

A Conceptual Act Analysis of the Emotive Use of COVID-19 Memes on Nigeria-related Social Media Platforms

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Abstract

Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in the world and Nigeria especially, the use of memes for communication in social media took a higher frequency and novelty. One of such novel ways through which memes communicate is the use of memes to trigger emotions such as fear and humour. The objective of this study is to unravel the ways in which COVID-19 related memes communicate fear and humour. This is done in order to further account for how language artefact like memes help in constructing emotion. The study purposely selected a total of fourteen (14) memes that communicate fear and humour from three social media platforms-WhatsApp, Facebook and Twitter. The analysis is largely qualitative, while Barret (2014) Conceptual Act Theory of Emotion is deployed as the theoretical framework. The study reveals that emotions of fear and humour are greatly triggered by language use and that just as language uses change, emotional constructions change with time and context.

Keyword: COVID-19, fear, humour, emotions, Conceptual Act Theory, meaning construction

Introduction

Fear and humour are two types of emotions common with language users. While one may see fear as negative and humour as positive, fear could help in making people cautious and ready for actualities. According to Lindquist et al. (2015), common sense dictates that emotions are physical types that have little to do with the words one uses. Newer psychological functionalist views, on the other hand, demonstrate that language is a crucial component of emotion, forming the basis of both emotional experiences and perceptions. An experience of emotion, according to the psychological constructionist Conceptual Act Theory (CAT), arises when disclosure from one's or other human's bodies is rendered relevant in light of the current circumstance by applying concept knowledge about emotion. Language is thought to play a role in emotion by supporting the conceptual information needed to make sense of the feelings from the body and world in a specific context. The human mind works in such a way that language data (what we hear and what we say) are processed in frames of concept awareness that enables the acquisition of complex thoughts like emotion categories of fear and humour.

A meme refers to a funny image or a video being shared on social media which could explain a situation contextually. Attias (2017) notes that the common use of the word "meme," usually

refers to the "internet meme," a subset of the general meme concept. The most common internet memes are image macros – photos with a bold caption written in impact font. Memes as a language instant contain layers of meaning which are explainable in different contexts. In this case, the picture or the text or the both in memes carry a meaning that can be interpreted concerning the COVID-19 pandemic. The major theme and message they contain are interpretable in the context of the pandemic.

The use of language and other means of expression reflects to a great extent, the personal, social and psychological attributes of the individual (cf. Nwala & Idegbekwe, 2016). Investigating Nigeria-related COVID-19 social media memes uploaded by Nigerians is significant because, in practice, it would be of help to psychologists and discourse analysts who stand a better chance of making an informed decision about the reactions and attitudes of Nigerians towards the outbreak of the pandemic. It is also significant because it helps to document the creative instincts of Nigerian social media users as it relates to the COVID-19 pandemic. In this case, the attention is on how the language in the memes reflect fear and humour; and as emblems in the reactions of Nigerians to the COVID-19 pandemic. The primary data is from the various social media platforms of WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

The COVID-19 pandemic is novel, especially in the impact it has had on the lives of millions of Nigerians. In the future, there would be a need for future generations to understand and appreciate the impact the pandemic had on Nigerians and how Nigerians in turn they reacted to the situation through language artefacts in the form of memes. This may not be possible if a cautious effort is not put in place to provide a documented linguistic investigation and more importantly. Hence, the main objective of this study is to undertake a conceptual act analysis of the use of Nigeria-related COVID-19 memes to express fear and humour.

Literature Review

Memes as a language form have attracted a considerable number of research though none of these studies before 2020 are related to the COVID-19 Pandemic. Studies of memes have been diverse in different cultures and societies. For example, Hatab (2016) studied memes as a form of social and political criticism in Indonesia. Where it was found out the memes act as a vehicle for the younger generation to voice their displeasure at the poor state of affairs in their nation. A similar finding was found from an earlier study by Yang, & Jiang, (2015) in a study of meme and pop culture. The study found out that memes have become a great trend for the younger generation to communicate on social media without typing longer texts. Sudarsono (2017) sees memes as a tool in biased political supporters' hands to malign opposition members and their policies as depicted in the US elections with Trump and Biden. Furthermore, Zubaidah (2018) opined that memes have become entertainment items and a core element of the social media world, where boredom can be mitigated through an examination of memes, especially for laughter. Then, Ross & Rivers (2019) in a study that examined the impact of the use of memes as shaping the political narrative, concluded that memes have a great deal of influence in the world and local politics.

