

# A Semiotic Approach to Some Internet Political Comic Memes

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## Abstract

This paper aims to investigate how meaning is created by the combination of different semiotic modes in some Internet political comic memes. More specifically, it investigates the semiotic resources in Trump's memes during and after the elections of 2016 by using an eclectic model based on Kress and Leewen's (2006) and Dian's (2002) models. The paper analyses four Internet political comic memes semiotically. The findings shows that different forms, functions and semiotic modes are employed in Internet political comic memes, such as images, colours, various shots, and types of the camera's movements.

**Key Words:** Semiotics, Internet memes, patterns of interactions, patterns of compositions.

## 1) Overview

Wiggins (2019,11) describes an Internet meme as a synthesized, iterated message that can be quickly disseminated by users of interactive digital culture for objectives of satire, parody, critique, or other discursive activities, he argues that it is a more descriptive name for the different forms it encompasses, such as image macro memes, GIFs, hash tags, video memes, and such.

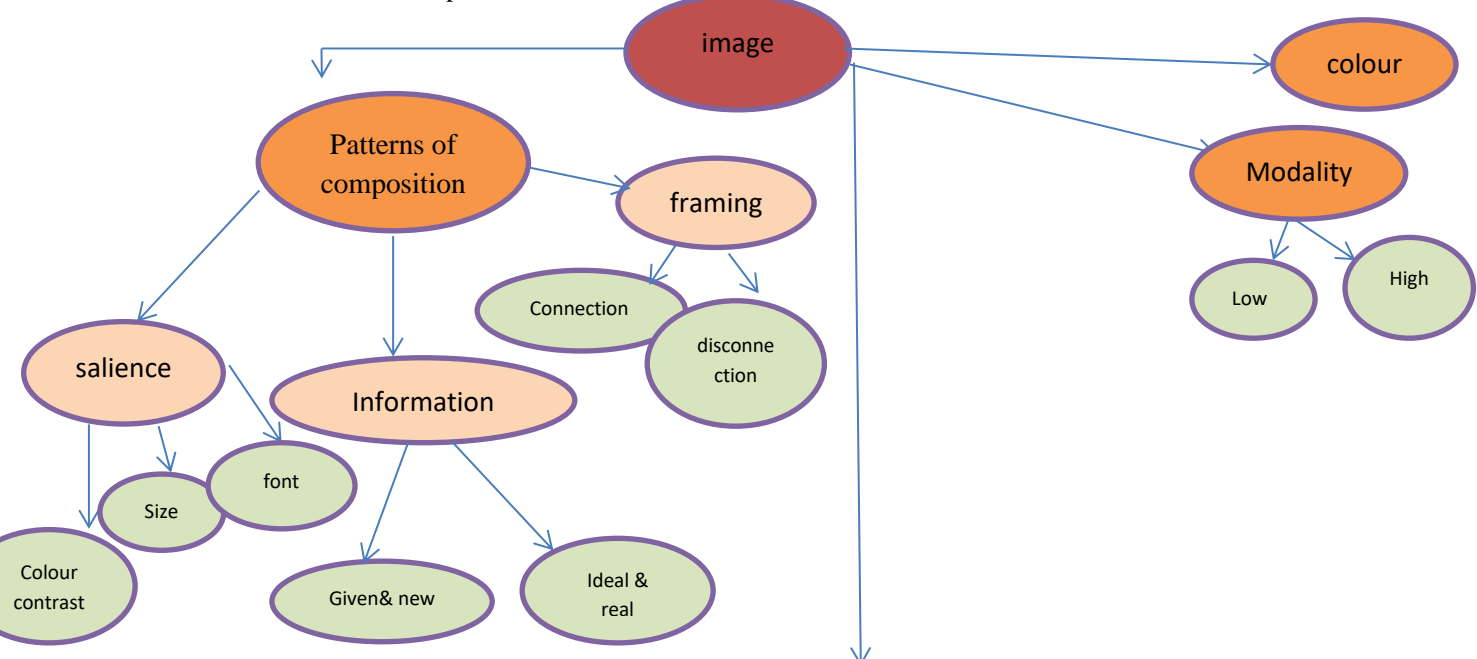
Describing Internet political comic memes visual elements is intricate and hard. Several studies of political memes do divide their constituents and focus on one or few and eliminate the others. There are also studies that focus solely on the text of political memes and ignore image. In such a study the major problem is exploring how meaning is created by the combination of different semiotic modes in these memes. This paper aims at: Figuring out the different semiotic types of memes; Finding out the functions of Internet political comic memes; Pinpointing the roles of contextual clues on Internet political comic memes; Figuring

