

# The Analysis of Meme Virality Factors in Twitter of Scholar Protest on September 2019

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## ABSTRACT

This research is performed to find out how the depiction of viral factors in memes on Twitter during the student demonstration on September 2019. The enthusiasm of Twitter users during the demonstrations period is used as the basis of this research to choose the viral memes as the object. This research uses a descriptive methodology and describes various viral factors influencing memes on Twitter during the student demonstration on September 2019. This research uses the "Six Ps" theory suggested by Shifman (2014). The memes going viral on Twitter during the demonstration period were chosen as the object of research. The result of research shows the memes going viral are the ones generating the emotion of Twitter users. The memes uploaded during demonstration in turn could easily attract the attention of Twitter users. The uploader, which is an account with a large number of followers, would speed up the memes distribution process. The Memes with simple packaging can be quickly redistributed by Twitter users.

**Keywords** Demonstration, meme, six Ps, twitter, viral

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Internet users must be familiar with funny, unique, or bizarre pictures (image) often known as *meme*. Nonetheless, many of them don't know that the pictures they may have seen or have shared are part of *meme*. The *meme* most commonly found on the internet is in the form of an image, although *meme* has no exact form. *Meme* can be found in various forms, such as text, simple animation (*gif*), short video, music, or film.

The *meme* circulating on the internet is mostly humor, so it's safe to say that *meme* is associated with humor, although there is often criticism included. The existence of social media makes it possible for everyone to distribute *memes*. Internet users can duplicate, forward, or link a *meme* [1]. The process of producing and distributing *meme* is related to the user itself who is a prosumer. Ritzer (2012) stated that each of internet users is a prosumer who produces information and at the same time receives information. Such characteristic makes *meme* surviving and becoming a culture on the internet [2].

There are only a few researches about *meme* on the internet, especially on *Twitter*, making this research crucial to conduct. Digital media enable the researcher to track the distribution and evolution of *meme* [3]. In relation to *meme* distribution, this research will discuss various factors influencing *meme* to become viral on *Twitter* during

student demonstration on September 2019. The objective of research is to find out *memes* on *Twitter* selected based on criteria such as type of *meme*, date uploaded, and the uploader. These three *memes* will be analyzed to find out how the *meme* went viral on *Twitter*.



**Figure 1**  
Example of the politic meme on Twitter (source:

twitter.com)

Figure 1 shows an example of *meme* in politics taken from *Twitter*. The picture shows two persons about to shake hands with happy expression, while the one in the middle has a disappointed expression. Two persons with happy expression represent Jokowi and Prabowo, while the other one with disappointed expression represents the proponent of Jokowi and Prabowo. This *meme* is sarcasm towards both proponents that have always been rivals and underestimated each other before, during, and after the presidential election.

In this research, *meme* as analysis object is taken from *Twitter* related to student demonstration on September 2019. Demonstration, according to Oxford dictionary, is a public meeting at which people show that they are protesting against or supporting somebody or something. The demonstration was related to a number of policies taken by the DPR (People's Representative Council) by some people considered as not prioritizing the public interest. The demonstration lasted for several days and involved college students, workers, and students.

Based on problems outlined in previous paragraphs, a question arising in this research is: *What are the content distribution factors appearing in political meme going viral in Twitter social media?* Based on the question, the objective of this research is *to explore content distribution factors appearing in the political memes going viral in Twitter social media.*

Considering the background explanation and the focus of problem aforementioned, it can be comprehended that viral *meme* has a very complex problem dimension. It can be seen from a large number of *memes* on *Twitter* having various factors from its proponents such as the background of uploader, selected period by the uploader, the issue raised by the uploader to the goal of uploader, etc. Thus, it is necessary to limit the study in order to achieve clear and focused research. The research is limited to seeing and explaining various factors making political *meme* viral on *Twitter*.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Several studies have been previously conducted on virality on the internet. The first research was conducted by Kokoh Pribadi (2015). Pribadi stated that in the information distribution process, the virality can be obtained if the message contains emotional content. He also stated viral marketing communication can be used to study a digital product. The use of the viral concept by Pribadi is similar to this research. This research is focusing on the messages of *meme* going viral and how a *brand* is examined using virality benchmark.

