

MULTIMODAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF THE IMPACT OF POLITICAL MEMES ON PUBLIC OPINION IN NIGERIA ON X (TWITTER)

Jane Chinelo Obasi

Department of English and Literary Studies, University of Nigeria, Nigeria
jane.obasi@unn.edu.ng

Goodness Chinecherem Muochukwu

Department of English and Literary Studies, University of Nigeria, Nigeria
muochukwugoodness@gmail.com

&

Chinasa Abonyi

Department of English and Literary Studies, University of Nigeria, Nigeria
chinasa.abonyi@unn.edu.ng

Abstract

This study examines how political memes on X (formerly Twitter) shape public opinion and civic engagement within Nigeria's digital political landscape. Using qualitative multimodal discourse analysis and purposive sampling, the study analyses 15 political memes circulated during key political events, drawing on Kress and van Leeuwen's *Grammar of Visual Design* (2006) to interpret their visual, textual, and symbolic elements. Focusing on the multimodal features of the memes rather than individual users, the findings reveal that memes, often framed through humour and satire, embed ideological cues and emotional appeals that influence public perception and political participation. Visual features such as layout, colour, facial expressions, and symbolism further reinforce or challenge dominant political narratives.

Keywords: Political Memes, Visual Grammar Theory, X (twitter), Public Opinion, Multimodal Discourse Analysis

Introduction

In the contemporary digital era, communication has undergone a profound transformation, with internet memes emerging as a dominant form of online expression. Once dismissed as trivial or humorous distractions, memes now function as complex cultural artefacts that blend satire, commentary, and visual storytelling. In Nigeria, this transformation is particularly evident on platforms such as X (Twitter), Instagram, and WhatsApp, where memes have become powerful tools for navigating political tensions, critiquing leadership, and expressing public sentiment. Their rapid circulation across these platforms reflects their growing influence in shaping public discourse within Nigeria's politically charged and socially dynamic environments.

The term meme was first introduced by the British evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins in *The Selfish Gene* (1976), where he defined it as “a unit of cultural transmission, or a unit of imitation,” derived from the Greek word *mimeme*. Dawkins likened memes to genes in their ability to replicate and evolve through cultural contexts (Dawkins, 1976). In the Nigerian context, this evolutionary nature is evident in how memes adapt to local political events, cultural idioms, and societal frustrations. Building on Dawkins' foundational concept, Rani (2025) argues that memes have evolved into a form of modern literary satire, an observation that resonates strongly in Nigeria, where memes often critique societal norms, corruption, and governance through irony, parody, and intertextuality.

Rathi and Jain (2024), in their systematic review, position memes as vehicles for collective ideology, a role they visibly play in Nigeria by reflecting and reinforcing shared beliefs within online communities. Galip (2024) further conceptualises memes as communicative artefacts embedded within specific cultural and political ecosystems, an apt description of Nigeria's digital landscape, where memes are shaped by local languages, ethnic identities, and political affiliations.

Political memes have become a salient feature of Nigeria's online discourse, frequently targeting government in efficiency, electoral malpractice, and public figures. From satirical depictions of fuel scarcity to viral memes mocking political gaffes, these digital expressions serve as both catharsis and critique. Anderau and Barbarrusa (2024) offer a functionalist account of political memes, identifying eight key characteristics: humour, in-group identity, caricature, replicability, context collapse, hermeneutical resources, low reputational cost, and signalling that underscore their rhetorical and

These traits are clearly observable in Nigerian meme culture, where users creatively remix political events and scandals into viral content that resonates across ethnic and generational lines. Lynch (2025) complements this view by emphasising how political memes in Nigeria provoke dialogue, affirm group identities (such as #EndSARS activists or pro-government supporters), and foster communities of dissent, thereby transcending mere entertainment to become instruments of civic resistance.

Public opinion, a foundational concept in democratic governance, is increasingly shaped by digital expressions in Nigeria. Howe and Krosnick (2022) define public opinion as “opinions on matters of public debate that have significant implications for society, (p. 104)” and explore how it is influenced by cognitive biases, emotional triggers, and media narratives. In Nigeria, where traditional media is often perceived as compromised or state-aligned, social media platforms have emerged as alternative arenas for public deliberation. Kumar (2023) traces the evolution of public opinion from Enlightenment thought to contemporary governance. Writing for *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, W. Phillips Davidson defines public opinion as “an aggregate of the individual views, attitudes, and beliefs about a particular topic, expressed by a significant proportion of a community,” and underscores its role in legitimising policy and ensuring governmental accountability (Davidson, 2025). In Nigeria, political memes play a significant role in this process by amplifying grassroots voices and challenging dominant narratives, particularly during election cycles and national crises.

This current study adopts Kress and van Leeuwen's Grammar of Visual Design (2006) as its theoretical framework. Their approach provides a systematic method for decoding how visual elements, such as composition, salience, framing, and modality, interact with textual components to construct meaning in the Nigerian context, where memes often blend Pidgin English, local proverbs, and culturally specific imagery, this framework enables a deeper understanding of how visual grammar shapes ideological messaging, emotional resonance, and audience interpretation.

Accordingly, this study explores the intersection of meme culture and public opinion in Nigeria, examining how political memes on X (Twitter) influence civic awareness, ideological alignment, and digital activism. Through the application of Kress and van Leeuwen's visual grammar within a qualitative multimodal discourse analysis, the research aims to contribute to the understanding of digital political communication and the evolving dynamics of public engagement in the Nigerian contexts.

Although numerous studies have examined the cultural, rhetorical, and ideological dimensions of political memes, few have explored how audiences interpret and respond to them, particularly within Nigeria's digital public sphere. Prior research has largely focused on the construction of memes and their symbolic functions. For example, Adkar (2022) and Lestari et al. (2023) analysed memes as tools of cultural expression and satire, while Hakoköngäsetal. (2020) and Huanget al.(2025) examined their ideological and cross-cultural roles. investigated memes as instruments of protest and political commentary, with Okonkwo (2024) and Unuabonah and Oyebode (2021) highlighting civic engagement and dissent.

Despite these contributions, limited attention has been paid to how political memes shape public opinion, civic awareness, and participation, especially on platforms like X (Twitter) , where immediacy and interactivity influence discourse. To the best of the researcher's knowledge, this remains an underexplored area in Nigerian scholarship. This study addresses that gap by applying qualitative multimodal discourse analysis, grounded in Kress and van Leeuwen's visual grammar, to examine how political memes on X (Twitter) influence ideological alignment and civic engagement in Nigeria's digital political landscape.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is to carry out a multimodal discourse analysis on political memes shared on X (Twitter) and how they impact public opinion, particularly focusing on their representational, interactive and compositional meaning. Specifically, the objectives are to:

- i) identify and analyse the multimodal elements embedded in selected Nigerian political memes on X (Twitter);
- ii) examine how representational, interactional, and compositional meanings are constructed in selected Nigerian political memes using Kress and van Leeuwen's Grammar of Visual Design; and
- iii) analyse how the multimodal features of selected Nigerian political memes construct, reflect, and negotiate public opinion on political issues in Nigeria.

Studies on Internet Memes

The exploration of internet memes as multimodal texts has gained scholarly attention in recent years, particularly in their role as instruments of humour, identity construction, and sociopolitical commentary. Within this context, Adkar (2022) investigates the multimodal nature of internet humour through a qualitative analysis of 15 memes sourced from Twitter and Instagram. The study integrates Humour Theory and Cultural Framing to interpret both visual and

textual components of the memes, illustrating how language and imagery function as tools for cultural expression and social critique within the Indian digital landscape. The findings reveal that internet humour is constructed through symbolic visuals such as icons and images, and verbal elements that reflect grammatical and pragmatic meaning.