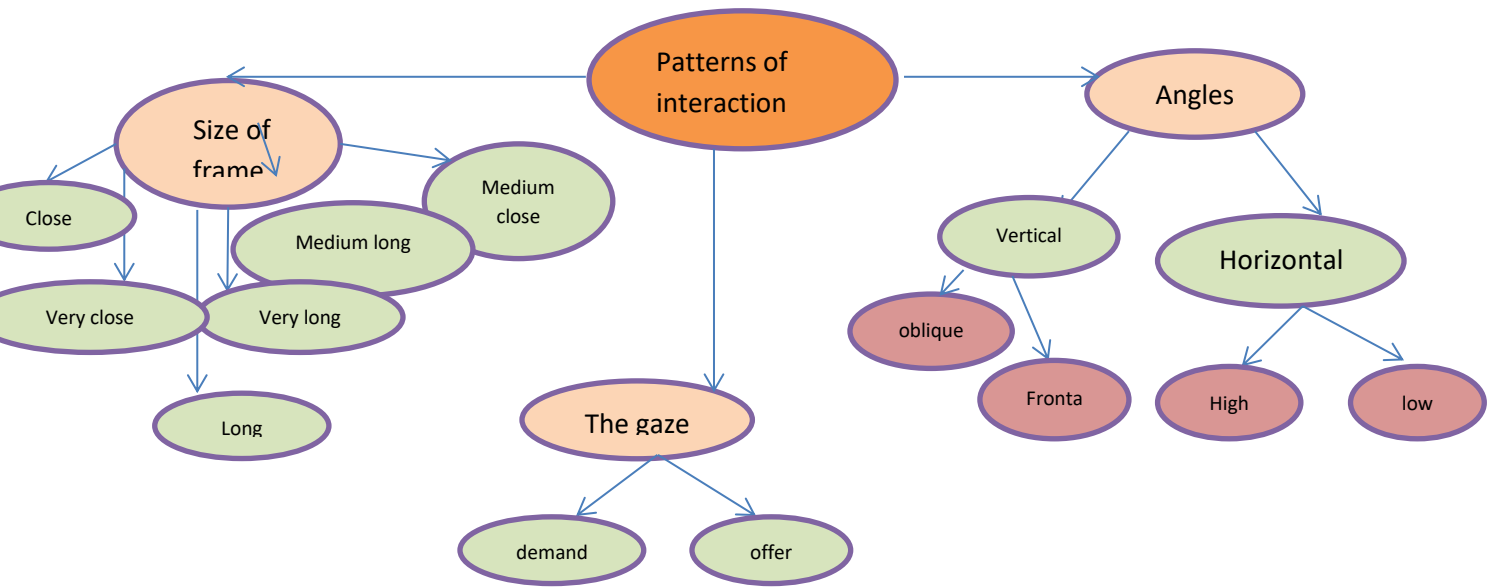
out what semiotic modes signify in American Internet political comic memes.

