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Internet Meme as a Campaign Tool to the Fight against Covid-19 in Nigeria

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Internet Meme as a Campaign Tool to the Fight against Covid-19 in Nigeria

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Keywords: awareness, covid-19, campaign tool, communication, internet memes, nigeria.

I. Introduction

The outbreak of coronavirus known as Covid-19 witnessed a digitalized era of unprecedented campaigns in Nigeria. Citizens engaged in using social media during the period to sensitize people and to call on the government to help prevent the spread of the virus. Facebook appears to be among the platform tremendously used by Nigerian to campaign against Covid-19 in the country. Covid-19 has created a global health crisis that has had a deep impact on the way people perceive the world in their everyday lives. Not only the rate of contagion and patterns of transmission threatens the sense of agency but the safety measures put in place to curtail the spread of the virus, which require social distancing, washing of hands, the use of masks, among others. Social media, in this regards, has zipped information, and misinformation around the world at unprecedented speeds, fueling panic, racism, and hope. Social media has become a space for collective grieving for the contestation of Covid-19.

Technological transformation and citizens' participation in communication on coronavirus is one of the notable aspects of contemporary campaigns in Nigeria. Cinema, television, magazines, newspapers, and the social networking sites are awash with numerous visuals including but not limited to photographs. One of the distinct features of social networks, especially Facebook, is its popularity, affordability, accessibility, and the capacity of sharing and distribution of information, messages and photographs for the consumption of the users (Gwandu, 2019). The proliferation of the information and communication technologies gadgets has contributed to the active participation of citizens in the creation and dissemination of media content, hence the emergence of what is globally recognized as citizen journalism. The usage of social networking sites has facilitated the ventilation of opinions, and improved the participation of the hitherto passive recipient into active members in the business of production and consumption of communication messages (Nnaane, 2014).

Technological developments in the field of internet impact the large group of people that uses this media source to obtain health information. Social media is such a new development and drastically changes websites from a static source to a many-to-many communication channel. The use of information communication technology especially, via social media, has transcended the use of words alone to the creation of images on Covid-19. Many of the social networking sites users do so without regard to the issues of decency, decorum, or ethical consideration. One significant effect of this development is that Nigerian citizens can scarcely avoid noticing the presence of these Internet memes. The Internet memes are so ubiquitous and unavoidable part of the networked social environment of coronavirus campaign communication on the Internet which forced people to become, if not producers or distributors at most, consumer of these Internet memes.

Social media renders enormous contributions to the fight against Covid-19 in Nigeria. These contributions could be positive or negative. Within this context, there is a paucity of research in the area. Most of the researches done in the related area were studies of photographs of Covid-19, as presented in

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Newspapers, News Magazines as well as mainstream media (Hand in Gwandu, 2019). This calls for a thorough study of the visual rhetorical analysis of how social media users apply Internet memes as tools to the fight against Covid-19 in Nigeria.

II. Objectives of the Study

Based on the gap identified in the literature, the following objectives are set:

1. To find out if Internet meme is used as an attack tool.
2. To study Internet memes as a platform for sharing sensitive ideas.
3. To investigate if Internet meme is used as a pull prank.
4. To ascertain whether Internet meme is used to derail a topic.

III. Operational Definition of Terms

Covid-19: This is an infectious disease caused by a type of virus that is capable of causing fever, cough and breathing as reported in form of Internet meme on Facebook.

Campaign tool: These are series of operation that are intended to achieve the goal of fighting Coivd-19 in Nigeria via social media like Facebook.

Internet meme: Is a type of meme that is used on social media like Facebook which consist of image, photographs or in form of cartoons and macros with a concept or catchphrase of Covid-19.

Nigeria: This is an African country on the Gulf of Guinea which has many natural landmarks confronted with Covid-19 pandemic.

Social media: These are websites and application that enable users to create and share content in form of meme on Covid-19 in Nigeria.

