



A MULTIMODAL STYLISTIC STUDY OF MEMES IN CONTEMPORARY NIGERIAN DIGITAL LANDSCAPE

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Abstract:

This paper investigates the multimodal meanings that are communicated by Nigerians with the use of internet memes. It focuses on the peculiarity of the digitally conscious generation of youths to challenge both linguistic and social status quo. The qualitative research design involves a systematic exploration of how visual and linguistic resources interact to construct meaning, express social commentary, and engage audiences across digital platforms. Although earlier studies on memes in multimodal studies have researched the subject matter with reference to politics, children's literature and advertising, this study presents an innovative paradigm in its theoretical approach and aim of study, which is stated above. Using both Visual Grammar and Kress and Van Leeuwen's (2006) offshoot of Halliday's Functional Grammar, it analyses purposively selected data with a view to projecting their semiotic communicative values in relaying lived-Nigerian realities and the users' attempt(s) to (re)construe age-long 'truths'. Twenty memes from *Instagram*, *X* and *Tik-Tok* that cover themes on education, social-economy and self-deprecation are studied. Findings reveal that memes employ symbolism, synecdoche, allegory, metaphor, analogy and iconography to convey thoughts that deconstruct aphorisms, question wise-sayings and torpedo age-old anecdotes. Also, the paper argues further that the interpretations of the selected memes are largely dependent on shared socio-cultural knowledge, contextual awareness, and familiarity with contemporary Nigerian experiences. The study concludes that multimodality is a veritable source of compressing thoughts that singular modes may not be able to sufficiently accommodate or communicate.

Keywords: stylistics, multimodality, internet memes

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1. Introduction

Traditionally, textual analysis had always been restricted to the linguistic structures and interplay of authorial tropes and proclivities as far as the manipulations of linguistic resources at the author's disposal were concerned (Bamigboye: 2020). However, the emergence of interdisciplinary approaches to textual study occasioned the birth of ideas that chose to complement language with other aesthetic accompaniments in the rendition of art. Within stylistics study and other text linguistic disciplines like discourse analysis, the text was the primary source of both data and the analysis of the same. However, emergent contemporary compositions with both pictorial and graphical accompaniments may have necessitated a more deliberate and ecumenical approach to analysis in order to cater for such omnibus varieties of discourse.

The advent of the internet came with a lot of innovations that have now been associated with digital communication. One such innovation is the use of memes. In its traditional definition, memes are images or videos that are digitally saved to illustrate particular arguments or say particular things. They could be still images or short-lived videos that involve both the animate and the inanimate. According to Gumilang & Juanda (2018: 135), *"a meme is an idea, behaviour or style that spreads from one person to another in a culture"*. Its origin can be traced to the 1976 seminal work of the anthropologist Richard Dawkins, who describes a meme as either an idea, theory, application, custom, song, or dance that enjoys a communal presence and is meaningfully passed around from end to end within a specific community. In recent times, however, the meme has taken a life of its own and has now come to refer to an assortment of both lexical and graphic representations that symbolise creativity in the art as well as humorous renditions of messaging in internet culture.

In generic terms, multimodal texts reflect those that combine more than one semiotic mode in the discharge of their communicative purposes (Kress and Van Leeuwen; 1996: 183). They are a grapho-lexical mix bag of words and images which may be presented in different shades of fonts and colours to convey specific authorial meanings. According to Shifman (2013), almost all memes carry humorous messages and may be comical in appearance; they may also communicate more serious intentions that may range from the political to the religious and the socially imperative. This is one of the reasons its study has become important as a vehicle for the transmission of meaning in the synchronic use of language.

2. Multimodal Approaches in Linguistic/Literary Stylistics

As stated earlier, stylistic analysis, which was largely confined to linguistic structures and the ways authors employed stylistic devices and personal techniques in their use of language, has now given way to more interdisciplinary approaches, which have introduced new perspectives that enrich the study of art by integrating language with other aesthetic elements in its expression. Stylistics as a discipline has evolved from its humble beginnings as an offshoot of Rhetoric to the ecumenical status it enjoys in contemporary scholarship (Missikova, 2003). All readable elements published in print may now be subjected to systemic investigation in order to ascertain or determine the total meaning of the same as intended by the author.

