RESEARCH PAPER

Emotional Resonance And Humour In Political Memes Of Tamil Nadu: Impact On Leader Popularity And Critique

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Received: *20th Feb, 2026;* ***Revised:*** *4th Mar, 2026;* ***Accepted:*** *25th Mar, 2026;* ***Available Online:*** *10th Apr, 2026*

Abstract

This research explores the use of emotional resonance and satire in political memes circulating within tamil nadu. It examines how memes function as a medium of both endorsement and critique, shaping the popularity of political leaders while simultaneously enabling sharp political commentary. By analysing meme content across diverse social media platforms, the study highlights the dual role of comedy in emotionally engaging audiences and influencing public perception as well as political discourse. The findings underscore the significance of satirical memes in the contemporary digital political landscape of tamil nadu, demonstrating their impact on political narratives, leader image construction, and the formation of public opinion.

Keywords: Political Memes, Tamil Nadu Politics, Humour And Satire, Emotional Resonance, Framing Theory, Leader Popularity, Political Critique.

How To Cite This Article: Thulasi Bharathy M, Shankar V, Arakiadoss Sv, Branesh Ak. Emotional Resonance And Humour In Political Memes Of Tamil Nadu: Impact On Leader Popularity And Critique. Int J Drug Deliv Technol. 2026;16(26s):629-637. Doi: 10.25258/ijddt.16.26s.68

Introduction

Background of the Study

Social media platforms have emerged as key venues for political discourse in the digital age, revolutionizing political communication. User-generated content, especially memes, which combine comedy, satire, and criticism into widely shareable formats, is now used to augment traditional speeches, rallies, and mass media (Shifman, 2013; Milner, 2016). Memes serve as cultural texts that quickly spread among digital publics, simplify complicated political problems, and express popular mood.

Popular culture, particularly film, has always been entwined with politics in Tamil Nadu. Film dialogues and cultural idioms have influenced political narratives from politicians like M. G. Ramachandran (MGR) and Karunanidhi to modern personalities (Ranganathan, 2020). Memes bring this practice into the digital age today. Memes accomplish emotional resonance that amuses and convinces viewers by utilizing comedy, local terminology, and connections to Tamil movies (Mohan & Subramanian, 2021). They actively frame political leaders and parties in ways that influence political discourse in addition to reflecting public opinion.

Statement of the Problem

Even while memes are frequently written off as pointless fun, they are extremely important in defining political figures and topics. Entman (1993) asserts that framing is the process of picking out and emphasizing particular elements of reality in order to influence how viewers understand events. Memes accomplish this by using comedy and satire to exaggerate leadership qualities, regulations, or shortcomings. A meme that makes fun of a leader's speech, for example, can portray them as inept, whereas one that highlights a welfare program might portray them as pro-people.

Regional meme cultures in India have received minimal attention, despite the fact that research on political memes is expanding internationally

(Highfield & Leaver, 2016; Shifman, 2013). Tamil Nadu provides a rich environment for researching how memes support or criticize leaders because of its distinctive blend of politics, film, and online activism. The use of Humour and emotional resonance as framing strategies in this situation, however, has not received much attention in research. By examining memes that influence leader critique and popularity in Tamil Nadu's digital political culture, this study fills that knowledge gap.

Research Objectives

1. To investigate how Tamil Nadu political memes use Humour and emotional resonance to portray political leader
2. To examine how memes are framed as both critical and supportive tools.
3. To analyze memes' use of cultural and cinematic allusions as framing techniques.
4. To evaluate the ways in which meme framing affects public opinions on political discourse and leader popularity.

Research Questions

1. How do memes use sarcasm and comedy to portray Tamil Nadu's political leaders?
2. Which emotions—disdain, rage, pride, or hope—are evoked by these meme frames?
3. How do memes support or oppose political figures?
4. How do memes affect Tamil Nadu's political discourse and the popularity of its leaders?

Significance of the Study

By placing memes inside the framework of Framing Theory (Goffman, 1974; Entman, 1993), this study advances media and communication studies. It emphasizes how, in the digital age, comedy and emotional resonance serve as crucial tools for political framing rather than just being amusing. The study contributes regional dimension to political communication theory by concentrating on Tamil Nadu and demonstrating how memes function as both critique and promotion.

Media scholars can expand meme studies into regional contexts, political strategists can use memes as tools for image construction, and citizens can become more conscious of memes as determinants of digital democracy (Milner, 2016; Mohan & Subramanian, 2021).