The second research was conducted by Hustomo. The research reviewed how virality can be used feasibly on a *brand*. In addition, it also reviewed how a video content is delivered for *brand* promotion purposes, as well as to see the responses of other social media users. The use of the virality concept makes a resemblance to this current

research. Hustomo's research reviewed the steps needed for a *brand* to be viral.

Dawkins suggested the term *meme* appeared first in 1976. He argued that *meme* can be distributed, replicated, and modified, through idea and culture. To be able to replicate and communicate, a *meme* must pass through an evolution and wide imitating process [4]. This means a *meme* is meant to be created to replicate. A *meme* can be replicated in email, *chat*, forum, social media, etc., and in the form of phrases, pictures, videos, and *hyperlinks*.

The *meme* on the internet is usually in the form of humor that can increase the influence of uploader through *online* distribution [5]. *Meme's* function can be viewed based on its content; commonly it shows humorous content leading to criticism from the uploader. *Meme* is, according to Shifman, usually used to perpetuate propaganda through content such as jokes, rumors, videos, or social networking sites [6]. Social media are part of internet functioning to be large *meme* bank for its users. *Meme* is used for free as a means of spreading information, especially in *Twitter* *meme* can spread fast in seconds.

Some content on the internet can be said "viral" when it becomes popular within seconds. The content is considered as having reached its popularity if it has passed through the distribution process from individual to other individuals [7]. Thus, one of the requirements to be viral is through continuous content distribution. The virality concept is closely related to *marketing*, advertising, and others. Viral marketing using the basic concept of WOM *marketing* can be applied to social media, *blogs* and other technology-based media [8]. Also, viral marketing is also known as a *marketing* technique utilizing social media to produce content and increase *brand awareness*.

Virality in social media has a strong relationship with its users, especially the *influencers* and *followers*. The *influencers* can ignite the virality; this is done mostly by artists, politicians, critics, and/or activists. There is no definite indicator to determine whether or not an upload is a part of viral upload. As the users still distributing the information to others, the process can be considered as viral marketing. Virality can very persuasive if it based on the *viewer* number [9]. *Twitter* has features that can be used as a method to evaluate emerging virality. The most popular and easy feature used as an evaluation method to know whether or not it is viral upload is *retweets* as the main measuring instrument, because *retweet* has the highest visibility compared with *reply*, *mention*, and *likes* [10]. Uploaded content on *Twitter* has its own characteristics. There are six factors, according to Shifman, that can make the uploaded content going viral [9]. The first is *positivity*. Social media users tend to share positive upload to others, for example, other things that are considered interesting, practical, surprising, and or useful. In addition, humor content is also excellent to share, because it may be confusing and it needs much thinking to understand the content. The second is *provocation of high arousal emotions*". The content can generate the "wow" responses from users in both a positive and negative way. It's habitual for users to share content that generating their emotions, whether the content is offensive or is supported.

The third is *packaging*. There is no proof that the clear and simple uploads can be distributed and accepted faster rather the complex ones. However, video or simple jokes evidently can be distributed easily because users can understand immediately and assume other users will do the same.

The fourth is *Prestige*. This is related to the person who uploaded the content. If other user knows the uploader of the content, so it is more likely that that user will distribute the upload as well. Thus, distributing a content that is expected to be viral can be started with targeting people who are widely known by the public. The fifth is *positioning*. *Positioning* is related to time, place and target, since those affect the virality of content. On this matter, the target is divided into two. The first target is the target knowing each other or known widely by other users since the target has a large network and the content very potentially to be shared and become viral. The second target is the contacts not knowing each other; this distribution process takes place if only the content is interesting. The sixth is *participation*. The content spreading not only generates the desire of other users to participate in distributing the content but also can give contributions to other content distributed. Commonly this is mostly used in a campaign. The success rate of a campaign depends not only on the content itself, but also on the active involvement of other users in re-creating the content. However, this does not rule out the possibility of other activities than campaigns that can be implemented with such the participation system.