In the context of Nigeria, Tella (2018) studied the use of memes by Nigerians. However, his attention was on its use by politicians and their supporters. The study concludes that supporters of election candidates use humorous internet memes for negatively portraying opponents and for positive representation of the favoured candidate. These negative other representations serve the purpose of depreciating the electoral values of the opponents and indirectly increasing the electoral chances of their candidates. The attention of Tella (2018) was not on COVID-19 related memes and how they process fear and humour. In another study, Ambrose & Idegbekwe (2020) investigated the echoic communication in COVID-19 memes shared by Nigerians during the pandemic. The study explored the aspects of echoic relevant meanings drawn from the memes but the attention was not on their ability to construct emotions and feelings as the study does.

In another study, Ajayi and Akirinmola (2021) explored the multimodal functionalities of memes developed and shared by Nigerians in response to the pandemic on various social media platforms. The data consisted of ten memes chosen at random from a large number of memes and deployed Mey's (2001) pragmatic act theory and Kress' (2010) multimodality as the theoretical frameworks. The findings show that the memes' texts and pictures mix with Nigeria's socio-political and theological contexts to elicit the practices of warning, admonition, information, mocking, criticism, condemnation, reprimand, labelling, accusation, and sermonisation. The study however does not handle the construction and production of emotions as concepts as the present study does.

Theoretical Framework: Conceptual Act Theory (CAT)

Many philosophers believed that the mind was structured biologically to have genetically programmed emotions. That is to say, the mind contains emotions such as anger, fear, sadness etc. as basic elements. However, shockingly, there has not been any study that could establish the physical properties in the brain or the nervous system that corresponds to the type of emotion an individual exhibits and the fact that emotions are dynamic makes this more difficult (cf. Lindquist, & Gendron, 2007, Barat, 2014). This means that there are other elements and, situations and conditions that trigger or produce emotions in humans. This is the tenet of the Conceptual Act Theory-to account for how language plays a role in emotion constructions.

The CAT of emotion was conceptualised in 2006 and has gone through a series of development and elaborations, empirical and theoretical expansions in the last decade (Barrett, 2006, 2009, Barrett & Bar, 2009; Barrett & Bliss-Moreau, 2009; Barrett; Barrett, Mesquita, Ochsner, & Gross, 2007; Barrett, Ochsner, & Gross, 2007; Barrett & Satpute, 2013; Barrett, Wilson-Mendenhall, & Barsalou, in press; Duncan & Barrett, 2007; Lindquist & Barrett, 2008, 2012; Lindquist et al., 2012). The present study attempts the deployment of the theory to unravel the extent to which it can account for the emotions of fear and humour in the memes used by Nigerians during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The CAT highlights how conceptual knowledge accounts for emotions. Conceptual knowledge refers to what language users see their world as. It could also cover the previous knowledge language users have of different concepts in the real world. The Conceptual Act Theory attempts to make a connection between how people see the world or their previous knowledge to the construction of emotional meanings and emotions generally (Barret, 2014). This finds validations because, in utterance interpretations, the previous knowledge of language users is a key conceptual background, which helps language users to make appropriate language and situational appraisals. Also, the previous knowledge language users have of their real-world determines their consciousness level and this invariably may affect how emotion is constructed when triggered through a current event or a language situation.