IV. The Benefit of Using Social Media to Create Awareness on Covid-19: Literature Review

Omoruyi (2015) observes the prevalence of internet memes on prominent personalities by the users of social media in Nigeria. Gwandu (2019) states that the inappropriate manipulation of scientific digital images typically does not arise from intent to deceive or to obscure information. More often, the inappropriate manipulations are simply due to ignorance of the basic principles." It seemed to this author that often, what is needed is an explanation of why manipulations are right, or wrong. In more ways than the traditional media, social media networks, particularly Facebook and Twitter, played central roles in the fight against Covid-19 in Nigeria. Omoruyi (2015) notes the use of internet memes in the campaigns via social media, especially Facebook is apparent. Other studies on social media bordered on citizen participation in social media for the fight against Covid-19 campaigns.

While the efficacy and efficiency of traditional media campaigns are well documented in the literature, social media use such as Twitter or Facebook, use remains significant in dissemination messages to the public on coronavirus. Traditional media campaigns are used widely to inform the public on Covid-19 for a wide variety of objectives and have shown positive outcomes in terms of reach, public awareness, and to an extent, behavior change. As more consumers turn to the internet to get information on Covid-19, health organizations have begun to turn to social media as a tool for connecting with the public. An emerging topic which very few studies have analyzed is the efficacy of Internet memes to campaign against Covid-19. Preliminary reports have demonstrated considerable reach associated with social media applications and have the potential for engaging specific target audiences. However, given the rapid and exponential growth of social media use, the development of best practices by public health organizations are crucial for adapting social media to every day public health practice (Anand, Gupta and Kwatra, 2013).

Reports suggest that social media is a very feasible option that is relatively easy to adopt but requires adequate, and appropriate human resources to maintain. A lot of overarching benefits of social media were identified for the general public, patients, and health professionals. Social media users have the potential to increase the number of interactions, and thus, are provided with more available, shared and tailored information. Social media can generate more available health information as users create and share medical information online. Blog sites create a space where individuals can access tailored resources to deal with health issues. Social media can widen of access to those who may not easily access health information via traditional methods, such as younger people, ethnic minorities and lower socioeconomic groups. The important aspect of using social media for health communication is that it can provide valuable peer, social and emotional support for the general public and patients. For example, social media can aid health behavior change, such as sharing information on Covid-19 among members of the public. Cousineau and Paris in Anand, Gupta and Kwatra (2013) reported that people used health-related social networking sites to discuss sensitive issues, and complex information with health professionals.

A report commissioned by the Region of Peel Public Health department reviewed the current and potential uses of social media on the public health stage. The review had emphasized the shift towards participatory methods for health consumers from the "traditional gatekeepers" of health information. Given the

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variable quality of health information available through social media, public health organizations can provide credible information to consumers how, and when they want it as their main motivation for reaching out via these channels. The potential to reach target audiences is also a factor, given that Facebook boasts the potential to reach over 500 million members of the exact audience you are targeting. Public health is also taking advantage of the reach of social media by enlisting it for "Infoveillance" (Marshall, Owen and Bauman, 2004).

Organizations can use social media for syndrome surveillance by monitoring the frequency of searches related to a particular illness, enlisting the public to report infections or symptoms, and mapping outbreaks with new tools and data mined from existing social networking sites. Furthermore, surveying the public's beliefs regarding a public health topic can provide critical information informing the types of messages that will be most effective. In public health surveillance, social media can provide communication in real-time and at relatively low cost. Social media can monitor public response to health issues, track and monitor disease outbreak like Covid-19, identify misinformation of health information, identify target areas for intervention efforts and disseminate pertinent health information to targeted communities. Health professionals can aggregate data about patient experiences from blogs, and monitor public reaction to health issues. Social media may have particular potential for risk communications as they can be used to disseminate personalized messages immediately thus making outreach more effective (Anand, Gupta and Kwatra, 2013).

There is the potential that information on social media may contribute to health care policy making, as medical blogs are frequently viewed by mainstream media. The main uses of social media focus on increasing interactions with others and facilitating, sharing and obtaining health messages. The general public mainly used social media for themselves, family members, and friends to obtain and share information on a wide range of health issues. Patients can share their experiences through discussions forums, chat rooms, and instant messaging or online consultation with a qualified clinician. Some health professionals were reported to use social media to collect data on patients and to communicate with patients using online consultations (Newbold and Campos, 2011).

