INTERNET MEMES AS DECONSTRUCTIONS OF MYTHS: A PRAGMA-SEMIOTIC APPROACH

Helen Ufuoma Ugah[1]

Abstract

This study argues that memes, though considered 'unserious', may lead to social and political reformation since they potentially express dissent against societal ills. The study utilises Mey's (2001) Pragmatic Acts to evince how memes are used to express varied reactions and receptions to pressing social and political issues in Nigeria. It explores thirty internet memes by categorising the nature of communication in them, analysing their communicative functions, and discussing the deconstruction of dominant societal beliefs and myths in them. The study contends that internet memes represent a new kind of comment culture and play a significant role in contemporary societal reformation and restructuring.

Keywords: myths, deconstruction, communicative function, semiotics, pragmatics, pragmeme

1.   Introduction

The term 'meme' can be traced to Dawkin's (1976) definition of meme as a basic unit of cultural transmission or imitation. A meme is a combination of catch phrases, images, news, or video clips. Bauckhage (2011, p. 1) notes that memes are created with only a few people in mind, so the meme may only be understandable to these people. However, since memes always contain images, and a particular image can be subjected to diverse interpretations, one image can have several captions in different memes, that is, a particular image can be used to create multiple memes with different meanings.

Internet memes are one of the most recent means of communication used by the masses to express varied thoughts and ideas which are considered 'unserious'. They are a piece of culture that gains influence through online transmissions; they represent a kind of comment culture and play a significant role in contemporary political expression by providing emotional and political catharsis (Reime, 2015). More so, they are a form of subversive communication, used to challenge dominant power relations and adequately represent disenfranchised groups. Calimbo (2016, p. 3) opines that memes are characterised by 'quirky, satiric and sarcastic humour', though Davidson (2012) and Shifman (2014) posit that not all memes are humorous. Memes usually refer to popular culture, events, icon, or phenomena; hence, they are both a combination of reality and fantasy. They are used to weaken dominant media messages to create new meanings. Even though memes are used to shape public opinion as well as draw the attention of the public to issues of national concern, their popularity is quite short lived. This is because they are also units of popular culture, used to create shared cultural experiences. They are constantly creatively edited and replicated to fit into current societal issues (Shifman, 2013; Dynel 2016). When they are relevant

---

[1.]   Department of English, Elizade University, Nigeria. Email: ugah.helen@gmail.com

to current societal issues, they become viral on the internet and are shared on various internet platforms. This is what Nagy (2018, p. 5) refers to as 'the technological artefacts of human minds'. With the virality of internet memes and their relevance to current societal issues, they become recorded in human brains and are hard to forget.

Memes are a combination of visual and linguistic signs, and they convey several concepts and ideas. Sari (2018) notes that the image in memes carries the bulk of the meaning of the meme; the caption usually represents the message. The picture and caption embedded in memes give a clue about the context of the meme and contributes to the general meaning of the meme. Hence, memes are context dependent for their meanings (Zubaidah and Ardelia, 2018).

Memes are usually analysed as discursive participation since they are specifically created to pass across certain messages. They could be analysed using the analytic tools of Pragmatics and Semiotics. Pragmatics is the study of meaning in context (Mey, 2001), thus, the meanings of memes can be pragmatically analysed based on the context of the meme or the societal issue the meme is addressing. Semiotics studies the multiple signs conveyed via different media. The interest in semiotics is the messages hidden in the texts and images, and their various meanings as used in communication in different cultures and societies (Wales, 1990). De Saussure's theory of Semiotics utilises a semiotic approach to the analysis of persuasive elements of texts. The theory perceives texts as objects created to construct meaning. To this end, considering memes as texts and analysing the discursive and semiotic elements in them can expose how memes are used to achieve various communicative purposes.

This study argues that the semiotics in memes are used to deconstruct myths about life. Barthes' (1993) posits that a myth is 'a representation of the dominant ideologies of our time; they transmit ideologies, and they are motivated by the realities of life. Calimbo (2016) notes that myths are regarded as statements of facts that demand no explanation. They are both natural and historical as they are used to refer to human situations which eventually become embedded in history.