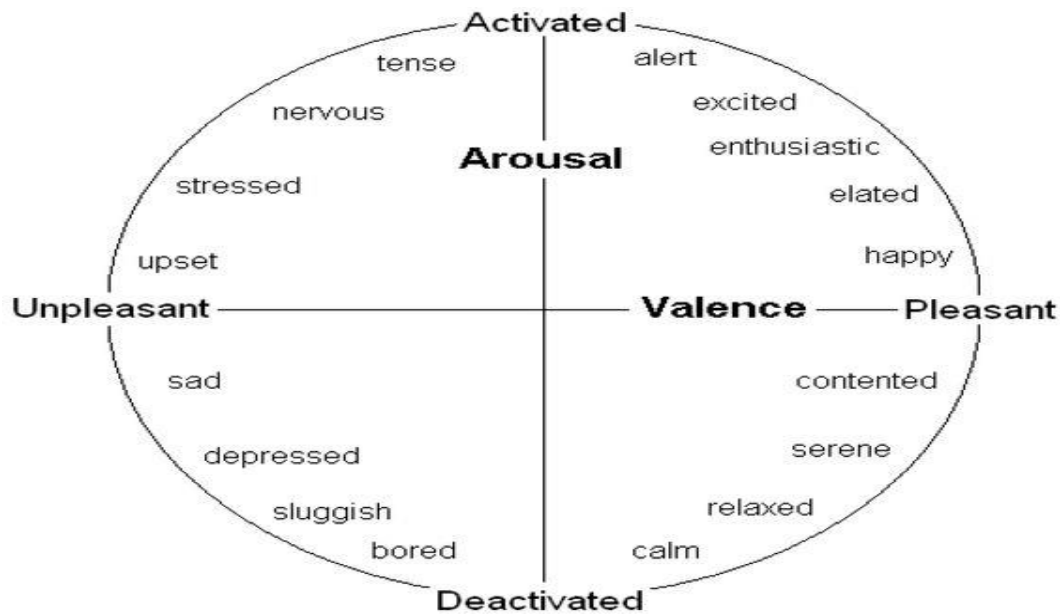


Diagram 1 showing Affective Interaction

(Retrieved from the interaction design foundation: <https://www.interaction-design.org/literature/article/the-three-schools-of-thought-governing-emotion-in-technology>)

Using the diagram above, it is easy to understand that there are many emotions in the human mind, ranging from the positive (on the right hand) and the negative (on the left). Each of these emotions in the opinion of Barrett (2014, p.3) are ‘continually being modified and undergoing constructive processes during which stored knowledge within an experiencer... makes incoming sensory inputs meaningful as situated conceptualizations.’ These incoming inputs are language inputs and communicative elements and they trigger the existing conceptual situations for an emotional release.

The CAT is built on four hypotheses on emotions which originate from an understanding of situated conceptualizations. The first is that emotions, like some other mental state classes, are

conceptual categories made up of populations of examples that are customized to their surroundings; as a result, each emotion classification has significant diversity. Second, each case of any emotion is built within the brain's functional design for creating situated conceptions, which involves domain-general internal systems; as a result, cases belonging to varying emotion classifications (or even non-emotional categories like cognitions or perceptions) share some similarities. Third, emotional occurrences do not dissect and decrease to these domain basic structures, but rather arise from their interplay; as a result, the operations of each structure cannot be studied separately and must be understood holistically within the current state of the brain, body, and nearby context.

Finally, because emotional episodes are emergent states, they have functional characteristics that physical states do not. Barrett goes into greater detail on these topics (2012). The CAT, like other perspectives, is a functional description of emotions (Barrett, 2012). When integrated conceptual knowledge is put online to influence the representation of a physical state, connecting that physical state to a world event (such that physical changes in the body are perceived as "about" something in the world), an emotion is generated. A body state or action has external functions (e.g., changes in voice tones, face stability, or widened eyes expand the visual field), but these occurrences have not designated those functions in the act of classifying them as emotion during the development of a situated conceptualization; events are allotted those features during the act of classifying them as emotion throughout the construction of a located conceptualization.

The functional aspects of the CAT enable the investigation of emotions as acts of meaning-making. The CAT hypothesizes that emotions, like all mental states, arise through the continuous process of perceivers (in this case, language users in Nigeria) getting meaning from the sensory input that they take in from the internal world of the body and the external world of physical surroundings (Barret, 2014). Hence, during the COVID-19 pandemic, especially during the lockdown in Nigeria, many Nigerians (both in the social media and outside the social media) had many strands of information on the disease and the precarious health situation in Nigeria and the high level of ignorance. These information account for the conceptual knowledge which are triggered by the memes as the temporary agents to produce emotions. The COVID-19 pandemic has halted the social and economic activities of Nigerians in many ways. In turn, too, Nigerians have through the language used in memes shown their reactions to the pandemic. These reactions or indicators are worthy of being studied as they tell the psychological, economic, social and humorous aspects of the users which can go a long way in telling us who Nigerians are in these trying times.

Methodology

This study is basically qualitative because it highlights the emotional features of COVID-19 related memes shared in Nigeria at the peak of the pandemic. A total of 14 memes that were adjudged to communicate fear and humour were purposively selected for the study. These memes were retrieved from three social media platforms-WhatsApp, Facebook and Twitter. In

selecting the samples, a check is done if the meme is COVID-19-related, then a check is done to see if it either communicates fear or humour. This is because not all COVID-19-related memes communicate either fear or emotion. In the analysis of the data, a total of seven (7) memes that communicated fear were first investigated and the second part of the analysis covered another seven (7) memes that communicated humour. These analyses were done in line with the Conceptual Act Theory of emotion construction.

COVID-19 Nigerian Related Memes that Indicate Fear of the Corona Virus

Fear is a primal, natural, and profound individual feeling. Fear warns one that there is a danger or a chance of harm, whether it is physical or mental. Fear can be triggered by real hazards, but it can also be triggered by imaginary dangers. However, most importantly, the current study argues that fear is triggered by what is known as being matched or triggered by new information in the context of COVID-19 memes shared by Nigerians. In this section, an investigation of the memes is done to validate this point.