### 3. METHODS

The interpretive paradigm approach was used in this research to see a fact as something unique, and having a specific context and meaning and as an essence in understanding the social meaning occurring. The interpretive approach sees the facts as flexible and inherent to semiotic system. A statement or behavior can have various meanings and can be translated. Therefore, this research emphasizes on how to read a text deeply. Furthermore, the text is not only in the form of writing, but also in the form of conversation or pictures [11].

This research used a qualitative approach. Baker and Hart stated that a qualitative approach is a term to describe the results of interpretation on the search subject, then provided a representation of interpretation result [12]. This paper used a qualitative approach to analyze pictures circulating on *Twitter*. The pictures are viral *memes*. After documenting the object of research, next various factors that can make a *meme* going viral are studied and explained. This research used documentation technique to select primary data based on where the data is spread. The primary data is the digital data of *meme* pictures on *Twitter*. The data is categorized into political *meme* based on the function of the *meme*. The content of the *Meme* will be studied to see what make a *meme* go viral using *six Ps* theory suggested by Shifman [9].

## 4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1 Data 1



Figure 2. Data 1 (source: *twitter.com*)

Data 1 as shown in figure 2 is a screenshot from an account on *Twitter* @harvens that has joined since 2009. This account has more than 2000 followers. The tweet has received 2533 *retweets* and 2104 *likes* from *Twitter* users. The *meme* was uploaded on October 1, 2019 or several days after the demonstration. The demonstration occurred due to the RUU KUHP (Criminal Code Law draft). Afterward, on October 1, 2019, when the situation had not fully subsided, news of music concert with several Indonesians musicians emerged, and it was initiated by the government [13]. The news triggered various responds from many people.

The tweet shows one picture with a *caption* above. It shows a person about to take the stairs. The difference is the person does not use the stairs as it should. On the picture, the uploader also input four sentences in each stair steps. The first sentence is "*issuing perppu*", "*sterilizing military/police position*", next is "*sitting down together on the neutral side*", and the last sentence which the person steps on is "*holding a music concert*". The uploader also writes a *caption* "*amazing crisis management~~~~*".

The intention of this *meme* is to express how a person's attitude is if it is likened to the picture. The person was facing several choices to make things go smoothly and safely. But the person ignored the choices he should take. The person took a big step to the choice considered unnecessary and unwise, like taking the highest stair steps potentially harmful to the person himself. In this case, the person is likened to the President Jokowi. He has several choices that could have been taken first. The choice is written on the first three steps: issuing Perppu, sterilizing military/police position, and sitting down together on the neutral side. However, with all those choices, President Jokowi ignores it all and immediately takes the highest step, that is, holding or attending to a music concert. Along with the picture, the *caption* is written "*amazing crisis*".

management~" is sarcasm as well. The word "mantap (amazing)" supposedly means something good. But the word "mantap" here is sarcasm against how the crisis is actually handled by the president.

The meme above went viral on Twitter. There are six factors that can make some content go viral by Shifman [9], and some of the factors can be seen in the information uploaded above. Firstly, the meme above has a positivity factor in the form of humor. The tweet is a photo that has humor in it, to see how a person steps over several stair steps to the highest steps. This invites a laughing reaction from several people because of the person's body posture that seems odd and funny to see.

#### 4.2. Data 2



Figure 3. Data 2 (Source: twitter.com)

The second factor is the packaging or how the meme is served. In this meme, the uploader picks up a picture of a person going up by stairs but didn't take them one by one, instead immediately took the highest stair. The person on the picture was portraying the President Jokowi. Moreover, the caption written was a satire against the president on handling the crisis.

