POWER AND PERSONALITY ON THE INTERNET:
A MULTIMODAL ANALYSIS OF ONLINE MEMETIC REPRESENTATIONS OF GOODLUCK JONATHAN

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Abstract
Internet memes are multimodal artifacts with profuse use on new media. While there is already appreciable literature on framing, memes, and audience effects in more technologically advanced countries, the paucity of corresponding studies within Nigeria’s political space necessitates the present study. Using data from a Facebook group, Nationwide Anti Fuel Subsidy Removal: Strategies and Protests, an outcrop of the 2012 subsidy removal protests, twenty (20) Internet memes on former President Jonathan were culled for analysis. The semiotic analysis aimed at identifying the perception—positive or negative—of Jonathan alongside his online representations and frames. The discussion of the images are validated with audience’s comments on the posts. We identified the prevalence of negative memes and further noted their implications on Jonathan’s online impression. The negative frames which may have contributed to the former president’s defeat at the 2015 polls are adjudged symptomatic of the need for governments to develop a citizen-centered dialogic approach through engagement in traditional, current, and emerging media.

Keywords: Political Discourse, Internet Memes, Framing, Social Media, Multimodality, Citizenship Participation

An Overview of the Case Study: Goodluck Ebele Jonathan
Goodluck E. Jonathan is the immediate past President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, having ruled from May 5, 2010 to May 29, 2015. A consummate politician who had variously served as Deputy Governor, Governor, and Vice President, President Jonathan was born on November 20, 1957 in the oil-rich Bayelsa State in the heart of Nigeria’s Niger-Delta region. He holds B.Sc., M.Sc., and Ph.D academic degrees, thus making him one of the most educated Nigerian presidents. President Jonathan’s rule as President from May 5, 2010 to May 25, 2011 followed the order of succession upon the demise of President Umaru Yar’Adua, a situation Jonathan himself described as “very sad and unusual circumstances” (English.aljazeera, 2011). However, his 2011 candidacy was nationally accepted as he won 59% of the votes (Guardian, 2011). His administration has been credited with positives like the power sector reform, Youth Enterprise with Innovation in Nigeria (YOUWIN), and Transformation Agenda.
However, notable challenges like insecurity and obvious government incapacity to tackle the Boko Haram menace, unbridled corruption and a perceived weakness in making tough government decisions implied that the race to win a return to Aso Rock, the seat of Federal power, come May 29, 2015, would be arduous, requiring immense image laundering and political capital. It is against this background that this study was conceived.

In line with the demands of political marketing, Jonathan’s 2011 presidential declaration for contesting was preceded by a conscious deployment of rhetorical strategies aimed at achieving success at the polls. These and his speeches have been studied to provide insight into the nature of political packaging. Kamalu and Agangan (2011) adjudged Jonathan’s presidency as symbolic on several fronts. As the first president from a minority ethnic group, his victory altered the dominant electoral ideology in Nigeria. Ogunlesi (2013) noted that Jonathan was the first vice president to become president; the first Nigerian to ascend from the post of deputy governor, to governor, vice president and president; the first president with a Ph.D., and second most popular head of state on Facebook. In fact, some of his media handlers mischievously acknowledged him as the pioneer social media user in Nigeria.

In addition, Jonathan’s campaign was remarkable, as he was presented as one with the average Nigerian. This was achieved through a reconstruction of his childhood experiences—*I had no shoes*—in order to appeal to prospective voters. According to Ogunlesi (2013), the emerging class of voters created the classic line, “I voted for Jonathan and not the People’s Democratic Party.” This narrative, distinguishing Jonathan from his party ideology and acknowledging him as “a breath of fresh air,” was deployed upon announcing his presidential ambition on Facebook on the 15th of September 2010 (timenigeria.com). The declaration marked a departure from the traditional style synonymous with Nigerian politics. His announcement was liked by 4,000 people within 24 hours. Opeibi (2016) noted that Facebook was a critical tool for President Jonathan to tell the stories of his achievements and seek more support. In 2011, he was elected to office, riding on a wave of popular nationwide support.

The tide, however, turned soon after. Ogunlesi (2013) attributes this development to the Nigerian government’s removal of fuel subsidies on January 1, 2012. Though the price was later reversed with government and labour unions reaching a middle ground rate, it engendered an unrelenting replication of memes (as a dominant online culture), and other invectives. Jonathan was subsequently rated as the “most abused” president in Nigerian history (Ochayi, 2013). The situation worsened in the run-up to the 2015 elections with the spate of bomb blasts, serious displacement of residents of the North-East of Nigeria by the terrorist group Boko Haram, and accusations of endemic corruption. This background provides a suitable entry point for the study of the correlation between the framing in memes and his political image. Its importance lies in Gere’s (2008) statement that for digital culture to be understood, one must comprehend the heterogeneous elements embodying it.

**Objective of the Research**

The focus is on the semiotic analysis of Goodluck Jonathan’s Internet memes. We further identify their significance on his image/representation in the social media. This is achieved by focusing on the connoted meanings of selected memes to uncover their ideological underpinnings for his online personality.
Background to Study

Framing, a sociological concept originally developed in sociology by Tversky and Kahneman (1986), refers to the background information that shapes our interpretation of a situation. Iyengar (2011) observes that the term has been localized in several disciplines, and this has consequently afforded it different definitions. Sheufele (1999) posits that frames, as pre-existing meaning structures or schema, influence information processing and interpretation. Entman (1993) further opines that framing requires us:

to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in communication within a text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described (p. 51).

While substantiating the ambivalence of frames in communication, the above definition reinforces the ubiquity of framing in everyday activity. Johansson (2009) identifies frames as means through which we organise reality and give meaning to our diverse perceptions. Frames are also identified as powerful means of organising or generating involvement. Since framing answers the question, what is going on here? its usefulness has ensured its application in the strategic creation of messages aimed at influencing certain audience responses.