Fearful Meme 1:



The meme above has two sets of information-the positive and negative. The positive information is that the COVID-19 lockdown in Lagos and Abuja would be lifted in May 2020, perhaps, as an indication that Nigeria was winning the war against the dreaded disease. The negative information, which overshadows the positive is that COVID-19, represented in a scary painting with dangerous weapons is still rearing its ugly head to announce that it has not left the scene yet. What activates fear in the minds of Nigerians is the fact that they are aware of the destructive nature of the disease. This is because before the 4th of May, 2020, the country

was on a total lockdown and many persons have been reported dead both in Nigeria and outside the country. This situation acts as the conceptual knowledge from the CAT earlier presented, while the scary image, axe and other weapons in the meme act as the activator which propels the conceptual knowledge to make meaning of the new information. This means that if the information was mainly positive (that is, the news of lifting the break or that a cure for COVID-19 has been found), the possibility of getting a positive emotional response would have been higher. However, that is not the case in this instance. The negative image when placed to activate the gory experience of many Nigerians on COVID-19 related problems could to a large extent trigger an emotion of fear.

Fearful Meme 2:



The meme above represents the emotional development of many Nigerians during the rise of the disease. In the first part of it, when the COVID-19 was ravaging different parts of the world, many felt it was a foreign disease and they moved on with disdain and lack of concern in the first few months. However, as time went on, there was a need to be really concerned as the number death rate in other countries soared and eventually, the disease was in Nigeria. So, the facial expression in the month of February differs greatly from the one in March and other subsequent months in the sense that the ones in the initial months were full of a smiling face

while the other months have a face with bulgy eyes out of surprise and fear for the COVID-19 coming so close in real-time.

The meme also aptly captures the developmental and dynamic nature of emotion construction as explicated by the CAT. No emotion is biological, emotions rely on the external factors (the news of COVID-19 coming close) and the previous knowledge (the awareness of the destructive powers of COVID-19). Both elements combine on a continuous and dynamic basis for language users to make a meaningful interpretation.

Fearful Meme 3:



The meme above captures the fear that accompanied the COVID-19 lockdown periods in Nigeria. Many Nigerians got exhausted and worn out due to the never-ending lockdown periods, which extended from two weeks to months in 2020. Fadipe et al. (2021) observed that one trait found in most Nigerians during the peak of the COVID-19 lockdown was the fear that they could be infected, could infect others and the fear of dying of hunger and starvation due to the continuous lockdown situation. When the situation above acts as the conceptual knowledge among many Nigerians, and they are informed of an extension after a series of extensions already, the most possible emotional reaction would be that of fear. The major fear is the fact that hunger and scarcity would greatly increase as many of them could not go to work daily. This becomes very important because many Nigerians are employed in the informal sectors that require them to daily attend to their businesses and activities to make a living. Also, the government was not paying or giving out palliatives to Nigerians at a level that would be satisfactory.

Fearful Meme 4:

Me after washing my hands for 20
seconds 57 times in one day



One trend that was observed during the COVID-19 lockdown periods was the spread of different conspiracy theories on the disease. Many gullible Nigerians bought into these theories and accumulated that as part of their conceptual knowledge of the disease (Ambrose & Idegbekwe, 2020). Also, Olugbile (2020, p. 3) notes:

...a rash of conspiracy theories have been spawned to explain and understand the disease. One of the early conspiracy theories was widely circulated in a gripping video... China was culling its citizens, committing mass murder on an industrial scale. Perhaps it was trying to reduce its population drastically....The virus was a biological weapon, created in the laboratory by the Americans, and deliberately exported to China

to cause havoc...Yet another theory had it that the Chinese developed the virus and were planning to export it as part of a trade war with the USA, which had seen the Americans imposing tariffs and victimizing the Chinese innovation flagship, Huawei.

Taking the above into context, it is obvious that many Nigerians were already filled with the wrong bits of information as part of their conceptual knowledge. Then, when placed with a meme with a picture of a man with a growing hand from the act of continuous washing of hand, there are bound to be an emotional reaction. The meme acts as a trigger for the emotion of fear. The argument in this paper is that the emotion of fear is built from the conceptual knowledge of COVID-19, which the language users have.

