

Between the *Star Boy* and the *City Boy*: Humour, Sarcasm and Rhetoric-Induced (De)Marketing in a Nigerian Presidential Primary Election

Umar Olansile Ajetunmobi

University of Ibadan, Nigeria - ajetunmobiumarolansile@gmail.com

Muhyideen Imam

University of Ibadan, Nigeria - lakanmiimam@gmail.com

Abstract

Beyond the political communication context, non-verbal communication cues are so potent that their interpretations may outweigh the intentionality of the interlocutors that produce the cues. This study analyses the communicative and rhetorical strategies in seven purposively selected political memes created by Nigerians before Nigeria's ruling party, the All Progressives Congress (APC) held her presidential primary election ahead of the country's 2023 Presidential Election. The study focused on how the memes marketed and de-marketed the candidacies of Nigeria's Vice-President, Professor Yemi Osinbajo (the star boy), and Former Lagos State Governor, Asiwaju Bola Ahmed Tinubu (the city boy). Driven by the set-up-incongruity resolution theory of hu-

mour, rhetorical framing and socio-semiotic model for visual analysis, the study identified two general themes and five sub-themes from the memes. In the first theme— collective framing of political actors—, Tinubu and Osinbajo were framed as combating competitors. For the second general theme— individuated framing of political gladiators—, sub-themes such as Osinbajo as a kind politician, Tinubu as a kingmaker, Tinubu as a thug and Osinbajo as a betrayer dominated. The study recommends that to establish a better democratic atmosphere in Nigeria, political stakeholders should emphasise accurate civic education on the Nigerian public space and stress pertinent campaign issues instead of irrelevancies.

Keywords: (De)marketing strategy, APC-Nigeria, humour, memes, presidential primary election.

Entre o *Menino Estrela* e o *Menino da Cidade*: Humor, Sarcasmo e (Des)Marketing Induzido pela Retórica nas Eleições Presidenciais Primárias da Nigéria

Resumo

Para além do contexto da comunicação política, as pistas de comunicação não-verbal são tão potentes que as suas interpretações podem

superar a intencionalidade dos interlocutores que as produzem. Este estudo analisa as estratégias comunicativas e retóricas em sete *memes*

Between the Star Boy and the City Boy: Humour, Sarcasm and Rhetoric-Induced (De)Marketing in a Nigerian Presidential Primary Election

políticos, intencionalmente selecionados e criados por nigerianos, antes do partido do governo da Nigéria, o *All Progressives Congress* (APC), realizar as suas eleições presidenciais primárias, tendo em vista as eleições presidenciais de 2023 no país. O estudo concentrou-se na forma como os memes comercializaram e desmercantilizaram as candidaturas do vice-presidente da Nigéria, professor Yemi Osinbajo (star boy - o menino estrela), e do ex-governador do estado de Lagos, Asiwaju Bola Ahmed Tinubu (city boy - o menino da cidade). Impulsionado pela teoria de resolução da teoria da incongruência na configuração do humor, pelo enquadramento retórico e pelo modelo sócio-semiótico para análise visual,

o estudo identificou dois temas gerais e cinco subtemas dos memes. No primeiro tema — enquadramento coletivo de atores políticos —, Tinubu e Osinbajo foram enquadrados como competidores combatentes. Para o segundo tema geral — enquadramento individualizado de gladiadores políticos —, subtemas como Osinbajo como um político gentil, Tinubu como influenciador, Tinubu como um bandido e Osinbajo como um traidor dominaram. O estudo recomenda que, para se estabelecer uma melhor atmosfera democrática na Nigéria, os atores políticos devem enfatizar a educação cívica correta no espaço público nigeriano e enfatizar questões de campanha pertinentes, em vez de irrelevâncias.

Palavras-chave: Estratégia de (des)marketing, APC-Nigéria, humor, memes, eleições primárias presidenciais.

1. INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

In a democracy, the primary election is an avenue through which political parties elect the standard bearers that represent them in elections. In Nigeria, for instance, before a candidate can be elected as a party's standard bearer, the candidate must garner the majority of votes cast by officially recognised party delegates in the party's primary election. Before such an election, however, political actors—both from the candidate's and his/her opponents' political blocs—would have deployed different rhetorical strategies with a view to marketing or demarketing the candidate—positive or negative publicity (Gbadeyan, 2011; Delaney, 2015). Some of these rhetorical strategies include intensifying the language of the campaign and the candidate's political experience (Clementson, Pascual-Ferra & Beatty, 2016), deployment of figurative devices such as metaphor and irony as political slogans (Koc & Ilgun, 2010) and using narratives for self-representation (Orkibi, 2015).

For two days (June 7-8, 2022), Nigeria's ruling political party—the All Progressives Congress (APC)—conducted her presidential primary election to elect her standard bearer for the 2023 Presidential Election in the country. Fourteen candidates contested the primary (Abdulkareem, 2022) after some earlier withdrew from the race

(Pedro, 2022). Before and during the primaries, two key members and leaders of the party were prominently projected to share the delegates' votes (Ajayi, 2022). They are the incumbent Vice President, Professor Yemi Osinbajo, and the former Lagos State Governor, Asiwaju Bola Ahmed Tinubu. One significant reason the two candidates dominated the political space at that time was due to the 'political father-son' relationship between the two. Professor Osinbajo was referred to as Bola Tinubu's political son because the former served as the Attorney General when the latter was Governor, though Tinubu disowned the Vice President's political sonship the moment the Professor joined the presidential race (Oluwafemi, 2022). Akande (2020) even noted that it was the latter who nominated the former when the APC zoned the Vice-Presidential slot to the Southwest region of Nigeria prior to the 2015 Presidential Election that brought the party into power. Thus, in some quarters, Professor Osinbajo is being described as the *Star Boy* (Vanguard, 2022) while Bola Tinubu is called the *City Boy*; these are metaphoric appellations used in describing their oratory prowess or sudden prominence and strategic political sagacity respectively.