Intersemiotic complementarity, according to Royce (2007), is the interpretative function given to the textual interactions and relations between linguistic codes and images in text/writing. It is how both linguistic structures and other semiotic devices like illustrations, pictures, images and the like combine to project authorial meaning in pages of texts. In the words of Leeuwen (2006) there is cohesion in the amalgam of these semiotic options the same way we have cohesion in purely linguistic compositions. In other words, those who engage in daily, official, business, academic or social communication may incorporate different modes to express their intents. They may also interchange or substitute modality in the overall interest of impactful transfer of thought from end to end.

Wee (1999: vi) reasons that 'compared to text with a single semiotic code, the meaning potential of multi-semiotic texts is greatly expanded. Hence, meaning creation becomes an interactive, dynamic and symbiotic process.' It navigates through the interacting modes with a view to solidifying their mutual stylo-semantic connections.

To achieve the above, however, the knowledge in multimodal communication must be ingrained in that particular society or speech community. In other words, those who communicate 'multimodally' usually share a certain commonality of experience of the world and a mutual acceptance of some shared linguo-cultural values. This shared body of knowledge has a profound impact on mutual intelligibility as far as the use of memes is concerned.

3. Literature Review

In this section, we shall attempt to review a few scholarly works that focus on the interpretation of texts through multimodal means. Bakomitrou (2024) investigates the use of humour for strategic brand optimisation by an airline company on *Instagram*, a social medium. The author employs critical discourse analysis to interpret the type and style of humour deployed in one hundred memes to show themes that convey customer-friendliness as the core value of the brand identity. This is revealed in the brand's capitalisation on the potential of memes to foster consumer engagement and brand loyalty. Konyspay et al. (2025) use a multimodal CLIP (Contrastive Language-Image Pre-training) model to conduct a modality-similarity assessment on 6992 memes based on text and visual content. This unique model reveals, among other findings, that anger and joy are the dominant emotions in most memes. Again, it is stated that motivational memes elicit the strongest emotional responses from selected participants. This invariably establishes a direct synergy between text and images in the deconstruction of memes.

Again, Bury (2025) examines the intentional use of humour in internet memes, especially as it applies to the promotional and business sectors. It does this examination with the aid of puns, wordplay and cultural references, which are subjected to multimodal analyses using semiotic and humour theories. It is found that memes are potent digital resources that are remarkably vital for cultural rebranding in business and corporate engagements. Similarly, Ngan and Dung 2025 explore how the calculated admixture of images, textual overlays, and other semiotic resources relays metaphorical meanings. This is done through the purview of multimodal metaphor analysis, which reveals the underlying and embedded sporting, cultural and sentimental content of memes relating to the 2024 ASEAN Football Cup Final. The

engagements, according to the authors, fuel a deep appreciation of the importance of the meme as a digital tool that is both shareable and contemporarily dominant.

In the realm of politics, Adebomi (2020) and Ayub et al. (2022) both study the portrayal of political issues and personalities in internet memes. The celebration and excoriation of politically exposed persons is often the subject of memes, especially in times of elections and political hustings. While the former combines van Leeuwen's social semiotic model and Fairclough's socio-cultural method of critical discourse study the depiction of political figures in memes on Nigerian cyberspace between 2025 and 2019, the latter focuses on multimodal stylistic analysis of magazine covers that relay both political and diplomatic content. In Adebomi's (2025) argument, memes serve as an avenue for citizens to express their misgivings or approvals of government policies and discontent with personalities in power. She also submits that memes are digital artefacts that derive their essence from both cultural and contextual praxis and that they are purposely employed to propagate both personal and communal perceptions of all areas of national life, especially politics. This submission finds a similar voice in Ayub et al (2022), who apply multimodal discourse analysis to find that politicians and diplomats are represented and framed using colour schemes, visuals, and linguistic components on magazine covers that significantly reinforce the stereotypical and determined projections they seek to impose on readers.

Also, Hao (2024) studies the multimodal stylistic features that are peculiar to children's literature as a distinct genre. Through both qualitative and quantitative paradigms, the study highlights the foregrounded stylistic effects in the language, image, layout, colour, typography and the inter-semiotic relationships that are textually exhibited. It finds that material and relational processes are prominent features of the verbal mode, while the images are technically deployed to chronologically help the narrative in consonance with lexical properties. This is followed by Ma (2025), who uses Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar and Kress and Leeuwen's Visual Grammar (VG) to submit that font, layout, image and colour all contribute intermodal relationships for the overall construction of multimodal texts and that these elements are purposively foregrounded by language users to construct intended meanings.

