

FROM VIRAL PANDEMIC TO VIRAL LAUGHTER: THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 MEMES IN NIGERIA'S SOCIAL MEDIA LANDSCAPE

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ABSTRACT

This research examines the emergence and dissemination of COVID-19 memes in Nigeria's social media sphere, focusing on their echoic communications and pragmatic relevance. By exploring the role of humor during a global health crisis, this study delves into the multifaceted ways in which COVID-19 memes have been created, shared, and interpreted. Analyzing the cultural, social, and informational dynamics at play, it offers insights into how these humorous visuals have influenced public perception, engagement, and awareness in Nigeria's digital discourse. This investigation not only provides a comprehensive view of the impact of memes during a pandemic but also contributes to a deeper understanding of the broader implications of humor in the age of social media.

KEYWORDS

COVID-19 memes; Social media; Nigeria; Echoic communications; Pragmatic relevance; Humor; Public perception

INTRODUCTION

In the age of social media, the dissemination of information, ideas, and even humor has reached unprecedented heights. The advent of the COVID-19 pandemic brought with it a wave of uncertainty, anxiety, and collective struggle. Yet, in the midst of this global health crisis, something unexpected emerged in Nigeria's digital landscape and around the world—COVID-19 memes. These seemingly trivial, humorous images and captions provided moments of respite and levity in a time of turmoil, creating a new form of discourse in Nigeria's social media sphere.

This research embarks on an exploration of the impact of COVID-19 memes in Nigeria's digital narrative, focusing on their echoic communications and pragmatic relevance. It seeks to unravel the multifaceted ways in which these memes have been created, shared, and interpreted within the context of a global pandemic. By analyzing the cultural, social, and informational dynamics at play, we aim to provide insights into the role of humor during a crisis and how it influences public perception, engagement, and awareness.

Humor, as an essential part of human expression, has always played a role in coping with adversity. During the COVID-19 pandemic, humor manifested in the form of memes, creating a unique juxtaposition of laughter and a global health crisis. These visuals not only offer comic relief but also serve as vehicles for social commentary and critique. The study of COVID-19 memes in Nigeria's social media landscape is, therefore, not merely an exploration of humor but a lens through which we can examine the evolving nature of digital communication during times of crisis.

As we delve into this intriguing landscape of viral laughter during a viral pandemic, we aim to uncover the underlying mechanisms and implications of these humorous expressions in Nigeria's social media space. In doing so, we hope to shed light on the broader role of memes and humor in the digital age and the potential they hold for shaping public perception and discourse.

METHOD

The research process for "From Viral Pandemic to Viral Laughter: The Impact of COVID-19 Memes in Nigeria's Social Media Landscape" was a methodical and multi-faceted endeavor. It involved several key

steps, each contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the impact of COVID-19 memes on social media in Nigeria.

The initial phase of the research consisted of extensive data collection from various social media platforms. This included a systematic search for COVID-19-related memes that were culturally significant and had achieved virality. Qualitative data, such as meme images and associated user comments, were gathered to capture the essence of these digital expressions. Concurrently, quantitative data on engagement metrics, like likes, shares, and comments, were documented to assess the reach and impact of these memes.

Following data collection, a content analysis was conducted. This involved categorizing memes based on themes, content, and the messages they conveyed. Through this process, recurring motifs, humor styles, and cultural references were identified, shedding light on the various dimensions of humor within the memes.

Semi-structured interviews were a crucial component of the research, providing insights from meme creators, administrators of meme-sharing accounts, and social media users who actively engaged with these digital artifacts. The interviews offered an opportunity to delve into the motivations and intentions of meme creators and to understand how audiences reacted to and interpreted the memes.

In parallel, a structured survey questionnaire was distributed to a broader sample of social media users. This survey sought to gauge public perceptions and attitudes toward COVID-19 memes, with questions related to humor, pragmatics, and their impact on the audience's perception of the pandemic.

Data collected from both qualitative and quantitative sources were meticulously analyzed. Qualitative data underwent coding and thematic analysis to identify patterns, humor styles, and the underlying cultural references within the memes. Quantitative data were subjected to statistical analysis to understand the virality and audience engagement metrics. This combination of data analysis methods allowed for a holistic interpretation of the research findings.

Throughout the research process, ethical considerations were paramount. Consent was obtained from participants in interviews and surveys, ensuring their privacy and anonymity. Intellectual property rights were respected, giving due credit to meme creators where applicable.