Prior to the presidential primary election that saw Asiwaju Bola Ahmed Tinubu as the winner with 1,271 of 2,096 votes (Oyeleke, 2022), a series of political marketing and de-marketing strategies of the candidates had surfaced on different digital and traditional media platforms. It was observed that political strategists and supporters of the candidates, especially those from the blocs of the *city boy* and the *star boy*, used the power of language, neologisms and symbols to communicate their political strategies. For instance, the neologisms *Emi lokan* (it's my turn) and *Ó lu lè* (He lost) emerged when one of the candidates, Bola Tinubu, publicly spoke against the consensus candidacy his party was rumoured to be considering. He used the first Yoruba expression to remind the listeners of his turn as the country's next president, having served his party in the past, while the second was to remind the gathering of his role after General Muhammadu Buhari (Retired) lost his third Presidential Election.

Also, when Tinubu's Campaign Director General, Senator Kashim Shettima (now his running mate), was asked on Channels TV about Professor Yemi Osinbajo's contest against his 'political father', he described the Vice President as "a nice man... But nice men do not make good leaders, because nice men tend to be nasty. Nice men should be selling popcorn, ice cream" (Daramola, 2022). These political utterances of the duo were later turned into memes, political jabs and rhetorical strategies that dominated the political sphere in Nigeria before, during and after the APC presidential primary election.

Between the Star Boy and the City Boy: Humour, Sarcasm and Rhetoric-Induced (De)Marketing in a Nigerian Presidential Primary Election

Consequently, Tella (2018) argued that political memes essentially are always deployed by political actors with a view to achieving some rhetorical effects such as political campaigning (Kulkarni, 2017). Coined by Richard Dawkins in 1976, memes are ‘an integral part of the netizen vernacular’ (Shifman, 2013:362) used to imitate a phenomenon that has one form of social/cultural information or the other when communicated implicitly or explicitly to others (Shifman, 2013). In fact, the internet has made it easier for political actors to use the multimodal feature of memes (they can combine visuals with texts) for political propaganda (Dimitrov et al., 2021), strengthening and criticising political ideologies (Martínez-Rolán & Piñeiro-Otero, 2016; Al Zidjaly, 2017). Netizens also use Internet memes for political participation, expression and evaluation of morals (Ross & Rivers, 2017; Seiffert-Brockmann, Diehl & Dobusch, 2017), symbolic representation of an ideology (DeCook, 2018) and public discourse provocation (Howley, 2016), among others. Hence, before, during and after the APC presidential primary election in Nigeria, netizens generated different memes to achieve humorous effects which were capable of either marketing or de-marketing the candidacies of the *city boy* and the *star boy*.

Therefore, this study analyses the semiotic frames and interpretations of seven humorous memes generated by Nigerian netizens before, during and after the political contest. Apart from being a semiotic enquiry about political humour and communication within current Nigerian politics, this study propels studies that had analysed the non-verbal communication and metaphoric elements in political memes. Some of these previous studies include Geise and Vigsø's (2017) investigation of election posters and Tella's (2018) exploration of the multi-modal framing of political actors in a Nigerian election. Others include examinations of political tweets (Shane, 2018; Osei Fordjour, 2021), political ideology in advertising (Briandana, 2019), political news (Mas'ud Muhammadijah & Hamsiah, 2020), editorial cartoons in newspapers (Nsungu, 2021), campaign videos (Habib, Ratnaningsih & Sinabutar, 2021; Schubert, 2021), Covid-19 socio-political narratives (Dewi, 2022) as well as elections (Qian, 2017; Bamgbose, 2021).

2. THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

This study adopts selected propositions of Attardo's (1997) set-up-incongruity resolution theory of humour, Kuypers' (2009, 2010) model of rhetorical framing analysis alongside Kress and van Leeuwen's (1996) socio-semiotic model for visual

analysis. The first by Attardo (1997) is a cognitive theory that expands Raskin's (1985) script-based theory of humour. In Raskin's theory, a text is classified as a single-joke-carrying text if two salient features are satisfied. The first feature is that the text is entirely or partially compatible with two separate scripts. For the second feature, the two scripts with which particular text is compatible are either fully or partially overlapping. "Scripts are collections of semantic information pertaining to a given subject" (p.403).

However, Attardo's expansion comprises three fundamental concepts: set-up, incongruity and resolution. Set up refers to the "initial portion of text" that instigates the humour (Lee, 2022:66). According to Attardo, incongruity is a situation whereby the punchline of a joke contradicts the perceiver's assumptions. "Incongruity is usually defined as a conflict between what is expected and what actually occurs in the joke" or simply a "divergence from expectations" (p.398). When incongruity sets in, the perceiver engages in a type of problem-solving exercise to identify a cognitive rule that causes the punch line to flow naturally from the joke's core idea and harmonises its disparate elements. This is resolution, the third element (Attardo, 1997; Couder, 2019).

Moreover, the set-up-incongruity resolution theory of humour assumes that most jokes have a similar structure, and when the hearer processes the joke's text, he/she discovers an incongruity. The hearer then comes up with a solution in order to achieve the desired comic effects. That is, during the interpretation of each paragraph that makes up the utterance, hearers adjust their interpretations in parallel with one another. This parallel adjustment is focused on by determining the intended explicit interpretation (explicature), determining potential implicated premises and conclusions (implicatures), and utilising as much contextual information as necessary (contextual assumptions) in order to achieve relevant interpretive outcomes for explicature and implicature (Yus, 2017).