The study of memes cuts across different fields of research. However, there are only few linguistic studies on memes. Furthermore, most of the linguistic studies on memes have dwelt more on the use of humour and satire in them. There seem to be no study on how memes created by Nigerians on the Nigerian socio-cultural and political contexts are used to deconstruct dominant societal beliefs and myths about life generally and living in Nigeria in particular. An investigation of the communicative function in the memes will explicate that the messages in memes are created for political reformation – they are used to express dissent against societal ills and are used to develop social consciousness among internet users.

2.   Situating the Study

Dynel (2016) notes that internet memes are used online to affirm, counterattack, and reply to current socio-political events. This assertion is similar to Calimbo's (2016) opinion that internet memes are used to deconstruct beliefs about political administrations by exposing political ideological constructs in the society. Calimbo's study which examines the deconstruction of dominant political ideologies of modern Philippine society in political internet memes, reveals that humour is created in memes through contrasts and binary oppositions. Humour is aggressive in political memes as it makes a ridicule of and satirises representatives of power and political elites for their perceived negative qualities and practices which are in contrast with the righteous and moralistic slogans of the administration. This present study, though similar to Calimbo's study, does not only dwell on the use of internet memes to deconstruct dominant political ideologies about political administrations but it also goes further to investigate how memes are used to deconstruct socio-cultural ideologies in Nigerian societies. More so, the study is not about humour but is about other linguistic items in the memes used to deconstruct myths, beliefs, and ideologies.

Memes are context dependent for their meanings (Sari, 2018; Grundlingh, 2017; Zubaidah and Ardelia's 2018). The meaning of a meme can only be detected in the context in which it is used, hence the use of pragmatic tools to investigate the meaning of memes. Grundlingh (2017) argues that internet memes are basically speech acts, and they facilitate communication online. Sari's (2018) research considers the relationship among the text, image, and interpretation of memes. The study which comprised the pragmatic analysis of 35 lifestyle memes obtained from popular meme-creating websites portrays that the images and captions play significant roles in interpreting the memes, thereby complementing, and supporting each other. This finding is also similar to that obtained from Zubaidah and Ardelia's (2018) study which set out to investigate the meanings of memes by examining the relationship between picture and texts in memes in comparison to the social function of the meme. The study utilises the analytical tools of Critical Discourse Analysis to analyse five famous memes downloaded from Google. The findings from the study evince that memes are created for many purposes, especially to create humour and express several feelings.

Most studies on internet memes have centred on the use of humour and satire in them. Eychaner (n.d) explored 30 randomly selected internet memes to determine a possible cognitive model of humour. The study demonstrates a significant relationship between memes and the subjective humour in them. In a similar study, Kariko (2013) randomly selected five internet memes with humour-based themes to determine the relationship among images, texts and meanings in the memes. The study portrays that memes not only contain humour, but also reflect universal emotions, as well as social and cultural messages. One of the social messages reflected in memes is social criticism. This is seen in Widiana's (2015) use of socio-

pragmatic approach to investigate the pragmatic features of comic memes. The study demonstrates that comic memes have pragmatic functions which distinguish them from other kinds of comic. Social criticism is used to express various kinds of social problems in human existence; they play the role of entertaining the reader as well as giving advice to people at the same time.

The effect of memes on viewers has been evaluated in different studies (Huntington, 2017; Nagy, 2018; Akram et al., 2021; Msughter, 2020). Msughter (2020) utilises a semiotic and content analysis approach to describe the internet memes used to campaign against the spread of corona virus in Nigeria. The study portrays that internet memes on Covid-19 in Nigeria contain visual metaphors that reflect the societal issues in Nigeria. Akram et al. (2021) argue in their examination of the significance of internet memes during Covid-19 lockdown in America that internet memes served as a coping mechanism during the lockdown and mitigated symptoms of anxiety. Huntington's (2017) examination of the media effects of internet memes as a form of user-generated media indicates that political memes produce different effects on viewers than non-political memes – viewing political internet memes results in more feelings of aversion than viewing non-political internet memes. Political memes are conceived as attempts at conveying arguments beyond mere jokes; they can be used as positive or negative responses to political situations (Plevriti, 2014).