Fearful Meme 5:

	Me laughing at corona virus memes
	It is now in Europe
	It is now in my Country
	It is now in my city

Fearful Meme 5 is very related to that of 3 in the sense that many persons in Nigeria paid less attention to the COVID-19 news because it seemed so far away, locked up in European and American countries. It was a conspiracy theory that the disease does not affect the black African man. Meme 6 resonates the emotion of fear because from the position of indifference to the disease, here it is on the shores of Nigeria, in every state and every city and the possibility of it getting to the home of the language (meme) interpreter is so real.

Again, the four changes in the facial expressions of the female character in the meme tell the emotion construction story. While in the first two boxes, where the COVID19 was seen as a disease for faraway countries and the fact that it does not affect the black man in Africa (conspiracy), the people represented by the lady in the meme laugh and smile. This stage is propelled by the fact that the CAT permits their conceptual knowledge to trigger the emotion of calmness, fun and laughter. However, when their CAT and conceptual knowledge change to reflect the new facts they must have seen and learnt, a different emotion, which is that of fear is resonated as seen in the last two boxes. The fear generates concerns and specific actions against the dreaded disease.

Fearful Meme 6:



Fear Meme 6 is a billboard containing the pictures of four pallbearers. These are popular in most African cities and Nigeria in particular. They symbolise death or funeral. At death, a pallbearer is one of several people who assist in carrying the casket. They may use white gloves to protect the casket from damage. Now, if one matches it with the fact that COVID-19 had killed many and the fact that funerals were being conducted regularly for the death, together with the fact that the symbols of death and sorrow (Pallbearers) are the ones warning people to

stay at home or else risk the possibility of dancing with them, can only construct the emotion of fear, which may lead to caution.

A possible reason behind the creation of meme 6 is to caution people against flaunting COVID-19 rules, especially the idea of going out during the sit at home periods. Things or circumstances that cause people to feel insecure or uncertain are feared. People shun situations or objects that they are afraid of. It is a well-known fact that nobody would willingly want to die. Hence, as a caution and relying on the existing knowledge of the language users towards the pallbearers, the COVID-19 and the unwillingness for people to accept death help in the construction of the fear emotion in many Nigerians.

Fearful Meme 7:



Lastly, for the fearful meme, we take a look at meme 7 above. This meme has the high possibility of exuding fear. This becomes more apparent considering the existing conceptual knowledge of COVID-19, which most Nigerians have. In the meme above, an object called Corona Virus is seen visiting different countries such as China, Italy, Ghana and then Nigeria. The gory aspect of the meme is the fact that besides the 'ugly' visit, the Corona Virus leaves blood flowing out of the door of each of the countries visited. The fear this time is triggered because the visitor is in Nigeria and about to enter the door. Looking at the antecedent of the visitor in spilling blood and death, the outcome of the visit is highly predictable.

COVID-19 Nigerian Related Memes that Indicate the Emotion of Humour from the Corona Virus

Humour, according to Ogonna (2015) is the attribute of being funny or comic. Humour, in most circumstances, causes readers or listeners to chuckle; it works as a cognitive component that causes the audience to laugh (Polimeni & Reiss, 2006). Similarly, Adjei (2015, p. 195) defines humour as "a cognitive process that frequently but not always results in the realization of the seizure-like activity known as laughter." (195) Humour is used as a literary device to pique the interest of the audience in any inventive work. Humour could be used to critique society issues through physical slapstick or aural technologies. It is vital to note that humour is not always positioned in a condemnatory context. In that instance, the form of humour examined in this study does not always condemn, but rather emphasizes the distinction between the caricature and the genuine to exude laughter as an emotion.

Humorous Meme 1



Humorous Meme 1 takes a careful look into two clear events that have occurred and their contrasts to create humour. The first event covers the speech by President Buhari in April of 2018 on much Nigerian youth being lazy and not ready to work except sitting down at home doing nothing. The President received lots of criticism for being so negative about the average Nigerian youth. These conversations on the comments continued until the end of 2019. Then, a few months into 2020, the COVID-19 disease is ravaging other parts of the world with Nigeria not excluded. There is then a need to sit at home and do nothing in order to stay safe. These so-called lazy Nigeria youth, who sit at home and do nothing that earned them the title as irresponsible, now became so responsible for sitting at home and doing nothing.

Applying the CAT to this meme shows that the ironic situation created by contrasting the conceptual knowledge (what the language users knew before) and the current situation. The current information triggers an emotion of laughter because it greatly deviates from what the users of the language knows already in a very harmless way.