While the study share same thodological interest with the present research inits attention to multimodal discourse, its focus remains on entertainment and cultural humour, lacking a systematic semiotic structure. The current study addresses this gap by applying Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) Grammar of Visual Design to political memes, offering a more structured semiotic framework and shifting the thematic scope to socio political discourse within the Nigerian X (Twitter) space.

Lestari et al. (2023) analysed 25 meme sets circulated on Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter. The study employs Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis to examine both pictorial and textual satire, identifying satire asa dominant rhetorical strategy used to critique political corruption, social behaviours, and digital norms. Although the study adopts a multimodal orientation similar to the present research, it differs in its broad thematics cope across cultural and educational domains. The current study narrows its focus to political discourse and public opinion formation, applying Kress and van Leeuwen's Grammar of Visual Design to provide a context-specific ideological analysis.

Using social semiotic theory, Hakoköngäs et al. (2020) examine the rhetorical and ideological functions of political memes circulated by two far-right groups in Finland-First and the Soldiers of Odin. The study is based on a data set of 426 memes posted on Facebook between 2015 and 2017 using a qualitative approach grounded in Kress and van Leeuwen's social semiotic framework. Their findings reveal that bitter humour, historical symbolism, and mythological motifs were strategically employed to construct persuasive political narratives that reflect the ideological stance of the groups. While the study shares a theoretical foundation with the present research, the focus was on meme production and thematic categorisation. The current study, however, shifts emphasis to audience interpretation and the sociopolitical impact of political memes on public opinion within the Nigerian digital space.

Drawing on multimodal discourse analysis, Huang et al. (2025) investigate the emergence of cross-language internet memes within the broader context of globalised digital communication. The study is based on 30 representative samples

sourced from various social media platforms. A mixed-methods approach was adopted, combining qualitative semiotic analysis with quantitative user perception data processed using SPSS. The findings demonstrate that cross-language memes serve as dynamic multimodal texts that facilitate identity construction and shared humour across cultures through linguistic blending and visual creativity. Although the study shares a theoretical alignment with the present research, it differs in scope and methodology. Huang et al. emphasise structural hybridity and audience reception through a mixed-methods lens, whereas the current study applies a qualitative multimodal framework to explore how political memes shape sociopolitical perception and discourse in Nigeria.

In another related research, Mahfouz (2022) offers a focused multimodal discourse analysis of Ethiopian political memes shared within the Facebook group Ethiopian vs. Egyptian Meme War. A total of 50 memes were purposively selected and analysed using a qualitative thematic approach, with attention to visual composition, textual elements, and cultural references. The study reveals that memes functioned not only as humorous artefacts but also as persuasive texts that reinforced collective sentiment and political positioning in the context of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) dispute. While both studies apply social semiotic theory and multimodal discourse analysis, Mahfouz centres on the symbolic encoding of political identity. In contrast, the current study prioritises audience reception and perception, focusing on how political memes influence public opinion within the Nigerian socio-political environment.

Political Memes and Public Opinion in Nigeria

In recent years, election cycles and periods of political unrest have witnessed a surge in digital political expression, particularly through internet memes. Platforms such as X (Twitter) have emerged as fertile grounds for meme circulation, enabling users to remix, share, and comment on political content in real time. Studies have shown that memes possess the capacity to influence public opinion by simplifying complex issues and amplifying ideological narratives. Drawing upon this context, Adebomi (2025) provides a compelling examination of internet memes as tools of political protest during Nigeria's 2023 pre-election crisis. Employing a qualitative methodology that combines multimodal discourse analysis with critical discourse analysis, the study purposively sampled and analysed 40 memes circulated on Facebook and WhatsApp. In the analysis, the researcher draws on the theoretical contributions of Fairclough and van Dijk to explore how visual and textual elements construct meaning, represent social actors, and express ideological resistance. The findings reveal that memes employed symbolic imagery, satire, and intertextual references to express public frustration, critique government policies, and mobilise

dissent. These memes constructed negative portrayals of state institutions and reflected ideological resistance, demonstrating how digital media can amplify socio-political discontent. Whilst the reviewed study is crisis-oriented, focusing on memes as reactive expressions of public discontent, the current study adopts a more engagement-oriented lens, using similar analytical tools to investigate how memes shape civic awareness and stimulate political participation.

In a research work where memes were investigated as a form of political satire and engagement, Oyemade and Adeagbo (2020) present a qualitative multimodal analysis of eight Instagram memes, four each from the presidential campaigns of Muhammadu Buhari and Atiku Abiodun. By employing a multimodal approach, the authors integrated Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) Social Semiotics to decode visual grammar, alongside van Dijk's (1998) Critical Discourse Analysis to interrogate ideological positioning and power relations. Their findings identified two dominant discursive strategies: positive self-presentation by Buhari's campaign to reinforce continuity and stability, and negative other-presentation by Atiku's campaign to critique the incumbent and highlight perceived failures. Visual elements such as facial expressions, gestures, and colour schemes were shown to reinforce these ideological stances, rendering the memes both emotionally evocative and politically strategic.

The current study shares methodological and theoretical similarities to examine meme discourse. However, both studies diverge in scope and platform. Whilst the reviewed study concentrates on campaign-driven ideological framing, the present research explores how memes influence public opinion and create civic awareness.

The study provides a compelling analysis of how memes functioned as grassroots in political commentary during the 2023 general elections. Okonkwo (2024) analysed a purposive sample of 30 memes sourced from Instagram and X (Twitter) between January and March 2023 by employing a multimodal discourse analysis framework, integrating Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) visual grammar and Fairclough's (1995) critical discourse theory. Her findings reveal that memes served not merely as entertainment but as strategic rhetorical tools for civic engagement and political dissent. The memes analysed were rich in visual symbolism, textual irony, and intertextual references, often targeting political figures and institutions. The reviewed study aligns with the current study, particularly through its application of multimodal discourse analysis and its reliance on Kress and van Leeuwen's framework.

Okonkwo's work focuses on the construction and rhetorical strategies of memes, emphasising the intentions of their creators and the visual-textual techniques employed to critique political authority. In contrast, the current study shifts the analytical lens towards audience reception, examining how these memes influence public opinion, shape ideological alignments, and potentially mobilise political engagement.

Unuabonah and Oyeboode (2021) provide a critical exploration of how Nigerian internet memes circulated during the COVID-19 pandemic served as tools of political protest. Their study, based on 40 purposively sampled memes shared on WhatsApp, employs a qualitative multimodal critical discourse analysis, integrating elements of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to uncover underlying ideological positions and power relations. Their findings revealed a consistent pattern of negative representation of state actors and resistance to anti-welfarist ideologies. Central themes identified include corruption, insecurity, hunger, and governmental failure. Memes in this context were not merely expressive but strategically crafted to project dissent and challenge dominant narratives surrounding the pandemic response.

The study aligns closely with the current research in methodology and theory. However, whilst Unuabonah and Oyeboode focus on meme content within the pandemic context and the private circulation of memes on WhatsApp, the current study expands the scope by examining public opinion formation on X (Twitter).