The second theoretical perspective of this work— Kuypers' (2010) model of rhetorical framing analysis— focuses on how the choices of communicators from language and other semiotic systems direct the decoder's interpretive efforts. Kuypers (2010) sees framing analysis from a qualitative viewpoint, and that influences him to view the theory as a rhetorical paradigm. Kuypers first argues that through language usage, "framing analysis can fruitfully be used to detect bias in news media reports that induce an audience to interpret political news in a media-supported direction (p.298).

Between the Star Boy and the City Boy: Humour, Sarcasm and Rhetoric-Induced (De)Marketing in a Nigerian Presidential Primary Election

However, he argues that framing analysis, from a rhetorical perspective, comprises deducible themes from narratives of news stories. That is, the media influences and shapes public opinion as well as public dialogues through *agenda-extension*. Through agenda-extension, the public will more frequently assess political actors' conduct in connection to the coverage of an issue in the news media. The second theme of this theoretical perspective is *frames*. In this context, it is assumed that frames occur when humans are induced to see things in a certain way. Frames describe problems, identify causes, morally judge and offer solutions by emphasising some aspects of reality over others. Phillips (2018) adds that rhetorical framing, through *framing contests*, makes it possible for socio-political actors to frame a single issue differently.

Our last theoretical underpinning for this work is Kress and van Leeuwen's (1996) socio-semiotic model for visual analysis. We specifically used this theory to account for the visual resources with which the frames are established in the analysed memes. This model stems from Halliday's meta-functions theory (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004), which holds that language serves the ideational, interpersonal, and textual meta-functions. Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) renamed these functions as representational, interactive and compositional meta-functions. Their belief is that for visuals to act as a whole system of communication, they must fulfil communicative and representational needs.

The first meta-function in Kress and van Leeuwen's (1996) model relates to the patterns of representation, or more specifically, the visual encoding of experience. They can either be narrative or conceptual structures. Narrative structures show developing acts and occurrences, changing processes (such as action, reaction, speech, mental and conversion processes) and ephemeral spatial configurations. However, conceptual structures depict participants according to their class, structure or significance. These can be seen in *locative* (relating participants to a location), *means* (presenting the tools used in action processes) and *accompaniment* (depicting two participants, who are not linked by any visual element). The second meta-function—interactive function— involves a variety of participants, including represented (depicted) and interactive participants (real). Here, three factors contribute to the interactive meaning of images: image act, social distance and point of view. For the last meta-function— *compositional*—meaning is built on three interconnected processes: information value, salience and framing (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996b; Stoian, 2015).

3. METHODS

The research method adopted in this study is semiotic analysis. For a week, 14 political memes generated by Nigerians to represent the APC's presidential primary election and its pre-primary political discourse were initially harvested for this study. The memes were monitored daily and downloaded from the Twitter accounts of a prominent cartoonist and a social media influencer in Nigeria, Nairaland, Punch Newspaper, Google Image, alongside the Facebook timeline of another prominent cartoonist in the country. After careful preliminary observation and cognitive interpretation of the memes, 7 were purposively selected for analysis, though only 5 were used as frames accompanying the analysis. The memes were selected because of their semiotic significance to the study. One, they have more humorous, sarcastic, metaphoric and politically-inclined elements than the excluded memes. Two, they all have a multimodal feature that could give more insights into the analysis. That is, the memes had both visual and textual elements. Three, the memes were also included because these researchers identified them as the most prominent political satires Nigerian digital natives utilised to express 'comic reliefs' before, during and after the APC presidential primary election. We used an inductive approach to understand the semiotic features in the data. This approach enabled us to conceptualise the entire work by first analysing the selected data for evidence-based interpretations. With this approach, we were also able to engage the data within the perspectives of the three theoretical frameworks this study adopts. This was used to denote how the relevant aspects of the theories relate to translating humorous and cognitive comprehension in the data. We then complemented this inductive analytical approach with the top-down analysis.

4. DATA PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION

The analysis below presents the varying frames inherent in the selected memes that Nigerians created for two political contenders in the Presidential Primary Election of Nigeria's ruling party held from June 7 to June 8, 2022—the star boy (Professor Yemi Osinbajo) and the city boy (Asiwaju Bola Ahmed Tinubu). The mode of analysis employed is the top-down approach. This section exemplifies how the visual contents (and verbal contents in the visuals) generate humour and rhetorically-induced demarketing formatives or otherwise for each of the candidates. Seven major

Between the Star Boy and the City Boy: Humour, Sarcasm and Rhetoric-Induced (De)Marketing in a Nigerian Presidential Primary Election

humorous frames are projected, but they are stratified into two: *collective framing of political actors, and individuated framing of political gladiators.*

4.1 Collective Framing of Political Actors

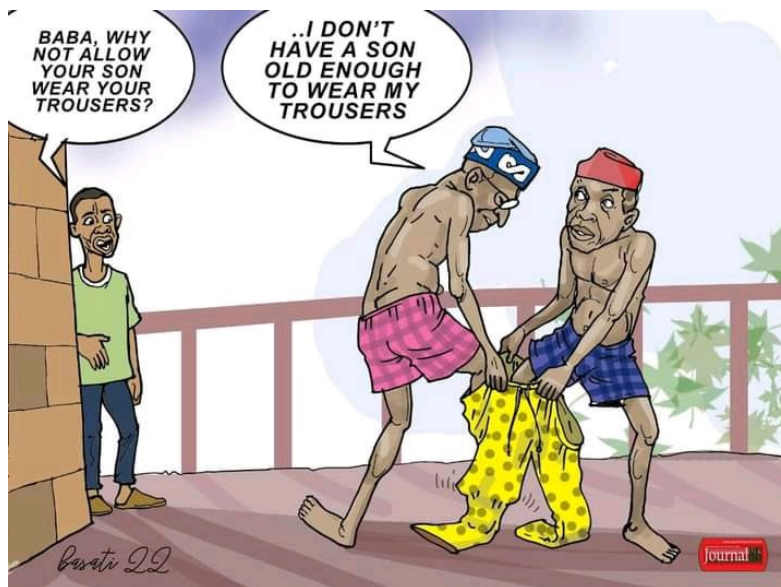
The collective frames portray the candidates as combined entities. It attributes mutually inclusive values to both— one exists with the presence of the other. This reflects in this sub-theme:

4.1.1 Tinubu and Osinbajo as Combating Competitors

The definition of combating competitors here refers to individuals engaging in a contest. In this theme, such a contest is represented as a fighting contest. Some of the memes represent the City Boy (Tinubu) and the Star Boy (Osinbajo) as wanting the same position (Nigerian President) and each not minding whose ox is gored. This follows Charteris-Black's (2004; 2011) metaphorisation of politics as war.

Meme 1

Tinubu and Osinbajo as combating competitors



Source: Nairaland, 2022

There are three iconic characters above. The one on the far right is Yemi Osinbajo, while the one in the middle is Bola Tinubu and the one on the left is probably an observer who knows what is transpiring. The first two's (Osinbajo and Tinubu) caps further support their identification or political-ideological symbols. They are jostling to wear the same trousers which extensively denotes the combating stance: it is either one removes his leg for the other or they will tear the trousers into shreds. The pair of trousers represent the APC presidential ticket. In fact, the meme could be viewed as a response to a question that journalists asked Bola Tinubu before the election. In the press interview, a journalist asked about Tinubu's take on his son who had declared for the presidency the same way Tinubu did. He responded that, "I have no son grown enough to declare." (Oluwafemi, 2022). This response sounds comical as the above meme, and it is likened to Lee's (2022) explanation of Kuypers' (2010) *set up*, an element of humour describing the initial portion of text that instigates humour.

The meme moves the two political contestants from the political campaign context to the entertainment context. It is indicative that Osinbajo and Tinubu are dressed like wrestlers (save for their caps); this portrays them as combating competitors who engage in coercive contestations as wrestlers in the ring do. Moreover, the idea of struggle underlies the frames as there is a transposition of the actors from being politicians to being wrestlers. The meme utilises semiotic resources such as verbal texts. The texts in the memes follow Attardo's (1997) instantiation of script. It is understood that Tinubu (the city boy) is older and is expected to forgo the contest for Osinbajo (the star boy). However, Tinubu delineates the biological father-son relationship from the political father-son relationship as he affirms that "I don't have a son old enough to wear my trousers". In addition, the word, *Baba*, used by the third participant in the meme engenders the context-bound verbal resource to stimulate humour. *Baba* is a lexeme in Yoruba, a language in Southwestern Nigeria which means a biological father or pragmatically, an older individual who should be respected. In Yoruba culture, it is considered honourable for the elderly to allow the young ones to take on challenging responsibilities instead of competing with them. It is part of the African tutelage established in the ways of the Yoruba. Thus, the meme has achieved the framing and communicative effect the cartoonist had intended, thereby inducing an interpretation communicated by the cartoonist's news medium (Kuypers, 2010).

Also, the background effect used in the meme resembles a wrestling ring. Although politicians struggle for votes during electoral campaigns, such contests take place through vituperations and argumentations. It should be observed that such en-

Between the Star Boy and the City Boy: Humour, Sarcasm and Rhetoric-Induced (De)Marketing in a Nigerian Presidential Primary Election

gagements are taken beyond the contestation of ideas as the attire (boxers) of the candidates further manifest this. As said, the structure of the background resembles the wrestling ring while the third individual can be said to be the referee; all these transpirations engender humour.

The humour generated here is simply accounted for by metaphorisation— the meme compares the two contesting political candidates to two combating characters who want to ‘put their legs in the same trousers’, a verbal negotiation which finds its source in the Yoruba proverbial saying. The demarketing implication for the star boy (Osinbajo) is that the pair of trousers best fits the experienced— a metonymy for Tinubu— but Tinubu reiterates that even if Osinbajo is his son, he is not old enough (experienced) to wear the trousers. These frames are achieved by the contextual variables in the textual parts of the meme. The candidates, being likened to opposing characters and the generated implicated conclusion, establish their frame as combating competitors not just contestants.

4.2 Individuated Framing of Political Gladiators

The individuated frames portray the candidates as separate identities and attribute varying representations to them. The sub-themes here include:

4.2.1 Tinubu as a Thug

Some memes portray Tinubu as a thug in relation to his supposed social work scheme that affords miscreants and touts to be at the helms of affairs of some key sectors in Lagos State, where Tinubu ruled as Governor for eight years. His style of governance has included the best brains in polity and as well brought violent thugs to the midst of political happenings. This perception, created by the cartoonist affirms Kuypers’ (2010) position that framing analysis can be used to detect bias in news media reports that induce an audience to interpret political news in a direction supported by the media. Thus, Tinubu’s perceived involvement in thuggery as represented in the meme is illustrated in the text below:

Meme 2

Tinubu as a thug



Source: Mike Asukwo, 2022

There are three key participants in the meme— Tinubu, Osinbajo, and Buhari. Nigeria’s President, Muhammadu Buhari was depicted as a bus driver, a transposition of realistic acts to textual situation. This represents his being the driver (President) of passengers (Nigerian citizens). The individual seating beside the driver is Osinbajo (the star boy) who probably expects to take the wheel from the driver. Tinubu is dressed in a thuggery fashion with a bottle held in hand typical of a violent atmosphere displayed by transport workers in the streets of Lagos, Nigeria. To achieve prominence for the three participants and Tinubu’s actions, onlookers (represented by three political appointees) are left mouth agape as existent in Lagos city violence. The key participants’ visual presentation works as the first point of humour generation. In terms of the narrative process, the first two participants and the street onlookers perform the non-transactional reactive process of gazing and being amazed at present happenings— the non-verbal look on their faces says it all.