Humorous Meme 2



Humorous meme 2 plays on the conceptual knowledge of the language users as regards the safe use of nose masks. While many did not know or appreciate the need to use the face mask, the COVID-19 pandemic made sure everyone at one point or the other did. The idea behind the wearing of the mask was that it served as a form of protection since the disease being fought was airborne. Hence, to reduce the rate at which people contracted the disease, there was a need

to wear a face mask and face shield, in some instances. Now, the meme above has a picture of a man with very broad and hairy noses. While it is well established as a conceptual knowledge that the face mask prevents the rate of contraction of the disease, the fact that the nose under focus has so much hair could as well mean that there would be no need for the face mask since the hair could fully act as a form of protection against the disease. Again, in this instance, the new information which the meme provides contrast the conceptual knowledge of the mask being indispensable. However, the new information does the deviation in a very mild way and the meaning is understood to be designed to elicit humour from the language users.

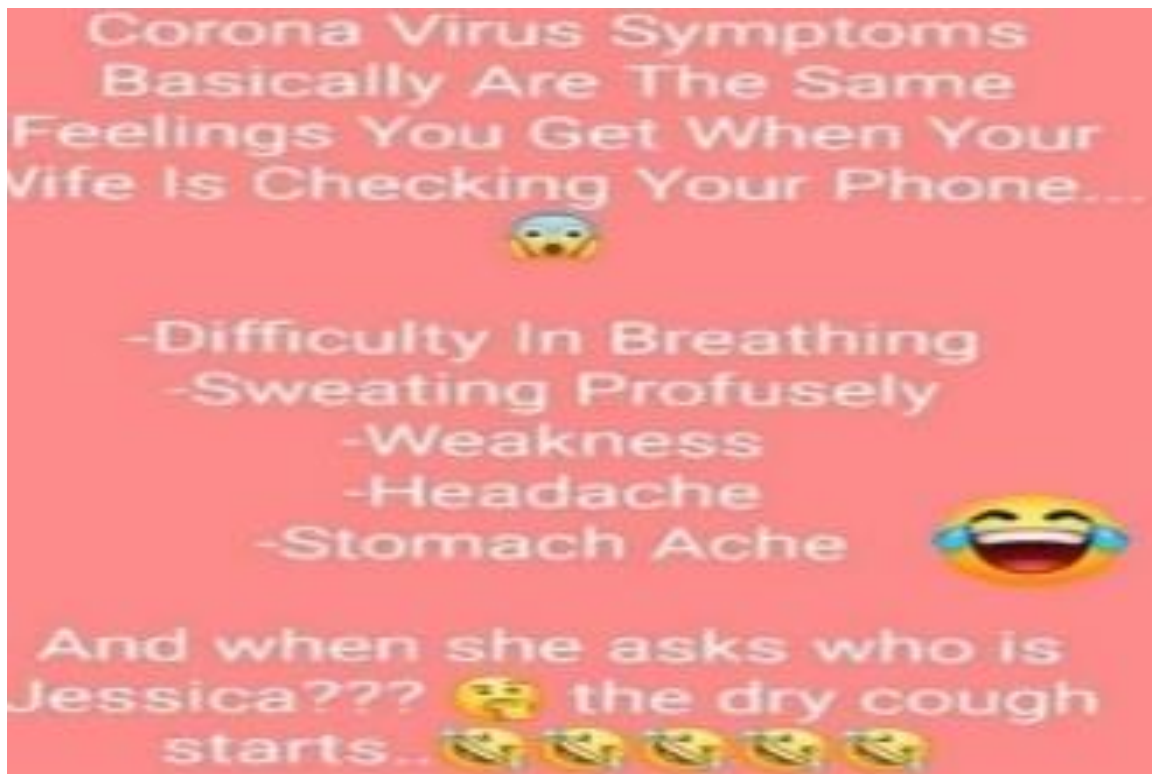
Humorous Meme 3

My 5 year plan is to make it through
this year.

The meme above is built on exaggeration that has the capacity of constructing humour. The meme talks about the five years goal of trying to make it through the year 2020, which was the year the COVID-19 pandemic was at its peak in Nigeria and the whole world. While everyone knew, as of 2020 that the world was 'boiling' and very tense, the fact that it would a great deal for it to be a five-year survival plan all in one year. When something is depicted as considerably larger than it is, this is known as an exaggeration. Exaggeration produces humour when things are purposefully exaggerated to the point of absurdity.

One of the most efficient methods to create humour is to use exaggerations. It elicits laughs by creating a mismatch between the actual situation and the words being stated. Overestimation does not generate humour by itself, and it is frequently employed in non-funny ways. To make things more amusing, you must exaggerate to the point where it is evident that you are doing so. The CAT argues that people rely on the right conceptual knowledge to process the information as humorous. In this context, the conceptual knowledge covers the fact that the language users have made the right evaluation of the situation and are aware that the picture the meme above creates is highly exaggerated.