In the role of meme as a tool for political engagement, Adebomi (2025) presents a detailed examination of how internet memes were employed to construct and promote political identity during Nigeria's 2023 presidential election. Drawing upon a multimodal framing analysis, the researcher purposively selected and analysed 40 memes supporting Peter Obi and the "Obidient" movement. In the analysis, the researcher integrates Kress and van Leeuwen's visual grammar with Kuypers' framing theory to explore how visual and textual elements were strategically framed to mobilise support and challenge dominant political narratives. The findings reveal that the memes were framed to elevate Peter Obi's image as a reformist and credible alternative to the political establishment. Through visual contrasts, intertextual references, and satirical juxtapositions, particularly in the "What we ordered vs. what we got" meme format, the memes critiqued existing leadership and reinforced the ideological stance of the Obidient movement. The study further argues that the memes are not merely entertainment, but strategic tools that actively shape political discourse by branding identity, fostering solidarity, and mobilising support among digitally engaged youth. Methodologically, the study aligns with the current research in its application of multimodal discourse analysis and its focus on visual political communication. However, whilst the reviewed study centres on meme construction and ideological framing, the present study extends the inquiry to audience reception and public opinion formation within the X (Twitter) ecosystem.

These reviews of previous studies are among the few that have been examined in relation to the current study. Collectively, they provide a foundational basis for the current research, which examines the multimodal

discourse analysis of the impact of political memes on public opinion in Nigeria on X (Twitter). Whilst prior research has explored internet memes across various cultural and political contexts, there remains a noticeable gap in studies focusing specifically on how political memes influence public opinion in Nigeria, particularly on platforms such as X (Twitter). The current study aims to fill this gap by analysing the multimodal structure and audience reception of selected political memes, drawing on the framework of Kress and van Leeuwen's grammar of visual design. The analysis uncovers how memes effectively convey complex political messages and elucidates their role in shaping public opinion and political discourse. In addition, it contributes to a deeper understanding of the interaction between language, visual communication, and civic engagement in the context of Nigeria's evolving digital democracy.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) Grammar of Visual Design as its theoretical framework, offering a systematic lens through which visual communicative elements on X (Twitter) can be identified, categorised, and meaningfully interpreted.

Kress and van Leeuwen's Grammar of Visual Design

This study is grounded in Kress and van Leeuwen's Grammar of Visual Design, which serves as the principal analytical framework. The Grammar of Visual Design originated from the collaborative work of Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen, first published in *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design* (1996), and later revised in 2006 to reflect developments in digital media and multimodal communication. Drawing inspiration from Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (1978), Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) extended linguistic meta functions into the visual domain, proposing that images, like language, are structured to perform representational, interactive, and compositional functions. Their work emerged in response to a growing recognition that visual communication plays a central role in meaning-making, particularly in media, education, and political discourse. Prior to this, visual texts were often analysed descriptively or aesthetically, without a formalised grammar. Kress and van Leeuwen's contribution was to systematise visual analysis, offering a framework that accounts for how images construct meaning through culturally embedded codes and conventions.

The framework has since been widely adopted and adapted. Scholars such as Machin (2007) and Jewitt (2009) have built upon its foundations to explore visual semiotics in advertising, classroom pedagogy, and digital media. Bateman (2014), while acknowledging its utility, argues for a more genre-sensitive approach, noting that visual grammar must be flexible enough to accommodate narrative structures and technological mediation. Despite these critiques, the Grammar of Visual Design remains a cornerstone of multimodal discourse analysis.

According to Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), visual communication operates through three metafunctions:

i) Representational Metafunction

This metafunction concerns what is depicted in a visual text, including the participants, settings, and actions being represented. In the context of Nigerian political memes on X (Twitter), this often includes politicians, national symbols, protest imagery, or satirical caricatures. These visuals are rarely neutral; they are ideologically loaded and strategically selected to evoke specific interpretations. For instance, a meme portraying a political figure with exaggerated facial expressions or juxtaposed with symbols of corruption directly communicates criticism or distrust. Through such representational choices, meme creators succinctly express complex political sentiments, reinforcing or challenging dominant narratives within Nigerian sociopolitical discourse.

ii) Interactive Metafunction

The interactive metafunction addresses the relationship between the image and its viewer. It involves elements such as gaze, social distance, and point of view, which shape how audiences engage with the visual content. On X (Twitter), political memes in Nigeria often employ direct gaze, close-up shots, or confrontational framing to simulate intimacy or provoke reaction. For example, a meme featuring a politician looking directly at the viewer may create a sense of accusation or demand accountability. The modality of the image, whether realistic, stylised, or exaggerated, also influences how seriously the message is taken. High-modality visuals (e.g., unedited photos from protests) may assert urgency or authenticity, while low-modality memes (e.g., cartoons or filters) often signal satire or ridicule. These interactive strategies are central to how political memes mobilise public sentiment and foster alignment or dissent.

iii) Compositional Metafunction

This metafunction concerns how visual elements are arranged to create coherence, emphasis, and narrative flow. It includes principles such as information value (left-right/top-bottom placement), salience (what draws attention), and framing (how elements are grouped or isolated). On X (Twitter), political memes in Nigeria often use bold text overlays, colour contrast, and strategic cropping to foreground key messages. For instance, a meme might place a politician's image on the right (the "new" or "given" information zone) alongside a sarcastic caption on the left (the "known" or "problem" space), guiding viewers toward a critical interpretation. Salient features, such as red text, emojis, or exaggerated gestures, can also amplify the meme's rhetorical force, ensuring it captures attention in a crowded digital space. These compositional choices are not merely aesthetic; they are deliberate acts of persuasion that shape how political messages are received and circulated. Various studies have applied Kress and van Leeuwen's grammar of visual design to explore how visual communication shapes meaning in digital political discourse.

For example, Adebomi (2025) examined protest memes during Nigeria's 2023 pre-election crisis, using the framework to decode how compositional and representational strategies conveyed dissent and mobilised youth. Bulatovic (2022) applied visual grammar to European populist memes, revealing how salience and framing reinforced ideological narratives. Hakoköngäs, Halmesvaara, and Sakki (2020) used the model to study far-right memes in Finland, showing how gaze and layout constructed exclusionary identities. Taken together, these studies highlight the broad usefulness of Kress and van Leeuwen's framework in examining visual political communication, showing that the meaning behind memes is influenced by their social context, how audiences interact with them, and the way different design elements are combined, often achieving more than just entertainment or satire.

The significance of Kress and van Leeuwen's Grammar of Visual Design to this study lies in its capacity to both categorise visual elements and interpret their communicative functions within multimodal texts. By applying their metafunctional framework, the study systematically examined how political memes on X (Twitter) encode meaning, engage viewers, and structure visual narratives. These metafunctions enable the identification of design strategies used by Nigerian X (Twitter) users to express political critique, mobilise sentiment, and influence public opinion. The framework thus serves as both a descriptive tool and a critical lens for understanding how visual discourse operates as a form of political engagement and social commentary in digital spaces.

Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research design, guided by Kress and van Leeuwen's grammar of visual design. A qualitative research design was considered most suitable, given its capacity to examine the subtle interplay between visual and textual elements in multimodal compositions. The framework provides a systematic analysis for decoding how meaning is constructed through visual semiotic resources. By analysing memes through the lens of representational, interactive, and compositional meta functions, the study seeks to understand how visual structures encode political identity, convey ideological positions, and engage audiences. This design facilitates a deeper examination of memes not merely as humorous artefacts, but as strategic rhetorical tools that shape public discourse and stimulate civic engagement in online spaces.