## 2. literature Review

### 2.1 Theories Related to Image Macros Analysis

Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) have promoted a systematic process for 'reading' or attributing the 'grammar' of visual images or the method in which image components are integrated into meaningful wholes. Developing Halliday's social semiotic idea of language to include the mode of visual communication, Kress and van Leeuwen (ibid) suggest that all images perform Halliday's three major functions through the following patterns: patterns of representation, patterns of interaction, and patterns of composition. For the aim of this paper, the analysis will concentrate on the last two patterns. In addition, Dain and Darmaprawira 's (2002) model to analyze colours (See Figure 1).





**Figure (1): The Model of Image Analysis**

**2.1.1 Patterns of Interaction**

Images include two types of participants, represented participants and interactive participants. Relations are tackled between these participants, thus proposing the viewers' attitude towards what is being tackled. These relations are communicated through the semiotic resources related to gaze, social distance, horizontal angles and vertical angles.

**2.1.1.1 The Image Act and The Gaze**

Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) point out to images in which the participants make 'eye contact' with the viewer as 'demand' images in that by straight 'addressing' the viewer, the represented participants symbolically 'demand' something from the interacting

participant, that the viewer come in to some kind of imaginary relation with them. By contrast, other pictures declaim the viewer indirectly. The participants, in these pictures, do not make eye contact and, in state, they become the object of the viewer's gaze. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) name this type of image an 'offer' (116).

**2.1.1.2 Social Distance**

Kress and van Leeuwen notice, "In everyday interaction, social relations determine the distance (literally and figuratively) we keep from one another" (2006: 124). These social distances are interpreted into the image by options in size of the frame. A scheme is adopted from Edward Hall (1966) and borrowed from the language of film and television to help categorize these distances. In Table 1 below, the categorization of social distance is shown.

**Table (1): Framing and Social Distance**

Hall's Social Distance (1966: 110-120)	Field of Vision Kress and van Leeuwen (2006:125)	Size of Frame Kress and van Leeuwen(2006: 124)
Intimate distance	Face or head only	Very close shot
Close personal distance	Head and shoulders	Close shot
Far personal distance	Waist up	Medium close shot
Close social distance	Whole figure	Medium long shot
Far social distance	Whole figure with space around it	Long shot
Public distance	Torso of at least 4-5 people	Very long shot

**2.1.1.3 Horizontal Angle**

The horizontal angle is a function of the relation between the frontal plane of the interactive participants and the frontal plane of the represented participants: the two can either be stratified with one another or splay from

one another, shaping an oblique angle. In the following terms Kress and van Leeuwen (2006,136) elucidate it: The frontal angle says, as it were, 'What you see here is part of our world, something we are involved with.' The oblique angle indicates, 'What you see here is *not* part of

our world; it is *their* world, something *we* are not involved with’.

**2.1.1.4 Vertical Angle**

The viewer has symbolic power over the represented participant, if a person is seen from a high angle. If the represented participant is seen from a low angle, then it is the represented participant who has symbolic power over the receiver. Finally, there is a relation of symbolic equality and there is no power difference involved, if the participant is at eye-level (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006: 140).

**2.1.2 Patterns of Composition**

They contain three resources of compositional meaning: framing; information value; and salience and modality.

**2.1.2.1 Framing**

The concept ‘framing’ denotes that components of a composition can either be given isolated identities or represented as belonging together. Framing, in other words, ‘connects’ or ‘disconnects’ components. Disconnection can be produced in several ways, through frame lines ,through space between components, also through contrasts of colour or form, or any other visual trait. In exactly the opposite way connection can be fulfilled, through similarities and rhymes of colour and form, through vectors that link components (Kress and Leeuwen,2006: 149).

**2.1.2.2 Information value**

Information values are recognized by the placement of the components of a composition. The thought is that the function of any specific component in the whole will rely on whether it is put on the right or on the left (a ‘given-new’ structure), or in the upper or the

lower ( an ‘ideal-real’ structure) portion of the image space or page (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006: 179-186) .

**2.1.2.3 Salience**

The expression 'salience' is utilized by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006: 201) to imply that some components can be made more noticeable than others. Again, this can be achieved by any means that makes a certain component stand out from its surrounds.

