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Abstract

Among several modes of communication, the language of images and cartoons has also been frequently used by print media across the globe. It has drawn the attention of the masses also because of its sense of humor, satirical meaning, and interpretation. Thus, semiotic studies help viewers and readers decode the hidden meanings and agendas behind the images or cartoons. History shows that numerous attempts have been made to discover the main objective and essence. Therefore, the study explores and discovers the meaning hidden in the political cartoons in the Urdu print media of Pakistan before the general election in 2024 through the lens of social semiotic theory. The study focuses on van Leeuwen and Gunther Kress' Social Semiotic Theories. Around ten (10) political cartoons were selected and investigated by Daily Jung Newspaper which has vast circulation across the country.

Keywords: Decoding Political Cartoons, Social Semiotic Theory, Humour, Criticism

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Title

Semiotic Analysis of Political Cartoons of Urdu Print Media in Pakistan during Election 2024

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Abstract

Among several modes of communication, the language of images and cartoons has also been frequently used by print media across the globe. It has drawn the attention of the masses also because of its sense of humor, satirical meaning, and interpretation. Thus, semiotic studies help viewers and readers decode the hidden meanings and agendas behind the images or cartoons. History shows that numerous attempts have been made to discover the main objective and essence. Therefore, the study explores and discovers the meaning hidden in the political cartoons in the Urdu print media of Pakistan before the general election in 2024 through the lens of social semiotic theory. The study focuses on van Leeuwen and Gunther Kress' Social Semiotic Theories. Around ten (10) political cartoons were selected and investigated by Daily Jung Newspaper which has vast circulation across the country.

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Keywords:

[Decoding Political Cartoons](#),
[Social Semiotic Theory](#), [Humour](#),
[Criticism](#)

Introduction

Communication through cartoonist language has indeed gained popularity among the people of Pakistan it is because a single cartoon has several hidden things to demonstrate besides it has an amazing sense of humor so that the viewers or the readers should view or read it with great interest. The study begins with a critique of the selected political cartoons published in the most circulated Urdu "Jung" newspaper of Pakistan during the

election of 2024. This time was selected for the collection of data because politics and political rhetoric are generally at the climax. Almost every newspaper in order to get the attention of the public, prints a cartoon that collects viewers and readers. The research examines the relationship between text and imagery in cartoons to uncover primary ideologies and power structures that influence public opinion during a pivotal time in Pakistan's democratic process.



Newspaper cartoons are influential in addressing societal issues and providing entertainment. Political cartooning, in particular, serves as a powerful medium for holding the political class accountable through satire and humor. Cartoonists, similar to traditional jesters, use their art to critique and highlight political and social issues, often combining satire with comic elements to convey their messages effectively (Jimoh, 2011). Cartoons can be broadly categorized into two types: Cartoons of opinion and cartoons of humor. Opinion cartoons usually revolve around domestic politics and social issues, offering insights and critiques on current events and societal issues. On the other hand, cartoons of jokes primarily aim to provide humor and entertainment to their audience (Adejwon & Alim, 2011). Political or editorial cartoons are an important form of interactions that deserve greater academic attention. The cartoons offer alternative perspectives through their visual and vivid presentations, often communicating clear and impactful messages to their audience. According to Diamond (2002), political cartoons are an important and interesting mode of communication, providing viewers with immediate and often obvious messages through their artistic expression. political cartoons play a crucial role in contemporary society by entertaining and educating the public, offering critical perspectives on political and social issues, and holding those in power accountable through the unique combination of humor and satire.

Significance of Research

The importance of political cartoons in political discourse, particularly in the time of elections, cannot be overlooked. It has indeed got significance in several perspectives, particularly when we talk about non-verbal communication which is an essential part of our education and society. Political cartoons work as a mirror to society, reflecting the collective consciousness and conflict of the populace. They are a form of visual rhetorical devices that encapsulate complex political narratives in a single and impactful image, often conveyed by succinct, poignant captions. In the Pakistani context, where political sensitivities are heightened during election periods, cartoons become a critical medium for voicing opinions and criticisms that might otherwise be censored or

silenced. These cartoons provide a platform for discourse and debate, offering a lens through which the public can view and examine the actions and promises of political candidates. The study of these cartoons through Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is also significant as it reveals the deeper meanings and ideologies that are propagated through this medium. It allows for an understanding of how political cartoons contribute to shaping public perception and can influence the electoral process. By analyzing the semiotics and linguistic elements of these cartoons, researchers can uncover and discover the subtle ways in which cartoonists comment on political events, critique power structures, and engage with the cultural and social issues of their time. Moreover, political cartoons are an essential part of the historical record, providing future generations with insights into the political climate and societal attitudes of a particular era. They are not just ephemeral pieces of satire but are enduring artifacts that hold the power to sway public opinion and, consequently, the outcome of elections. In essence, this research is significant because of its ability to decode the visual and textual language of political cartoons, offering a comprehensive understanding of their role in the democratic process and their impact on political communication in Pakistan as the nation approaches the 2024 elections.