Another benefit of social media for health communication is the accessibility and widening access of health information to various population groups, regardless of age, education, race or ethnicity and locality, compared to traditional communication methods. Social media allows users to generate peer-to-peer discussion in a way not enabled by traditional websites. Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy and Silvestre (2011) have suggested that organizations need to recognize and understand the social media landscape and where the conversations about them are already being held (cognize), develop strategies that are suitable, work out how often and when they should enter into conversations and be aware of what others are doing and act accordingly.

Different studies have highlighted different benefits for health communication, but there are not enough studies indicating its long-term effects. As there is an expected increase in the use of social media, there is a dearth of research supporting the effectiveness of social media applications on an Internet memes. Most studies conducted were observational and analyzed the current health-related "conversations" taking place over social media. There is a deficit of peer-reviewed research on the use of Internet memes which is significant to this study.

a) Participation in Social Media by Health Care Professionals

Social media provide health care professionals (HCPs) with tools to share information, to debate on health care policy and practice, to promote health behaviors, to engage with the public, and to educate, and interact with people regarding their health issues (Bernhardt, Alber and Gold, 2014). HCPs can use social media to potentially improve health outcomes, develop a professional network, increase personal awareness of news and discoveries, motivate patients, and provide health information to the community (Fogelson, Rubin and Ault, 2013). Physicians join online communities where they can read news articles, listen to experts, research medical developments, consult colleagues regarding patient issues, and network. In this perspective, they can share cases and ideas, discuss practice management challenges, make referrals, disseminate their research, or engage in health advocacy. For instance a survey of more than 4,000 physicians conducted by the social media site by Fogelson et al., (2013) found that more than 90% of physicians use some form of social media for personal activities, In contrast, only 65% use these sites for professional reasons. Nearly a third of physicians have reported participating in social networks.

Unlike physicians, pharmacists have been relatively slow to adopt social media. Much of the growth in the professional use of social media among this group appears to involve pharmacist-specific social networks. The surveys have shown that many pharmacists use Facebook. Although this use is most often for personal communications, more than 90 pages on Facebook are related to the pharmacy profession, such as the Pharmacists Interest Page, the American Pharmacists Association, and the Cynical Pharmacist. Only 10% of pharmacists use Twitter, and a search for pharmacists on LinkedIn identified 274,981 profiles (Grindrod, Forgione, and Tsuyui, 2014).

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b) The Use of Social Media by Hospitals

People appreciate businesses that speak in a human voice. Nevertheless, many healthcare organizations have been slow to adopt social media, mainly because executives have not yet realized the benefits of these platforms. Studies have shown that teaching hospitals and those with high bed capacities adapt more rapidly to social media (Bennett, 2013). Social media can help hospitals in different ways. It can increase patient volume, reach a new audience, introduce new services, create awareness, improve outcomes, provide excellent customer service, and maintain the reputation of health organization. An example of using social media platforms is Facebook, which is technically a free advertising resource that may be utilized for local, national, and global exposure of practice or healthcare organizations. It can offer paid advertisement placement, which is different from a search engine, pay per click adverts since Facebook can better target advertisements in its user's news stream, based on having information about their users and users' preference (Bennett, 2013).

Hospitals across the globe are turning to social media as a means of distributing their message, educating people and their patients, and marketing their services. Barry (2010) identified the primary social media uses for 1800 hospitals using social media: supplying information to a general audience (97%), providing content about the entire organizations (93%), announcing news and events (91%), furthering public relations (89%), and promoting health (90%). Hospital systems such as the Mayo Clinic, Henry Ford Health System, Innovis, and Scripps Health use blogs or interactive, informal communication Web-based pages, linked with Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube to expand their reach to people and the patients.

The importance of social media for health organisations relates to their need to manage their online reputation while combating then spread of misinformation and opinions based on a fallacy. While a growing body of scholarly evidence links online heath information to positive health-related behaviors, the growth and ease of social media platforms have also resulted in concerns about the quality and reliability of the information provided through this medium (Lustria, Smith and Hinnant, 2016).

c) The Dangers of Social Media in Creating Awareness on Covid-19

Poor Quality of Information: The main limitation of health information found on social media, and other online sources is a lack of quality and reliability (Sajadi, 2011). Authors of medical information found on social media sites are often unknown or are identified by limited information. Also, medical information may be unreferenced, incomplete, or informal. While evidence-based medicine de-emphasizes anecdotal reports, social media tend to emphasize them, relying on individual patient stories for collective medical knowledge. Similar problems exist with traditional online media; however, the interactive nature of social media magnifies these issues, since any user can upload content to a site. Social media users may also be vulnerable to both hidden and overt conflicts of interest that they may be incapable of interpreting (Sajadi, 2011).