In all the above instances, however, none has studied the deconstruction of myths in memes that are peculiar to the Nigerian situation. This is the gap this present research is determined to fill through a systematic analysis and interpretation of memes using the aforementioned theories in conjunction with the residual knowledge of contemporary Nigerian politics and socio-cultural dynamics.

4. Theoretical Framework

Visual grammar (VG) as explained by Riechers (2024) is the theoretical principle selected to guide the interpretation of data for this study. This shall be combined with Kress and Van Leeuwen's (2006) semiotic model that asserts that communication occurs across various modes. The choice of VG owes to its almost limitless ability to generate both intrinsic and extrinsic values in images. According to the theory, the basic purposes of images are to inform, entertain and intrigue. It basically means they serve similar purposes to language. In Riechers' words, images are used to *"inform by providing a visual corollary to what the author is writing about; they*

delight through aesthetic qualities that mirror the tone of the writing; and they intrigue by offering just enough mystery to pique the reader's curiosity and convince them to invest more time in the text" (2024; 10). Images act as graphical embellishment for both cognitive and interpretive corollary in textual studies. They enhance understanding by providing contextual and hallucinatory information on thoughts that are expressed by lexical items. Some scholars argue that readers often sense information from images far quicker than written words (Porter et al., 2014). This is communicated through colours, shapes and pictures.

Images, according to Riechers (2024), aid textual understanding through the conceptual strategies of symbolism, synecdoche, allegory, metaphor, analogy and iconography. These elements present comprehensive outlets through which memes could be understood within defined sociolinguistic parameters. While symbolism characteristically uses one thing to represent, stand for or suggest something else beyond the literal meaning (the crow, for example, in Stephen King's *The Dark Half* represents death), synecdoche, on its own path rhetorically, uses a part of something to stand in for the whole (Aso-Rock Villa, for example, is often used to describe the federal government of Nigeria). Allegory may refer to a tale, photograph, or other artistic trope that employs symbols to transmit a veiled or ulterior meaning, usually a moral or political one. The most famous example of this is George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, wherein the farm is used as a Bolshevik Russian.

Metaphors are used for comparisons; that is, they are employed to compare one thing with or to another (Bamigboye, 2023). A metaphor is used to convey the idea that two things are alike or share similar characteristics. The sentence 'The boy is a pig' metaphorically translates to his being dirty, among other connotative possibilities. Conversely, language users use the linguistic resource known as analogy to draw similarity between two things that are otherwise dissimilar. Riechers (2024) gives the example of the human brain as being wired like a computer's operating system. Here, comparisons are given contexts that provide the illuminating reasoning for the same. And finally, iconography is a variety or network of images used to convey cultural or historical context or symbolic meanings. An example of such is the snake that represents the devil in Christendom. All these conceptual paradigms shall be superimposed on the data for proper deductive analysis.

In addition to VG, however, Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) offer analytical help in using words to create meaning as motivated signs in social semiotics. Their arguments stem from the idea embedded in functional grammar that language serves a social purpose of transmitting meanings/signals in the overall interest of sustaining social relationships and continued interaction. They argue that images function like a language with their own "grammar," meaning they are structured systems of communication shaped by culture rather than random visuals. Using ideas from Halliday's social semiotics, they explain that images create meaning in three simultaneous ways: by representing the world (what is shown), by interacting with viewers (how the image positions and engages us), and by composing elements (how layout, colour, and focus guide interpretation). Overall, their central claim is that visual design actively constructs meaning, relationships, and ideology; and can, therefore, be systematically analysed just like written or spoken language.

5. Materials and Methods

The data for this study were purposively selected from the internet. Guided by the principles from the adopted theories, the researcher sieved through online resources like X (formerly *Twitter*), *Instagram*, and *TikTok*. A total of twenty memes, retrieved between January and March 2026, are used for the analysis to showcase the ingenuity of Nigerians in the deconstruction of long-held societal beliefs, mores and fads, celebration of uniquely Nigerian eccentricities and the satirical torpedoing of social aphorisms. The deliberate misreading of aphorisms, celebrations of vanities and misrepresentations of long-held communal beliefs are reflected in the data and the analysis.