Researches in framing have highlighted its importance in media as a tool for agenda setting (McQuail, 2010; Curran, 2010), while in public relations, it is a vital resource in achieving the core PR mandates of maintaining and sustaining relationships. Because frames build up and shape perceptions of legitimacy, they are also powerful tools in the hands of politicians and political communicators, as they allow political language to be fully harnessed to define reality, create understandings of the past and future, provide interpretation and linkage, and set the agenda and provide a stimulus for action (Sanders, 2009). The styling of the political self and projection of a particular image is essentially a form of branding that reinforces a political candidate’s profile (Corner & Pels, 2006), positioning them as competent, trustworthy, and credible. These qualities are expressed in press releases, official statements, press conferences, interviews, and speeches that embody news frames meant to dominate the interpretation of events. Internet memes are currently forms of expression and representation of the political self.

Citing Boyd and Ellison (2007), Good (2013) explains that the new communication technologies, particularly the social media, allow users to follow media personalities without having real connections to them. This is discernible in notable sites that allow users to manage the flow of content they receive from what is currently a saturated media environment. This affords the audience an opportunity to deploy their own preferred reading through the Internet (virtual sphere), allowing them to challenge the mainstream media by creating opposing frames (discursive and visual) online. Citing Fahmy (2011), Tufekci and Wilson (2012) describe it as “reverse agenda setting”—directing attention to topics in opposition to those within the public sphere.

Increasingly, these new communication technologies have become viable tools for democratisation and “de-spacing” as they level the distance between the politicians and the citizens. Proof of this was evident in the Egyptian protests of 2011 and the Arab Spring of the Middle East. The diffusion
of the Internet, the rise of dedicated platforms like Twitter and the Arabic version of Facebook, coupled with the falling costs and expanding capabilities of mobile telephony, allowed the Internet to be used for dissent by those opposed to the Mubarak regime (Tufekci & Wilson, 2012). This ended his 30-year reign as president. In Moldova, Gladwell (2010) highlights how the reinvention of social activism saw events being labelled the “Twitter Revolution.” These novel uses of social media platforms of engagement and citizenship bypass conventional government architecture, subjecting political actors to greater scrutiny from their citizens, who exercise a form of soft power, described by Carroll and Hackett (2006) as bottom-up governance.

**Social Media and Political Representation**

Since social media became popular in 2003 (Boyd & Marwick, 2011), they have been the most-visited on the web, with its audience being “tied to a common place and mutual interdependence” (Miller, 2011). Social media sites are hubs of endless activities and opportunities for political actors, government institutions, and the general public to interact, corroborating arguments by Winner (1986) that technological “artefacts can contain political properties.” The social media also functions as a bridge between companies and consumers (Coleman et al., 2008). Political activism is also rife on dedicated platforms like Facebook and Twitter, with Clarke (2010) examining how societies form networks of support to hold governments accountable to the people. Given the political inclinations of networked publics, under various tags, global governments in entrenched or transitioning democracies have no choice but to adopt social media as a form of interface with citizens in a bid to deepen democracy. Just as John F. Kennedy was the first U.S. President to effectively use television to his advantage, Barack Obama’s 2008 presidential campaign made history as the first to effectively use social media as a campaign strategy that created awareness, built networks of support, and raised around $1B online. The same can be said of President Jonathan in the 2011 Nigerian elections.

The usefulness of social media platforms further lies in their ability to generate instant feedback on the needs and aspirations of constituencies while attracting input to a democratic process. Harfoush (2009) referred to this as “democracy 2.0.” Apart from its accessibility, affordability and one-to-many capabilities, social media assists in projecting the ideal political self (through dissemination of visual and textual information). Corner and Pels (2006) emphasized the need for the projection of an identity satisfying popular perceptions and judgments. Navigating such portrayals is easier online since social media offers a distributed presence that allows individuals to be simultaneously involved in several frames or performances (Miller, 2011).

This current trend has come with different forms of optimism for civic engagement and the enrichment of democracy, vindicating Winner’s (1986) claim that new technologies alter the exercise of power and the experiences of citizenship. However, Gladwell (2010) expressed confidence in the abilities of Web 2.0 for increasing the efficiency of existing social orders, while Baba et al. (2013) added that it has broadened opportunities for nations, institutions, organizations, and individuals all over the world where it has penetrated. In developed countries, the adoption of these technologies has promoted public engagement, accountability, and transparency, while in developing countries like Nigeria, social media diffusion has been identified as a future ingredient in the narrative of social change (Howard & Parks, 2012).
In describing part of this growing digital culture, Dawkins (1999) uses the “meme” metaphor to capture the transfer of varied ideas that are increasingly brought to life on the worldwide web. Memes are thus vehicles of culture possessing particular frames, since they are dominant ideas transferred from person-to-person and sustained by their psychological appeal. Based on this premise, this study focuses on how memes reflect the portrayal of President Goodluck Jonathan. With Corner and Pels (2006) commenting on the private and public spheres applicable to the lives of political actors, such memes have focused on both sectors of Goodluck Jonathan’s image, with ambivalent captions (anchorage) reflecting the intent of their creators.

Theoretical Framework

Hallahan’s (1999) submission that frames are useful paradigms for studying the strategic creation of messages and their subsequent effects guides this study. Of importance is the framework applying to rhetorical perspectives, concerned with how messages condition meaning and thereby influence recipients. Synonymous with framing are selection and salience that aim for persuasion by shaping inferences of a message. According to McLeod et al. (1984), these are perceivable in framing devices (metaphors, exemplars, catch phrases, depictions, and visual images) and reasoning devices (such as causal attributions, consequences, and appeal to principles).

This research draws on Hallahan’s (1999) seven-model typology that demonstrates how particular personality traits are accentuated. As vehicles for individual and collective ideas, memes, as repositories of frames, have effects on society and oftentimes engender the stereotypes McQuail (2010) highlights as forms of sustained representations. Hallahan (1999) added that, apart from being vehicles of persuasion, messages reflect judgments made by the message creators or framers. These theoretical perspectives are deemed complementary for the focus of this study and have thus been adopted in the study.