**2.1.3 Visual Modality**

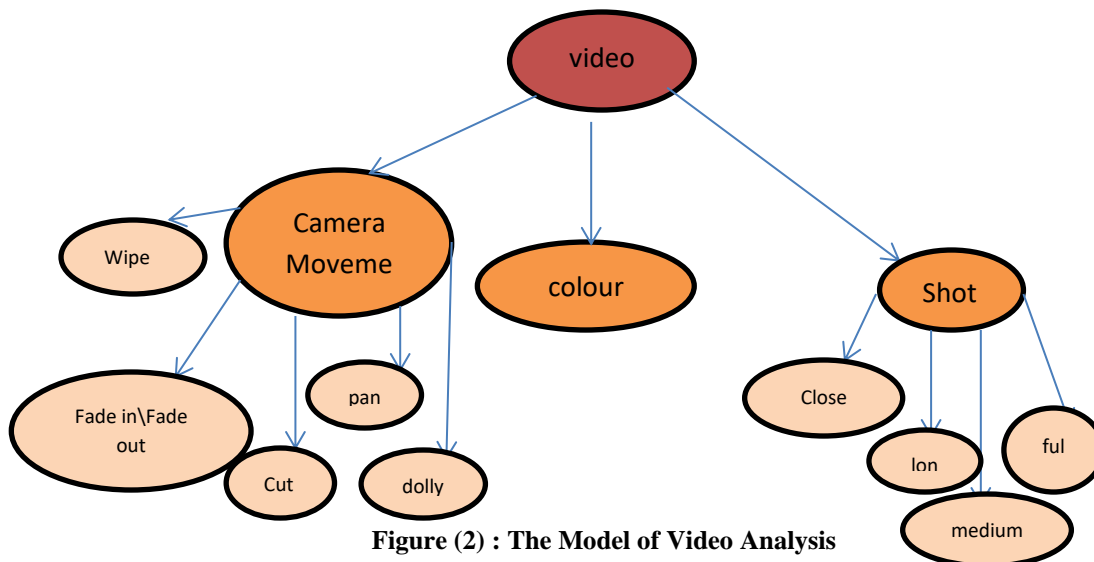
Kress and van Leeuwen (2006: 89) clarify that visuals can be either low modality or high modality. Low modality indicates that things or people appear unreal. High modality in visuals refers to the idea that things or people look 'realistic'.

**2.1.4 Colours**

Being a very intensive component within visual communication, colour generally possesses a number of symbolic characteristics. Thus, applying several colours and colour combinations may support or even alter the image's intended message and meaning. Indeed, it can communicate universal ideas, even though there is a subjective aspect to colour perception. According to Darmaprawira (2002: 45-49) , in general picture colours have some symbolic value. Those values are classified in terms of Dain and Darmaprawira 's (2002) thoughts.

**2.2 Theories Related to Video Analysis**

The Semiotic Thought of Roland Barthes as the "Theoretical Container" will be utilized in conjunction with the ideas of Arthur Asa Berger (Concreteness of the Signifier and Signified) to analyze shots and camera movement, and with the ideas of Mass to analyse colours.(See Figure 2 below)



**Figure (2) : The Model of Video Analysis**

**2.2.1 Shot**

Shot is a sequential strings of pictures that shapes unit of action in a film. In technical terms, a shot occurs when a cameraman presses the record button until he releases it, which means recording only one take. A type

of shot is also needed to analyse film or video clips. Type of shot refers to a technique while an image or video is shot by a camera (Satya 2018: 34).

The following table shows Berger’s (1991) thought of shot interpretation.