Politics and memes are inextricably linked; memes are used in politics to enhance political involvement and help one to understand politics. Nagy (2018) concludes in their investigation of the nature of internet memes that memes have a major impact in politics. Memes are sometimes caricatures of social and political situations; they shape political and cultural landscapes (Jenkins, Ford, and Green, 2013; Kulkarni, 2017) and are utilised to lampoon government administration and resist anti-welfarist ideology (Unuabonah and Oyebode, 2021). Plevriti's (2014) exploration of the use of satire in political memes evinces that memes are sometimes created for self-expression, self-actualisation, and the construction of individual identity. They are also used to expose societal misfits and draw the attention of the public to issues of social concerns. Gawne and Vaughan (2011) also conclude after analysing the common language play strategies in internet memes that the language of memes displays collaboratively constructed norms and tendencies which allows for the construction of complex identities. Unuabonah and Oyebode (2021) reveal in their analysis of internet memes circulated in Nigeria during the Covid-19 pandemic that memes are protest tools utilised to protest government's deceit, corruption, and failure to provide social and health amenities.

Memes have been analysed for reasons beyond the political. Bangun et al. (2017) describe the functions of expressive illocutionary acts in the discourse of Indonesian meme comics and their usefulness as reading materials for students. The data which spanned 306 memes downloaded online portray that internet memes are used for expressing illocutionary acts

like flattering, criticising, blaming, complaining, and thanking; and they can also increase the students' interest in reading and critical thinking. Aguilar et al. (2017) investigate the dominant messages in internet religious-themed memes and identify the common genres in the memes used to present messages and assumptions about religion online. The study portrays that contemporary digital culture provides resources for presenting beliefs about religion and that memes provide useful lens for understanding popular concepts about religion. Chandler's (2013) study evinces that Internet memes can transmit ideological content. He uses CDA and Multimodal Discourse Analysis and Social Semiotics to analyse visual and textual elements of First World Problems and Third Success memes. The study shows that texts and images are ideological and salient and are used discursively to construct oppositional binaries between 'Us' versus 'Them' in terms of wealth disparity.

The studies reviewed so far have shown that internet memes are interesting data for research, especially in the field of linguistics. Even though the studies are similar to this present study, they do not have the same thematic concern with it, neither do they investigate the use of memes to deconstruct societal beliefs. This study utilises Mey's (2001) Pragmatic Acts and De Saussure's Model of semiotics to evince how memes are used to express varied reactions and receptions to pressing social and political issues in Nigeria, by categorising the nature of communication in Nigerian internet memes, identifying, and analysing the semiotic meanings in the memes and discussing the deconstruction of dominant societal beliefs and myths in the memes.

2.1 Semiotics

Semiotics is the study of signs or the knowledge of the existence of signs in the society. Ferdinand de Saussure (1959) notes that any element counts as a sign. He categorises sign into Signifiers and Signified. Signifier is the representation (sound, images, texts) of the sign while the signified is the mental concept the sign represents. The relationship between the signifier and the signified is referred to as signification.

Semiotics studies signs as significant aspects of communication. The system of linguistic sign plays an important role in constructing reality; language is used to give meaning to the world using signs. Signs are intentionally delivered with the purpose of communication though they can produce a variety of different meanings depending on how they are interpreted. Jakobson (1971, p. 698) opines that semiotics is the analysis of signs and their meanings. He investigates signification patterns and structures in texts by identifying and analysing them. The author also shows how the relationship between the sign and the signifier results from what is taught by society. Further, Jacobson considers how language and objects portray meaning by acknowledging that the significance of objects and language is realised from the complex relations between individuals, the objects, culture, and society (Jakobson, 1971).

Since the sign in semiotics is an entity that refers to something else based on perceptions from social experiences and cultural ideals learnt, this study analyses the linguistic and non-linguistic signs in the memes to interpret them and evince how they are shaped by societal experiences and how they are used to debunk societal myths.