5.1 Data Analysis

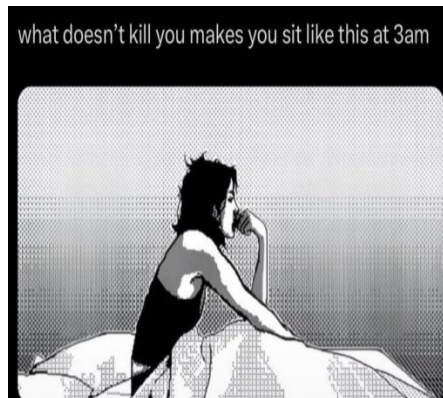
The data are categorised into four groups. The first group consists of memes that deal with the economic situation of Nigeria. The second contains memes on education, while the third reflects social issues. Lastly, the fourth group of memes is associated with self-deprecating jokes Nigerians play on themselves.



The first meme above presents a vivid representation of the dire economic straits most Nigerians have found themselves in since the Federal Government introduced the petroleum and national currency reforms of 2023. Here, a crocodile has a bundle of hundred-dollar bills between its upper and lower jaws while a short dialogue about the possibility of risking one's life to retrieve the money ends with the assurance of the Nigerian respondent that his will to get the tapped currency supersedes the crocodile's predatory instinct. Although laughable in the literal sense, this combination of pictorial and lexical depiction of austerity succinctly captures the extreme economic condition of most Nigerians and how far they are willing to go in changing their fortunes.



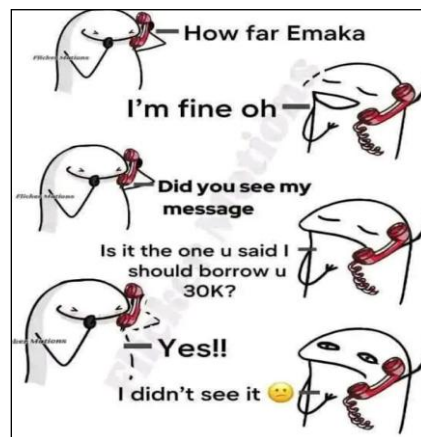
Again, the meme above showcases how petroleum products (especially gasoline) have become prohibitive to the average Nigerian. A stick is used to hold the fuel gauge of a car so that it would not be easily siphoned as it is used. Since the government removed the subsidy on gasoline, the price of the product has skyrocketed and with it the concomitant costs of transportation, feeding, housing and travel. Although neither mechanically possible nor scientifically reasonable, the attempt to support a car gauge with a stick in order for the fuel not to depreciate visually demonstrates the level of fiscal anxiety in the Nigerian populace.



The depressing outlook of the economy and the lack of hope and faith in its restoration present a gloomy outlook for most citizens, going by what is *memetically* expressed in the piece above. The internet is saturated with daily complaints of struggling parents and families, who have been hard done by, as a direct result of the fiscal policies of the government. The meme shows an adult female who is lost to depressive thoughts that have kept her awake at three o'clock in the morning.



Even though education is still greatly valued among a large section of Nigerians; however, it is not uncommon to find instances where the value of literacy is mocked when compared with financial stability. A weeping dog is presented with a sad face and is completed with the regret of the poster's earlier take on the more preferred between education and money. The idea is that the current economic situation of Nigeria has made the poster realise that money is more important than education. This, of course, is a satirical take on the contemporary Nigerian socio-economic landscape.



How hard times affect relationships is portrayed in the meme above. In a comical manner, a friend is seen deftly avoiding a monetary favour to another. The context concerns a debilitating pecuniary condition where the citizens have become so reluctant to part with the least amount of their heavily devalued legal tender. This lack of empathy is viewed as a phenomenon that has changed the communal disposition of a once loving and generous people. The tide, thus, could be likened to the emergence of a generation who sees life from the angle of the survival of the fittest.