For the speech process, an utterance is attributed to Tinubu. The attributed utterance is “*Alaye! Dis thing na turn by turn. Na my turn. I no mind to fight dirty...no try me - o!*” Some expressions in the utterance require further enrichment through extra-textual reference assignment. One of the insinuations made by Tinubu before the APC Presidential Primary Election was that he brought Buhari to power. According to Tinubu, “If not me that led the war front, Buhari would not have emerged...This

Between the Star Boy and the City Boy: Humour, Sarcasm and Rhetoric-Induced (De)Marketing in a Nigerian Presidential Primary Election

time, it's the Yoruba's turn and in Yorubaland, it's my tenure" (Punch, 2022). It was well pronounced in the Nigerian political space that Tinubu grooms thugs to achieve his political goals. Consequently, Tinubu's depiction aligns intra-textually with the real identities of those he allegedly groomed (Lagos thugs). His syntactic deployment of Nigerian Pidgin English also attests to this fact. The verbal texts employed instantiate the script-based linguistic eventualities on the streets of Lagos. This is typical of city boys' lexical stylistics.

Furthermore, the semantic extensions observed in Tinubu's linguistic usage add to being portrayed as a thug in the meme, *I no mind to fight dirty...no try me – o!* realises violent incursions that can be integrated into the power tussle. Elements in Tinubu's statements foreground the compositional meaning manifested in its usage. The tonal salience and perspective add up to his framing as a thug. The meme's employment of the common Lagos bus (danfo) with the inscription: "Route: Aso Rock" engenders the interactional meaning passed to receptors. Moreover, the meme establishes a representational meaning (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996) in relation to Tinubu's essence, for instance, in his wielding the bottle or *fighting dirty* not concerned with rolled-up sagged trousers and no shoes; that ideation houses what Tinubu represents in the visual delineation (a form of demarketing)— a thug and city boy.

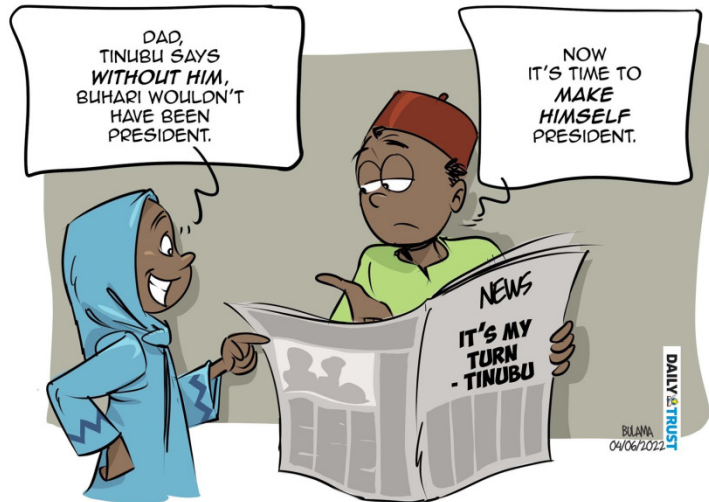
Based on the instances above, the reader derives humour from the text and invests more cognitive efforts to determine the covert rhetorical import of the meme. The APC Presidential Primary Election context, especially Tinubu's proclamation that if he is not given the platform to fly as it is his turn, "he is going to fight dirty" guides the investment of more cognitive efforts. This follows the characterisation of the meme as a rhetoric-induced demarketing strategy to portray Tinubu as a thug who is not fit to be in the revered presidential position. This leads to his framing (Kuypers, 2010) as a thug; proclaiming to be violent is thuggery.

4.2.2 Tinubu as a Kingmaker

A kingmaker is a person or group that has a great influence on royal or political succession, without being a viable candidate. Kingmakers may use political, monetary, religious and military means to influence such succession. In memes presenting Tinubu as a kingmaker, he is depicted as the maker of men in Nigerian politics. Similarly, he supposedly made Muhammadu Buhari the President. Meme 3 below serves as a representative sample for memes with this frame:

Meme 3

Tinubu as a kingmaker



Source: Mustapha Bulama, 2022

The meme creator contextualises humour generation in the transactional process of a daughter-father interactional exchange. The father-daughter discourse foregrounds the representational meaning in the Tinubu character. The daughter employs a mild interrogative to express what Tinubu proclaimed. The daughter's lexical choice is employed to accentuate the context-bound verbal resource and elicit a reactionary response from the other interlocutor— these instances are used to generate humour. Also, the meme foregrounds its humour generation by giving perceptual salience to lexical manifestation: lexemes creating reference assignment to Tinubu are in bold and capital letters — **WITHOUT HIM; MAKE HIMSELF**. The bold lexical choices are semiotic resources employed to direct the decoder's interpretive efforts. Those words focus the decoder's attention on Tinubu's role and attribute a 'kingmaker' quality to him. The semiotic system also stimulates an interrogative background engendered by the capitalised lexical choices namely: if he could make others, he should make himself. The discourse properties generate both humour and sarcasm. Moreover, the linguistic usage of the capitalised words manifests a context-bound

Between the Star Boy and the City Boy: Humour, Sarcasm and Rhetoric-Induced (De)Marketing in a Nigerian Presidential Primary Election

script of pride and arrogance in Tinubu's proclamation as the meme creator draws the decoder's attention to a rhetoric-induced demarketing strategy spurred by the bold lexemes— *if kings can't be made without him, let him make himself*.