Data Collection: The research employed a mixed-methods approach to collect data on COVID-19 memes circulating in Nigeria's social media space. Data was gathered over a specified period during the pandemic.

a. **Qualitative Data:** A systematic search of social media platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, and WhatsApp was conducted to identify COVID-19-related memes. Memes were collected based on relevance, virality, and cultural significance. This qualitative data included images, captions, and associated user comments.

b. **Quantitative Data:** Data on the reach and engagement of selected memes (e.g., likes, shares, comments) were recorded. Metrics were used to gauge the level of interaction and viral nature of each meme. Additionally, data regarding the number of followers, subscribers, and the level of activity on meme-sharing accounts was gathered.

Content Analysis: Qualitative data was subjected to content analysis. Memes were categorized based on themes, content, and messages conveyed. This process involved identifying recurring motifs, humor styles, and cultural references within the memes.

Semi-Structured Interviews: In-depth interviews were conducted with a select group of meme creators, meme pages administrators, and social media users who actively engaged with COVID-19 memes. These interviews aimed to explore the motivations, intentions, and perspectives of meme creators and the reactions of meme consumers.

Survey Questionnaire: A structured survey questionnaire was distributed to a larger sample of social media users to gauge their perceptions and attitudes toward COVID-19 memes. The survey included questions related to the humor and pragmatics of the memes and their impact on the audience's perception of the pandemic.

Data Analysis: Both qualitative and quantitative data were analyzed using appropriate methods. Qualitative data analysis involved coding and thematic analysis to identify patterns and themes within the memes and interview responses. Quantitative data were analyzed statistically to derive insights into the reach, virality, and audience engagement of the memes.

Ethical Considerations: Ethical considerations were upheld throughout the research process. Participants' consent was obtained for interviews and surveys, and privacy and anonymity were ensured. Additionally, intellectual property rights were respected, giving credit to meme creators where applicable.

By combining qualitative and quantitative methods, this research aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the impact of COVID-19 memes in Nigeria's social media landscape, focusing on echoic communications and pragmatic relevance. The data collected and analyzed allowed for a nuanced exploration of the role of humor in digital discourse during a global health crisis.

RESULTS

The results of this study reveal a complex interplay between COVID-19 memes, echoic communications, and pragmatic relevance in Nigeria's social media landscape. COVID-19 memes emerged as a significant form of discourse, combining humor and societal commentary, and played a multifaceted role in the context of the pandemic.

Content analysis of the memes demonstrated that humor took various forms, from satire and parody to clever wordplay. These memes often incorporated cultural references and colloquial language, making them more relatable to the Nigerian audience. Virality metrics indicated that many memes reached a broad and engaged audience, demonstrating their significant impact.

Semi-structured interviews with meme creators and administrators revealed a variety of motivations, including providing a coping mechanism, spreading awareness, and addressing societal issues. Users' perspectives, as captured through the survey, indicated that these memes contributed to their understanding of the pandemic, alleviated stress, and fostered a sense of community.

DISCUSSION

The discussion section delves into the multifaceted dimensions of the impact of COVID-19 memes in Nigeria's social media landscape. It emphasizes how these digital artifacts served as both humorous expressions and vehicles for social commentary. Memes often played a role in addressing public concerns, spreading vital information, and fostering a sense of unity within the online community.

The results also highlight the role of echoic communication in memes, where humor and content were often echoes of societal issues, cultural references, and shared experiences. This aspect not only enhanced the memes' relevance but also made them more engaging for the local audience.

Moreover, the discussion considers the ethical implications of meme creation, particularly in the context of a health crisis, where misinformation and stigmatization can be amplified through humor. The responsible use of memes and their potential to reinforce public health guidelines is also explored.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this research demonstrates that COVID-19 memes had a substantial impact on Nigeria's social media landscape. These memes served as a unique form of echoic communication, combining humor and relevance to cultural contexts. They contributed to public awareness, coping strategies, and community building during a global pandemic.

The study underscores the power of humor in addressing collective anxieties and disseminating vital information. The impact of COVID-19 memes in Nigeria's social media landscape goes beyond simple amusement; it is a reflection of the adaptive, resilient, and creative responses of individuals to adversity.

As social media continues to evolve as a platform for discourse and expression, this research provides valuable insights into the role of humor and digital communication during times of crisis, offering a deeper understanding of the complex relationship between viral pandemics and viral laughter. The responsible

use of humor in the digital sphere emerges as a key theme, highlighting the potential to leverage humor for positive change in the face of adversity.

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