Data Collection and Sampling

The dataset comprises 15 political memes purposively selected from 15 publicly accessible X (Twitter) handles extracted between June 2025 and October 2025; @PIDOMNIGERIA, @LettertoJack, @AprokoDoctor, @Savvy Rinu, @Chude, @OgbeniDipo, AishaYesufu, @FSYusuf, @Morris Monye, @firstladyship, @AyoBankole, @DrOlufunmilayo, @MaziIbe_, @Nefertiti,

@MrMacaronii, and **@ZikokoMemes**. The focus of the study was not on individual X (Twitter) users but on the multimodal features of the meme themselves, such as visual elements, textual overlays, and accompanying tweet captions.

A purposive sampling technique was employed to identify tweets that featured political memes with high engagement (likes, retweets, and comments using Hashtags such as **#NigeriaDecides**, **#Tinubu**, **#PeterObi**, **#Buhari**, **#iStandWithJega**, **#Obidients**, and **#Emilokan**), ensuring that the selected content had visibility and influence within the Nigerian digital public sphere. This method ensured that the selected data were relevant, ample, and well-suited for analysis, offering deep insights into how political memes were utilised and understood as instruments of influence, humour, and identity expression in Nigeria's digital political landscape.

Method of Data Analysis

The data collected from the selected memes were analysed, guided by Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) *Grammar of Visual Design*. This method entailed a structured analysis of visual and textual components to uncover, classify, and understand recurring features that contribute to the construction of humour in digital media. Each analysis focused on the instances of Representational Metafunction, Interactive Metafunction, and Compositional Metafunction. Each meme was carefully reviewed and coded according to these categories. The qualitative method provided detailed accounts and a deep understanding of how visual and textual elements work together to convey meaning, express social critique, and shape how audiences perceive content in casual digital interactions.

Data Presentation

The analysis is guided by Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) *Grammar of Visual Design*, which offers a systematic framework for decoding the representational, interactive, and compositional meanings identified within the memes.

Table 1: Multimodal Elements in the Selected Nigeria Political Memes on X (Twitter)

Nigeria Political Memes (See APPENDIX for a clearer images)	Multimodal Elements (Visual, Textual, Graphics and Layout)
Figure 1: Meme featuring Nnamdi Kanu in court	Visual: Close-up photo of Nnamdi Kanu with eyes closed and hands raised, flanked by a lawyer in a courtroom setting. Textual: Caption includes hashtags and statements like "@GovNiger doesn't obey court orders. Nigeria is a failed state." Graphics: High photographic realism; emotional expression; symbolic inversion of courtroom justice. Layout: Intimate framing; contrast between image and text; emphasis on hashtags for virality.
Figure 2: Meme of shocked woman reacting to Peter Obi tweet	Visual: Image of a shocked young woman with wide mouth and expressive eyes. Textual: Sarcastic caption referencing Peter Obi's 2013 tweet; rhetorical question in Nigerian Pidgin. Graphics: Reaction template; exaggerated emotion; humour through facial expression. Layout: Juxtaposition of image and text; contrast between visual shock and textual irony.
Figure 3: Meme of older man in turban smiling	Visual: Stylised portrait of Attahiru Jega with calm expression. Textual: Declarative caption supporting electoral integrity; hashtag #iStandwithJega. Graphics: Red background symbolising energy; heroic framing.
Figure 4: Meme of Older man in turban.	Layout: Central figure; balanced text overlay; campaign-poster style composition. Visual: Older man in blue turban smiling sarcastically; direct gaze. Textual: rhetorical question. Graphics: High modality realism ironic re-coding of smile. Layout: Close distance framing intimate viewer connection
Figure 5: Meme of Nnamdi Azikiwe recontextualized	Visual: Historical photo of Nnamdi Azikiwe with outward gaze. Textual: Caption in informal tone: "coz why did Zik want..."; Graphics: High modality image; stereotype construction. Layout: Central image; caption below as "new information"; visual salience.

Figure 6: Meme of Nnamdi Kanu seated formally	Visual: Nnamdi Kanu seated in formal attire with direct gaze. Textual: Caption referencing “one man’s meat is another man’s poison”; rhetorical question. Graphics: Neutral background; contrast between calm pose and charged text. Layout: Balanced composition; figure centred; caption below.
Figure 7: Meme of Buhari covering his face (Barbie trend)	Visual: President Buhari covering his face in despair. Textual: Reference to Barbie meme trend; ironic caption: "When will they do 'this Barbie is tired of life'". Graphics: Realistic image; gesture of emotional retreat. Layout: Close shot; obscured face; pop culture contrast.
Figure 8: Meme of animal wearing Emilokan cap	Visual: Animal with indifferent expression wearing “Emilokan” cap. Textual: Caption in Nigerian Pidgin mocking political seriousness: "This Tinubu meme dey tear me". Graphics: Symbolic accessory; humorous transformation. Layout: Minimalist style; balanced image and text; comic effect.
Figure 9: Meme combining Tinubu tweets and caption	Visual: Screenshot of tweets and Tinubu’s image. Textual: Irony about freedom of expression; Pidgin English. Graphics: Twitter interface contrast; factual grounding. Layout: Tweets at top; caption below; sequential reading path.
Figure 10: Meme of corrupt politician with POV text	Visual: Politician in parliamentary setting. Textual: POV meme format; humorous inner monologue: “bestie’s birthday”. Graphics: White text overlay; irony through setting. Layout: Central text placement; contrast between image and message.
Figure 11: Meme of Tinubu pointing with sarcastic caption	Visual: Tinubu pointing outward in traditional attire. Textual: Sarcastic praise; Yoruba phrase “ire o” meaning “bye bye o”. Graphics: Warm colour tones; religious symbolism. Layout: Simple design; cohesive balance; visual harmony.
Figure 12: Meme of Soyinka with cornfield hair The digitally altered image replaces Soyinka’s white hair with green cornfield	Visual: Digitally altered image of Wole Soyinka with cornfield hair. Textual: Sarcastic commentary on renaming landmarks. Graphics: Green colour symbolism; metaphor for “renewed hope”. Layout: Minimalist design; striking contrast; symbolic exaggeration.

Figure 12: Meme of Soyinka with cornfield hair The digitally altered image replaces Soyinka's white hair with green cornfield	Visual: Digitally altered image of Wole Soyinka with cornfield hair. Textual: Sarcastic commentary on renaming landmarks. Graphics: Green colour symbolism; metaphor for "renewed hope". Layout: Minimalist design; striking contrast; symbolic exaggeration.
Figure 13: Meme of Pennywise as political metaphor	Visual: Pennywise character in mundane setting. Textual: Juxtaposed tweet: Buhari saying "democracy is the best government" Graphics: Horror symbolism; conceptual attribution. Layout: Seamless alignment of image and text; quotation marks for emphasis.
Figure 14: Meme of two Buhari lookalikes	Visual: Two lookalike images of Buhari; eye-level angle. Textual: Tweet with claims like "borrowings were rooted in wickedness". Graphics: Split frame; dual identity metaphor. Layout: Vertical division; close proximity; intimate viewer engagement.
Figure 15: Meme of Peter Obi rally in Benue	Visual: Rally crowd with Peter Obi banner. Textual: Collective pronouns ("we"); hashtags; urgency in "BENUE". Graphics: Demand image; symbolic call to action. Layout: Left-to-right ideological flow; problem-resolution structure.

Grammar of Visual Design Analysis

Table 2 gives a brief description of the analytical tools proposed by Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) Grammar of Visual Design adopted for this study.

Table 2: Description of Kress and van Leeuwen's Analytical Tools

Analytical tools	Description
Representational Meaning	This analytical tool is concerned with how the characters in the memes demonstrate conceptual or narrative relationship with each other.
Interactive Meaning	This tool focuses on how the characters in the meme interact with the viewers.
Compositional Meaning	This tool examines how the images in the meme are systematically arranged to ensure visual cohesion and contribute to the complete meaning of the memes.