Furthermore, Tinubu (kingmaker) performs the speech process. The quotation, *it's my turn*, which receives much information value from its placement on the front page of a newspaper, indicates the content of his speech. Since the person to whom the utterance is attributed is Tinubu, one employs reference assignment to determine the referents of *my* and *turn*. *My* as a definite token refers intra-textually to him (Tinubu) who, though he has no iconic representation, has a textual attribution in the visual. *Turn* is an indefinite token that refers to both the APC's presidential ticket and the presidential tenure. To generate explication, one considers some of the speaker's propositional attitude in context (Yus, 2017). The speaker, Tinubu, was the National Leader of the APC and a candidate in the party's presidential primary election. Therefore, one considers the speech as a campaign point. *Turn* refers to the APC's presidential ticket as Tinubu believes he is core to the winning ways of the party and the baton should go to the Southwest where he comes from. This is coupled with his effort in ensuring APC's electoral success. The implicated premises are that Tinubu is a candidate for the APC's presidential primary election and he should be given the ticket freely as he has been instrumental to the overall success of the party.

In addition, the paralinguistic disposition of the father in the meme further adds to humour generation, as it functions as humour instigator (Lee, 2022). The facial expression doused on the father character and the hand usage questions the truth value of Tinubu's proclamation— we shall see if he's really a kingmaker; he should make himself president.

4.2.3 Osinbajo as a Kind Politician

When an individual is kind, he is said to have a friendly nature and a generous attitude. He is regarded as helpful, considerate and humane. In memes presenting Osinbajo as a kind politician, he is depicted as serving goodness to Nigerians. Similarly, he provided food items like popcorn and ice-cream to Nigerians. The value and quality of the food items attached to Osinbajo is the first point of humour generation and a demarketing strategy. In Nigeria, popcorn and its likes are not staple foods and cannot be totally regarded as appetizers as the poverty ravaging the country has made it an item for the seemingly rich. The lexeme *kind* used in describing Osinbajo generates humour and sarcasm as being kind and simultaneously being a politician

indicates context-bound scripts in the Nigerian polity. Allegedly, Nigerian politicians are not naturally kind except when it deals with their interests. This is accentuated in a representative sample of memes with this frame thus:

Meme 4

Osinbajo as a kind politician



Source: Deborah Tolu-Kolawole, 2022

The meme creator draws the decoders' attention to a rhetoric-induced demarketing strategy spurred by the metaphorisation of *goodness* with *popcorn*. The capitalisation of the first letters of the content words in the rider— *Serving Goodness to Nigerians* are both grammatical and emphatic. The meme creator relocates the popcorn advert from an everyday context to the 2022 APC Presidential Primary Election campaign context through the verbal texts accompanying the visual.

The image of Osinbajo emboldened with a smile further manifests his being kind. Had it been that he had frowned, it would have indicated the opposite. Yemi Osinbajo

Between the Star Boy and the City Boy: Humour, Sarcasm and Rhetoric-Induced (De)Marketing in a Nigerian Presidential Primary Election

performs a non-transactional reactionary process by gazing outside the image. The use of a bolder colour and font in writing *Osinbajo Popcorn* also engenders humour. The perceptual salience can be likened to a normal business owner's banner where politics here is seen as the enterprise.

Moreover, the paralinguistic pose of the lady seating at the rear also adds to the humour generation. It is both an activity performed for recognition stimulated by her facial expression and a semiotic visual disposition that *if Osinbajo could provide this, he would also be good and kind if given the mandate.*

4.2.4 Osinbajo as a Betrayer

A betrayer is a person who is not loyal to their country or to another person, often doing something harmful such as giving information to an enemy. Meme 5 below serves as a representative sample for memes with this frame:

Meme 5

Osinbajo as a betrayer

Wife: My dear, have you started writing congratulatory message to Asiwaju?

Osinbajo: No, I am writing apology letter first!



Source: Anike Nonso Kingsley, 2022

Yemi Osinbajo, the incumbent Vice President and a Presidential Primary Election candidate of the APC and his wife were captured in a close-up shot; this foregrounds them as having an intimate relationship and as the main interlocutors in the meme. They both perform the speech process. The meme has been entextualised as the image ensues from a ceremonial political gathering. Conversely, the meme does not shift the gesture out of the ceremonial context. It only establishes the gesture in relation to another topic. The meme creator imagines a topic that fits the gesture and is compatible with their rhetorical intentions.

The meme attributes the verbal text *My dear, have you started writing congratulatory message to Asiwaju?* to Osinbajo's wife. *My dear* is a definite token that refers intra-textually to Osinbajo which endears him to her as the husband. Their holding hands in the meme is also an indication of their strong marital relationship. *Asiwaju* refers to Bola Tinubu, the city boy. Osinbajo's wife's question is the first platform for humour generation and demarketing strategy. *Apology letter* in Osinbajo's response requires some extra-textual explication. Osinbajo is supposedly a mentee to Tinubu whose Vice-Presidential slot he assumed. In Nigeria's cultural society, it is right for such a mentee to not only be appreciative of his mentor but to not also betray him. Osinbajo's feat of vying for the APC Presidential ticket was regarded as a betrayal of his mentor, Tinubu. This fact instigated the two writings alluded to in the meme: *apology letter* and *congratulatory message*. Hence, one looks for the rhetorical value of the meme beyond the humour content. The explicit meaning portends the implicated premise that Yemi Osinbajo betrayed his master, Bola Tinubu, and his disloyalty is not a good virtue for a presidential candidate. The premise and conclusion lead to the frame of betrayal for Osinbajo.