Background of Study

Historical Context: Political cartoons have been an essential of public discourse, offering explanations of political events, figures, and decisions. In Pakistan, Urdu print media has a rich tradition of using cartoons to encapsulate public sentiment and critique during pivotal moments such as elections. In this context, the Role of Semiotics in Political Cartoons: Semiotics, the study of signs and symbols work and reflect one's communicative behavior. It is crucial in understanding political cartoons because it has so many layers to interpret the hidden meanings and ideologies. The cartoons rely on visual semiotics to carry complex messages that often include satire, caricature, and symbolism¹².

Election 2024: The general elections of 2024 in Pakistan are a significant event, with Urdu print media providing extensive coverage. It is high time for Pakistani politicians and political parties. Thus Political cartoons during this period are expected to

reflect the dynamics of the election, reflecting the performance of political parties, and the public's reaction to the unfolding political landscape.

This background study sets the stage for a comprehensive investigation of political cartoons, offering a lens through which to view the relationship between media, politics, and public opinion in Pakistan during an election year. The semiotic analysis will not only contribute to the field of visual communication but also to the understanding of political processes in Pakistan.

Statement of Problem

The study of political cartoons through semiotic analysis gives a unique lens to understand the socio-political outlook of Pakistan during the election period of 2024. These cartoons, published in Urdu newspapers, are not merely pictures but a complex interplay of signs and symbols that convey deeper meanings, messages, and commentaries on the political scenario. Most people only view cartoons just for the sake of getting entertained and amused with the humorous constructions of cartoons but actually these cartoons are responsible for reforming the society.

During the 2024 elections in Pakistan, political cartoons in Urdu newspapers serve as a critical medium for political discourse. This research proposes to conduct a semiotic analysis of these cartoons to decode the embedded messages and symbols that reflect the public sentiment and political ideologies prevalent during this period. It seeks to understand how cartoonists use semiotic resources to critique, satirize, and influence public opinion, and how these visual narratives contribute to the shaping of political consciousness among the readers. The study will also explore the role of cultural and linguistic nuances in the interpretation of these cartoons, considering the diverse socio-political fabric of Pakistan. This study is also going to be beneficial for the students of linguistics providing them a vast knowledge about what semiotics actually is.

Research Questions

1. How do political cartoons in newspapers construct ideologies?

2. What semiotic strategies do cartoonists employ to frame their agendas?

Research Methodology

Type of Research: To investigate the hidden ideology and to decode the hidden meaning in the political cartoons, Qualitative research is suitable for such type of exploration. Qualitative research is generally flexible, and inductive, meaning that the research designs, data collection, and data analysis which can be adapted or modified as the research progresses. Qualitative research gives in-depth understanding, thematic analysis, contextual understanding, rich data, and descriptions.

Theoretical Framework

To investigate the political cartoon, the Social Semiotic Model of CDA has been selected for the current study. The rationale for selecting this model is, that it offers a complete framework to investigate various aspects of political cartoons. It gives comprehensive analysis uncovering the image and discourse, understanding power dynamics, and uncovering Ideological underpinnings. It gives a path for researchers to dig deeper into the nuances of political communication through images beyond surface-level interpretations. The social Semiotic Model helps researchers and learners identify power mechanisms within discourse, such as who holds power, how it's exercised, and its impact on different stakeholders. Political cartoons are manufactured and crafted by politicians therefore these cartoons with written texts have the force to shape ideologies, beliefs, values, and goals that drive discourse. Analysts can uncover the ideological orientations embedded in political image communication by employing the Social Semiotic Model, whether they are explicit or implicit. The social Semiotic model paves the way for a systematic approach to identifying various kinds of interpretations of a cartoon image, such as framing, propaganda, emotional appeals, loaded language, and misinformation providing a framework for researchers to refine analytical tools, develop new methodologies, provide a sense of humor and generate empirical evidence to support their findings.

Data Collection Procedure

The circulated Urdu newspaper Daily Jung was selected for data collection. Ten (10) newspaper political cartoons of different dates showing political humor have been collected, and seen through 'Social Semiotic Theory' by applying the CDA lens. The results are very productive in terms of data collected. The rationale behind the selection of newspapers is the vast circulation across the country. Moreover, after the investigation, the findings have confirmed that procedures have remained appropriate and paved the way for the current research.