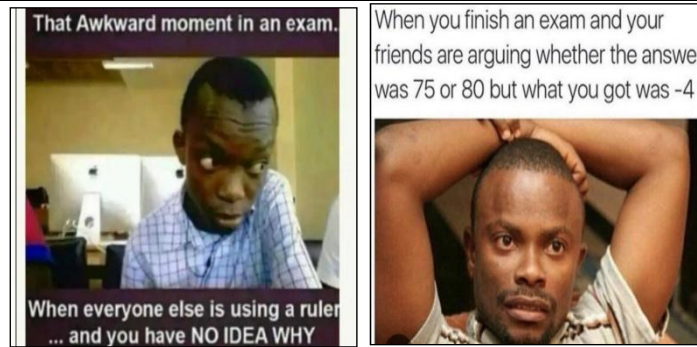
5.2 Education



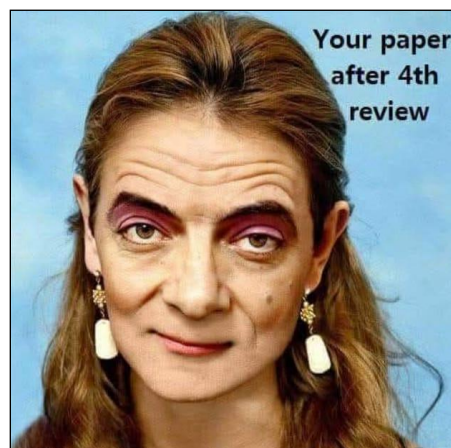
The way students and pupils fleece their otherwise uninformed parents by exaggerating school fees and other dues is a common topic among Nigerians on the internet. This idea is well illustrated in this meme where an elegantly dressed dog (who represents a parent) innocently exposes her ignorance and her ward's irresponsible behaviour at an interface with school administrators and teachers. Although depicted in a humorous fashion, the parents' obsession with sartorial elegance at the expense of proper monitoring of their children exposes the rot in the educational system.



The cynical smile on the face of the dog in the meme above aptly communicates the tendency of youth to mistake parental advice, training and admonition as unnecessary intrusion into their lives. The humour inherent in the image and the accompanying composition both relay an attitude that borders on exuberance and misplaced application of energy in youth, as seen in the prevalence of cultism and other violent acts on Nigerian campuses.



Also, the negligent attitude towards study and general lethargy among students are subjects of memetic ridicule and multimodal castigation. The subject matter of university examination reflects in the two memes above. The higher education environment ordinarily should set the tone of societal renewal and moral renaissance, but it has itself been caught in the pervasive corruption that has eaten deep into the fabric of society. This is fittingly showcased in the two memes above, where the two students are actually confused or oblivious of the central ideas in each of the examinations taking place. While the former sees a student having no idea why a ruler is essential to answering a particular question, the latter depicts a totally clueless student whose answer to a mathematics question is totally at variance with those of his more brilliant and academically committed colleagues.



The alteration of the original thought of researchers by some reviewers to the extent that the paper deviates from its original aim and objectives is represented by the altered picture of Rowan Atkinson, a famous British actor and comedian who appears as a female. This disfigured image of Atkinson, representing an academic article submitted for publication in a journal, is said to have been so altered that it has become barely recognisable from its original form in terms of content and style.

5.3 Social Issues



In the piece above, a man is seen drinking from a bottle of alcohol without holding it in his hands. The caption also corroborates the idea the picture communicates as a defiant reaction to a doctor's warning on the negative effects that the consumption of alcohol has on the human body. This goes beyond a comical resistance to beneficial advice from a physician; it also shows the levity with which people hold serious issues on healthy living and lifestyle choices.



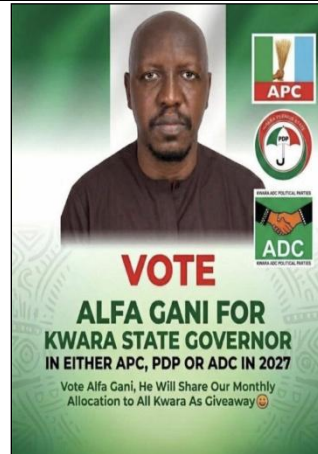
The levity with which some people treat their health also reflects in the way they take their personal safety and wellbeing for granted. In the above meme, an inebriate with swollen eyes wakes up to find that his personal effects luckily made it home with him from the previous night's drinking spree. The lexical accompaniment confirms the edgy living the man operates, which may probably resonate with the majority of internet users.



One of the major social ills in present-day Nigeria is body modification. This, maybe, stems from personal insecurities, peer pressure or the desire for fame and social approval. The spread of plastic surgery among Nigerian youth has led to some interventions to stop such. In the meme above, the poster compares a badly assembled plastic chair of different colours to mimic what he termed as plastic surgery. This meme mocks the social degeneracy that is known as body modification to showcase the inherent danger in it when done by quacks and unqualified people.



