CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Internet memes have become a significant mode of communication in the digital landscape, particularly in online spaces such as corporate advertising, media fan communities, and political groups (Kearney, 2019). Memes have evolved into a new language beyond geographical and linguistic limits; this way, people can connect with each other more often than not in a manner that, most times, becomes amusing and relatable. This form of digital language combines visual imagery with brief text to create multifaceted messages that can be understood at a glance, making it an efficient tool for rapid communication in the age of social media. When discussing the effectiveness and impact of memes, we can say that if a picture is worth a thousand words, then a Meme is worth a thousand words because of its presentation and popularity (Kumar Dwivedi, 2023). Memes, as a product of creative activity, possess specific forms and structures, composed of elements that interrelate to create meaning. From a media linguistic perspective, internet memes can be viewed as structured polymodal information, consisting of a combination of semiotic codes that evolve within media spaces, exhibiting high pragmatic and communicative potential. The collective findings from Anderson and Keehn (2020), Dyahtasya and Mahadian (2023), Fachrezi (2022), Petrova (2021), and Shifman (2019) emphasize that memes are not only tools of entertainment but also significant carriers of cultural and societal messages, making them a potent medium for global communication.

The rapid spread of internet memes is significantly influenced by the participatory culture of global society. Participatory culture refers to a phenomenon where individuals and communities actively participate in creating and disseminating various content on the Internet, driven by technological advancements. This culture of widespread participation in the modification and distribution of internet memes has substantially impacted communication in the digital era, making memes a universal method for understanding and depicting reality, both virtual and non-virtual (Petrova, 2021). While many studies highlight the viral and humorous aspects of memes, there is a gap in exploring their potential as reflective and communicative tools, particularly for specific memes like 'Two Guys on a Bus' which showcased by most of its usage as a satirical meme. For instance, Dyahtasya and Mahadian (2023) and Putra et al. (2023)

focus on memes' humorous and political aspects but overlook their broader cultural and emotional narratives. Similarly, Anderson and Keehn (2020) demonstrate memes' sociopolitical potential but do not address their narrative versatility across diverse contexts. ' This research stands out by analyzing the meme through the lens of Horatian, Juvenalian, and Menippean satire, moving beyond its humorous nature to examine its role in global communication and social commentary. By focusing on the narrative potential and communicative function of memes, this study offers a fresh perspective that positions memes not just as jokes but as evolving digital tools for personal expression and cross-cultural understanding.

The idea of a meme was originally brought forward by Richard Dawkins in his book titled "The Selfish Gene" published in 1976 where the author used the word in an analogy to gene, as a unit of cultural transmission. Over the decades, the term has changed and in connection with the Internet becoming a wide definition of any type of content that goes viral. In the digital era and new media, a meme is broadly understood as a unit of cultural information that spreads virally online, often in the form of images, videos, or text, which are altered and shared by many users. According to Shifman (2014), memes are "a group of digital items sharing common characteristics of content, form, and/or stance, which were created with awareness of each other, and were circulated, imitated, and/or transformed via the Internet by many users." Memes are no longer just forms of entertainment; they have evolved into media that can be repeatedly modified, parodied, and spread across the internet (Dyahtasya & Mahadian, 2023). Furthermore, as stated by Milner (2016), people use memes to participate in the culture and share opinions and ideas with others while sharing creative content in the form of texts and images.

The "Two Guys on a Bus" meme originated from a 2013 illustration by Genildo Ronchi. It depicts two people on a bus, one looking at a bleak landscape and the other at a beautiful view, symbolizing different perspectives on life. The meme gained viral popularity in 2021 as people began using it to represent contrasting attitudes, often with humorous or philosophical captions. It's simple yet powerful imagery allowed it to resonate globally, making it a widely recognized format for expressing optimism versus pessimism in various contexts. Thanks to its unique dual-perspective format, which allows for contrasting interpretations within a single visual structure. Unlike many other memes that rely on explicit text or cultural references, this meme's strength

lies in its ability to communicate complex emotions, ideological stances, and social commentary through a universally understood framework. Internet memes widespread appeal and adaptability to various contexts make it a significant subject for content analysis (Fachrezi, 2022). However, the academic focus on memes as primarily humorous artifacts has left a deficiency in understanding their role as serious communicative tools. Future research should explore how memes like 'Two Guys on a Bus' can serve as reflective instruments in global discourse, contributing to a more nuanced understanding of their impact on digital communication.