Scope and Delimitation

Ten purposefully chosen memes about Tamil Nadu politics from Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter are the subject of the study (X). The memes were chosen on the basis of their comedic value, circulation, and political significance. The study uses Framing Theory for content analysis and is qualitative in nature. Instead of statistically assessing audience response, its focus is interpretive, aiming to unearth meanings, emotional resonance, and frames hidden in memes.

Review of Literature

With an emphasis on the Tamil Nadu setting, this chapter examines the body of research on memes, Humour, emotional resonance, and political communication. The review uses Framing Theory as the primary lens and places the study amid larger conversations about digital political culture. The literature shows how, in the digital age, memes serve as cultural texts that define political figures and events, affecting audiences' perceptions of leadership and government.

Memes as a Form of Political Communication

In the digital age, memes have become a potent form of political expression. Shifman (2013) asserts that memes are cultural units that are circulated, remixed, and imitated online. In addition to their deeper communicative purposes—political critique, identity construction, and community building—they are frequently hilarious. Memes, according to Milner (2016), democratize political discourse by enabling regular people to frame issues in ways that were previously only possible through mass media. Scholars like Mohan and Subramanian (2021) draw attention to how regional meme cultures in India are especially appealing to viewers because they integrate regional languages, movie allusions, and cultural idioms.

Humour, Satire, and Emotional Resonance in Memes

In political debate, Humour has long been acknowledged as a persuasive tool. Irony, sarcasm, parody, and satire enable critique to be expressed in manners that are impactful but non-confrontational. Political memes frequently combine Humour and incisive critique to provoke thought and amusement. Moreover, Humour has a powerful emotional impact; it can inspire admiration and unity for a leader or mockery and rage at political rivals. According to Highfield and Leaver (2016), memes proliferate because they elicit strong feelings that motivate people to share. Memes commonly use comic skits, movie dialogues, and well-known cultural icons in Tamil Nadu, which heightens their emotional impact.

Framing Theory and Meme Communication

A helpful perspective through which to view how memes impact political discourse is provided by framing theory. Entman (1993) described framing as

the process of choosing elements of reality and making them prominent in communication, while Goffman (1974) introduced frames as interpretive structures that organize experience. By emphasizing some leader characteristics or policy shortcomings while downplaying others, memes serve as framing tools. For example, a meme that distributes a welfare announcement portrays the leader as pro-people, whereas a meme that parodies a leader's speech portrays the leader as incompetent. These frameworks are reinforced by emotional resonance, which makes sure that viewers experience them affectively as well as cognitively.

Tamil Nadu Political Culture and Media

Tamil Nadu has a distinct political culture that has been greatly impacted by mass media, charisma, and film. Film dialogues and popular cultural idioms have historically influenced political narratives, from M.G. Ramachandran (MGR) to Karunanidhi and Jayalalithaa. Memes, which blend Humour and cultural iconography, have emerged as the new cinematic language of politics in the digital age. The state's long history of fusing politics and entertainment is reinforced by memes that target figures like M.K. Stalin, Edappadi K. Palaniswami, Annamalai, and Seeman. These memes frequently use Tamil film patterns. These memes function as a virtual public space where political criticism and support coexist.

Gaps in the Literature

There is a growing body of study on memes and political communication worldwide, but little of it focuses on the regional context of Tamil Nadu. Few studies have looked at how memes frame leaders and policies through Humour, or how their framing effect is heightened by emotional resonance. Studies that have already been done mostly focus on memes as online activism or fun rather than as systematic framing tools. By using Framing Theory to methodically examine Tamil Nadu political memes, this work fills these gaps and advances the fields of political communication and meme studies.

Implications

The examined literature demonstrates that memes are not only amusing online content but also effective political instruments that frame issues, parties, and leaders. Their persuasive power is increased by Humour and satire, and their emotional relevance is reinforced by cultural allusions. The intellectual underpinnings for comprehending how these memes emphasize particular storylines and influence public opinion in Tamil Nadu are provided by framing theory. This study fills important gaps in regional political communication research while building on previous work by placing memes inside the state's own political culture.

Research Methodology

This study explores how political memes in Tamil Nadu shape the popularity of politicians by endorsing or criticizing them through comedy and emotional resonance. The study uses a qualitative content analysis methodology informed by framing theory to do this. Goffman (1974) and Entman (1993) established the framing theory, which describes how the media highlight some parts of reality while leaving out others, influencing how the public interprets the world. Satire and comedy serve as framing strategies in the context of memes, influencing how viewers view political figures and topics.

Research Design

The research design used in this study is qualitative and interpretive. Memes are regarded as cultural texts that actively "frame" leaders and topics in specific ways, rather than just providing entertainment. This study investigates how memes portray Tamil Nadu officials either favourably (as charismatic, relatable, or popular) or unfavourably (as corrupt, incompetent, or irrelevant) by examining the Humour styles, emotional tones, and cultural allusions. The application of framing theory makes sure that the investigation goes beyond light-heartedness to reveal the more profound stories that are concealed inside memes.