**Table (2) : Types of shot (Berger, 1991: 27)**

Signifier of shot	Definition	Signified (meaning)
Close up	Only the face	Intimacy
Medium Shot	Nearly the Entire Body	Personal relationships
Long Shot	Setting and characters	Context, scope, distance
Full Shot	The whole body	Public personal relationships

**2.2.2 Camera Work and Editing Techniques**

A camera movement means how a camera shifts to visually narrate and shape a viewer’s perspective of a scene. Camera movements can make scenes more interesting, incorporate a natural element to scenes, and simulate human movement because it is the audience’s

eyes on a story. The specific movement of a camera can avail many objectives: Influencing audiences’ emotional reactions, directing audiences’ attention.

The following table shows Berger's (1991) interpretation of camera movements.

**Table (3): Camera Work (Berger, 1991: 41)**

Signifier	Definition	Signified
Pan down	Camera pointing down	Power, authority
Pan Up	Camera pointing upwards	Weakness, diminution
Dolly In	The camera moves forwards and backwards	Observation, focus
Fade In	Images look at a blank screen	Beginning
Fade Out	Images on the screen to be lost	Closure (ending)
Cut	Move from one image to Another	continuation, interesting
Wipe	Erased from the screen image	"Determination" conclusion

**2.2.3 Colours**

Concerning the symbolic values of colours are illustrated previously in the image analysis (3.2.1.5), they are, in fact, applicable to the video analysis. Those values are classified in terms of Dain and Darmaprawira 's (2002) thoughts.

after the 2016 American political election to 2020: two image macros (See Appendix1) and two videos. Those images are related to Trump’s cheating in the elections, while the videos tackle the issue of the wall and the immigration from Mexico. The qualitative approach is utilized in this paper for to analyze the selected data in detail to discover the different semiotic modes that are used to create meninges in such data.

**3) Methodology**

The present paper is limited to the semiotic analysis of Internet political comic memes. It provides a theoretical background on the semiotic approach and some semiotic notions that are related to the aims of the study. The chosen data will be limited to four political comic memes about Trump

The model of the current paper is an eclectic one. It is concerned with analyzing Internet political comic memes based on Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006), and Berger's (1991), Barthes’s(1977) and Darmaprawira and Dain's (2002) models.

### 3.1 The Analysis of Image Macro (1)

#### 3.1.1 The Image Act and The Gaze

In this meme (See Appendix) Trump does not look straight at the receiver which implies that this image is an offer image in which the represented participant is presented to the recipient for detached observation. The gaze, along with facial expression, indicates that there is no contact between the participant and the viewer. His facial expression, for instance, his eyes, his mouth and teeth indicate that he is very angry and does not accept any disagreement. If we, as viewers, concentrate on his hands we can find them too small because at that time people make fun of the small size of his hands in comparison with his body and head.

#### 3.1.2 Social distance

In this image the head of Trump is only appeared which indicates an intimate distance between the viewer and the participant. The shot used in this image is very close shot. The creator of the meme wants to amuse the viewer by showing the great difference between his head's size and his hands.

#### 3.1.3 Horizontal angle

The viewer is involved in this meme and he is not detached from who or what he see. So that, it is a frontal angle that is utilized here.

#### 3.1.4 Vertical angle

Image of Trump in this meme is photographed from low angle. In general, low angles give an impression of superiority, exaltation, triumph, and power on viewer.

#### 3.1.5 Framing

Connection between Trump and other objects is established from the purview of framing. There is no separation lines between the images of chair, table, phone and Trump. Small spaces of red and white colours are behind him. These colours are symbolized the American flag that gives him power and superiority.

#### 3.1.6 Information Value

1. The telephone is placed on the right which means that this element is 'new'. This element represents the source of information with which trump is argued. On the left is the button which something 'given' to the viewer.
2. Trump's face is the idealized essence of information since it replaces at the top of the image, 'ideal'. The writing is the 'real' since it contains more specific information and replaces at the bottom of the image.

#### 3.1.7 Saliency

According to its size, Trump's head is the most salient element in this meme. This indicates that such meme attempts to make the viewer note the huge size of his head. Contrast in colour is another salient element, for instance, the chair's colour is black while the sheet's colour is white, the phone's colour is red and a part of the table is light blue. The font is printed with white colour and large size to attract the reader's attention.