The penchant for exaggerating qualifications, potentials and achievements on many social media platforms is ridiculed in the meme above. The dog that chased a squirrel in reality is presented as having done the extraordinary on a particular social medium. This is a common phenomenon on the internet as people often over-accentuate their personal accomplishments for whatever reasons. The verbosity with which the natural, everyday act of a dog chasing a squirrel is written on the social medium shows the artificiality and superficiality that rule the corporate environment.



One of the major social issues in the Nigerian country is the way politics is played and the citizens' almost cynical reaction to the same. This pessimistic view of politics must have informed the poster of the meme above, where an aspirant hopes to win an elective post on the platform of three political parties. It mocks the common political practice in Nigeria where politicians move from one political party to another without regard to both ideology and the sensitivity of the voting public. It also frontally describes corrupting as the only manifesto of the aspirant; a cynical take on politicians and their insidious quest for the public till.

5.4 Self-Deprecation



In this self-deprecating meme, an 'employee' (a cat) is shown with teary eyes at his workstation while showing clear signs of sadness. It is a summation of the intense side of capitalism that purportedly drains the last ounce of energy from the working class. The conversation between the boss and the subordinate also lends credence to the daily frustration most Nigerian workers experience at their places of work.



This attitudinal disposition to the prevailing culture of entrepreneurship in corporate circles is communicated in this meme. It is a fast-paced, high-energy sector that spares no empathy for the weak. The picture of a dejected applicant (a dog) who has just been rejected is used to illustrate the disappointment many young graduates suffer in the course of job hunting. While it is communicated in a rather self-deprecating manner, it still establishes the daily struggle of the unemployed in the Nigerian job market.



A seemingly disgruntled baby is being held by the mother in the first meme above. With the look of disdain and disappointment pasted on the baby's face, the complementary words read 'I cannot understand what you're doing in Nigeria'. This humorously captures the way Nigerians lament the country's perennial underachievement amid its abundance in both human and material resources. The argument is that most babies would wish to be born elsewhere to enjoy quality social services that support both family and professional prospects. It is often said that Nigerians would rather laugh at the expense of themselves than allow others to mock them for their national inadequacies and shortcomings. This self-criticism and introspection among Nigerian nationals are always well depicted in their online engagements. The second meme, for example, shows the two major political parties in Nigeria cheating while 'playing' Nigerians. The underhand dealings of politicians and their hirelings, according to the meme, are oblivious to the 'innocent' masses who conscientiously engage these politicians with open minds, thinking they are co-players with integrity. The two men who face each other exchange dubious cards while the third player in the middle enjoys the game of cards, smiling with a bottle of wine as a distraction from the sneaky endeavours of his fellow players.



In the meme above, a despondent man with perspiration looks dejected and frustrated at the turn of events. He is portrayed as a student who has been moved away from his classmates whom he had planned to copy examination answers from. The meme rather heartily showcases a malaise in the educational sector and the self-deprecating manner same is viewed upon in the social media.

6. Discussion of Findings

From the analysis above, we have found that the memes communicate semiotic meanings which are ingrained in the Nigerian social fabric through the instrumentality of symbolism, synecdoche, allegory, metaphor, analogy and iconography. From the category on the economy, the five memes use metaphor, allegory and analogy to communicate multimodal meanings in both graphic and linguistic manners. The crocodile in the first meme metaphorically represents the desperate Nigerian who has battled economic misery and is ready to risk it all for money. The analogical illustration of the crocodile seizing a wad of money between its jaws and the sentential reading of the man poised to retrieve the money vividly captures this imagination of the allegorical person who has nothing to lose and is ready to do the seemingly unthinkable to better his lot. The meme reflects a sense of desperation in the mind of the average Nigerian who has been conditioned to take deadly steps in the hope of changing their fortunes. They take the extraordinary step of travelling through the Sahara *en routeto* Europe to make economic way for themselves and their families, while others resort to more devious acts of ritual and armed robbery to make money.

The second meme graphically illustrates hardship through the image of the stick to hold the fuel gauge from dropping. It's a synecdoche as the stick represents the citizens' recourse to more manual ways of transportation as a result of the deregulation of the oil sector, the removal of subsidy on petroleum products and the subsequent hike in the prices of same. It also metaphorically communicates the ingenuity of Nigerians as they attempt to navigate through the untold hardship the government reforms have brought on them. The third meme on economic hardship, on its own, communicates a mixture of insomnia and frustration at the gloomy fiscal conditions of Nigerians under the present government. The woman who sits up straight in bed represents many Nigerians across generations, religions, ethnicities and political affiliation. This synecdoche is a powerful communicative tool that resonates with many Nigerians who feel the same economic downturn in their own personal fortunes. The dark

nightwear symbolises gloom, and the hand-under-chin posture is analogous of a situation where there is little or no hope in sight for a turnaround.