Figure 1

@GovNigeria, doesn't obey court orders. Nigeria is a failed state. From a multimodal perspective, the meme presents a close-up image of Nnamdi Kanu with eyes closed and hands raised in a courtroom, visually conveying distress and victimhood. The caption, including hashtags like "@GovNiger doesn't obey court orders. Nigeria is a failed state," reinforces the textual critique of institutional injustice. Graphically, the high photographic realism and emotional expression invert the courtroom's expected symbolism. The layout uses intimate framing and colour contrast to draw attention to the emotional appeal and amplify the meme's virality.

Analysis of Figure 1:

Representational Meaning: The figure represents the image of Nnamdi Kanu supposedly in distress, with a lawyer in court. This visual representation, coupled with the text, constructs a narrative of institutional oppression and human rights violations. This is a Reactional Process (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 55), where Kanu is the Reactor, emotionally responding to his circumstances.

Interactive Meaning: The figure directly engages both local and international audiences by tagging global institutions. The close-up image also establishes an intimate distance, compelling the viewer to empathise directly with the reactor's suffering.

Compositional Meaning: The image relies on the colour contrast and emphasis on hashtags, which makes the image readable and shareable. The use of a realistic photo lends the image credibility, supporting the serious textual claim about judicial injustice.



Figure 2

No be 2013 be that? But "APC/Ronus introduced bigotry". Peter Obi is a bigot.

Analysis of Figure 2:

A shocked young woman with a wide mouth and expressive eyes serves as the visual anchor of this meme, symbolising disbelief. The sarcastic caption referencing Peter Obi's 2013 tweet, written in Nigerian Pidgin, adds textual irony. The graphic use of a reaction template and exaggerated emotion enhances humour. Layout-wise, the juxtaposition of image and text creates a striking contrast that satirises political inconsistency.

Representational Meaning: The figure represents the visual of a wide-mouthed female student displaying the emotion of exaggerated shock or disbelief, which sells a narrative of the citizens' sarcastic reaction to political instability among leaders. The image functions as the carrier of the emotion, and the attribute is the unbelievable, hypocritical nature of the opposition's claim.

Interactive Meaning: The figure engages the viewers directly through the use of Nigerian Pidgin English and the meme's reaction template to construct familiarity and shared understanding. This informal diction positions the viewers as insiders in the conversations. The image also engages the viewer's shared reaction to the perceived political hypocrisy through the figure's direct expression.

Compositional Meaning: The figure contrasts the visual's exaggerated expression and the sarcastic text, which creates the humour. While the image is a real photo, its use of a reaction template lowers its overall perceived truth value and transforms it into a humorous comment on social issues. The text also uses a rhetorical question to highlight chronological inconsistency, linking historical data to the current political debate to delegitimise Peter Obi's current stance. Consequently, excerpt (1) exemplifies how Nigerian Twitter users employ facial reactions and humour as semiotic tools to question political opinions.



Figure 3

Our #StandwithJega pledges makes it to @BbcAfrica's #FocusOnAfrica And they say it is just Change

Analysis of Figure 3:

From a multimodal lens, the meme features a stylised portrait of Attahiru Jega with a calm expression, visually portraying dignity. The declarative caption and hashtag #iStandwithJega support textual advocacy for electoral integrity. The red background and heroic framing graphically evoke energy and trust. The layout mirrors a campaign poster, with central placement and balanced text overlay that lend institutional credibility.

Representational Meaning: The figure represents a dignified, composed individual whose image is heroic and emblematic of electoral integrity. With the hashtags, the image is a narrative composition on collective participation. The memes' representational structure thus communicates optimism and dignity, contrasting sharply with the hypocrisy seen in **Figure 2**.

Interactive Meaning: The figure engages both national and international viewers through the use of hash tags and the forward gaze of the character in the image. The image also employs a declarative tone in its text to challenge public perceptions that online activism lacks real-world impact. The interpersonal relationship between the image and the viewer inspires political change.

Compositional Meaning: The figure integrates visuals and text harmoniously. The central placement and calm expression of the portrayed figure suggest confidence and moral authority, while the red background suggests energy and emotional appeal. The overlay of hashtags at the bottom creates balance, ensuring textual clarity. The layout mirrors formal campaign posters, giving the meme institutional credibility. As Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) note, composition contributes to the “information value” of an image. No doubt, excerpt (3) symbolises the power of social media as a platform for participation in political issues.



Figure 4

I live in Nigeria of course???

Analysis of Figure 4:

Through multimodal analysis, the image features an older man in a blue turban who smiles sarcastically, with a direct gaze that visually suggests apathy. The rhetorical question in the caption implies widespread political fatigue. Graphically, the high modality realism and ironic re-coding of the smile reflect shared disillusionment. The layout uses close framing to establish intimacy and viewer connection.

Representational Meaning: The figure represents the identity of the common Nigerian as a weary survivor of the state's failures. The sarcastic smile of the character in the image conceptualises the complete lack of trust in the government.

Interactive Meaning: The image interacts with the viewer through a sideways gaze and a close-up shot of the character in the figure. The high photographic modality anchors this absurdity in the reality of the subject's experience, validating the sense of shared existence. The rhetorical question suggests the depicted absurdity of the figure.

Compositional Meaning: The figure and text are arranged using the principle of Information Value. The image of the man is the given while the text, "I live in Nigeria of course???", is the New information, explicitly articulating the punchline and interpreting the visual. The text activates the ironic meaning by confirming the shared assumption that the only explanation for the depicted absurdity is the reality of living in Nigeria. This composition is designed for ironic self-identification, allowing users a powerful, concise way to express collective political exhaustion and resignation.



Figure 5

Another proof that the Ibos have always wanted what belongs to the Yorubas. Coz why did Zik want to become the Premier of Western Region when the Eastern region was there?

Analysis of Figure 5:

By analysing this image from the multimodal perspective, it features a historical photo of Nnamdi Azikiwe with an outward gaze recontextualising nationalism into tribal ambition. The informal caption, “coz why did Zik want...”, introduces textual irony (ironic commentary on tribal ambition). Graphically, the high modality image and stereotype construction critique ethnic politics. The layout places the image centrally with the caption below, enhancing visual salience and interpretive closure.

Representational Meaning: The image represents the character of Nnamdi Azikiwe, as Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) argue, visual representations are not neutral; they “recontextualise” social actors within ideologically loaded frames. Here, the actor is recast as a representative of perceived Igbo political ambition, thereby humorously creating a stereotype about the Ibos.

Interactive Meaning: The figure engages the viewers directly by using informal language (“coz why did Zik want...”) and a conversational tone. This places the viewer as a participant in public opinions on ethnic politics. reduce social distance and create familiarity.

Compositional Meaning: The figure is placed centrally, with the historical figure's gaze directed outward, creating visual salience and authority. The caption below acts as “new information,” according to Kress and van Leeuwen's spatial information value system, providing interpretive closure to the image. The image combines historical photography (high modality) and casual text (low modality) to generate a multimodal meaning where seriousness is combined with sarcasm. From this image, it can be deduced that irony is a major linguistic tool to highlight opinions on ethnic stereotypes.



Figure 6

Is “One Man's Terrorist Another Man's Freedom Fighter”?