Methodological Details

A semiotic analysis of 20 memes from the Facebook page “Nationwide Anti Fuel Subsidy Removal: Strategies and Protests” were examined to isolate the dominant frames used to critique the image of former Nigerian president Goodluck Jonathan online. A product of the subsidy removal protests of January 2012, the online social movement page was created on January 2, 2012 by Gimba Kakanda. The subsidy removal protests informed the research focus of Onanuga and Ademilokun (2014), who examined surrealism and humor in the memetic representations of the nationwide protests. Various still images, including Internet memes, were randomly uploaded by members of the group and meme creators. In supporting varied discussions under the ideology of social justice, facts, figures, and arguments on social, political, and economic complexities are presented. This is reflected its regular posts. As a confluence of images and texts, it is a suitable repository for collecting data related to this research, and the focus is on Internet memes that reflect themes contrary to the official ones.

Given the prevalence of the Jonathan memes, the delimitation to Facebook is necessary since it had a profusion of the necessary data. The analysis covers memes uploaded on the movement’s Facebook page over the period between January to December 2012, beginning with the commencement of the “Occupy Naija” subsidy removal protests. While traffic on the page was most intense during the period of protests and when a consensus was reached between government and labor (January 2012), the remaining
months (February to December 2012) still featured the spread of the memes and others focused on critiquing the president and his cabinet, culminating in the conclusion from various official quarters and his apologists that he is the most abused Nigerian president in history.

Unravelling GEJ’s Online Representations: Presentation and Discussion of Findings

1) Legacy of Waste Meme

In the upper left side of the image is the map of Nigeria with green edges and “legacy of waste” embossed in white within it. The green and white denote national colours while the red is synonymous with danger. On the right side of the image is a full-face shot of President Goodluck Jonathan (signifying government) staring at (his right) the left side of the image. Adopting Chandler’s (2009) framework, the left side, containing the map of Nigeria and text, represents the past or given. It also connotes the profligacy synonymous with Nigeria despite an abundance of resources. Chandler added that elements on the left side of images are commonsensical, assumed and self-evident. Given the interplay of images, this can also be applicable to the profligacy frame within this meme. Chandler’s argument explains that the right-hand side of images (showing Goodluck Jonathan) is synonymous with the new. Through association between the image (signifying government) and the map of Nigeria, the interplay of elements frames the president as being wasteful.

This view is constantly reiterated by advocacy journalists Sahara Reporters, who frame his administration as being guilty of a “culture of waste,” “wasteful spending,” and “high cost of governance” visible in his “large travelling contingents,” “indiscriminate establishment of committees,” “stealthily conducted media campaigns,” and “huge budgetary allocations” to the Presidential Villa (Oluokun, 2012). Such views are reinforced in the discourse analysis of the Facebook comments that portray Jonathan as “no brain,” being “inept,” lacking “the minimal intellect, sincerity, and the commitment to govern,” a “worthy stooge as deputy governor,” “never found worthy to comment even at the grassroots,” and being a “Fake Messiah.” This last term contrasts with the positive self-presentation of his pre-election campaign adverts and “Breath of Fresh Air” slogan, where there was a promise of transformation (Oluokun, 2012) and his framing as a political messiah (Kamalu & Agangan, 2008) who would solve all the intractable problems facing the economy in major sectors of energy, education, health, agriculture, transparency, and accountability. An analysis of the discourse in the Facebook comments reveals a critique of the dismal...
healthcare system (through an allusion to Goodluck’s late brother who died in a government hospital in November, 2012), the rise in kidnapping (identified through a recall of the abduction of the minister of finance’s 82-year-old mother in December 2012), and the questionable nature of a Ph.D. Goodluck acquired from his alma mater (the University of Port Harcourt). The basis of this questioning lies in the argument that one who could gain a Ph.D. would show greater pragmatism in dealing with state problems.

2) In the Beginning?

The unaltered form of the image was prominently used for Goodluck’s Presidential election campaign of 2010. In this image, he does not wear his usual attire of a fedora (referred to in Nigeria as “minimum resource hat”), and attire particular to his region (South-Southern Nigeria). Given the ethnic and religious sentiments particular to Nigeria, (Kamalu & Agangan, 2008), departing from his usual clothes and donning casual attire is consistent with marketing him politically as a detribalized Nigerian. This ideology was prevalent in his campaign speech (political discourse), which resonated with an alignment with the majority of the suffering masses. The image portraying him as an ideal presidential candidate is, however, altered by adding some elements to the other side of his frame using trick effects (Bignell, 1997). This Jekyll and Hyde alteration reveals a side of him as dark, with horns and sharp nails. This beast-like representation has been merged with his form to create a half-man, half-animal figure. In Nigeria, the representation, referred to as Eshu (or Belzebub), belongs to the indigenous pantheon, with a predilection for teaching humans valuable lessons (Britannica.com, 2013).

Given Bignell’s (1997) arguments on the transference of cultural connotations among objects within the same image, it is arguable that this dark side-faced hybrid transfers his cultural connotations to Goodluck through trick effects, which have merged two separate entities into one while asking the question bordering on whether this was his real image or not.
3) Celebratory dinner meme

The meme is actually an original image from a celebratory dinner held on May 29, 2011, following the swearing-in of Goodluck Jonathan and Namadi Sambo as president and vice president of Nigeria, respectively. The image has been altered with the addition of captions in Nigerian Pidgin. When translated the meme caption means:

Goodluck: “Namadi, we have removed [fuel] subsidy and Nigerians do not have the guts to fight us, please dance very well.”

Namadi: “Don’t mind those cowards. We now have money to party. If they like, they should Occupy Aso Rock (Presidential Villa).”

The implication of this anchorage (caption) alters the original message in the still image with the dance becoming a celebration of the victory of the oligarchy over the majority. The dominant narrative of social groups during the Occupy Nigeria protests over fuel subsidy removal was that subsidy removal, which would inevitably increase oil prices, was favorable to fuel marketers, described as a cabal, rather than to the masses (Suleiman, 2012). However, the Nigerian government based its decision to remove fuel subsidies on a need to reduce its annual subsidy expenditure of $8B (Moyo and Songwe, 2012) in line with global best practices. Unfortunately, Nigerian citizens remained doubtful of their true intentions, even after a collective bargaining approach achieved a consensus.

