices may contribute toward toxic political communication environments and increased political polarization.

Memes as Propaganda Tools

Table 12 summarizes respondents' perception of political memes as propaganda tools within digital political communication.

Table 12 Memes as propaganda tools

Item	Statement	General Finding	Interpretation
1	Political memes can function as propaganda tools.	Strong agreement among respondents.	Respondents perceived that political memes are capable of influencing attitudes, opinions, and political narratives in strategic ways.
2	Political memes can reinforce ideological beliefs.	Strong indication.	Memes may strengthen existing political identities, ideological positions, and partisan perspectives among audiences.
3	Political memes can mobilize supporters and spread political narratives.	Strong indication.	Memes contribute toward political mobilization by encouraging audiences to share, discuss, and emotionally engage with political content.
4	Political memes can influence emotional responses toward political issues and opponents.	Strong indication.	The emotional and symbolic nature of memes may shape public reactions, increase polarization, and intensify political sentiments.

The eleventh statement examined whether memes can function as propaganda. The findings demonstrated strong agreement among respondents. This indicates public awareness regarding the strategic manipulation potential of memes. Propaganda traditionally refers to systematic communication designed to influence attitudes and behaviours. In digital contexts, memes increasingly fulfil similar functions. Political memes are capable of (1) reinforcing ideological beliefs; (2) mobilizing supports; (3) spreading political narratives; (4) attacking opponents; and (5) influencing emotional responses. The findings therefore support Niebuurt's (2021) argument that memes represent modern digital propaganda.

Memes and Politicians' Image

The final statement examined whether memes can improve politicians' image. Table 13 summarizes respondents' perception of political memes in improving politicians' image.

Table 13 Memes improves political image

Item	Statement	General Finding	Interpretation
1	Political memes can improve politicians' image.	Moderate agreement among respondents.	Respondents perceived that political memes may help politicians appear more relatable, approachable, and connected to younger audiences.
2	Memes can humanize political figures.	Moderate indication.	Humorous or self-deprecating memes may soften formal political images and present politicians as more ordinary, accessible, and socially aware.
3	Memes can strengthen personal political branding.	Moderate indication.	Politicians may use meme culture to reinforce personality traits, campaign messages, leadership style, or public identity.
4	Poorly designed memes may create backlash.	Moderate concern.	Meme-based image management carries reputational risks if the content appears insensitive, artificial, offensive, or inconsistent with public expectations.

The findings revealed moderate agreement among respondents. This suggests that memes may positively humanize politicians and improve relatability. Politicians increasingly utilize humour, self-deprecating content,

and meme participation to connect with younger audiences. However, meme culture also creates risks because poorly designed memes may generate backlash and ridicule. Consequently, political actors must strategically manage meme-based communication.

DISCUSSION

Overall, the study demonstrates that political memes possess substantial influence within Malaysian political communication and political marketing environments because they are no longer perceived merely as humorous or entertaining online materials, but as meaningful digital communication instruments that can shape political awareness, influence public perception, encourage political discussion, and support the strategic positioning of political parties and political actors.

The findings suggest that respondents increasingly recognize memes as part of everyday political communication, particularly because memes are concise, visually engaging, emotionally persuasive, and easily circulated across social media platforms. In this regard, political memes operate as both informal political content and persuasive marketing tools, as they enable political messages to reach audiences quickly while simplifying complex political issues into accessible and relatable forms. This is particularly significant among young voters and digitally active citizens, whose political exposure is often mediated through visual content, humour, satire, and peer-to-peer sharing.

At the same time, the influence of political memes must be understood critically, as the same features that make memes effective in political marketing also make them vulnerable to misuse, especially in spreading misinformation, reinforcing partisan bias, ridiculing opponents, and manipulating public emotion. Therefore, the overall findings indicate that political memes represent a multidimensional phenomenon in Malaysian politics, functioning simultaneously as tools of political engagement, image construction, propaganda dissemination, and potential political misunderstanding.