2.2 Mey's (2001) Pragmatic Act

Mey's Pragmatic Act Theory is situation derived (Mey, 2001, p. 218) and is a development of Austin's Speech Act Theory. It is a function-based theory of meaning which maintains that a speaker may influence others through language and deny certain claims without betraying such acts through lexical choices. In Pragmatic Act Theory, the focus is not just on what is said, but what is unsaid. The act is not totally explicit. The theory consists of pragmeme which is initiated using Practs. Practs reflect language users' perception of the interactional situation in a particular context; it is the knowledge of the topic of discussion and its effects on the interlocutors. Practs are used to realise pragmemes. A pragmeme is a speech act, that is, a speaker's intention of using language or any form of linguistic expression. It is the goal a speaker intends to achieve by saying or doing something (Mey, 2001). Capone (2005) notes that a pragmeme is 'a situated speech act realised by the combination of linguistic rules and social expectations to produce interpretable utterances' (Capone, 2005, p. 1355).

Mey's Pragmatic Act Theory is sub-categorised into 'textual' and 'activity' component of discourse. Activity component constitute the roles played by the interlocutors while textual component is the contextual variables which come into play during interaction. The theory dwells on the environmental constraints that determines what is said or left unsaid in an interaction.

In this study, the context of the memes is analysed using aspects of Mey's Pragmatic Act theory. The memes are related to the linguistic and social context in which they are used since practs cannot be fully understood outside social contexts.

3.   Methodology

This study is purely analytical and qualitative. The data for the study comprises 30 purposively selected memes downloaded from threads on different sections of *Nairaland,* which is one of the most popular Nigerian online forums. Participants in *Nairaland* encompass both old and young, educated, and semi-educated, and are made up of Nigerians living in Nigeria and Nigerians in the diaspora. The memes in *Nairaland* are used by participants as responses to comments and posts on the forum. The themes of the memes cut across different aspects of human life peculiar to Nigerians and the Nigerian situation.

The memes were studied and the linguistic elements in them are analysed to evince the pragmatic acts utilised in them. The messages embedded in them were also investigated and the myths in them were

deconstructed and analysed pragmatically. Also, the signification of the images used in the memes were examined and discussed after being related to the average Nigerian experience. The memes are named MEM 1-30 for ease of reference.

4.   Analysis and Discussion of Findings

The pragma-semiotic analysis of the memes used in this study evinces that memes are informative, sarcastic, satiritic, humourous, self-deprecating, informative, etc. Though they exhibit direct acts expected to lampoon the social, cultural, and political situation in Nigeria, they also contain indirect acts used to relate an average Nigerian's daily experience in Nigeria and to respond to political situations in the country. Subsequent sections reflect the pragma-semiotic analysis of the memes.

4.1 Nigerian Politics in Memes

Political memes in the context of this study demonstrate the socio-political situation in Nigeria. They are mostly negative responses to the Nigerian political situation used to caricature, lampoon, and satirise the Nigerian political situation while at the same time criticising the actions of different political actors in the country. Their use in the data gives credence to Plevriti's (2014) assertion that political memes can be used as responses to political situations. For instance, MEM 14 relates the average election situation in Nigeria: lives are lost, properties are destroyed, electoral officers are kidnapped, etc., at the end of which a leader that does not care about the citizens' welfare emerges. The meme reflects a pragmeme of complaint: the political experience in Nigeria is unsatisfactory and totally awful. The picture of the man with his hands on his head signifies that the situation is negatively overwhelming and life-threatening. Further, the meme deconstructs the myth of peaceful elections in Nigeria – there is no peaceful political transition in Nigeria. Political transition in Nigeria is regarded with trepidation because it is always accompanied by deaths and loss, whereas the opposite is the case in some other countries of the world.
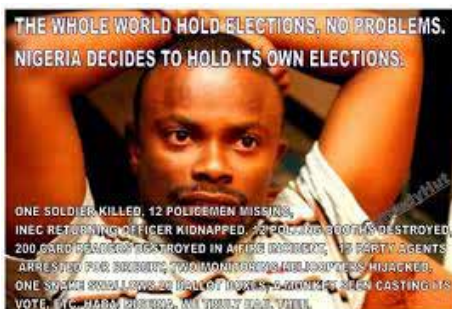
MEM 14