The popular social take among Nigerians that education is more important than money is subtly ridiculed in the fourth meme on the economy. The crying image of a sad dog (representing Nigerians) is superimposed on the aforementioned aphorism. This multimodal representation successfully tries to upend and torpedo the long-held belief that education opens the pathway to wealth and comfort. It is done in a rather comical way which, nonetheless, symbolises the reasoning of the new generation of Nigerians who have become disillusioned with the realities of graduates without jobs and the saturation of the political space and offices by averagely educated politicians. The idea that this meme communicates is that it attempts to show a rethinking of values among new-breed Nigerians who may not be so much enamoured of the previously held beliefs of the preceding generations.

In the fifth meme on the Nigerian economy, findings reveal that relationships are being affected by the harsh economic outlook. The zig-zag manner in which the lexical items are composed and the facial mannerisms of the interlocutors in that communicative exchange are illustrative of the toll the fiscal policies of the government are taking on families and friends. The two communicators represent the many families and social partnerships that are affected by the monetary glut in the Nigerian fiscal environment.

The second group of means are categorised under education. In the sixth meme, the analogy of the uneducated but rich parents and the irreverent pupil who takes advantage of the parents' illiteracy to obtain money from them is reinforced. The dog represents the unlettered parent who is resplendently appalled but lacks education. It is symbolic of the generation of female Nigerians who could not benefit from formal education but know the value of same. It also communicates the allegorical tale of the prodigal ward, who is soon found out while engaged in corrupt practices at the expense of his parents. This also metaphorically represents the corrupt tendencies of the average Nigerian who may be conditioned to exploit the vulnerabilities of others for self-gain.

The seventh meme contains the image of a cynical dog with a mischievous grin. This is adorned with lexical items that communicate the idea that the eerie smile on the dog's face belies the evil intent within. This analogy fits the common narrative of parents not noticing the behavioural changes in their children until it is too late. The dog is a metaphor for the recalcitrant youth or student who pretends to be harmless at home but becomes dangerous in school. The meme is a socially important survey on parental responsibility and delinquency among pupils.

In the eighth and ninth memes, the two pictures show students who are ill-prepared for their respective examinations. The first one looks askance and confused. While others use rulers to attempt a question, he is puzzled as to the reason for the same. The sweaty demeanour also highlights the graphic manifestation of pressure and fear. This is analogous to the contemporary academic realities of many students. In the second meme also, the subject is seen with arms raised above his head (a symbolic gesture of ill luck, calamity or bad experience in many Nigerian cultures) and a capricious frown. The linguistic accompaniments in the two memes cement their metaphorical rendition of failing-to-plan leading to planning-to-fail among Nigerian university students.

The tenth meme recounts the face of a comedy giant. The iconoclastic use of this comedic icon lends further credence to the meme's creative and communicative value. The picture of Rowan Atkinson is altered to showcase a massive alteration of his masculine traits. The additional trope indicates the way academic articles may eventually come out after much editorial review. This is used to metaphorically symbolise the erasure of authorial thought; that is, the original look of the academic paper before editorial inputs.

In the third group, some social commentaries are run on topical issues like politics and wellness. The eleventh meme depicts a derisive take on alcoholism. A man is seen drinking from a bottle while his hands are by his side. The linguistic composition reveals the reason behind the act: his doctor warned him to 'touch' alcohol again. Beyond the witty manner in which this meme is designed, it also conveys the attitudinal disposition of young Nigerians to wise sayings, aphorisms and the do-good attitude of older generations of Nigerians. These value-inducing sayings are routinely mocked, ridiculed, interrogated and deconstructed. The motif perhaps may be recreational or downright fundamental to their own guiding ethos. A similar theme is reiterated in the twelfth meme where an anthropomorphic creature searches for personal items on the floor after a night of revelry. The specific image used in this context is analogous to the visage of the drunken man. It resonates with the community of young adults who are deemed to have more laxity and freedom, which some may term reckless.