The failure of the government’s framing of the situation as a matter of economic expediency (a form of ideology) is consistent with studies by Van Dijk (2009) and Fairclough (2009). The former states that discourse structures are actions that are instances of global political acts, with the resulting constraints being the crux of discourse analysis. His views are reinforced by Fairclough’s (2009) statement that the preoccupation of contemporary governments for adaption to the global economy (a by-product of globalization) is fraught with ambivalent effects, a negative one being the sacrifice of the majority’s wellbeing for the interests of others. Quoting Ranciere, who taps from Aristotle’s characterisation that a good democracy is a mixture of forms (oligarch and democrats), Fairclough (2009) argues that such an
equilibrium between the oligarchy and majority is needed for society to thrive. However, the importance of discourse still remains in an implicit questioning of this conflictual relationship between both ideologies, which usually involves politicization, de-politicization, authorization, de-authorization and other strategies that are realized semiotically to satisfy various interests.

The captions and visual elements portray the president and vice president as being disposed to an oligarchy. Their “dance” is reinforced by anti-democratic sentiments relayed in their choice of words characterizing Nigerians opposed to the subsidy removal through the Occupy Nigeria movement (terms such as “cowards” and “gutless”). Their invectives come with relief that there will be availability of more funds for partying, rather than the serious demands of office. Framing the president and vice president as “self-indulgent” and “profligate,” rather than serious individuals once again questions their official capabilities, denoting them as pro-oligarchy and party lovers, rather than governance-oriented people, thereby making them unsuitable for the demands of political office, a critique falling into Corner and Pels’ (2006) public-popular sphere of action.

4) Crazy Cabinet members

The picture is a montage consisting of President Jonathan in the foreground, with his ministers and governors occupying the background. Faces from the upper left are former Inspector General of Police Hafiz Ringim, Central Bank Governor Lamido Sanusi, Senate President David Mark, and Minister of Petroleum Resources Diezani Madueke. Bottom left to right are Rivers State Governor Rotimi Amaechi, Minister of Finance Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, President Goodluck Jonathan and Edo Governor Adams Oshimhole. As part of the federal government’s strategy to persuade Nigerians to accept the fuel subsidy removal, some cabinet members were at forefront of various P.R. and media events framing the fuel subsidy removal as a matter of economic expediency. By pushing this subsidy-removal agenda, it was construed as an imposition of the oligarch’s agenda over that of the majority, with Ahmed (2011) linking the decision to remove the fuel subsidy to the International Monetary Fund, whose globalization strategies have been adopted in Nigeria. Quoting Castells (1996), Fairclough (2009) describes this as a process where national governments become incorporated in larger networks composed of national governments and international agencies within an arrangement concerned with creating necessary conditions for
competing successfully in the global economy. However Fairclough (2009) and Van Dijk (2009) note how such processes start ideological battles when the views of minorities are given greater attention than those of the majority.

In analyzing the discourse, the caption frames the public officials in the image as insensitive (to the needs of the masses), given their unwillingness to yield to their voices in retaining the fuel subsidy, as shown in the image’s Facebook comments below.

_Caption: In the last one week these men and women have been in the forefront of crass display of insensitivity to the plight of the people, while they swim in opulence. They are insisting we must make sacrifices, while they budget billions for their feeding, cars, aides, allowances etc. ENOUGH IS ENOUGH!!!!_

The first level effect of these depictions (in Facebook comments) is the categorization of these officials as a crazy bunch that must be stopped. This is the immediate connotation drawn from combining the discourse and images related to the subsidy removal issue that gained national prominence. These negative traits (an evaluation) relate to their inability to handle matter of national importance, and therefore they can fit into a critique of Corner and Pels’ (2006) public-political sphere of action regarding the capabilities of the individuals to hold office.

5) Jonathan as Abacha

The image uses trick effects to merge Goodluck Jonathan’s image with that of the penultimate military ruler of Nigeria, General Sani Abacha, who died in 1998 after ruling Nigeria for five years. Abacha’s rule was regarded as autocratic, given the exile of prominent intellectuals, the killing of activists like Ken Saro Wiwa, and the restriction of political activity (bbc.co.uk, 1998). Criticism of his rule led to Nigeria’s suspension from the Commonwealth until he died from a heart attack. Denoted objects like the uniform
and beret in the foreground serve to transfer Abacha’s traits to Jonathan through association, while the image’s caption,

“I, General Goodlock Jonathan, GCON, PhD, NLC, TUC, PENGASSAN, hereby ordered the sell of fuel @N97/litre! Anybody wey no gree should leave 9ja with immediate effect! Period!!!”

includes the word “order,” an attempt to anchor the discourse in autocratic, rather than democratic, rule. This framing of Jonathan as a military dictator is reinforced by the comment, “leave Nigeria with immediate effect,” meaning there is no option for dialogue in this system as the [fuel] price increase from 69Naira to 141 is final. The first order of effects in the Facebook comments are “dictator and tyrant,” “military rule,” “full dictator,” mumu (fool), his description as being an unreal man and references to his wife’s grammatical blunders. These evaluations fall into the public-popular realm highlighted by Corner and Pels (2006).

6) Jonathan as Monkey

Goodluck Jonathan’s facial traits have been altered by computer technology. Trick effects have distorted his features with his visage expanded to an almost caricature-like dimension. This form of framing elicits the effects of Jonathan being likened to a “Jaki (donkey),” or “chimpanzee,” and the referential term “this” rather than the pronoun “him” to refer to Goodluck in the comments, which are our first order of effects as defined by (McCombs, 1994) as occurring at the intermediary level. This critique is essentially concerned with critiquing his physical attributes, falling into Corner and Pels’ (2006) realm of public-popular sphere of action, with a focus on the leader’s looks.
7) Jonathan as Substance Abuser

The translation of the Pidgin caption reads “don’t blame me, I was given the hemp.” The original picture showed the president in an explanatory stance but it has been altered by trick effects that have added the caption, roll of hemp, red eyes and smoke from his lips to his visage. This is the image in the foreground, while the background has the presidential seal of office. The meme frames the president as smoking hemp in the official chambers reserved for matters of national importance. Such behavior (hemp smoking) runs contrary to the demands of his role as president, and becomes antithetical to the whole process of leading, as substance abuse is denoted as having an effect on his rationality. This is reinforced by the Facebook statement, “I’m sure he was high when he accepted this devastating decision.”