Sampling Procedure

For this research, the purposive sampling technique has been applied to collect the data. The rationale behind selecting this sampling method is, that it is a method that is mostly used in qualitative research analysis after selecting a specific group of people or units. Furthermore, it is non-random based on specific criteria relevant to the study's objectives. This approach develops the depth and relevance of data that has been collected ensuring connections with research purpose and questions. It is used to study a wide variety of linguistic variations, and semiotic and editorial choices. It gives an opportunity to view the data with a powerful CDA semiotic lens. Moreover, 10 cartoon images from (Jung Urdu newspaper for the month of January 2024) were collected, and reviewed through the lenses of Critical Discourse Analysis to understand and decode the hidden meaning of political cartoons of Pakistan during the electoral campaigns 2024 and to expose the ideology through the linguistic features used in cartoons of Urdu newspaper which confirm that criticism along with the sense of humor.

Literature Review

Cartoon images are powerful and appealing to the senses because they can say a lot without saying too much. They use familiar scenes or people but twist them in a way that makes us see and feel things differently. For example, a cartoon might show a politician as a king on a throne, telling us something about power without using any words at all. When we look at political cartoon images,

especially from Urdu newspapers during election time in Pakistan, we're diving into a world where pictures and a few words come together to tell a big story with a little joy and amazement. These cartoons are like puzzles; each symbol and character has a special meaning if we are able to understand and decode the real meaning that can make us think or laugh about the serious business of politics. It has been generally seen that during the elections, these drawings become even more interesting because people love to see these images and have discussions over them according to their understanding level. They're like the pulse of the people, showing what everyone is thinking and talking about. They can poke fun at politicians, point out problems, or just make light of the whole process.

According to Refaie (2003), political cartoons are typically single-panel drawings that use visual symbols to express the cartoonist's opinions on current events in a humorous or subtle manner. The language used in these cartoons is shaped by the context, giving them a unique perspective. Cartoonists effectively use both language and imagery to convey complex ideas, making political cartoons a distinct form of commentary (Ashiru, 2017).

Political cartoons are illustrations that provide commentary on current events or personalities (Omolabi & Abiodun, 2020). They depict political and social issues in a straightforward concise, and often humorous way, employing irony and satire to highlight faults and provoke thought (Test, 1991). Giarelli and Tulrnan (2003) argue that cartoons about politics use cultural and non-linguistic elements to spread information and reflect cultural norms. They enable public participation in societal debates by making complex issues accessible and engaging (Sani, 2012). Using social semiotic theory, which considers communication to involve both cultural and non-linguistic components, is appropriate for studying political cartoons. This theory, introduced by van Leeuwen and Gunther Kress, views visual images in newspapers as a form of discourse that can influence thoughts and behaviors (Gee, 2011). Multimodality explores how different semiotic resources combine within a cultural context to create meaning (G. Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2020b). This approach recognizes that communication includes both verbal and non-

verbal elements, such as images and colors (Ariyo, 2017).

Political cartoons are effective multimodal media that combine linguistic and non-linguistic elements to convey messages. They stand alone as works of art and require no additional interpretation to be understood. The public often seeks hidden truths and desires change, which is why political cartoons have been historically significant. Seymour-Ure (2001) notes that the daily combination of familiarity and novelty provided by cartoonists contributes to the stability of newspapers. Understanding political cartoons

requires knowledge of their context and background, as they often reference ongoing stories and events. Kress (2010) and Fowler (1991) emphasize that much of the meaning in discourse is implicit, requiring readers to interpret and assign significance to the cartoons. Political cartoons play a crucial role in media by combining visual and linguistic elements to provide commentary, provoke thought, and engage the public in societal debates

Data Analysis

Figure 1

This cartoon appeared in "Daily Jung" on January 14th, 2024.



In the above cartoon, apparently, a cricket match is seen but if we dig deeper, we will find that there is a political upset can be witnessed. It is in a sense that there has been tough competition between *Pakistan Tehreek e Insaaf* PTI and the rest of the political parties. The wickets are scattered and show out whereas the umpire is also indicating the sign of out. Imran Khan is putting his hand on his

forehead which means that he has no chance of winning the election. on the other hand, this indication by the umpire does not only mean being out of the cricket match but it means that there is no place for PTI (Imran Khan to contest the election 2024). This also shows that there has been a unity of all political parties in Pakistan to stand against Imran Khan and his party.

Figure 2

This cartoon appeared in "Daily Jung" on January 18th, 2024



In the above cartoon image, two famous political leaders Imran Khan and Sher Afzal Marwat both of them belong to Pakistan Tehreek e insaf PTI. It shows that Arif Alvi who was the President of Pakistan had strong ties with Imran Khan in the recent past. However, due to political dilemmas, there has been a gap between the ties of both of

them. Mr Murawat is drawing a red line between the Arif Alvi and Imran Khan whereas Imran Khan is offering something to Mr Arif Alvi and he is refusing to get something that is being offered by Imran Khan. Whereas, Mr. Murawat also seems to be uneasy with the situation between the both famous personalities.