#### 3.1.8 Visual Modality

This image contains a realistic photo of human, who is Trump.

Therefore, in term of using images it has high modality.

#### 3.1.9 Colours

The three primary colours in this meme are red, white, and black. They are repeated in more than one object. While the brown and light blue colours are not primary. The red colour in the background and in the phone indicates strength and angry, while black colour is the symbol of mystery (or evil). White colour in this context indicates his grief of the disagreement with him. His hair is represented with golden colour which suggests power and activity. In addition, the contrast of colours, white and black and light blue and red, are used as salient elements.

### 3.2 The Analysis of Image Macro (2)

#### 3.2.1 The Image Act and Contact

The participant (See Appendix) does not stare straight at the receivers. As a result, contact may not be established. These types of pictures do not address receivers directly. It is a meme with 'offer' because it offers the represented participant to the receiver as items of information and things of observation. His eyes are closed which indicate his loss of self-compassion. His pouch is designed with a large size which indicates that he is eating something (document).

#### 3.2.2 Social Distance

Close distance (very close shot) is used in this meme. Such distance shows the head of the participant along with his shoulders in order to make his facial expressions (which are important here) clear. This close distance make an intimate relationship between the picture and the receiver.

#### 3.2.3 Horizontal Angle

Since the oblique angle is used in this image, so we (the viewers) are not engaged with the performers. We are aligned with them. What we observe here is 'not part of our world'.

### 3.2.4 Vertical Angle

Trump's image is depicted from a high angle, as having no symbolic force over viewers. The point of view is one of equality and there is no power difference involved because the picture is at eye level. Therefore, this meme has high angle without exercising power over receivers.

### 3.2.5 Framing

From the domain of framing, no significant 'disconnection' is observed between Trump, writing, and the microphone image. There is no separation between them through frame lines or graphic framing tools. All elements are integrated so that connection is achieved.

### 3.2.6 Information Value

1. The microphone is put on the right while writing is put on the left. This implies that the 'given', 'new' structure is applied in this meme. What is put on the left (writing) is 'given' which means familiar to the viewer, as part of the culture. The microphone is 'new', the message Trump wants to deliver.

2. Ideal and Real are not applied here.

### 3.2.7 Saliency

The most salient elements in this image are Trump's pouch and the arrow referring to it. The author's use of contracted colours, red and blue, white and black, in this meme and his use of shading add to its saliency.

### 3.2.8 Visual Modality

This meme contains realistic photos of human image and the microphone. Hence, in terms of using images they have high modality. The background sign of people's shadow has low modality.

### 3.2.9 Colour

The light blue colour of Trump's jacket and shading is dominant here. It represents calmness of Trump because he disposes of presidential records. His tie is coloured by red because red is an emotionally intense colour which attracts the receiver's attention. It has very high vision and gets image to the focus. Whereas the colour of the shirt is white to express completion and perfection. The microphone is black which denotes strength and authority. Colours with facial expressions and other visual resources are integrated to communicate the message correctly.

## 3.3 The Analysis of Video (1)

### 3.3.1 Shot

This meme (See Appendix) is photographed with a medium shot since Trump's body is nearly appeared, the upper part of his body including his hands using them in building. Such kinds of shots indicate a personal relationship between the participant and the receiver. Hence, he appears in this video as a mason wearing a suit work with a big smile on his face that expresses his happiness and enjoyment about this wall. He has a great

ambition for building such a wall to the extent that he continues while it is raining with clear pleasure on his face.

### 3.3.2 Camera Work

In this meme camera moves from one side of the frame to another using 'wipe' technique to catch the viewer's attention. Such movement makes the viewer concludes the end of the event or the action.