MEM 19

The pragmeme of complaint is also reflected in MEM 19 which uses the picture of a cat to demonstrate Nigerian politicians' relationship with the masses before and after elections. The friendly picture of the cat with an innocent and welcoming facial expression in the pre-election section signifies the positive, appealing, and friendly disposition of Nigerian politicians when they are campaigning before elections. However, after elections, they become aggressive and unapproachable to the masses. The picture of the aggressive cat signifies that Nigerian politicians only care about the masses and their opinions during electioneering campaign, after which the politicians make themselves unavailable and unapproachable when they have won the elections. This meme deconstructs the myth that politicians serve the interest of the people and always make themselves available for the people. The humour used in this meme also contains polarisation – used to juxtapose how Nigerian politicians behave before and after elections. It is also used to portray the negative qualities of Nigerian political practices, and Nigerian politicians. This aligns with Calimbo's (2013) postulation that memes are a 'deconstruction of political ideologies of our time'.

MEM 9 demonstrates the pragmeme of criticism and an indirect speech act calling Nigerian youths to be consistent in their choice of political leaders. It criticises Nigerian youths for being rash, hasty, and disloyal. They campaign for politicians without thorough assessment of the politicians' competence or expertise. They are easily swayed by little campaign promises made by the politicians. Youths are generally regarded as the strength and future of any country, but the pragmeme in MEM 9 insinuates that Nigerian youths cannot be relied upon to campaign and vote for competent and reliable leaders – they are immature and lack ingenuity. The facial expression of the man in the meme signifies disdain for Nigerian youths and holds them accountable for the socio-political situation in Nigeria. This meme deconstructs the myth that youths are smart and knowledgeable humans who can be relied upon to herald positive development in any country.

MEM 14

MEM 11

MEM 11 also contains a pragmeme of criticism that indirectly lampoons President Buhari's inability to fulfil his campaign promise of providing lunch for primary school pupils across Nigeria. While debunking the myth that children do not express themselves amid adults, especially adults that are political leaders, the meme also insinuates that President Buhari should be ashamed that a child is reminding him of his campaign promises. Only a selfish, inconsiderate, and heartless leader would refuse a child's sincere request or refuse to fulfil a promise made to a child since every child needs food to survive and grow. The meme is a reminder that most Nigerian politicians do not fulfil their electioneering campaign promises after they have gained power, and no one holds them accountable for their inactions. It would take a bold and courageous child to do this. This is also reflected in MEM 18 where Aisha Buhari, the wife of President Buhari is reminding him that he is fasting. The pragmeme of reminding President Buhari that he is fasting carries a pract which insinuates that he is lying even under oath and only his religious inclination can make him realise the implication of his lies. This meme, which not only debunks the myths that political leaders neither lie to the masses nor lie under oaths, points to the fact that Nigerian leaders in general and President Buhari in particular lack credibility. They are deceitful and devious. The fact that it is his wife that reminds him of his spiritual exercise signifies that not only does he have little respect for the law, but he is also a hypocrite who does not live according to the dictates of the religion he is practicing and is fanatical about. It also signifies that even his wife, who is supposed to stand by him, does not trust him or his ability to respect the words of the oath. She is more loyal to Nigerians than he is. This meme is thus used to expose the political and societal misfit in Nigeria and is consonant with Plevriti's (2014) view that memes are sometimes created to expose societal misfits.

MEM 18

MEM 18

Still on the Nigerian political situation, the political memes portray Nigerian politicians' flair for corruption and amassing of wealth when they are in power. These memes debunk the myth that political leaders are selfless while signifying that Nigerian politicians are several times richer than an average Nigerian. These memes also lampoon the corruptive tendencies of Nigerian politicians. This is also seen in MEM27 which signifies that Nigerian politicians grow fat on the sweat of the masses who are suffering to make a living for themselves. The effort of an average Nigerian on ensuring they carve a niche for themselves, favours the politicians more that the average Nigerian who is not in politics. The picture with two fat politicians on a boat named 'Nigeria' rowed by skinny and hungry-looking Nigerians signifies that while the people suffer, are impoverished, hungry and homeless, their political leaders live on and grow very fat off the suffering of the masses. In the words of one of the politicians '… every Nigerian must join hands to move this country forward'. These wors signify that the politicians do not regard themselves as being in the same category with the suffering Nigerians – they are 'Nigeria' that is why they are sitting on the boat named 'Nigeria' and being pushed by Nigerians. The politicians are not only selfish, manipulative, and greedy, they are cruel and deceptive.