The last factor on the meme is participation or for what participation the content is distributed and the impact it caused. The meme content is a form of expression of sarcasm. The uploader satirizes how the government acted on the problem occurring. This clearly shows that the uploader is disappointed with and criticizes the government at that moment. The meme's replies column is filled in with other users' comments with the same feeling as the uploader's. Therefore, it resulted in many users sharing the tweets to their timeline. The second data is a screenshot from a Twitter account @dididikiu with more than 3800 followers. This tweet received 14600 retweets and 11500 likes from Twitter users. This meme was uploaded on September 24, 2019, the day when student's demonstration happened. The demonstration was motivated by the DPR's RUU KUHP policy considered as problematic.

The tweet shows one picture with a caption above. The picture shows a doll resembling a human. The doll is held by a person whose face can't be seen. The doll is also pierced by a long needle on body. Based on the picture above, this is identical to the description of witchcraft practice that is usually done by someone considered as

magic. Witchcraft is quite common in some circles and regions in Indonesia. Witchcraft is an attempt to harm people with magic methods [14]. A doll is commonly used as a mediator to hurt or harm the body of person intended. The uploader also wrote caption on the meme. He wrote "assalamualaikum @DPR\_RI" which is a greeting that usually said by Muslims when meet or visit other Muslims. On the context above, the uploader seems to greet and meet the DPR.

The uploader's goal was to make the meme the media to express his aspirations towards the DPR. When a person intends to do witchcraft or magic on someone, it must be motivated by something that comes from the person, whether it is a feeling of annoyance, disappointment, hate, and such. It can be interpreted that the uploader has the feeling mentioned previously. He might be disappointed and angry with the DPR's decision considered as taking a wrong decision. This makes the meme serve as an expression method.

The content of the meme above was going to be viral on Twitter. There are six factors that can make a content go viral and some of the factors can be seen in the information uploaded above. Firstly, the meme above has a positivity factor in the form of humor. Expressing bizarre actions to deal with something becomes a joke for some people. The use of witchcraft to deal with state problems is not a common action done by some people. Besides, using witchcraft for noble purposes is a wrong deed yet it may become a joke to people who read it.

Secondly, in the meme there is the packaging or how the meme is presented. In this meme, the uploader used the picture of how witchcraft or magic is done to someone, in this context, the DPR. There is also a caption that explicitly for the DPR. The written greeting is a description of to whom this content is intended, and mentioning the DPR's account explains that they are the target of the witchcraft.

Thirdly or the last, the meme shows the participation or for what participation the content is distributed and the impact it caused. On that meme, the uploader uploaded the content as a form of expression towards the DPR. This also provoked a public response and many of them agreed with what the uploader felt. Therefore, that led many users to share the tweet to their timeline.

#### 4.3. Data 3



Figure 4. Data 3 (Source: twitter.com)

Data 3 as shown in figure 4 is a screenshot from an account on Twitter @sandalista1789 that has more than 32.000 followers. This tweet received 4900 retweets and 8500 likes from Twitter users. This meme was uploaded on September 25, 2019, the same day when the students' demonstrations happened, motivated by a policy made by the DPR's discussion of the RUU KUHP. In the demonstration taking place in front of the DPR building, students group became a trending topic in several social media, including on Twitter [15].

The picture shows a group of people who participated in the demonstration. Those people were identified as STM (Industrial high school) students. The account uploaded the meme along with a caption that has the same text with the poster held by the STM students, and added "*mass of students demonstrating to the DPR (People's Representative Council)*". That describes what happened in the photo uploaded. On the meme above, the text on a paper by STM students is "*kite yang bolos, die yang bego. #DPRGOBLOK*", is translated into "It's us who skipped class, but they are the stupid one. #DPRMORON". There is also a word of *bolos* on the text. According to KBBI (kbbi.kemdikbud.go.id) *bolos* is an activity to not present at work, but in this context is going to school. This refers to the STM students admitting that they often skip school during school days. Most people also have the notion that STM students attached to this act of truancy [14].