Analysis of Figure 6:

Unlike Figure (1), where Nnamdi Kanu is presented as a victim of political oppression, this meme in Figure (6) presents him well-dressed, seated on stairs. However, the figure employs ambiguity to pass on an ironic message regarding the activist. By posing a question of two opposing views, the meme creator passes an opinion on how people have different views regarding the activist. For instance, the government sees him as a terrorist while a section of the populace views him as a saviour. The figure also uses a caption that makes a direct allusion to the idiom: “one man's meat is another man's poison”, further buttressing these divides between views on the figure. Furthermore, this ambiguous and contradictory stance creates irony in the serious situation.

Representational Meaning: The figure represents the image of Nnamdi Kanu; the seated pose and formal attire conceptualise calmness and control, which directly contrasts with the caption that frames him as dangerous. This aligns with Kress and van Leeuwen's assertion that representational choices such as pose, dress, and setting convey ideologies of images. In this case, it conveys the narrative of a dignified person.

Interactive Meaning: The image engages viewers through the direct gaze of the character in the image, which invites empathy rather than fear. The rhetorical question posed in the caption also gives the viewer a chance to morally choose between condemning him as a terrorist or not.

Compositional Meaning: The neutral background of the image eliminates distractions, allowing the viewer to focus on the subject's humanity and on the meaning the text provides.



Figure 7

When will they do 'this Barbie is tired of life'

Analysis of Figure 7:

The use of multimodal techniques enables the viewer to see President Buhari with both hands over his face. The message conveyed by such an act could have several meanings and interpretations, depending on the surrounding environment. The picture alone does not convey any emotions; instead, it acquires meaning when used with the help of the caption attached to it. The caption relates to a new meme culture, specifically referencing the Barbie meme trend. From a graphical standpoint, the use of the realistic-looking photograph is contrasted against the internet meme style. This creates an interesting mixture of political image and modern popular culture.

Representational Meaning: The figure depicts former President Muhammadu Buhari with both hands covering his face. In Kress and van Leeuwen's terms, this constitutes a narrative action process in which the participant is engaged in a visible action. The gesture itself does not provide sufficient evidence to determine a specific emotional state; it may suggest reflection, contemplation, prayer, fatigue, or another personal response depending on the viewer's interpretation. Meaning is therefore not derived solely from the image but from its interaction with the accompanying caption. By pairing the image with the statement, "When will they do 'this Barbie is tired of life'," the meme creator recontextualises the gesture within the popular Barbie meme trend, inviting viewers to interpret the image humorously as a commentary on political leadership and public perceptions of governance.

Interactive Meaning: The figure interacts with the viewer through the close shot image. The close shot of the image forces intimacy, yet the obscured face creates a barrier, denying the viewer direct contact and consequently instilling a sense of political isolation and failure.

Compositional Meaning: The reference to the "Barbie" meme trend contrasts the perceived severe political distress of the former leader with a piece of lighthearted, modern pop culture. This contrast satirises the gravity of the political situation by trivialising the president's emotional state, implying his administration's struggles are fit only for internet ridicule.



Figure 8

This Tinubu meme dey tear me

Analysis of Figure 8:

This meme employs the popular image of the meerkat that has been copiously deployed by internet users to either satirise or make fun of situations. In this particular meme, the animal is keeping a serious but sarcastic or indifferent face, which serves to trivialise or mock the seriousness of political leadership.

Representational Meaning: The figure metaphorically represents the Nigerian public's perception of President Tinubu, embodying Kress and van Leeuwen's notion of recontextualization across semiotic modes (2006, p. 113). The animal is also humorously adorned with the signature "Emilokan" cap, a symbolic accessory associated with President Tinubu, which transforms the image into a political caricature, making fun of the seriousness of the government.

Interactive Meaning: The figure engages viewers through the use of the informal English language ("This Tinubu meme dey tear me") and the relatable but popular image of the animal meme.

Compositional Meaning: The figure contrasts the animal's absurd seriousness and the symbolic cap representing political authority. The textual caption is positioned to complement the visual frame, reinforcing the comic effect through linguistic expression. The meme's visual balance between image and text ensures coherence, and its minimalist style aids quick recognition and virality. The composition thus embodies what Kress and van Leeuwen describe as the information value of visual elements, how placement, framing, and emphasis direct the viewer's reading path and interpretation.



Figure 9

Tinubu give you freedom of speech, you wan silent my own. Oya na

Analysis of Figure 9:

Reflecting on President Tinubu's leadership, this meme combines a screenshot of two tweets which utilise humour and irony to comment on perceived hypocrisy among Tinubu's supporters.

Representational Meaning: The figure represents Tinubu's image through two referenced tweets, which represent the leader as a figure of political irony: one who says something and does another thing. This aligns with Kress and van Leeuwen's concept of conceptual representation, where the image or text conveys abstract relations rather than specific actions (2006, p. 59).

Interactive Meaning: The figure interacts with viewers based on Declarative Modality and Shared Social Distance. The tweets themselves are a form of declarative statement, offering information and judgments without explicitly demanding a response from the viewer. However, the meme format (a screenshot of a Twitter conversation, including replies, retweets, and likes) creates a sense of Shared Distance, placing the viewer within the social context of the Twitter platform.

Compositional Meaning: In the figure, the placement of both tweets at the top, followed by the caption, creates a sequential reading path to ensure clarity of message. The colour contrast between the dark background of Twitter's interface and the bright text ensures coherence of the message. Both the visual and textual components of the meme expose the dissonance between the principles of democracy and authoritarian tendencies. The Salience is shared between the bolded names ("Tinubu," "Buhari," "Messi") and the highly active engagement metrics (4.8K retweets, 163K likes), which visually validate the critique, suggesting that the public sentiment is largely in agreement with the negative attributes being assigned to the president.



Figure 10

Tinubu memes on TikTok dey kill me bro

Analysis of Figure 10:

This meme from a multimodal angle analyses a politician in a parliamentary setting, paired with a humorous inner monologue in POV format, visually and textually trivialising corruption. The white text overlay graphically contrasts with the serious background. The layout centres the text across the image, drawing immediate attention to the ironic message.

Representational Meaning: The figure represents the image of Jacob Zuma, a one-time South African president, in a parliamentary setting, thinking to himself. Coupled with the text, this frames a narrative of a generic, corrupt “Nigerian Politician” interested in embezzling public funds over responsible leadership. The narrative is further established by the text placed across the image.

Interactive Meaning: The figure engages the viewer through the framing device “POV” (Point of View), which forces the viewer to adopt the identity of the corrupt politician. Also, the character's gaze is generally downward, signalling a declarative mode.

Compositional Meaning: The figure uses the image as the Given (the recognisable, pensive politician archetype) and the overlaid text as the new information (the specific, satirical thought being entertained). The interplay between the image and text is also balanced such that the central placement of the text across the politician's chest in the image draws immediate attention to the message. By using a non-Nigerian politician in a non-Nigerian parliamentary setting, the figure achieves Universal Modality for corruption. This allows Nigerian users to apply the critique universally to their own political class without relying on a specific, recognisable domestic figure, making the satire more broadly applicable while still hitting its target.



Figure 11

Remove Hate in your Heart and you'd realize that "Tinubu" is God sent to save NIGERIA from collapsing. Ire oo.

Analysis of Figure 11:

This figure features President Tinubu dressed in his characteristic Yoruba traditional attire and cap, with one finger extended outward. The gesture draws attention to the represented participant and contributes to the communicative focus of the image. Accompanying the image is the statement, “Remove hate in your heart and you'd realize that Tinubu is God sent to save Nigeria from collapsing. Ire oo.” The textual message presents the president as a national saviour whose leadership is portrayed positively.