In conclusion, political memes give credence to Davidson's (2012) view that memes are 'a new kind of comment culture that plays a significant role in politics'. They also corroborate Unuabonah and Oyebode's (2021) assertion that memes are used to protest against corruption and the deceit of the Nigerian government. Nigerians use political memes to express dissent against societal ills perpetrated by politicians. These memes foreground the Nigerian political problem and contain reactions to these problems. The memes also foreground the ideological perception of wealth distribution in Nigeria and the inequality that exists between Nigerians and Nigerian politicians.

4.2 Nigerian Police in Memes

Memes on the Nigerian police are criticism oriented. They comprise direct and indirect acts that utilise contextual features of shared situational knowledge and shared social knowledge. They exhibit pragmemes of lampooning and criticising. Most of the memes in this category are coated with humour, satire, and sarcasm to ridicule the Nigerian police. Humour is used in the memes as a subversive resistance to the perceived power of the Nigerian police force, to show hostility against them and to lampoon them. Its use in the memes also signifies that members of the Nigerian police are not reliable – Nigerians cannot rely on them for protection. The memes that feature the Nigerian Police signify that the duty of the Nigerian Police force which is to 'prevent and detect crime, apprehend criminals, preserve law and order, protect life and property and to investigate crime, etc' (to Section 4 of Police Act and Decree No. 23 of 1979) is a myth in the Nigerian context and needs to be discredited. Satire is used to cast aspersion on the operations of the Nigerian Police Force and sarcasm is used to suggest that the Nigerian police

are deceitful and bad at their job. This is seen in MEM 5 which contains the inscription 'hours after robbery has ended, #9japolice be like "Oga where did they pass?"' and features Nigerian policemen fully dressed and armed, walking purposefully. This meme signifies that the police personnel have an abysmal performance and Nigerians have a very low perception of them. It also portrays the Nigerian police as cowards that run into hiding during robbery like every other person, but only come out after the robbers have left. Sarcasm is used in this context to ridicule the police for their perceived cowardice and negligence of duty. MEM 3 which contains the caption 'police be like "investigations are on-going"' and a policeman deeply asleep on his chair with his mouth open, signifies that Nigerian police personnel do nothing when they are in their offices; all they do is sleep while on duty when they should be investigating crimes. This also portrays the ineptitude and recklessness of the Nigerian police force and their nonchalant attitude to their duty of protecting the citizens of the country. MEM 6 which contains a picture of a young man being arrested because 'the picture your license is carrying is afro, but you're on lowcut' portrays the Nigerian police's proclivity for arresting people indiscriminately and for inconsequential reasons. This meme contradicts the myth that police arrest only criminals or criminal suspects. It also portrays that Nigerians' right to freedom of movement is sometimes violated by the Nigerian police as a Nigerian could be arrested for just walking.

MEM 6

MEM 3

MEM 10 contains a pragmeme of surprise – a man expresses disbelief that the police did not collect a bribe from his son. The expression 'adonbilivit' signifies the impossibility of the situation and expresses the pragmeme 'this is unbelievable, no normal Nigerian police would refuse to collect a bribe'. Since pragmatic acts are situation derived and situation constrained, this meme features the disposition of the Nigerian police to collect money from road users – commercial and otherwise. They extort money from travellers on the highways and demand gratification from citizens for doing nothing – this has been regarded as the 'normal' in the Nigerian context.

MEM 10

MEM 5

Memes that feature the Nigerian police are negative responses to the behaviour of the Nigerian Police Force and they are used by Nigerians to communicate their displeasure. These memes signify that Nigerians have an aversion for the Nigerian police –they are critical of the police force, present them negatively and consider them generally corrupt and inefficient. Nigerian police brutalise unsuspecting citizens and their (in)actions are fraught with practices that undermine public trust. Consequently, Nigerians have little or no respect for the police.