4. CONCLUSION

The study has examined verbal and visual realisations of humour and demarketing strategies of two major political gladiators' frames in Nigerian political memes created before, during and after the 2022 APC Presidential Primary Election. Its foundational proposition is that humorous political memes do not only create humour but they also perform communicative cum cognitive purposes of framing political actors. The constructed frames are classified into collective and individuated frames. The collective frames portray the candidates as combined entities. It attributes mutually inclusive

Between the Star Boy and the City Boy: Humour, Sarcasm and Rhetoric-Induced (De)Marketing in a Nigerian Presidential Primary Election

values to both— one exists with the presence of the other. The individuated frames portray the candidates as separate identities and attribute varying representations to them. It is evident from the study that the memes Nigerians generated from the political utterances were not only humorous but also capable of either marketing or demarketing the candidacies of the *city boy* and the *star boy*. To a large extent, the engagements of the Nigerian cyber public on election discourses determine the political choices of its adherents. This formative makes the Nigerian political campaign devoid of issue-based and nationalistic exchanges. To establish a better democratic atmosphere in Nigeria, political stakeholders need to emphasise accurate civic education on the Nigerian public space and stress the pertinent campaign issues instead of irrelevancies.

5. LIMITATIONS

Although this study is set in Nigeria, we believe its theoretical foundations and practical explications have contributed to the wider literature of political semiotics. Nonetheless, we are aware of some limitations of this study. One, like every semiotic analysis that is always critiqued for its subjectivity, our study was largely premised on the interpretivist paradigm informed by semiotic theories of textual and visual analyses. Two, we understand that our interpretations of the political memes may differ from the intents of their originators or makers; however, we remained neutral by analysing the memes based on theoretical assumptions that enabled us to present our submissions scholarly.

REFERENCES

- Al Zidjaly, N. (2017). Memes as reasonably hostile laments: A discourse analysis of political dissent in Oman. *Discourse & Society*, 28(6), 573-594.
- Attardo, S. (1997). The semantic foundations of cognitive theories of humor. *Humor- International Journal of Humor Research*, 10(4). <https://doi.org/10.1515/humr.1997.10.4.395>
- Akande, B. (2020). *My Participations: An Autobiography*. Gaskia Media Limited.

- Ajayi, O. (2022). APC Primary: Osinbajo and Tinubu now last men standing, says Senator Gaya. *Vanguard*, June 7. <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2022/06/apc-primary-osinbajo-and-tinubu-now-last-men-standing-says-senator-gaya/>
- Abdulkareem, M. (2022). The real winners, losers of APC presidential primary. *Premium Times*, June 10. <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/535937-the-real-winners-losers-of-apc-presidential-primary.html>
- Bamgbose, G. (2021). Multimodal analysis of post-election memes in the Edo State (Nigeria) 2020 Gubernatorial Election. *Argentinian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 9(2).
- Briandana, R. (2019). Representation of political ideology in advertising: semiotics analysis in Indonesia television. *International Journal of English Literature and Social Sciences*, 4(3), 764-775.
- Couder, O. (2019). Problem solved? Absurdist humour and incongruity-resolution. *Journal of Literary Semantics*, 48(1), 1-21.
- Charteris-Black, J. (2004). *Corpus Approaches to Critical Metaphor Analysis*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Charteris-Black, J. (2011). *Politicians and Rhetoric: The Persuasive Power of Metaphor*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Clementson, D. E., Pascual-Ferra, P., & Beatty, M. J. (2016). How language can influence political marketing strategy and a candidate's image: Effect of presidential candidates' language intensity and experience on college students' ratings of source credibility. *Journal of Political Marketing*, 15(4), 388-415.
- Dimitrov, D., Ali, B.B., Shaar, S., Alam, F., Silvestri, F., Firooz, H., Nakov, P. & Martino, G.D.S. (2021). Detecting propaganda techniques in memes. *arXiv preprint arXiv:2109.08013*.
- DeCook, J. R. (2018). Memes and symbolic violence:# proudboys and the use of memes for propaganda and the construction of collective identity. *Learning, Media and Technology*, 43(4), 485-504.
- Daramola, K. (2022). Shettima: Osinbajo is nice but nice men don't make good leaders — they sell ice cream. *The Cable*, June 3. <https://www.thecable.ng/shettima-osinbajo-is-nice-but-nice-men-dont-make-good-leaders/amp>

Between the Star Boy and the City Boy: Humour, Sarcasm and Rhetoric-Induced (De)Marketing in a Nigerian Presidential Primary Election