The final Yoruba expression, “ire o,” meaning “goodbye” or “farewell,” follows the statement and contributes to the overall meaning of the meme. Rather than assuming sarcasm or irony, the interpretation of the meme depends on how viewers negotiate the relationship between the visual representation and the accompanying text. Through the combination of image and caption, the meme constructs a discourse around political leadership, public perception, and support for the president.

Representational Meaning: The figure represents a smiling image of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu dressed in traditional Yoruba attire. The visual presentation portrays the president in a positive and approachable manner, while the accompanying text, “Tinubu is God-sent to save Nigeria from collapsing,” attributes exceptional qualities to his leadership. Together, the visual and textual elements construct a representation of the president as a figure capable of addressing national challenges. Within the context of Nigerian political discourse, such expressions may reflect political support, admiration, or loyalty towards a political leader. The combination of image and text, therefore, projects a favourable evaluation of Tinubu's leadership and political role.

Interactive Meaning: The figure engages viewers directly through the sideways gaze, and the directive tone of the caption meme is constructed through an appeal to emotion and belief. The directive tone of the caption involves the audience directly, positioning them as participants in a moral evaluation rather than neutral observers. By invoking religious images, the meme reduces social distance and encourages identification with the leader.

Compositional Meaning: the simplicity of design and use of warm colour tones reinforces positivity and hope. The cohesive balance between image and text creates what Kress and van Leeuwen call “visual harmony,” guiding the viewer toward a singular interpretation that Tinubu's leadership embodies divine purpose.

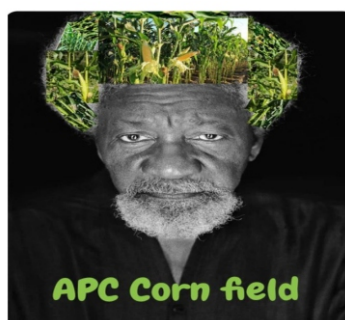


Figure 12

Tinubu have to rename something to make you feel good

Analysis of Figure 12:

This image is a digitally altered image of Wole Soyinka, one of Nigeria's most revered literary figures, with his trademark white afro hair replaced by a green cornfield. This meme is used by the creator to particularly comment on the changes introduced by the Tinubu-led government on the assumption of office, in renaming several places of national unity after himself. Some of these landmarks include: the Abuja International Conference Centre, the National Assembly Library, etc. Online commentators have argued that the pace and scale of these renamings under his administration suggest branding or legacy-building rather than substantive change.

Representational Meaning: This figure represents the image of the popular writer, Wole Soyinka. The replacement of the character's white hair with green is a visual or conceptual metaphor for the transformation of national landmarks or places for political reasons. This represents the government as a body appeasing public sentiment. The text "Tinubu has to rename something to make you feel good" buttresses the aforementioned thoughts.

Interactive Meaning: The figure engages viewers directly through the use of Wole Soyinka's image, familiar to most Nigerians, to draw immediate attention. His forward gaze also engages the viewers, inviting them to share in the meaning of the figure.

Compositional Meaning: The meme achieves visual coherence through striking contrast and symbolic exaggeration. The deliberate replacement of white hair with green fields is metaphorical to signify that the colour of growth and prosperity becomes an ironic commentary on political slogans that promise "renewed hope" without substance. The minimalist design ensures clarity and humour, while the balance between image and text exemplifies Kress and van Leeuwen's principle of *information value*.



Figure 13

Buhari saying "democracy is the best form of government" knowing fully well he's a dictator running his country under military rule

Analysis of Figure 13:

From the multimodal view, the image is that of Pennywise the clown sitting in a mundane setting, visually symbolising deception. The juxtaposed tweet adds textual irony about dictatorship. Graphically, horror symbolism and conceptual attribution critique leadership. The layout aligns image and text seamlessly, with quotation marks enhancing emphasis.

Representational Meaning: The figure depicts Pennywise, a fictional horror character commonly associated with fear, deception, and menace. In Kress and van Leeuwen's conceptual symbolic attributive process, Pennywise functions as the Carrier, while the symbolic qualities culturally associated with the character serve as the Attribute. The image itself does not visually represent former President Buhari. Rather, the connection between Pennywise and Buhari is established through the accompanying caption, which invites viewers to associate the political figure with the symbolic characteristics attributed to the fictional character. Consequently, the meme constructs a negative political evaluation by linking Buhari to traits that audiences may associate with Pennywise. The meaning, therefore, emerges from the interaction between the visual and textual elements rather than from the image alone.

Interactive Meaning: The figure engages the viewers indirectly through the gaze of the character, suggesting that the viewer's interpersonal relationship is with the content rather than with the image. The scene is presented as a realistic photograph, which makes the juxtaposition with the tweet more serious.

Compositional Meaning: at this level, the visual and textual elements seamlessly align with each other to show public views on the government's incapacity. The use of quotation marks and contrastive clauses helps to create irony and comment on the message of presidential deception, in line with the objectives of this project.



Figure 14

WICKED BUHARI: Your borrowings were rooted in wickedness. 64,000 were killed under your watch. You destroyed businesses of all categories. You sent 134 million into avoidable poverty. Corruption became an institution under you. Yet you claim heroism. Wicked man.

Analysis of Figure 14:

This meme presents a visually edited image resembling former President Buhari alongside a critical textual caption. Rather than functioning as satire, the meme operates more directly as political ridicule or visual criticism, as it does not employ humour, irony, or indirect commentary typical of satirical expression. Instead, it foregrounds a straightforward negative evaluation of the political figure, particularly within the circulating online discourse surrounding claims of a “clone” replacing the former president. The accompanying tweet, stating “borrowings were rooted in wickedness,” intensifies the evaluative tone by extending the critique into textual form. Graphically, the split-frame composition suggests contrast and tension between competing interpretations of political identity and leadership. The vertical division of the image draws attention to ideological polarity, while the close visual framing increases viewer engagement by creating a sense of immediacy. However, rather than attributing this interpretation to “the general public,” it is more accurate to describe it as a recurring narrative within segments of online political discourse on social media platforms.

Representational Meaning: This image constructs a representational structure in which former President Buhari is depicted in two visually distinct but related representations. The composition creates a sense of duplication or juxtaposition of the same political figure, suggesting a comparison between alternative visual portrayals of identity. Through this arrangement, the image invites interpretation of uncertainty or ambiguity surrounding the representation of the former president in public discourse, particularly in relation to circulating narratives of altered or substituted identity. Rather than presenting a fixed character judgement, the image relies on visual comparison to foreground questions of authenticity and representation. The duplication functions as a semiotic resource for contrasting perceived versions of the same political figure within online political commentary.

Interactive Meaning: The camera angle and close proximity of the head and shoulders in the image engage an intimate relationship with the viewer, forcing them to confront the visual evidence of the claimed duality.

Compositional Meaning: The composition is organised through a vertical split, which visually separates the two juxtaposed representations of the figure and constructs a sense of contrast between alternative depictions of political identity. This framing guides the viewer's interpretation by positioning the image elements in a binary arrangement that encourages comparison. The textual element (tweet) is placed beneath the visual component, following a typical compositional hierarchy in which text functions as an anchoring device. Rather than serving as factual evidence, the tweet operates as an evaluative caption that anchors the image by providing an interpretive stance on the political subject.

The statement “borrowings were rooted in wickedness” reflects a subjective opinion expressed within the digital discourse environment, which contributes to the framing of the political figure in critical terms. Through this spatial arrangement, the image integrates visual and textual modes to construct a coherent but ideologically loaded message. However, this interpretation is understood as part of user-generated online commentary rather than an objective or verifiable account of political performance.