Figure 3

This Cartoon appeared in "Daily Jung" on January 20th, 2024



In this cartoon image, there is an uncertain condition with Imran Khan the party leader who has been arrested and captivated under police custody. It seems he is pushing both persons the legal advisor an advocate and Mr. Latif Khosa. Further, the image assures that there has been an unexpected delay in getting Mr Khan out of police

custody. Mr Khan wants to say that both of them (particularly an advocate) are not so efficient in getting him out of jail so Mr Khan himself has decided to get him out of his cases. He is seen pushing them both away which means that he is throwing them out of his cases and they are no more required at any cost.

Figure 4

This Cartoon appeared in "Daily Jung" on January 21st, 2024



In the above cartoon image, there is a very apparent message that Mr. Imran Khan is seen polishing the long boots of someone hidden and that long boot refers to the establishment of a militaristic regime or powerful establishment which has always been in power. Imran Khan has a brush in his hand that says that anyone who accepts the slavery of the powerful elite which is a militaristic regime will

always be in power over the people. He states that he has got huge influence over the military and claims that they (90% military) will vote for him in the election. Another message that can generally be interpreted is that Mr. Khan seems captivated maybe because of his doings in the past or by the establishment to keep him as a slave.

Figure 5

This Cartoon appeared in "Daily Jung" on January 22nd, 2024



In the above cartoon, Bilawal Bhutto is seen giving grains to the small chicks, and on the other hand, Mr. Imran Khan is seen arrested or captivated under the serious cases that refer that Imran Khan is no more in power and Bilawal Bhutto is trying to avail that opportunity. He is trying to divert the

vote bank of PTI by giving them some bribe or some greed in order to get them and use them as his voters in the election whereas, Imran Khan is also watching everything behind him and seems agitated and worried with his behavior.

Figure 6

This Cartoon appeared in "Daily Jung" on January 24th, 2024



In the above cartoon image, Imran is seen excited about the election 2024 but he is arrested. There seems a media person who is seen asking questions but Mr Khan is chanting slogans for his party's success in the election. On the other hand, there is a large number of people in his party who are also

captivated they all belong to his party (PTI). But they seem not excited they are rather worried because they think that their leader will not come to get them free from police custody because he himself has been arrested by the police.

Figure 7

This Cartoon appeared in "Daily Jung" on January 25th, 2024



In the above cartoon image, the famous politician Faisal Wada is seen painting the picture which means that he is predicting the political situation in the election of 2024. He means to say that the majority of PTI candidates will be purchased. In the election that PTI's independent candidates sell their

votes, the market will crash. Wada is originally showing the cheapness of the PTI party. In the picture, some goats are being shown they be compared with the PTI independent candidates whereas, the owner of these goats is seen getting some money as a bride or greedy to sell votes.

Figure 8

This Cartoon appeared in "Daily Jung" on January 27th, 2024



In the above cartoon image, it has been shown that during Election Day, there is a chance that there may be mishaps during the election process in the district of Ghotki which is known as a state of dacoits and kidnapers. If the army was deployed in the district Ghotki then there is a vivid chance of

rigging in some of the parts of the country. There is a tall army official seen casting his vote having a stick in another hand that refers to power and domination over the state. There is a line of police constables watching all this happening.

Figure 9

This Cartoon appeared in "Daily Jung" on January 30th, 2024



In the above cartoon image, Mr Imran Khan is seen behind bars and is extremely worried about the current situation that all his party candidates are leaving his party and contesting the election being the candidate of another party. He thinks that all

the candidates of his party have been a little more independent which was never ever expected by him. Therefore he is worried about this entire situation but he can do nothing about all this happenings because he is in police custody.

Figure 10

This Cartoon appeared in "Daily Jung" on January 31st, 2024



In the above cartoon image, there are pieces of three images. In the first image, there is a group of advocates assuring Mr. Khan that they will not get him arrested. In the second image, Mr. Khan is seen arrested and kept behind bars by the police whereas the same group of advocates visit him to assure him that they will not let you be punished by the court. In the third image, after having been given ten years of imprisoned life, the group of advocates visited him and said, "Mr. Khan! You escaped by hair's breadth. Mr Khan looks astonishingly worried.

Conclusion

It is generally believed that an image speaks two thousand words. A semiotic analysis of political

cartoons in Urdu print media during Pakistan's Election 2024 would likely decode the nuanced ways in which visual rhetoric is used to comment on political events and figures. These cartoons work as a barometer of public sentiment, summarizing complex ideas through symbolism, satire, and humor. These do not only reflect the political climate but also shape public discourse, influencing observations and opinions. As a vibrant form of political explanation, they offer insights into the cultural and social undercurrents of the electoral process in Pakistan. Ultimately, political cartoons in Urdu media are a testament to the freedom of expression and the role of media as a pillar of democracy, especially during pivotal proceedings like national elections.

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