The findings reveal several important implications. First, political memes have become normalized within political communication. Respondents no longer perceive memes merely as entertainment but increasingly recognize them as political communication tools. Second, memes significantly influence youth political engagement. Youths actively consume, interpret, and share political memes. This demonstrates the transformation of political participation within digital societies. Third, memes contribute toward political branding and propaganda. Political parties increasingly utilize memes to shape perceptions, attack opponents, and mobilize supporters. Fourth, respondents are aware of misinformation risks. Despite recognizing the usefulness of memes, respondents also acknowledged the dangers of misunderstanding and manipulation. Fifth, meme culture reflects changing political communication patterns. Visual communication, humour, and emotional engagement increasingly dominate political discourse among younger generations. The findings therefore support broader theories concerning digital political communication, participatory media culture, and political marketing.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the influence of political memes on political marketing and political attitudes among Malaysian youths. The findings demonstrate that political memes have become influential communication instruments within contemporary political environments. Respondents generally perceived memes as effective political marketing tools capable of shaping political understanding, influencing political support, constructing party image, and functioning as propaganda.

The study also found that political memes encourage political engagement among younger audiences by simplifying political communication into visually attractive and emotionally engaging content. However, despite their effectiveness, political memes simultaneously create concerns regarding misinformation, misunderstanding, emotional manipulation, and political polarization. Political memes therefore represent both opportunities and challenges for democratic political communication.

From political marketing perspectives, memes provide political actors with low-cost, highly shareable, and emotionally persuasive communication tools. Political parties increasingly integrate memes within broader campaign strategies due to their effectiveness among digitally connected youths. Nevertheless, the ethical implications of meme-based political communication require serious consideration. Political memes may weaken rational political discourse if they excessively prioritize sensationalism, ridicule, or propaganda.

This study recommends that digital political literacy among youths should be strengthened as an important response to the growing influence of political memes in contemporary political communication. Since memes are often humorous, visual, emotionally appealing, and rapidly circulated, young users must be equipped with the ability to critically evaluate political content before accepting, interpreting, or sharing it. Digital political literacy should therefore not only focus on technical skills in using social media, but also on the ability to distinguish between political satire, propaganda, misinformation, manipulated content, and fact-based political information. Educational institutions, civil society organizations, election-related agencies, and policymakers may consider developing structured awareness programmes that help young citizens understand how political messages are constructed, framed, circulated, and weaponized through memes.

The study also recommends that political actors, political parties, campaign strategists, and digital content creators adopt more ethical approaches in meme-based political communication. Although memes can increase public engagement and make politics more accessible to younger audiences, their use should not normalize hate speech, character assassination, racial or religious provocation, gender-based ridicule, or deliberate disinformation. Political communication through memes should be guided by democratic responsibility, factual accuracy, and respect for social harmony. This is particularly important in Malaysia's plural society, where emotionally charged political content can easily intensify misunderstanding, polarization, and distrust among communities. Ethical meme production should therefore balance creativity, humour, criticism, and accountability.

Future research should further examine the relationship between political memes and political behaviour using more advanced quantitative methods. While the present study provides descriptive insights into respondents' attitudes toward political memes, future studies may apply inferential statistical techniques such as correlation analysis, multiple regression, factor analysis, or structural equation modelling to identify stronger empirical relationships between meme exposure, political understanding, political trust, political support, voting intention, and online participation. Such approaches would allow future researchers to determine whether political memes merely attract attention or whether they have deeper effects on political decision-making and electoral behaviour.

In addition, future studies should consider comparative and cross-country research to understand how political memes operate across different political systems, media environments, and cultural contexts. Political meme culture in Malaysia may differ from that in Indonesia, Thailand, the Philippines, the United Kingdom, or the United States due to differences in political institutions, media freedom, youth participation, party competition, and levels of digital literacy. Comparative research would provide broader theoretical insights into whether memes function primarily as tools of humour, resistance, propaganda, civic education, or political marketing in different societies.

The study further recommends that qualitative approaches should be used to explore how audiences interpret political memes emotionally, ideologically, and culturally. Interviews, focus group discussions, digital ethnography, and discourse analysis may help researchers understand why certain memes are persuasive, why some memes become viral, and how users negotiate meaning when exposed to political satire or symbolic attacks. Such qualitative insights are important because the influence of memes is not always measurable through numerical data alone. Memes often work through humour, irony, shared cultural references, and emotional cues that require deeper interpretive analysis.

In conclusion, political memes will continue shaping political communication and political marketing in Malaysia as it did its own way. As digital political culture evolves, understanding the persuasive power and ethical implications of memes becomes increasingly important for researchers, policymakers, and political actors.

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