8) Jonathan as Modern-day Hitler

The dominant frame likens Goodluck Jonathan to former German Chancellor and Nazi ruler Adolf Hitler. The foreground reveals the visage of the Nigerian president sporting indexical signifiers in form of the moustache and hairstyle of Hitler. Notable for his attacking Jews through anti-Semitic rhetoric that
culminated in the Holocaust (Auschwitz.dk, 2013), the picture merged features of Hitler with those of Jonathan. In doing so, the theory of transference of Hitler’s traits to Jonathan traits (through association) is achieved, framing Goodluck as a modern-day Hitler. This semblance is brought about using physical attributes associated with the German leader, who was also noted to be a destructive charismatic suffering from narcissism and paranoia (Redlich, 1998).

The lower part of the picture is captioned with a quote from Lyndon Johnson: “The future holds little hope for the government where the present holds little for the people.” This reiterates that the present, symbolized by Goodluck Jonathan (a modern-day Hitler), is bleak, given his framing as Hitler, whose obsession with annihilating Jews and world domination made his era a bleak one for non-Germans.

9) Slum Pig meme

With English language being read from left to right, the left side of the image reveals the words slum pig while the center (nucleus) shows Goodluck Jonathan, before the Hausa words “waka” are repeated four times on the right. In Nigerian usage, waka is an invective similar to the western “talk to the hand.” The choice of the word “slum” connotes his ethnic background. Coming from a minority ethnic group in South-Southern Nigeria (Kamalu & Agangan, 2008), the predominantly swampy nature of the terrain of his hometown Otuoke evokes its likeness to a slum/swamp. Likening him to a pig connotes an Islamic origin, as the consumption of pork is considered a taboo (Haram) among Muslims around the world. With the pig considered a filthy animal due to its love of dirt, Muslims regard it as the worst of animals (The muslim voice, 2009). The combination of both “slum” and “pig” connotes the disaffection the North had for his presidential ambitions in 2010. Jonathan had to rely on support from other ethnic groups after the northern delegates of the PDP (predominantly Muslims) within his party put their support for former Vice President Atiku Abubakar (Vanguardnigeria, 2013) ahead of the Party’s in the presidential primaries for the 2011 elections. Jonathan’s eventual emergence upset the trend of a candidate coming from the dominant ethnic groups of Yoruba, Hausa or Igbo. Given the signifiers and analysis of the discourse criticizing his background rather than his political capabilities (Corner and Pels, 2006), this image falls within the private sphere of action.
10) Clueless meme

The meme positions Goodluck Jonathan in the center of the image (nucleus of information to which others are subservient) with elements at the left and right side of his image (a form of representation). Chandler’s (2009) theorization has focused on the “before” and “after” significance of these elements of the left and right sides of the visual image. Citing the works of Kress and van Leeuwen, he says that facing the right side is consistent with facing the future, while the left side represents the past. The left-hand side is the side already given, with which the reader is familiar, and within this image is the PDP logo (an umbrella with the colors of white, red, and green). Using trick effects, the Party slogan of “Power to the People” has been removed from the umbrella, and been replaced with two “Ghana must go” bags. Such silk holdall bags remain a carrier of choice on Nigerian shores due to their strength and affordability. The bag’s ubiquity is apparent in all spheres, but in the picture it serves a symbolic purpose as it is filled with money, signifying the corruption synonymous with the Party (PDP) through association.

This mercantile and pecuniary inclination has been identified with the PDP, which El Rufai describes as a “toxic party.” This premise arises from the predilection of those members of the Party who hold public office to embezzle public funds and destroy public institutions. This is consistent with other elements (located in the lower part of the image) that identify insecurity (more bomb blasts and terrorism), arrogance, and strikes as pitfalls of Jonathan’s administration. According to Chandler (2009), the lower part of the image is associated with badness, depravity, and other negative traits. Thus, by placing “More Arrogance, More Explosions, More Strikes” under the image of the president’s face, these captions function to highlight pitfalls of the administration, thus serving as premises for the conclusions of “Yes he can’t” and “cluelessness 2015,” on the left hand side of the poster, which Chandler (2009) stated as being reserved for the future.

This prognosis for a bleak future (Jonathan as president in 2015) depicts Goodluck Jonathan as a bad choice for a second term in office, given his inability to solve national problems within his initial term. This is the dominant connotation extracted from the poster. Its arrangement of text and visuals add up to a critique of Goodluck Jonathan, and suggest his unsuitability for a second term.
11) Who Wants to be a Millionaire Meme

This particular meme, through trick effects, places the president in the foreground of the TV quiz show “Who wants to be a Millionaire.” This is denoted from the background of the image showing the game show icons (fifty-fifty, phone a friend, and ask the audience, in descending order) on the right (options). On the right side of the image are sums of money to be won by answering correctly. President Jonathan is, once again, the nucleus of the image. Seated on what the presenters call the hot seat, he is unable to answer the question (who is the president of Nigeria?) as shown by his upward stare and caption, “I will phone a friend.” The upward stare denotes thinking, and the upward stare to the right indicates the imaginative construction of a picture (Changeminds.org, 2013). This body language is inspired by the question, which he has been unable to answer despite using two other lifelines (ask the audience and fifty-fifty) crossed out on the left of the image. His inability to answer such a simple question shows him to be unaware of his position as president, or one neglecting his duties to others.