Sampling Method

Ten political memes were chosen using a purposeful selection technique from social media sites like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter (X). Three main factors were taken into consideration while selecting the memes: (i) their political significance to Tamil Nadu leaders, parties, or policies; (ii) their visibility and circulation among online audiences; and (iii) their Humour and framing potential. Memes that both praised and criticized politicians were included in order to maintain variety. This made it possible for the study to record opposing and conflicting political endorsement contexts.

Data Collection

Memes that became viral during recent political events in Tamil Nadu were found, saved, and cataloged in order to gather the data. Memes' screenshots and metadata, such as the political topic they addressed, the leader or party they targeted, and

the cultural allusions they made, were preserved. A code sheet was subsequently created for each meme, enabling methodical categorization. The study makes sure that the analysis captures the comedy and framing techniques included in the material by placing each meme in its political and cultural context.

Data Analysis

Three phases of thematic coding based on Framing Theory were used in the analysis.

1. Descriptive Coding: Every meme was explained by mentioning the political issue, the leader or party that was being targeted, and any cultural or cinematic allusions that were made.
2. Analytical Coding: Memes were classified based on their framing orientation (neutral, critique, or endorsement), emotional resonance (anger, ridicule, hope, and pride), and Humour type (satire, parody, irony, and sarcasm). This stage demonstrated how leaders were framed in specific ways through the use of comedy.
3. Interpretive Coding: Overarching themes were found in all of the memes, exposing recurrent frames including "policy as injustice," "leader as incompetent," and "leader as people's choice." The use of comedy and emotional resonance as framing strategies to direct the audience's view of political reality was highlighted on this stage.

By choosing memes from various platforms and meme pages to prevent partisan bias, reliability was increased. By firmly establishing interpretations in the sociopolitical and cultural context of Tamil Nadu, validity was guaranteed. Instead of treating memes as stand-alone jokes, the investigation consistently links Humour and emotional components with broader frames of political communication by utilizing Framing Theory.

Every meme examined in this study was accessible to the general public on social media sites. To preserve privacy, personal identifiers like usernames were anonymised. According to fair use guidelines, the memes are regarded as cultural texts that are utilized in scholarly investigations. The study stays away from partisan endorsement and concentrates on comprehending framing techniques.

Theoretical Framework: Framing Theory

This study is supported by framing theory, which offers a prism through which memes are viewed as political frameworks rather than just amusing artefacts. Entman (1993) asserts that framing is the process of choosing particular facets of reality and emphasizing them in a communication text. Memes accomplish this by using Humour and satire to emphasize particular leadership qualities, policy shortcomings, or political rivalry. A meme that mocks a politician's speech, for example, portrays the leader as inept, whereas a meme that applauds a welfare program portrays the leader as pro-people. These frameworks are strengthened by emotional resonance, which guarantees that they engage audiences and shape views. Thus, this study's comprehensive examination of the role memes play in Tamil Nadu's political discourse, leader popularity, and critique is made possible by framing theory.

Summary

The study's methodology has been described in this chapter. This study examines ten purposively sampled memes from Tamil Nadu politics using qualitative content analysis informed by framing theory. Memes with contextual information were archived as part of the data gathering process, and framing methods were discovered through the use of interpretative and thematic coding in the analytic process. Diverse sampling was used to assure reliability while adhering to ethical standards. All things considered, this methodology allows for a thorough investigation of how Humour and emotional resonance frame leaders in ways that support or contradict their reputation and shape political narratives.

Data Analysis and Findings

Ten Tamil Nadu political memes that were specifically chosen for analysis are presented in this chapter. Memes are analyzed as framing methods that emphasize some facets of political issues and leaders while downplaying others, rather than just as amusing artifacts, using Framing Theory as the conceptual lens. In order to comprehend how memes serve as tools of support and criticism, the analysis decodes Humour kinds, emotional tones, and cultural allusions in accordance with the research aims and questions. The results, which are arranged topically, demonstrate how leaders are framed by Humour and emotional resonance in ways that influence public opinion and conversation.

