# The Meme As Modern Satire: Literary Functions Of Internet Humor In Digital Culture.

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Abstract:

In the digital age, memes have emerged as a dominant form of communication, entertainment, and commentary. More than mere humor, memes serve as tools of satire, critiquing societal norms, politics, and culture with remarkable speed and reach. This paper explores how internet memes function as modern literary satire, analyzing their rhetorical strategies, intertextual nature, and participatory elements. Drawing from literary theory and media studies, the research argues that memes are a new form of digital literature that mirror and evolve traditional satirical functions, embodying the voice of the contemporary collective consciousness.

Index Terms – Internet Memes, Digital Satire, Meme Theory, Intertextuality, Irony and Parody, Multimodal Texts

## I. Introduction

Satire has long served as a critical lens through which society examines itself. From Jonathan Swift's A Modest Proposal to George Orwell's Animal Farm, literature has used irony, exaggeration, and parody to challenge authority, expose hypocrisy, and provoke reflection. Today, satire has found a new and dynamic vehicle: the internet meme. As easily shareable visual-text hybrids, memes are widely used to critique current events, ideologies, and human behavior. This paper investigates how memes operate as a form of modern satire, asking: What literary functions do memes serve in digital culture, and how do they reflect or reshape traditional satire?

## II. Literature Review

The conceptual foundation of the meme originates with Richard Dawkins' The Selfish Gene (1976), where "meme" referred to a cultural gene—a replicable idea or behavior. In the internet era, Limor Shifman (2014) reconceptualized memes as digital units of culture that spread by imitation. Scholars like Ryan Milner have emphasized memes' role in online discourse, identifying them as "multimodal artifacts" that blend image, text, and cultural context.

Meanwhile, literary satire remains rooted in rhetorical devices—irony, parody, and hyperbole—designed to critique societal flaws. Linda Hutcheon's Theory of Parody (1985) and Bakhtin's carnivalesque theory emphasize the subversive and dialogic nature of satire. Yet, few studies comprehensively bridge literary satire with meme culture, revealing an opportunity for deeper exploration.

## III. Methodology

This study uses qualitative analysis to examine memes that function as satire. Memes were collected from public social media platforms (Twitter, Instagram, Reddit) between 2022–2024 and analyzed in terms of their rhetorical strategies, intertextuality, and socio-political context. Memes that gained viral traction and addressed themes like politics, capitalism, mental health, and gender were prioritized.

## IV. Analysis

### 1. Memes as Political Satire

Internet memes often mimic political cartoons in their critique of government figures and decisions. For instance, memes comparing politicians to historical tyrants or depicting them as oblivious to public suffering employ exaggeration and irony—classic satirical tools.

### 2. Irony and Absurdism in Digital Humor

Many memes lean heavily on nihilistic or absurd humor. A popular genre uses deliberately nonsensical images paired with existential captions, reflecting postmodern skepticism.

### 3. Intertextuality and Literary Parody

Memes remix literature, mythology, or pop culture for satirical effect. Example: 'Pride and Prejudice' meme parodies modern dating culture.

### 4. Social Commentary through Humor

Memes addressing mental health or capitalism use humor to unveil societal pressures—similar to Swift's satire.

### 5. Participatory Satire: The Audience as Author

Unlike traditional satire, meme culture is participatory. Anyone can create and distribute satire, expanding authorship and voice.

## V. Discussion

Memes fulfill many literary functions of satire: they critique, entertain, parody, and provoke thought. Their multimodal nature—combining visuals, text, and cultural references—makes them adaptable and potent. While traditional satire is often dense and textual, memes are brief and immediate, leveraging humor for viral impact. Their participatory nature allows a plurality of voices, though this also leads to interpretive ambiguity and the risk of misinformation or offense.

Moreover, memes reflect a shift from structured satire to chaotic, post-ironic commentary. This reflects the fragmented, fast-paced digital age, where humor often veils anxiety, disillusionment, or resistance.

## VI. Conclusion

Memes are not just trivial entertainment—they are a digital evolution of literary satire. As dynamic, crowd-sourced, and rapidly evolving texts, memes articulate critiques of culture, politics, and identity with brevity and bite. In doing so, they echo the satirical traditions of literature while forging a new path in the digital literary landscape. As digital culture continues to evolve, so too will the meme—as a mirror, a magnifier, and a jester of our times.

**References**

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