“Caption: WHO WANTS 2B A MILLIONAIRE?
Here on d hot seat is GEJ. He has already used 2 lifelines; ask d audience & 50-50, & now he wants call a friend. Supposing that u're d friend: Who is d president of d Federal Republic of Nigeria?! U can as well give other intuitive answers such as Ngozi or Sanusi (4 influencing fuel subsidy removal), Boko Haram (4 failing 2 deal with them), d cabals (4 dancing 2 their tones)... GOODLUCK”

This connotative meaning in the picture is supported by its Facebook comments suggesting that the minister of finance (Ngozi Okonjo Iweala) or the Central Bank governor (Sanusi Lamido) are performing the president’s role. The “powerless president” frame is also reinforced with mentions of Boko Haram and the fuel marketers, both of which he was unable to control. Such frames have occurred in the mainstream media, with the opposition party’s (All Progressive Alliance) then interim national chairman calling President Jonathan the leader of a “kindergarten government” (punch.com.ng, 2013). Chief Bisi Akande’s views stem from the premises listed above, as he cited insecurity, breakdown in infrastructure, and the president’s nonchalance about national needs as being symptomatic of an unserious president.
The particular image reflects what Bignell (1997) called trick effects, with the head of the Nigerian president pasted (imposed) on the body of a muscular man wearing female clothing. The plane of connotation points towards a lover of female clothes, described as a transvestite in some cultures; in some settings, however, the term used is cross-dressing (Norton & Herek, 2012). The altering of the discourse is indicative of its increasing acceptance and that of transgender people around the world. However, sexual prejudice remains common in Nigeria, with groups like Changing Attitude for Nigeria (CAN) campaigning against the demonization of gays, lesbians, and transgender individuals as people practicing sexual immorality (Changingattitude.org.uk, 2013). Framing Goodluck as transgender imposes the notion of a deceptive individual on the viewer. The linkage between this view and the transgender person has been made apparent in studies that Norton and Herek (2012) conducted on negative views held towards transgender people by heterosexuals who believe they are deceptive by claiming to be what they are not (a member of opposite sex). Such transference of traits is possible through association (Bignell, 2012), which situates Goodluck within the transgender narrative.

13) Vampire meme
This meme shows a close-up semi-facial shot of the President with red eyes, sharp teeth and blood dripping from his mouth. The manipulated image, replete with these signifiers, frames Goodluck Jonathan as a vampire. A cultural connotation of blood is that it is a symbol of life, and therefore drinking blood imbues one with such life. The “blood is life” motif has gained currency around the world, but its destructive aspect allows the correspondence between the real (Jonathan) and the mythical (vampire). A recognition of the vampire frame attracts Facebook comments on when the change occurred. By use of the vampire element to categorize his traits, Goodluck Jonathan is portrayed as a destructive, rather than creative, president who would rather preserve himself than attend to the needs of the people who voted for him to lead the national agenda as head of the executive.

As a major archetype bequeathed by English romantics, this mythical figure of the vampire is a powerful analogy for aberrant energy transfer, as vampires are demonic figures that nocturnally attack and destroy others to preserve themselves (Gelder, 2001). As a contemporary archetype, its presence in the narrative affirms the role of the meme as a vehicle of popular culture and falls into the Public-Popular sphere of action.

14) Google meme
This image is consistent with Google co-founder and CEO Larry Pages’s comments that the perfect search engine “understands exactly what you mean and gives you back exactly what you want.” Within this image, the tag, “most foolish president ever in Nigeria” has been typed, and its main option is Goodluck Jonathan. In analysing the discourse, “foolish” is defined as a lack of good sense or judgment (freedictionary.com), and the appearance of “did you mean Goodluck Jonathan?” (though manipulated) is an endorsement of this reality. Also, within the image, “foolish” is modifying the noun “president,” Thus, by critiquing the political abilities synonymous with the highest executive position in Nigeria, Jonathan is portrayed as lacking the acumen required for his current position.
15) Nigerian Idiot meme

The foreground of this image reveals Goodluck Jonathan alongside prominent members of his cabinet. From left to right are Jonathan, Vice President Namadi Sambo, former information minister (now Defense Minister) Labaran Maku, Finance Minister Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala and Special Adviser on Media and Publicity to the President Reuben Abati. This meme is situated in the Nigerian Idols narrative—a version of the popular global franchise that unearths musical talent. The show’s contestants are retained through audience votes. With the audience participating by voting for their favorite idol, there is intense competition on the way to picking the eventual winner. As a form of popular culture, the narrative has been altered, with the word “Idol” replaced by “idiot.” While the caption on top of the image entreats votes for the favorite idiot to be sent to the number 65141, the one below is calling for votes as a means of destroying the dreams of the president and members of his cabinet. In psychology, the “idiot” has the least position on the intelligence quotient (IQ) scale, equivalent to someone who is “mentally retarded” or “challenged.”

By framing these cabinet members as lacking IQ, the image projects their characterization as unsuitable candidates for political office, given the high cerebral and competency output it requires. The first level of effects available in the Facebook comments particular to this image show the endorsement of Goodluck Jonathan, Sambo and Okonjo-Iweala as the “most favorite” idiots. Other comments call for the inclusion of the Central Bank Governor Lamido Sanusi in the fold. Framing the cabinet members in this form criticises their political capabilities.
16) Jonathan’s Pledge

The meme shows Goodluck Jonathan being sworn into office as the substantive Nigerian President during the absence of President Yar’Adua from office. Alongside him is the Chief Justice of Nigeria (in 2011) Aloysius Iyorgyer Katsina-Alu. Goodluck Jonathan is clutching a Bible in his hand he takes the oath of office, altered in the form of a conversation on top of the image. The first comment from the Chief Justice is a statement that those indicted in the oil subsidy probe report of May 2012 will not be prosecuted. The report, a product of the subsidy removal protests of January 2012, indicted marketers and government officials in a wide scale embezzlement of large funds budgeted for subsidizing fuel prices. It also recommended refunds of around $6B to government, prosecution of those involved in the diversion of funds, and restructuring of the national oil corporation to increase transparency and accountability (opensocietyfoundations.org, 2013). However, most of the recommendations were not implemented, including the prosecution of those found guilty of participating in the fraud (entrenched interests). These interests are referred to as a cabal, made up of powerful individuals who import petroleum products into the country due to the inability of the government-owned refineries to function at full capacity. Suleiman (2012) identified the power of the cabal as resurfacing in 2012 during the attempts at subsidy removal, and also contributing to state policies by featuring as the organized private sector. This line of argument is similar to those expressed by Fairclough (1989) on individuals who exercise constraints on majority of the people.