Next is the words *bego* and *goblok*, according to KBBI (kbbi.kemdikbud.go.id) has the definition very stupid, and those words refers to the DPR. Thus, if interpreted as one sentence, it explains that STM students think they are the ones who often skip school and do not take part in learning activities. It should be them that become stupid, but instead the DPR that became stupid. This discontinuity makes the sentence came out as a joke. In line with Davison's statement mentioning memes that appear on the internet is usually in the form of humor that can increase the influence of users [5].

The uploader intends to make the meme as an aspiration and satire against the DPR. The policy the DPR took was deemed as an "unintelligent" step so the word "*bego*" was used for the DPR description at that time. This makes a meme serve as an expression mode and public discussion. The caption described the situation during the photo was taken. Also, from the use of *hashtag* STM Fightback and AyoSemuaBergerak, it can be concluded that the uploader used this meme as a medium to persuade Twitter users to take action at the time. The explanations above are how the overall contents of the meme, also the meme become viral on Twitter. There are six factors that lead a piece of content to become viral, contained within this upload. Firstly, the meme above has a positivity factor in the form of humor. The use of unrelated cause-and-effect sentences evokes the humorous side of what the student wrote. So, it becomes a joke for Twitter users.

Secondly, in the meme there is the packaging or how the meme is served. On this meme, the uploader used a picture taken during the demonstration by fellow STM students. Thirdly, it is prestige or the person who upload

the content. The meme uploader has more than 32,000 followers. Therefore, it is very possible to make the content go viral because if the uploader is quite famous or well known, he/she has the bigger the chance to make people distribute their content.

Fourthly, on the meme there is participation or for what participation the content is distributed and the impact it caused. On that meme, the uploader uploaded the content to show and express his aspiration. In addition, the use of hashtags voices the community to be actively involved at that moment. The replies on the comment column are mostly positive and supporting the movement. This could indicate that most of viral content distributors agreed and wanted the same thing with the uploader. So, they consciously wanted to share the content in their timeline.

**4.4. Table data**

Data	Viral Factor
1.	<i>Positivity/Humor</i>
	<i>Packaging</i>
	<i>Participation</i>
2.	<i>Positivity/Humor</i>
	<i>Packaging</i>
	<i>Participation</i>
3.	<i>Positivity/Humor</i>
	<i>Packaging</i>
	<i>Prestige</i>
	<i>Participation</i>

**5. CONCLUSION**

This research draws some conclusions from the results of discussion, along with the description. Meme that becomes viral is the one successfully having an emotional attachment to Twitter users. Three of the memes that went viral have a positivity factor which is humor. Something humorous is more likely to distribute faster on Twitter. Humor on those three memes is easily understood humor, thus speeding up the distribution process.

Those three memes uploaded when the demonstration happened; therefore it immediately grabs Twitter users' attention. The three memes will be easily recognized by Twitter users because the demonstration was a hot topic on the community. So, the Twitter users will immediately associate those three memes with ongoing demonstration.

The uploader is the account with many followers that speed up distribution of three memes. The number of followers of those three uploaders greatly influences the visibility of the meme. The number of followers reaching thousands to tens thousands makes the memes at least seen to the same number.

Those three memes are presented in a simple way, so it can redistribute faster by Twitter users. Those three memes use one picture panel only with a short text on it, and a short caption from the uploader. In addition, those three memes did not go through complex editing process. The simplicity makes it easier for readers to understand the humor, even the criticism. The meme has various factors, as concluded in the paragraphs above, also supported with the characteristics of Twitter users themselves who are prosumer. These characteristics make the distribution process of the three memes faster, because Twitter users who see the upload will redistribute it consciously/unconsciously. Simply put, the characteristic "you must know/see what I know/see" directly makes those three memes live and go viral on Twitter.

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