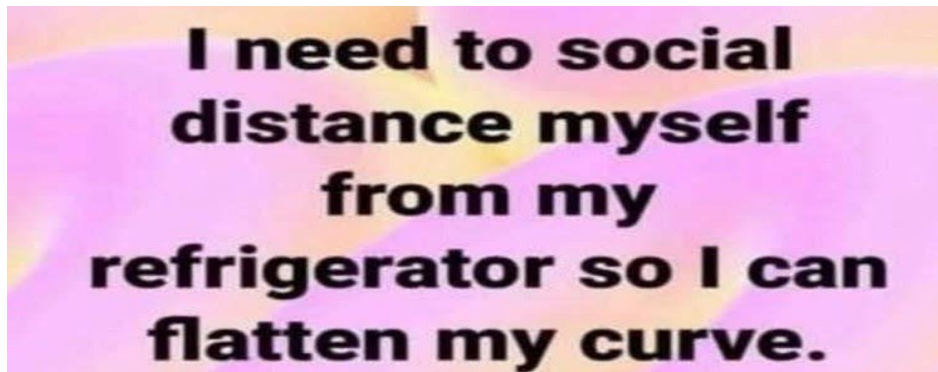
Humorous Meme 4



There is two basic conceptual knowledge that needs to be in existence in the language used for the meme above to create the humorous feeling, which is the goal of the communication piece. Firstly, there is the conceptual knowledge that the people need to know about cheating husbands and the other is on the symptoms of COVID-19. Naturally, it is expected that if a husband is cheating and the wife wants to check his phone, there would be a great sense of anxiety in the man, which could lead to fast breathing, stomach rumblings and sweating. This is because the man is not free 'conscience-wise.' This is a scenario that has played out in most adults' life, which they can easily relate to. The funny thing here is that these feelings that come with a wife trying to check the phone of a cheating husband are very much related to proven symptoms of COVID-19 (difficulty in breathing, excessive sweat, headache and dry coughs).

If the two sets of conceptual knowledge are well-established, there is a great propensity for the meme above to trigger humour and laughter. If the opposite exists, where the two ideas cannot be fully related or reconciled, then, there would not be the likelihood of humour construction. This helps to validate the point that emotion construction is not a biological process rather, a psycho-linguistic process that is dynamically determined and fluid.

Humorous Meme 5



One area many people struggled with during the pandemic break in Nigeria was the need to stay fit and healthy. The six months break meant everyone stayed indoors with very minimal physical activities but with lots of food consumption. This led to many persons gaining weight in the course of the break. According to Whyte (2020), Obesity is one of the main causes of early mortality, and it may contribute to a variety of life-threatening health problems, some of which have been linked to COVID-19 issues. Though it has been noted previously that Nigerians gain weight by dining out, the opposite appears to be the case amid the pandemic. According to Whyte (2020), the pandemic may restrict eating out in states where there are lockdowns. Even food is eaten at home, though, can be dangerous. Starchy roots, tubers, and plantains were the most expensive foods on Nigerian individuals' shopping lists. Second place went to rice.

The above explication of the relationship between the pandemic and weight gain accounts for the conceptual knowledge needed to trigger the emotion of humour from the meme above. The concept of social distancing meant creating space but not in the sense in which it is used in the meme, however, the one used in the meme means that there is a need to create a gap that can lead to avoiding the refrigerator. The ability to put these strange relations together greatly contributes to the humour in the meme above.

Humorous Meme 6



@Stacksupbj

How tf ppl think they still know me
from 3-4 years ago 😂😂



folake aina

@f0lake

Im not even the person i was
pre-quarantine at this point

Humorous Meme 6 continues with the idea of changes that occurred to people due to the COVID-19 outbreak in Nigeria. However, in this context, the attention is not on weight gain and obesity but on the psychological and emotional changes that have taken place with people during the period. Anxiety and panic, intense symptoms, insomnia, digestive issues, along with depression and post-traumatic stress conditions, are the most frequent psychological problems appearing (Rogers et al., 2020). These are not only a direct result of the pandemic, but they are also substantially driven by the impacts of long-term social isolation — that is, a lack of intentional connections with people (Leigh-Hunt et al., 2017).

The humour here exudes from the use of exaggeration, where the second part of the meme claims to be different from the person he or she was before the COVID break. While the physical and psychological changes are well acknowledged, however, it does not get to the point of a wholesome and clean change that could be so radical to say: 'I am not the person I was pre-quarantine.' The ability to process the semantic difference between what exists as the real situation and the exaggerated is very important to construct the meme above as humorous.