The second comment in the image is a promise from the FG to release a list of Boko Haram suspects. Boko Haram is a terrorist group with links to al Qaeda, whose aim of creating an Islamic state across Nigeria has led to a wave of insurgency in Nigeria since 2009, consisting of various forms of attacks (BBC.co.uk, 2013). The second statement ends with a suggestion that maybe the public will deal with them. This is contradictory, as the FG should perform that role since it is responsible for defending its citizens from internal and external aggression through the police, army, and other security forces. The text below the image is a remixed version of the Nigerian Pledge. In it, Goodluck Jonathan pledges his loyalty and honesty to the cabal, rekindling the pro-oligarchy tendency. In the first line, “Nigerian Cabal replaces” the original phrase “Nigeria my Country,” while subsequent instances of “Cabal” in the text
replace “Nigeria.” Thus, Goodluck is pledging to the Cabal (a powerful minority), rather than Nigeria (composed of Nigerians). The line of connotation frames him as loyal to a small number of people, rather than to the majority of Nigerians. Thus, his tenure as president will only benefit a small, rather than substantial, number of citizens.

17) German Chancellor Meme

The original image depicts Goodluck Jonathan’s April 2012 visit to Berlin, where he met the German Chancellor Angela Merkel. The two-day visit focused on bilateral talks to increase trade between Nigeria and Germany. One of the images from the visit shows Goodluck Jonathan and the Chancellor addressing a press conference. This background has the German eagle and Nigerian flag, while the foreground depicts the political significance of the event. From their poses, a conversation is ongoing, as Merkel’s and Goodluck’s stances denote.

However, the political message derivable from the image has been altered with the introduction of the captions. The question and his response connote a president lacking the etiquette required for such duties. This frames him as engaging in behavior that is inconsistent with official etiquette. Adhering to diplomatic protocol is a delicate art requiring tremendous discipline, acute cultural awareness, and mastery of the diplomatic protocol code. In fact, there is little margin for error in international relations. Thus, by omitting courtesies and consistencies from one’s messages, objectives are compromised. This makes it expedient to uphold traditions, acknowledge customs, and maintain appropriate formalities in interactions which nations, thereby conveying respect and order, and creating an environment conducive to mutual understanding and collaborative decision-making. Given the anchorage employed in the meme, the opposite is conveyed through image and captions. This meme criticizes the public-popular sphere of action of Jonathan’s image.
18) Jonathan with Obama

The foreground of the meme reveals Goodluck Jonathan on the left and his American counterpart Barack Obama on the right. The original image was from their meeting at a Nuclear Security Summit held in Washington in 2010 (Allafrica.com, 2010). While the summit’s purview was originally about enhancing international cooperation to prevent nuclear terrorism (State.gov, 2013), the message has been altered with the addition of a caption that anchors it into a frame affirming corruption and embezzlement. The new message is extractable from Barack Obama’s question regarding Goodluck’s change in complexion and Goodluck’s response. This affirms views by advocacy journalists like Sahara Reporters who have constantly charged his administration of being guilty of wastage by drawing around $35B from Nigeria’s Excess Crude Account and failing to complete any of the rail and power infrastructure projects.

19) Jonathan as Boko Haram

In this meme, Goodluck Jonathan sports a beard. The beard is usually symbolic of a Muslim (Douglas, 1978), even in Nigeria, which is religiously heterogeneous. However, the beard in the image has deeper connotations beyond the identification of the Muslim. As a cultural signifier for identifying Muslims of a particular creed, security agents have also used it to identify and arrest suspected Boko Haram members. This action has made the beard synonymous with local terrorists who frame their insurgency as a religious war aimed at converting the largely Islamic Muslim North to an Islamic state.
Their battle with the Nigerian security forces has led to casualty figures estimated at 3,600 (Vanguardngr, 2013), and has also seen the group designated as the most dangerous terrorist group in the world. Goodluck’s beard likens him to a member of the terrorist group. Coincidentally, the Nigerian president, rather than the terrorist group, has been identified as the mastermind of the bombings in some quarters. Notable among those accusing him of this is a jailed terrorist, Henry Orkah, who testified that Goodluck’s agents were responsible for the 2010 bombings in Warri and Abuja on March 15 and October 1 respectively (Al Jazeera, 2010). While this view has not been substantiated with evidence, the conspiracy theory which frames him as being responsible for bomb attacks has continued to circulate, and its efficacy is visible in Facebook comments accompanying this meme. A comment sought to discover if it was true or not that the president was the mastermind of the bombings. This frame reappears in the meme which questions his service to the wellbeing of the people as enshrined in his oath of office, thereby critiquing his public popular sphere of action.

20) Jonathan as Mr. Ibu

This meme’s caption has a pop culture reference to the humorous duo the Blues Brothers, likening Goodluck Jonathan and Nollywood comic John Okafor (aka Mr. Ibu) to them. While the duties of Goodluck Jonathan as Nigerian president run contrary to such laxity associated with humor (signified by Mr. Ibu and the reference to the Blues Brothers of Chicago), the anchorage within the caption achieves the result of transferring comical traits to him, and thus framing him as a sidekick and fellow comedian. There is also the word “Goofluck” replacing Goodluck. This alters the cultural significance of his name from positive fortune, to one filled with gaffes. Such a critique targets the public popular sphere of action by labeling Goodluck Jonathan as handling the country in a laughable manner.

Classifying Frames: The Faces and Facets of Goodluck Jonathan in the Online Domain

With respect to the 20 memes selected for this study, an analysis of captions and Facebook comments by the group members (essentially moral judgments about causal agents of social injustice that their group is aiming to eradicate) also revealed some dominant frames.