- Dewi, O.C. (2022). Face Masks, Between Social and Political Messages in Covid-19 Pandemic: A Semiotic Analysis. *Metahumaniora*, 12(2).
- Delaney, S. (2015). Attack is the best form of defence: the golden rules of political campaigning. *The Guardian*, February 11. <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2015/feb/11/political-campaigning-advertising-golden-rules>
- Gbadeyan, R.A. (2011). Political marketing strategies and democracy in Nigeria. *Asian Journal of business management*, 3(1), 8-17.
- Geise, S., & Vigsø, O. (2017). Methodological approaches to the analysis of visual political communication through election posters. In *Election Posters Around the Globe* (pp. 33-52). Springer, Cham.
- Howley, K. (2016). 'I have a drone': Internet memes and the politics of culture. *Interactions: Studies in Communication & Culture*, 7(2), 155-175.
- Halliday, M.A.K., & Matthiessen, C. (2004). *An Introduction to Functional Grammar*. 3rd edition. Hodder Arnold.
- Habib, M.A.F., Ratnaningsih, A.P.A., & Sinabutar, M.J. (2021). Semiotics analysis of Ahok-djarot's campaign video on Youtube social media for the second round of the 2017 DKI Jakarta Gubernatorial Election. *Journal of Urban Sociology*, 4(2), 76-89.
- Kuypers, J. A. (2010). Framing analysis from a rhetorical perspective. In D'Angelo, P. & Kuypers, J.A. (eds.). *Doing News Framing Analysis: Empirical and Theoretical Perspectives*. Routledge, pp. 287-313.
- Kuipers, G. (2009). *Humor Styles and Symbolic Boundaries*. *Journal of Literary Theory*, 3(2). doi:10.1515/jlt.2009.013
- Kress, G., & van Leeuwen, T. (1996). *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design*. Routledge.
- Kulkarni, A. (2017). Internet meme and Political Discourse: A study on the impact of internet meme as a tool in communicating political satire. *Journal of Content, Community & Communication Amity School of Communication*, 6.
- Koc, E. & Ilgun, A. (2010). An investigation into the discourse of political marketing communications in Turkey: The use of rhetorical figures in political party slogans. *Journal of Political Marketing*, 9(3), 207-224.

- Lee, S. (2022). Analysis of humor from the perspective of incongruity theory: Focusing on a YouTube parody video titled 'Parodysite'. *Liberal Arts Basic Education Research*, 3(1), 63-76.
- Mas' ud, M.M. & Hamsiah, A. (2020). A semiotic analysis of political news featured in Indonesia Newspapers. *International Journal of Innovation, Creativity, and Change*, 1627-1640.
- Martínez-Rolán, X. & Piñeiro-Otero, T. (2016). The use of memes in the discourse of political parties on Twitter: analysing the 2015 state of the nation debate. *Communication & Society*, 29(1), 145-160.
- Nsungu, D.P. (2021). A pragma-semiotic analysis of selected editorial cartoons in Vanguard Newspaper of February–March, 2018. *Sapientia: Journal of Philosophy*, 15.
- Oyeleke, S. (2022). Full result of APC presidential primary. *Punch*, June 8. <https://punchng.com/full-result-of-apc-presidential-primary/>
- Oluwafemi, A. (2022). I have no son grown enough to declare, says Tinubu on Osinbajo's presidential bid. *The Cable*, April 11. <https://www.thecable.ng/ive-no-son-grown-enough-to-declare-says-tinubu-on-osinbajos-presidential-bid>
- Orkibi, E. (2015). 'New politics', new media—new political language? A rhetorical perspective on candidates' self-presentation in electronic campaigns in the 2013 Israeli elections. *Israel Affairs*, 21(2), 277-292.
- Osei Fordjour, N.K. (2021). A multimodal social semiotic analysis of an African Vice President on Twitter. *Visual Communication Quarterly*, 28(4), 227-239.
- Pedro, O. (2022). APC presidential primary: Nine aspirants who withdrew from the race. *ICIR*, June 8. <https://www.icirnigeria.org/apc-presidential-primary-nine-aspirants-who-withdrew-from-the-race/>
- Phillips, R.J. (2018). Frames as boundaries: Rhetorical framing analysis and the confines of public discourse in online news coverage of Vegan parenting. *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 019685991881482. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0196859918814821>
- Punch (2022). I brought Buhari out of political retirement, assisted him to emerge President – Tinubu. <https://punchng.com/i-brought-buhari-out-of-political->

Between the Star Boy and the City Boy: Humour, Sarcasm and Rhetoric-Induced (De)Marketing in a Nigerian Presidential Primary Election

retirement-assisted-him-to-emerge-president-tinubu/

- Qian, X. (2017). (De) humanization of the Chinese and the Malays in the *Sin Chew Daily* and the *New Straits Times*: A semiotic study of the 2013 Malaysian elections. Master's thesis, Kuala Lumpur: International Islamic University Malaysia.
- Raskin, V. (1985). *Semantic Mechanisms of Humor*. Reidel.
- Ross, A.S. & Rivers, D. J. (2017). Digital cultures of political participation: Internet memes and the discursive delegitimization of the 2016 US Presidential candidates. *Discourse, Context & Media*, 16, 1-11.
- Seiffert-Brockmann, J., Diehl, T. & Dobusch, L. (2018). Memes as games: The evolution of a digital discourse online. *New Media & Society*, 20(8), 2862-2879.
- Shane, T. (2018). The semiotics of authenticity: Indexicality in Donald Trump's Tweets. *Social Media+ Society*, 4(3), 2056305118800315.
- Shifman, L. (2013). Memes in a digital world: Reconciling with a conceptual troublemaker. *Journal of computer-mediated communication*, 18(3), 362-377.
- Stoian, C. E. (2015). Analysing images: a social semiotic perspective. *Scientific Bulletin of the Politehnica University of Timișoara Transactions on Modern Language*, Vol. 14, No. 1, 23-30.
- Schubert, C. (2021). Multimodal cohesion in persuasive discourse: A case study of televised campaign advertisements in the 2020 US presidential election. *Discourse, Context & Media*, 43, 100537.
- Tella, A. (2018). Humour generation and multi-modal framing of political actors in the 2015 Nigerian presidential election memes. *European Journal of Humour Research* 6 (4) 95– 117.
- Vanguard (2022). Osinbajo @ 65: A Starboy with Big God. <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2022/03/osinbajo-65-a-starboy-with-big-god/>
- Yus, F. (2017). Incongruity-resolution cases in jokes. *Lingua*, 197, 103-122.