Meme 1 – Seeman and Vijay

"Meme 1: Seeman's contradictory statements about Vijay"

This meme frames Seeman as inconsistent and unreliable by juxtaposing his earlier criticism of Vijay's political entry with his later softened stance. The Humour type is **satire and irony**, with the emotional appeal being **mockery**. The intended audience is Vijay's supporters and the general public who are sceptical of Seeman. By framing Seeman as a hypocrite, the meme damages his credibility while simultaneously **boosting Vijay's political relevance**

Meme2 – PMK Protests on Liquor Shops

This meme frames PMK's protests as repetitive and theatrical, comparing them to a Kamal Haasan movie scene. The Humour type is **satire + parody**, with emotional appeal being **sarcasm**. The frame critiques both PMK and DMK, highlighting the **futility of repeated political protests** without real impact.

Meme 3 – Rajinikanth and Ajith Politics Meme

This meme frames the entry of film stars into politics as **spectacle rather than substance**. Using a **parody with Vadivelu's reaction**, the meme humorously questions the seriousness of cine-politics. The emotional tone is **cynical Humour**, and the frame critiques both Rajinikanth and Ajith while reinforcing DMK IT Wing and Seeman's mockery.

Meme 4 – BJP Leaders (Kit–Adalt–Legend Meme)

This meme satirizes leaders such as Narendra Modi, Amit Shah, and Nirmala Sitharaman, framing them as **excuse-makers**. The wordplay ("Kit–Adalt–Legend") ridicules repeated justifications for failures. The Humour type is **satire and wordplay**, while the emotional appeal is **ridicule**. The frame critiques BJP leadership, weakening their credibility by portraying them as avoiding accountability.

Meme 5 – Sasikala on Jobs

This meme uses irony and pop culture parody to frame Sasikala's claim about job availability as **absurd and disconnected from reality**. The Humour type is **irony**, emotional tone is **cynicism**, and the frame portrays her as unrealistic. This damages Sasikala's credibility, framing her as an out-of-touch leader.

Meme 6 – Annamalai vs. TR Balu

This meme uses a **Vadivelu comedy parody** to frame Annamalai as powerless against DMK leader TR Balu. The Humour type is parody, and the emotional appeal is ridicule. The meme critiques Annamalai by showing him in a weakened position, thereby undermining his authority and **framing DMK as dominant**.

Meme Analysis in Relation to Research Questions

RQ1: How do memes use sarcasm and comedy to portray Tamil Nadu's political leaders?

The analysis reveals that the most popular framing technique is Humour, especially satire and parody. Memes that make fun of Seeman's inconsistent remarks regarding Vijay's political debut, for example, paint him as an inconsistent leader, which undermines his credibility. Similarly, Annamalai's authority is diminished by memes that depict him as helpless in legal or political disputes. These memes reinforce criticism by creating frames of ineptitude and hypocrisy through parody and irony. However, memes supporting Vijay's political comeback make good use of comedy by portraying him as likable and charismatic, which increases his political significance.

RQ2: Which emotions—disdain, rage, pride, or hope—are evoked by these meme frames?

The results show that memes arouse a variety of emotions, the most common of which are derision and ridicule. Cynicism and discontent are stoked by memes that make fun of Nirmala Sitharaman's tax policies or Sasikala's exaggerated employment claims. At the same time, Vijay is framed as a leader of the people in endorsement memes that inspire pride and hope. This is consistent with the methodological focus on emotional resonance, where comedy heightens the frames and helps viewers relate to and remember them.

RQ3: How do memes support or oppose political figures?

Seven of the ten memes that were examined take a negative stance, portraying BJP leaders, Seeman, Sasikala, and Annamalai as incompetent or hypocritical. Just three people support leaders, mostly Vijay, who is shown as charismatic and able to get real public support. This pattern illustrates the dual role of memes as stated in the objectives: most memes serve as Humourous critiques that shape opposition narratives, while some serve as soft propaganda tools that increase the popularity of leaders.

RQ4: How do memes affect Tamil Nadu's political discourse and the popularity of its leaders?

The analysis shows that leader discourse and image are significantly influenced by memes. Vijay's appeal among young people is increased by endorsement

memes, which establish him as a legitimate political candidate in contrast to Rajinikanth's unsuccessful run. On the other hand, criticize memes harm competitors' reputations by portraying them as dishonest, unimportant, or inept. Memes increase their influence in the digital public domain by transforming political problems into commonplace conversations by fusing Humour with cultural references, such as sequences from Tamil films or Vadivelu dialogues.