Humorous Meme 7



Lastly in the data analysis section, humorous meme 7 is investigated. The meme plays on the safety precaution of using face masks. Face masks offer a direct medicinal benefit in stopping the COVID-19 virus from transmitting to the most vulnerable people (Wu and McGoogan, 2020). Face masks, on the other hand, cover a large portion of the human face by definition, which can have a significant impact on social interaction. Our faces convey personal identification as well as extra socially relevant data such as honesty, attractiveness, age, and sex, as well as information that aids incomprehension.

Now, the idea is that the use of a mask does not warrant or lead to a complete loss of identity that may cause a wife to come home with the wrong husband. The fact that masks are used by people and that they may cover the face partially is a conceptual knowledge available to language users in Nigeria that helps in constructing the humour in the meme, especially if triggered by the exaggeration the meme provides.

Discussion of Findings

In this section, four points of findings are presented for discussion. The first is that emotions are not biological constructions, rather they are language construction and are determined by information go through language. This finding invalidates earlier findings and positions held by the natural theory approach to emotion held by scholars such as Klein, 1970; Gall 1835; Spurzheim, 1832; Lindquist & Barrett, 2012. The natural emotion theory links emotion construction to natural and biological factors, where the brain devotes a large proportion to emotion construction. However, as noted earlier, recent studies have been unable to find the

biological evidence and physical structure that support the natural order theory. On the other hand, the current study validates the theory of conceptual acts. This is because it is justified from the memes investigated that a better interpretation and emotion can be got if the language users share the needed and necessary concept to construct the expected emotion. For example, the memes indicating fear could be designed to act as a warning. The meme designer then needs to decide on the hearers know that may make a particular meme fearful in order to act as a warning.

Also, emotions are not static or partially stable as many biological features of man may be, rather emotions are dynamic as languages are. One feature of the human language is the dynamism it shows in all aspects of use. This is unlike many biological features like the functioning of the heart and kidney, where a certain pre-determined stable or partially stable set of operations are expected. If indeed the brain has an aspect for processing emotions like laughter or fear, then, it would be expected that at every point in time, such an emotion would be processed irrespective of the situation and it would be predictable in most persons. However, that is not the case. What scares A may be humorous to B and what scared A earlier may become funny later on. This happens not because the biological feature has changed but that the knowledge of the concept being examined has changed.

Thirdly, the previous knowledge of language users is an important aspect of meaning construction. It is greatly triggered by new or current information for the construction of apt emotions. In Nigeria's social media realm, Ambrose and Idegbekwe (2020) did a study on echoic communications and pragmatic significance for understanding COVID-19 memes. The speaker/meme creator's shared cognitive background knowledge and the hearer/shared audience's cognitive background knowledge were found to be significantly connected in this study. This is also in line with Romadhon's (2020) hypothesis, which states that memes have a higher level of humour effect if they are related to the users' contextual information. The relevance is achieved through the conceptual knowledge or the background knowledge as espoused by the CAT.

Lastly, this study presents that a strange semantic deviation either as a form of irony or exaggeration is a veritable tool for constructing humour. This aligns with the concept of incongruity. Incongruity, according to Attardo (1994), is predicated on the finding of a reality or a notion that is incongruous with what was expected. It means that inconsistencies are the most prominent feature of that philosophy of humour. A distorted linguistics component, according to that theory, could be expressed by a strange language expression, contradiction, befuddling, or disordering the hearer's perception. Incongruity can be used in syllables, lexical, phrases, and meanings to create humour, according to Berger (1976). "Conflict, difference, and distinctiveness characterize incongruity" (Marmysz, 2003, p. 128). Wijana (1994) believes that the basis of humour formation uses a distinct mixture of two interpretations, perceptions, or ideas between speaker and hearer, which causes unexpectedness and oddity as a funny construction need, similar to Marmysz's feature of incongruity.

Conclusion

This study discusses the construction of emotions by Nigerians through the language inherent in COVID-19 memes. The study focuses on two types of emotions-fear and humour as possible constructions from some of the Nigerian related COVID-19 memes shared at the peak of the lockdown ensured by the pandemic. The study deployed the Conceptual Act Theory of emotion to investigate 14 randomly selected memes of which seven of these were for fear and the other seven for humour. The study concludes that fear and humour and like other emotional constructions are greatly influenced by language knowledge and the knowledge of the language user of the 'real world. The knowledge is the base for emotion production while the new information that may come in as a meme or any other text act as a trigger to the base information for apt emotional responses.

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