4.3 Memes and socio-cultural realities in Nigeria

Memes in this category reflect Nigerians' flair for creating humour out of dire life situations. On the one hand, they portray Nigerians as resilient and happy people who do not allow the frustrations of life to get at them. On the other hand, they indicate that Nigerians are not fighting hard enough for positive development in the country. Instead of looking for possible solutions to their problems, they create humour from it to make life bearable and liveable for themselves. This is evident in MEM1 which has two poorly dressed women laughing hysterically and uncontrollably and the inscription 'we are going to starve to death, it's so fucking funny'. Ordinarily, starvation is not what anyone should laugh about. Anyone that faces the threat of starvation is afraid and sad, but in this meme, it is found funny. This not only contradicts the myth that starvation leads to fear, sadness, and anger, it also portrays that Nigerians do not lose their ability to laugh and make jokes even when it seems all hope is lost. This is a form of self-deprecation. It is also seen in MEM 12 which features the picture of Gollom, a popular character in the American movie *The Lord of the Rings* that loves a special powerful ring so much that it calls it 'my Precious' and would do anything to keep the ring within its reach. The use of this character clearly indicates Nigerians' flare for and creativity in retaining a clear and recognisable intertextual link with the Nigerian situation and the outside world. By equating Nigerians' reaction when they see fuel with the love Gollom has for the ring, the meme demonstrates the austerity of living in Nigeria during fuel scarcity so much so that Nigerians would do anything to ensure they get and hoard the fuel. The meme also lampoons the fuel situation in Nigeria – a country that has crude oil in abundance but suffers from fuel scarcity.

MEM 1

MEM 4

MEM 12

MEM 15

The textual-visual analysis of MEM 15 reveals the tendency of Nigerians to lie about their age when there is something to gain. The meme which features a young man well over 30 years of age claiming to be 19 years old, contains a pragmeme of sarcasm and disbelief. It also signifies that Nigerians lie a lot even when the truth is obvious. The meme deconstructs the myth that people are proud of their age.

5.   Conclusion

In conclusion, memes are potent vehicles for information dissemination. They are used to critique actions, lampoon political leaders and public office holders, and deconstruct myths generated over time. The visual and textual elements in them are combined to complement the message in a way that ensures the reader understands it. Beyond being used to lampoon Nigerian political leaders, the memes represent the state of the country's democracy. They suggest that Nigerian democracy is not sustainably developed and that the citizens want and expect more from their leaders. The memes are thus 'unserious' ways of righting the socio-political wrongs of Nigerian political leaders. They suggest areas that the leaders can pay attention to for sustainable development. Though they are informal and unserious, they provide a window to what living in Nigeria is like. They contain pragmemes of complaint, satire, ridicule, and humour. Hence, they are viable tools for political and social reconstruction.

Works Cited

Aguilar, G. K., Campbell, H., Stanley, M. & Taylor, E. (2017). Communicating mixed messages about religion through internet memes. *Information, Communication and Society 20(10) 1-23.* https://doi.org/10.1080/13 69118X.2016.1229004

Akram, U., Irvine, K., Allen, S. F., Stevenson, J. C., Ellis, J. G., & Jennifer Drabble, J. (2021). Internet memes related to the COVID19 pandemic as a potential coping mechanism for anxiety. *Scientific Report.* 22 1-8. 10.1038/s41598-021-00857-8

Bangun, T. A., Syahnan, D. S. & Daulat, S. D. (2017). An analysis of the illocutionary act in indonesia's meme Comics at social media and its advantages as reading Materials for senior high school. *British Journal of English Linguistics* 5(4) 64-77.

Barthes, R. (1993) *Mythologies*. Translated by Annette Lavers. Vintage

Bauckhage, C. (2011). Insights into internet memes. *Conference: Proceedings of the Fifth International Conference on Weblogs and social media, Barcelona, Catalonia, Spain, July 17-21, 2011.*

Calimbo, A. C. (2016). Deconstructing myths via humor: A semiotic analysis of Philippine political internet memes. *CASS Langkit Journal,* 6 1-20

Capone, A. (2005). Pragmemes (a study with reference to English and Italian), *Journal of Pragmatics*, 37(9) 1355-1371 https://doi.org/10.1016/j. pragma.2005.01.013.