Major Findings

- Objective 1: Investigate how political memes use Humour and emotional resonance to portray politicians. • → Memes highlight a leader's incapacity, hypocrisy, or charisma by framing them in satire and parody. These frames are strengthened by emotional resonance, such as pride, rage, or mockery.
- Objective 2: Examine the dual framing of memes as criticism and support. → Memes criticize Seeman, Sasikala, Annamalai, and BJP leaders while endorsing Vijay as a popular leader, illustrating the dual nature of meme framing.
- Objective 3: Deciphering cultural and cinematic allusions as framing elements in memes In order to frame political themes, memes usually use Tamil film (Vadivelu comedy, Vijay dialogues, Kamal Haasan sequences). The Humour is recognizable and emotionally impactful because of these cultural contexts.
- Objective 4: To evaluate how meme framing affects political debate and the public's perception of a leader's popularity. While critique framing undermine the credibility of competitors, endorsement frames enhance Vijay's reputation as a rising political star. By reducing complicated topics to amusing, shareable content, memes help to shape political conversation.

Political memes in Tamil Nadu serve as effective framing tools, according to an analysis of ten memes. They create frames of support and criticism that impact political narratives and leader popularity through comedy, satire, and cultural allusions. The use of framing theory demonstrates how memes choose and highlight characteristics—like incompetence, charm, or hypocrisy—while eliciting emotional reactions that cause audiences to connect with these frames. According to the findings, memes play a crucial role in digital political discourse and influence how politicians are seen in Tamil Nadu's modern political culture.

Results and Discussion

The study's results are examined in this chapter in light of the theoretical framework, research questions, and aims. It analyzes how Tamil Nadu memes portray political figures, using Humour and emotional appeal as key strategies. The chapter ends with a summary of the study's implications for digital democracy, media scholarship, and political communication.

Memes as Framing Devices

According to Entman's (1993) theory that framing entails picking out and emphasizing certain features of reality, the analysis showed that memes function as potent framing mechanisms. Humour serves as a framing technique in Tamil Nadu's meme culture, since satire and parody highlight a leader's hypocrisy, incapacity, or charisma. Memes that support Vijay portray him as charismatic and believable, but those that ridicule Seeman's contradicting remarks portray him as inconsistent. These results support Shifman's (2013) assertion that memes influence public opinion in addition to providing enjoyment.

Humour, Emotional Resonance, and Audience Engagement

Humour enhances emotional resonance in addition to framing it. The sample was dominated by derision and ridicule, indicating that critique frames are more engaging and viral in Tamil Nadu's meme culture. This supports the finding by Highfield and Leaver (2016) that the spread of memes is driven by emotional intensity. But endorsement frames, like the ones honoring Vijay, framed him as a leader of the people by appealing to pride and optimism. As a result, emotions make meme frames more salient and affect how audiences view leaders.

Endorsement vs. Critique

According to the survey, most memes served as criticism rather than support. Leaders such as Sasikala, Seeman, Annamalai, and BJP figures were frequently targeted through satirical ridicule, undermining their credibility. Just a small percentage of memes supported leaders, especially Vijay. This dual purpose illustrates the ambivalent nature of memes, which can serve as satire that undermines authority or as propaganda that increases the popularity of a leader. This supports Milner's (2016) claim that memes allow for both celebration and disagreement, democratizing political discourse.

Cultural Framing in Tamil Nadu Politics

Meme framing was heavily influenced by cultural allusions, particularly language and comedic moments from Tamil films. In line with Mohan and Subramanian's (2021) discovery that Indian memes are localized through regional idioms, these references enhanced relatability and emotional effect. For instance, Vijay's movie character was transformed into political charisma, while Vadivelu's comedic sequences were utilized to mock political people. This demonstrates how Tamil Nadu memes, albeit in digital form, carry on the state's long history of overlapping politics and film (Ranganathan, 2020).

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that political memes in Tamil Nadu are not merely trivial forms of online entertainment but function as powerful, culturally embedded framing devices that shape political discourse. By combining Humour, satire, and emotional resonance, memes construct narratives that both support and critique political leaders, thereby influencing their popularity and public perception. While critique-oriented memes dominate, reinforcing skepticism and ridicule, endorsement memes selectively enhance the image of certain leaders, particularly by projecting charisma, relatability, and mass appeal. Through the application of Framing Theory, the study reveals how memes selectively highlight traits such as incompetence, hypocrisy, or leadership strength, while simultaneously evoking emotions like pride, anger, or mockery to deepen audience engagement. In doing so, memes transform complex political realities into simplified, relatable, and highly shareable content that actively participates in shaping public opinion. Furthermore, the study underscores that meme culture in Tamil Nadu is deeply rooted in regional identity, drawing heavily from cinema, language, and popular culture. This cultural integration enhances both the accessibility and persuasive power of memes, making them a significant tool in contemporary digital political communication. Ultimately, memes contribute to a participatory form of digital democracy, where citizens are not passive consumers but active creators and interpreters of political meaning. As such, understanding meme culture is essential for comprehending the evolving dynamics of political communication in the digital age.

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