Pro-oligarchy frame: Memes 3, 11 and 16 deploy a pro-oligarchy narrative to characterize Goodluck’s administrative strategy. These frames are prevalent in the comments of meme 3, the part of meme 11’s caption touching on fuel subsidy removal and meme 16, which frames the Nigerian President
swearing an oath of office to the Cabal rather than the Nigerian State. This ‘cabal’ is also mentioned severally within the analyzed texts as a reinforcement of this oligarchy frame.

**Destructive leader frame:** Memes 2, 13 and 19 framed Goodluck as embodying destructive tendencies by associating him with traits common to Beelzebub, vampires, and terrorists respectively. Given their cultural connotations, these representations are the group’s evaluations about the negative trend of Goodluck’s administration. While meme 2 is a recall, meme 13 and 19 use current representations to presume that the destruction is already ongoing as signified by the blood on his lips (meme 13) and the lives claimed by the insurgency group *Boko Haram* in (meme 19).

**Tyrant frame:** Memes 5 and 8 frame Goodluck as tyrannical in nature by using trick effects to join his image with those of Adolf Hitler and Sani Abacha. Such metaphorical associations are consistent with the group’s view of him as a “despotic interest.”

**Clueless frame:** Memes 10 and 11 frame Goodluck as being oblivious to the demands of his office and his role as president by situating him in a clueless frame. The cluelessness is fully stated in Meme 10, while meme 11 constructs it by placing him in a popular culture narrative of a game show to highlight this presumed trait.

**Inept president:** Memes 7, 10, 11, 14, and 16 harp on the perception of Jonathan being incapable of meeting the demands of office. This is reinforced in Facebook comments from meme 1 describing Goodluck as lacking “... the minimal intellect, sincerity or commitment to govern,” “... I know how inept he is” and “GEJ is an inept unintelligent opportunist.”

**Profligacy frame:** this is prevalent in meme 1 (legacy of waste), the comments of meme 3 “... more money to party” and the captions of meme 4 “... they budget billions for feeding, aides, cars, allowances, etc...”

**Corruption frame:** Meme 18, though manipulated, is a confirmation of corruption by Goodluck.

**Unworthy frame:** memes 6 and 9, using references, liken Goodluck to a “slum pig,” *jaki* (donkey), and *chimpanzee*.

These dominant frames, applied in their critique of the Nigerian president, represent him as a cause and recipient of blame, and consequently an unsuitable choice for a second term.

**Discussing Frames: Public-Popular Sphere of Action in Jonathan’s Memes**

The semiotic analysis of the 20 selected memes exposed the prevalence of embodying criticisms that fall within the public-popular sphere of action (Corner & Pels, 2006) particular to former Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan. Criticisms of the public-popular sphere of action synonymous with Goodluck’s image were visible in memes that framed him as blame-worthy and incapable of meeting the demands of his office. According to Corner and Pels (2006), the public-popular sphere of action is a breeding ground for the politician’s reputation, rise and decline, measurable through responses to the actions of their mediated persona. The public’s evaluation of a politician’s actions as good or bad makes it necessary for an analysis and evaluation of the preponderance of media cues (visuals, texts, etc.) pertaining to the politician in question. Castell (2010) opines that what matters most to voters are embodied in the persons of political candidates who are the faces of politics. Given the values of credibility, trust, and candidate character, unrelenting criticism portended negative outcomes for the subject of this study.
The findings of this study suggest that the social media framing of Goodluck Jonathan, through the lens of the memes, is negative in nature. This has been highlighted through a categorization of dominant memes that are highly critical of the public-popular aspect of his image, revealed by a mixed-method approach focusing on images and discourse particular to a Facebook group concerned with entrenching social justice in Nigeria. One of the main objectives of the analysis was to discover the correlations between online memes and audience perceptions. With memes being multi-modal embodiments of popular culture that are perpetuated from person to person (Dawkins, 1999) and having the abilities to challenge the dominant hegemony of the state (Tay, 2012), the analysis discovered the nature of such cognitive alterations on audiences, and their implications for the politician.

These critical views have been described by (McLeod et al., 1994) as a form of first-level effects, a pattern of response corroborated by the founders of the Facebook group studied. In response to an interview question regarding the rationale behind aggregating memes on the group, the creator’s response was that it (responses) was the responsibility of the group members as “. . . the group merely aggregates the opinion of these members taken together.” This comes from allowing uploads of diverse content. Such pluralism, besides being a form of social capital, is symptomatic of uses and gratifications particular to media messages (in this case, memes).

The analysis of images and messages enabled access to the connotations and consequences of such frames affecting the image of the Nigerian president Goodluck Jonathan. Their effects in altering audience perception are apparent in the analysis, confirming Fairclough’s (1989) views on how legitimization and delegitimization as high-level strategies of social struggles are realized semiotically. It also resonates with Tay’s (2012) argument on the dominant nature of memes as a form of online visual culture generating subversive discourse with the potential to undermine governments through humorous means. By framing Goodluck Jonathan in negative ways, these individual framing depictions were in direct opposite to his mainstream media portrayals, but still remained quite popular in the online sphere where they are diffused, verifying Curran’s (2010) reasoning that media portrayals which influence people’s understanding of someone they are against remained a central aspect of contemporary politics.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study examined the social media framing of former Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan. This was achieved through the study of prevalent negative memes that are adjudged as consequential for his online impression. The negative representations are highlight the government’s need to develop a dialogic approach to meet the needs of the citizens through engagement in traditional, current, and emerging media. Such increasing attention to social media engagement has the potential to build trust in public institutions and figures and would be preferable to the current drive of the Nigerian government for social media regulations aimed at limiting the challenges to its dominance by individuals who use social media for achieving their emancipatory goals. In contributing to existing knowledge on the nexus between social media and political discourse, this study aligns with Cappella and Jamieson (1997), as it concludes that frames are cues that trigger inferences, ideas, judgements and contrasts about issues, policies and politicians.

Based on the focus of and realizations from this study, we recommend future considerations of how netizens perceive online images of politicians and how these frame their acceptance or otherwise.
Focus may also be placed on the Multimodal Discourse Analysis of the implications of political images for propagandist purposes. In addition, the nexus between social media platforms and political participation must be further explored, particularly in the aspect of language use.

References