Chandler, R. (2013). *Meme world syndrome: A critical discourse analysis of The First World problems and Third World success internet memes.* M.A Thesis submitted to the Department of Communication, University of Central Florida.

Dawkins, R. (1976). *The selfish gene.* Oxford University Press.

Davidson, P. (2012). The language of internet memes. In Mandiberg, M. (ed) *The social media reader.* New York University Press. 10.18574/ nyu/9780814763025.003.0013

de Saussure, Ferdinand. 1959 [1916]. *Course in general linguistics.* Translated by Wade Baskin. New York: Columbia University Press.

Dynel, M. (2016). *Political memes as tools of dissent and alternative digital activism in the Russian-language twitter*. Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the University of Westminster for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Eychaner, B. (n.d.). Memes and humor: A linguistic analysis. Retrieved January 13, 2019, from http:// missourifolkloresociety.truman.edu/Missouri Folklore Studies/MFS papers to review/Eychaner Memes and Humor. pdf

Grundlingh, L. (2017). Memes as speech acts, *Social Semiotics*, http://dx.doi. org/10.1080/10350330.2017.1303020

Gawne, L. & Vaughan, J. (2011). *I can haz language play: The construction*

of language and identity in LOLspeak. Proceedings of the 42nd Australian Linguistic Society Conference – 2011, 97-125

Huntington, H. E. (2017). *Affect and effect of internet memes: Assessing perceptions and influence of online user-generated political discourse as media.* M.A Thesis submitted to Colorado State University.

Jakobson, R. (1971). *The framework of Language.* New York

Jenkins, H., Ford, S. & Green, J (2013). S*preadable media: Creating value and meaning in networked culture.* New York University Press.

Kariko, A. A. (2013). Humorous writing exercise using internet memes on English Classes. *Lingua Cultura* 6(2) 1-14. http://dx.doi.org 10.21512/lc.v6i2.406

Mey, J. (2001). *Pragmatics.* Blackwell.

Mey, J. (2006). Pragmatic Acts. In: Brown, Keith, (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of language and linguistics* (2nd ed). Elsevier.

Msughter, A. E. (2020). Internet meme as a campaign tool to the fight against Covid-19 in Nigeria. *Global Journal of Human-Social Science: Arts & Humanities – Psychology 20(6)* 1-15.

Nagy, L. (2018). *Memes and their impact on politics.* Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Modern Philology and Social Sciences, Institute of English and American Studies, University of Pannonia.

Plevriti, V. (2014). *Satirical user-generated memes as an effective source of political criticism, extending debate and enhancing civic engagement.* M.A Thesis submitted to the Centre for Cultural Policy Studies: The University of Warwick.

Reime, T. (2015). *Memes as visual tools for precise message conveying: a potential in the future of online communication development.* Department of Product Design Norwegian University of Science and Technology.

Sari, C. P. (2018) *Meanings of lifestyle memes in English: Pragmatic-Semiotic analysis.* Unpublished M.A thesis submitted to The Graduate Program of English Language Studies, Sanata Dharma University, Yogyakarta.

Shifman, L. (2013). Memes in a digital world: reconciling with a conceptual troublemaker. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, 18*, 362–377. https://doi.org/10.1111/jcc4.12013

Shifman, L. (2014). *Memes in digital culture. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.*

Unuabonah, F. O. & Oyebode, O. O. (2021). 'Nigeria is fighting Covid-419': A multimodal critical discourse analysis of political protest in Nigerian coronavirus-related internet memes. *Discourse and Communication 15(2)* https://doi.org/10.1177/1750481320982090

Wales, K. (1990). *A dictionary of stylistics.* Longman.

Widiana, Y. (2015). A sociopragmatics study on social criticism in meme

comics. *PRASASTI: CONFERENCE SERIES.* Retrieved from https://jurnal.uns.ac.id/prosidingprasasti/article/view/76 on 8th January 2019.

Zubaidah, I. N. & Ardelia, I. (2018). A discourse analysis of memes. *Getsempena English Education Journal (GEEJ)* 5(2)158-164