### 3.2.3 Colour

Blue is the dominant colour in this meme, Trump's suit, the background, building materials and bricks are blue. Blue is a strong colour which symbolize power and authority. It is the colour of confidence and proficiency. His shirt is in a white colour which symbolized bright, light and honesty. Pale yellow is the colour of Trump's hair in this meme which associates with nature and this is clear in the atmosphere of raining.

## 3.4 The Analysis of Video (2)

### 3.4.1 Shot

In this video (See Appendix) the shot used is a long shot in which Trump's body is totally appeared with a wide space around him. This kind of shot indicates a far relationship between the participant and the receiver and it enables viewers to observe everything around the participant which may lead their interpretation of the meme. This type of shot helps to realize the context in which the participant is appeared.

### 3.4.2 Camera Work

There are more two shots in this video in which one shot is ends and the other one begins. So that the camera uses the 'cut' movement which signifies continuity and progress. Since it is a comic meme this camera technique is used to amuse the receiver as well as to get interest of what they have watched.

### 3.4.3 Colour

In the first shot Trump is wearing clothes in blue colour and his hair is yellow. Blue in this meme signifies Trump as cool, passive, and quiet person because he is happy with his project of building a wall. Blue is a colour perspective that drags us to isolation, cool, disconnection and establish distance. While yellow indicates pleasure, agility, and brilliant well. In the second shot Trump appears wearing green clothes and his hair is brown. Green reveals freshness, raw, hope, rebirth and fertility. The bricks he throws are orange and this colour describes carefree, and popular.

## 4) Results and Discussion

From the above analysis, the researcher can find that Internet memes have different forms and functions. Two types are analysed in this paper which are image macro and video. Different semiotic modes are employed

in Internet political comic memes, such as images, colours, various shots, and types of the camera's motions. All those modes are combined together to create meanings and deliver the message correctly. With respect to modality, the analysis of image macros reveals the high use of high modality in which realistic participant, things, and people are used. In this paper, it is found that blue colour is the most dominant colour. Blue is a strong colour which symbolizes power and authority of Trump. It is the colour of confidence and proficiency. It is found that contrast in colours (for salience) is utilized widely in image macros in order to hook the viewer's attention. Close and intimate distances are used widely in image macros as patterns of interaction and composition. This close distance makes an intimate relation between the image and the receiver. Offer gaze is used widely in those memes in which the depicted participant is offered to the receiver for separated observation. In relation to shot and camera's movement, it is found that long, medium shot is utilized in video memes. This shot helps viewers to realize the context as well as the scope of what they are watching. Cut and wipe movements are utilized in video memes. The camera uses the 'cut' movement which signifies continuity and progress. Since it is a comic meme, this camera technique is used to amuse the receiver as well as to get interest in what they have watched. 'Wipe' technique is used in order to attract the viewer's attention. Such movement makes the viewer concludes the end of the event or the action.

### 5) Conclusions

The main conclusions of this paper are (1) Internet memes have different forms and functions; (2) different semiotic modes are employed in Internet political comic memes, such as images, colours, various shots, and modality; (3) colours are found to have a great influence in memetic communication. It can be used to influence mood of the viewer, add meaning to communication, denote specific things or classes of people, and more general ideas, it is found that colours describe strong, confident, and professional are extensively used as well as those that describes nature, classical, sheen, and grief; (4) In addition to amusement, they can also be informative, and because of the growing influence of visual communication, they are also used in political communication as symbols of criticism, parody, and irony; (5) Concerning patterns of interaction and patterns of composition, data analysis gives the following conclusions: realistic participant, thing, and people are used in Internet political comic memes to represent the idea to the viewer; the presence of unity between elements of image, "connection", as well as "given- new" structure which refers to the placement of the sign on the left or right; the represented participant is offered to the viewer for detached observation; (6) In relation to shot and camera's movement, it is found that shot that helps viewers to see the participant's facial expressions clearly

and interpret the meme accurately is widely used. The camera's movement, that is used to direct the viewer's attention in a single frame is frequently used in video memes.

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