Figure 1.1. Origin of Two Guys on a Bus Meme

(Source: knowyourmeme.com)

As Shifman (2014) has stated in her book *"Memes in Digital Culture,"* there are four promising areas for meme research: the politics of memetic participation, internet memes as a language, memes and political change, and viral and memetic success. For this research, the focus will be on the second point internet memes as a language by analyzing the 'Two Guys on a Bus' meme as a global communicative tool. By examining how this meme is utilized across various online platforms to convey ideas, emotions, and social commentary, this study aims to demonstrate that memes function as a dynamic and evolving form of digital language. This research will explore how the meme's variations and contextual usage across different cultures and communities contribute to its role as a medium for personal and collective expression, reinforcing the concept that memes are a powerful and versatile language in the digital age.

This research is expected to reveal that the 'Two Guys on a Bus' meme functions as a global digital language, effectively communicating complex emotions and ideas across cultural boundaries. By examining its variations and thematic narratives, the study aims to contribute to the broader understanding of memes as essential tools for conveying a global digital language. The study employs a qualitative descriptive approach, using content analysis based on Shifman's (2014) dimensions of memes content, form, and stance, and Quintero's (2007) framework of satire, categorizing the memes into Horatian, Juvenalian, or Menippean types. While many studies explore memes in general, few focus on specific meme formats like "Two Guys on a Bus." This meme is used worldwide to express different ideas, but little research explains how it works as a global digital language. This study aims to fill that gap by exploring how the meme is adapted across cultures, what messages it conveys, and how humor and satire shape its meaning.

Data is collected from Knowyourmeme.com and Google search engine, focusing on variations of the meme to explore its communicative function and cultural significance. The use of Google search for meme data collection is justified by previous studies, such as Mahadian and Hashim (2022), Campbell et al. (2018), Gambarato and Komesu (2018), and Seiffert-Brockmann et al. (2018), which demonstrated its effectiveness in identifying diverse meme variations and ensuring comprehensive datasets. Additionally, the findings of this research can guide meme creators and marketers in designing culturally resonant and relatable memes, enhancing engagement in digital campaigns aimed at multicultural audiences. The study also provides a methodological framework for academic research on digital communication and cultural semiotics, offering insights that can inform policies promoting inclusivity and understanding in global discourse.

1.2 Research Focus

This study focuses on examining how the "Two Guys on a Bus" meme functions as a global digital language by analyzing its content, form, stance, and satire type. It aims to identify the types of messages conveyed through the meme, the role of humor and satire in shaping its meaning, and how its structure allows for diverse interpretations. By doing so, this research seeks to provide a deeper understanding of how specific meme templates contribute to online communication and digital culture.

1.3 Research Question

1. How does the 'Two Guys on a Bus' meme function as a form of global digital language across different cultural contexts?

2. What are the key variations in content, form, stance, and satirical types within the meme?

3. How do these variations convey complex emotions and ideas across different cultural contexts?

1.4 Research Objectives

1. To analyze how the 'Two Guys on a Bus' meme functions as a global digital language by examining its adaptability across cultural contexts.

2. To identify key variations in content, form, stance, and satirical types within the meme and how they influence interpretation.

3. To explore how these variations contribute to the communication of complex emotions and ideas across different cultural settings.

1.5 Significance of Research

The research conducted by the researcher is expected to provide benefits to several related aspects, including:

1.5.1 Theoretical Aspect

This research is expected to add insight and provide knowledge related to digital culture and meme, especially theories related to language using the content analysis research method.

1.5.2 Practical Aspects

This research is expected to serve as a valuable reference for future researchers examining meme studies, and it aims to increase public knowledge about the spread of internet memes. Additionally, it aids community managers, educators, businesses, and developers in understanding user behavior, improving digital literacy efforts, and enhancing user engagement and interaction patterns on digital platforms.

1.6 The Time of Research

Table 1.1 Time of Research

No.	Research Stages	2024					
		January	February -March	April	May	June	November- December
1.	Research theme determination	■					
2.	Research problem identification		■				
3.	Research method, data collection, and data analysis formulation			■	■	■	
4.	Data collecting					■	
5.	Data processing						■
6.	Report writing						■