Figure 15

We must vote out criminals next year. BENUE state has spoken.

Analysis of Figure 15:

A rally crowd with a Peter Obi banner visually represents collective activism. The caption uses “we” and hashtags to textually mobilise support. Graphically, the demand image and urgency in “BENUE” symbolise civic engagement. The layout follows a left-to-right ideological flow from problem to resolution.

Representational Meaning: This figure represents the image of an ongoing rally with a crowd of political supporters. The underlying text, “We must vote out criminals next year. BENUE state has spoken”, demonstrates a narrative of civic participation in electoral matters.

Interactive Meaning: The figure engages the viewers directly through the use of collective pronouns (“we”) and hashtags. Also, the visual representation of a crowd engages viewers as participants in the democratic process, reinforcing what Kress and van Leeuwen describe as involvement through demand images, texts that call upon the viewer to act (2006, p. 119).

Compositional Meaning: The sequential arrangement from problem (“criminals”) followed by resolution (“vote Peter Obi”), creates information value, structuring the meme around a left-to-right ideological reading path. Therefore, through the interplay of text and image in this figure, the viewer strategically comments on Nigerian politics by conveying information about the electoral choices of a particular segment of the populace.

Conclusion

This study explored how political memes on X (Twitter) function as multimodal texts that construct, circulate, and negotiate political meaning within Nigeria's digital public discourse. Drawing on Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) *Grammar of Visual Design*, the analysis demonstrates that memes operate not merely as humorous artefacts but as complex semiotic resources through which users produce situated interpretations of political events and actors. Through representational, interactive, and compositional metafunctions, the memes analysed conveyed layered meanings relating to leadership, governance, ethnicity, and civic engagement. Rather than reflecting a unified or general public opinion, the findings indicate that Nigerian X (Twitter) users engage in diverse and often competing discursive practices, employing visual satire, irony, and intertextuality to express critique, negotiation, or support within specific online contexts.

culture in which political critique becomes both accessible and viral.

The study, therefore, highlights memes as a form of participatory digital communication through which political meaning is actively constructed and contested within Nigeria's online political sphere. A recurring pattern across the dataset was the use of humour and irony to reframe serious political issues. Memes featuring figures such as Nnamdi Kanu and Wole Soyinka were recontextualised to evoke empathy, critique state power, or comment on symbolic politics. Similarly, memes that incorporated popular culture references, including the Barbie trend and animal caricatures, illustrate how users blend global meme formats with locally grounded political commentary. The use of Nigerian Pidgin English and informal diction further reduced social distance, fostering a sense of shared cultural knowledge and collective participation. These linguistic and visual strategies enhanced the relatability and persuasive power of the memes, shaping how citizens interpret political events and actors. Overall, the study concludes that political memes in Nigeria are powerful instruments of digital discourse that enable citizens to negotiate meaning, express dissent, and construct political identities. They operate through a dynamic interplay of visual and textual modes, where gaze, layout, symbolism, and language converge to produce meaning. The findings reveal that memes contribute to the formation of digital counterpublics by offering alternative narratives to mainstream political discourse and providing spaces where marginalised or dissenting voices can circulate. Their emotional resonance, whether through humour, sarcasm, or empathy, fosters a participatory culture in which political critique becomes both accessible and viral.

By unpacking these multimodal texts, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of how digital culture shapes political communication and public opinion in contemporary Nigeria. The study highlights the tension embedded in political memes between hope and cynicism, idealism and realism, and participation and apathy, mirroring the broader political mood of the Nigerian populace.

References

- Adebomi, O. O. (2025). "The land of your fathers lieth in ruins": A multimodal critical discourse analysis of Nigeria's 2023 pre-election crisis-related internet memes. *Discourse & Society*, 36(1), 3–22. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09579265241252998>
- Adkar, R. (2022). Analysing the evolution of internet humour: Memes and more. *Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Science*, 10 (7), 308–314.
- Anderau, G., & Barbarossa, D. (2024). The function of memes in political discourse. *Topoi*, 43(5), 1529–1546. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11245-024-10112-0>
- Bateman, J. A. (2014). *Text and image: A critical introduction to the visual/verbal divide*. Routledge.
- Davison, W. P. (2025). *Public opinion*. In *Encyclopedia Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/public-opinion>
- Dawkins, R. (1976). *The selfish gene*. Oxford University Press.
- Galip, I. (2024). Methodological and epistemological challenges in meme research and meme studies. *Internet Histories*, 8(4), 312–330. <https://doi.org/10.1080/24701475.2024.1012345>
- Hakoköngäs, E., Halmesvaara, O., & Sakki, I. (2020). Persuasion through bitter humor: Multimodal discourse analysis of rhetoric in internet memes of two far-right groups in Finland. *Social Media + Society*, 6(2), Article 2056305120921575. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305120921575>
- Halliday, M. A. K. (1978). *Language as social semiotic: The social interpretation of language and meaning*. Edward Arnold.
- Howe, L. C., & Krosnick, J. A. (2022). The psychology of public opinion. In D. Osborne & C. G. Sibley (Eds.), *The Cambridge handbook of political psychology* (pp. 104–117). Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108779104.008>
- Huang, Y., Chen, L., & Smith, J. (2025). Meme-ing across cultures: Understanding how non-EU international students in the UK use internet memes for cultural adaptation and identity. *Behavioral Sciences*, 15(5), 693–697
- Jewitt, C. (Ed.). (2009). *The Routledge handbook of multimodal analysis*. Routledge.
- Kress, G., & van Leeuwen, T. (2006). *Reading images: The grammar of visual design* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Kumar, A. (2023). Public opinion and democratic evolution: From Enlightenment to digital age. *Democracy Studies Quarterly*, 29(3), 201–218.
- Lestari, D., Nugroho, A., & Sari, M. (2023). Meme culture: A study of humor and satire in digital media. *International Journal of Advanced Multidisciplinary Research Studies*, 4(4), 134–140.
- Lynch, T. (2025). Memes and civic resistance: Digital satire in postcolonial democracies. *Journal of Political Communication and Culture*, 18(2), 88–104.

- Machin, D. (2007). *Introduction to multimodal analysis*. Hodder Arnold.
- Mahfouz, M. (2022). Memes' influence on political change in the digital era. *International Research Journal of Engineering and Technology*, 11(12), 574–579.
- Hakoköngäs, E., Halmesvaara, O., & Sakki, I. (2020). Persuasion through bitter humor: Multimodal discourse analysis of rhetoric in internet memes of two far-right groups in Finland. *Social Media + Society*, 6(2), 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305120921575>
- Okonkwo, C. (2024). The role of memes in shaping political discourse on social media. *Studies in Media and Communication*, 13(2), 112–124.
- Oyemade, T., & Adeagbo, A. (2020). Memes as ideological representations in the 2019 Nigerian presidential campaigns: A multimodal approach. *Language and Semiotic Studies*, 6(1), 78-103.
- Rani, S. (2025). Memes as modern literary satire: A semiotic analysis of digital dissent. *Journal of Digital Humanities and Culture*, 12(1), 45–59.
- Rathi, N., & Jain, P. (2024). Memes, memetics and their applications: A systematic review of literature. *e-mentor*, 2(104), 14-22. <https://doi.org/10.15219/em104.1657>
- Shifman, L. (2014). *Memes in digital culture*. MIT Press.
- Unuabonah, F. A., & Oyebode, O. (2021). 'Nigeria is fighting Covid-419': A multimodal critical discourse analysis of political protest in Nigerian coronavirus-related internet memes. *Discourse & Communication*, 15(2), 175–192. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1750481321991271>