The topic of plastic surgery in the thirteenth meme is metaphorical in orientation and allegorical in substance. It compares the result of cosmetic medical intervention to that of a misaligned chair which is cobbled together from various sources without regards to aesthetics. It also restates the common and popular idea of the inviolability of the original form of a person, entity or object whose wholesomeness could never be replicated the moment it is tampered with.

In the fourteenth meme, the difference between reality and social media projection is communicated with the same image of a single dog. However, the compositional elements that depict the actual action of chasing a squirrel in the social media variant are symbolic and showcase the verbosity and exaggerated glamour with which basic tasks are couched or described online. This deliberate act of using colourful language to describe menial jobs is metaphorically characterised in this meme. It subtly ridicules the pretentious sophistication of some professionals whose skills may not readily be commensurate with the virtual profiles they create for themselves. The pictures of the dog in both instances serve to situate the real within the parameters of the imagined.

The fifteenth meme is a social commentary on the political fluidity of politicians in Nigeria. The picture of a politician is presented with the colour brands of three political parties serving as the background. The words written on it indicate that voters should vote for the particular candidate in either this or that party. This obvious confusion is politically iconoclastic in a way that calls attention to itself. The meme obviously projects the way Nigerian politicians defect from party to party in the hope of realising their ambitions. There is even the promise of sharing monthly allocations meant for developmental projects to all the constituents. This combination of pictorial and lexical modes succinctly projects a comprehensive meaning that borders on the penchant for the ludicrous and perhaps unethical in Nigerian political circles.

The last category of memes contains the ones that are self-deprecating. Memes number sixteen and seventeen are deployed to highlight the issues of unemployment, underemployment

and the unrelenting pace of the business environment. Themes of depression and frustration are expressed in the images and linguistic compositions of the two memes. The stricture in corporate opportunities and the high and pernicious unemployment rates in Nigeria are sentimentally relayed through the multimodal framework of memes. Both memes are forms of synecdoche as the entities therein represent the overused and underpaid worker as well as the average job-seeker.

The eighteenth and nineteenth memes are comically used to depict the attitude of Nigerians towards the country's socio-political challenges. While a baby in the former curiously asks the mother the reason for her continued stay in the country, the Nigerian voter in the latter is dutifully absorbed in his business while the politicians he is dealing with cheat to win. The baby's cynical look betrays a wanton desire to be rid of the country. This is connotatively related to the mass emigration of young adults from the country. Also, the innocuous Nigerian is portrayed as unaware of the shenanigans of those with whom he is playing. This is a representation of the Nigerian situation where politics is seen as a game to be won by crooked means.

Finally, the twentieth meme describes the forlorn look of a student whose plan to rely on other students in an examination has been truncated. The unpreparedness easily leads to apprehension, as evident in the perspiration covering him. The meme communicates metaphorical, analogical as well as allegorical values in the rendition of a major social malaise in the form of examination malpractices.

These findings validate McGann's (1991) expression of a 'laced network' which was used to describe the interconnectivity of the agents and resources involved in the production of the text (from the writer to the graphic designer to the image illustrator to the editor and the reader as well) as fully involved in a bubble of closed interactions that transcend both the linguistic and the pictorial to give interpretative meaning to semiotic stimulus. Both graphic and written texts combine to give informed meanings which are superimposed on the interpretative mechanism of readers.

Again, we found Riechers' (2024: xi) submission that while 'careless image choices' may seek to 'minimise the force of the written text and may sometimes work at cross-purposes to its intended message thereby sabotaging the author's best intentions and weakening their intellectual position', carefully-selected images, on the other hand, capture attention, pique curiosity, reel readers in, and encourage them to be attentively immersed in the text.

7. Conclusion

From the present study, it has become tenable that the use of memes transcends the political to the jocular, academic/educational, religious and the social to the downright comical. People use memes to communicate their feelings and emotions, which they believe only words cannot fully capture. They are employed to carry, reinforce and reiterate total meanings that may not be conveniently captured by lexical items alone. Their uses are often tailored towards the rendition of socially ingrained meanings that are heavily influenced by integration into a particular culture, sub-culture or social movement. In other words, posters and readers of memes must have some shared residual knowledge and certain commonalities of experience for the

successful depictions in memes and their author-intended interpretations to take place. This aligns with the position of Pillière (2014: 114) who submits that 'socio-cultural factors play an integral part in the visual mode and also need to be included in any multimodal analysis'. The study concludes that although the findings in the present research may be remarkable, further studies need to be carried out on the use of a multimodal approach in language and communication studies.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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