Social Media Risks: Here are some dangers in using these relatively new platforms in healthcare.

a. *Message control.* The speed at which messages can spread through social media allows for a little time to think, react, and control situations as could be done in traditional media. Therefore, it is important to think carefully before posting any information. If unsure about the content of your post, ask someone who can provide guidance. For example, the communication department may be of help.
b. *Privacy and security breaches.* Privacy and security are top consumer concerns when sharing their health information through social media. Healthcare providers should do the following when using social media. Use privacy settings to protect personal information and content as far as possibly. Monitor their internet presence to ensure that personal and professional information published on their sites and content posted about them by others is accurate, and appropriate. Online actions and content can negatively affect the reputation with possible far-reaching consequences on their medical career. Keep professional and appropriate boundaries when interacting with patients online and ensure that patient privacy and confidentiality are maintained (Singh, Wal, Awani and Tiwari, 2016).

Damage to Professional Image: A major risk associated with the use of social media is the posting of unprofessional content that can reflect unfavorably on HCPs, people, and affiliated institutions. Social media convey information about a person's personality, values and priorities, and the first impression generated by this content can be lasting. Perceptions may be based on any of the information featured in a social media profile, such as photos, nicknames, posts, and comments liked or shared, as well as the friends, causes, organizations, games, and media that a person follows.

Weaknesses in Health Care: Opponents of online social communities for patients argue that some patients may not understand the limitations of the Internet. Some worry that because standards of care have not been established for health information on social media Web sites, people may be vulnerable to false information provided for them online. People need to fully understand that any advice provided on social media

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sites is limited by the fact that it is not based on their individual medical history. At this point, guidelines that explain to what extent physicians can provide care online and what they are liable for have not been established or implemented. In the United States, for example, physicians are licensed by individual states.

However, on social media sites such as AmericanWell.com, which provides video conferencing between physicians in the continental United States and patients in Hawaii, health information is available for anyone regardless of their location (Singh et al., 2016). Health care providers also face limitations and barriers if they want to share Covid-19 stories using social media. The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) of 1996 ensure patient confidentiality, stating that physicians can use patient data without their consent only for three purposes: treatment, payment, or health care operations. Therefore, HIPAA requires physicians to obtain patient consent before displaying information anywhere, including public and restricted networks. However, individual information regarding Covid-19 has remained a topic of discussion on social media.

Legal Issues: The widespread information on Covid-19 on social media in the country needs an urgent introduction of a new legal framework. Although several constitutional rights can be applied to the use of social media, such as freedom of speech, freedom from search, and seizure and the right to privacy; however, these rights can be successfully challenged. For example, in 2009, a U.S. District Court upheld the expulsion of a nursing student for violating the school's honor code by making obscene remarks about the race, sex, and religion of patients under her care. The court concluded that the school's honor code and confidentiality agreement signed by each nursing student-governed the standards of acceptable behavior, dismissing the student's claim that her right to freedom of speech had been violated. A similar ruling was made in a case in which a student posted pictures of herself as a drunken pirate on MySpace.

Therefore, physicians and other healthcare providers should not discuss patients' illnesses, medical conditions, or personal information online without the patients' permission. The permission when obtained should be clearly stated in the post. Use a disclaimer to state that the posted opinions represent your views, not those of your employer. Legal cases should never be discussed on social media because most current case law dictates that such information is discoverable, however, this may depend on the purpose for, which the information is sought (Singh et al., 2016). Therefore, the proceedings literature examined in this study are significant and serve as a framework for the current study.

V. Theoretical Framework

The study is guided on the theoretical lens of Visual Rhetoric which is an art of effective communication through images typography, and texts. Visual rhetoric encompasses the skill of visual literacy and the ability to analyze images for their form and meaning. Drawing from the theoretical lens of rhetorical analysis, visual rhetoric examines the structure of an image, and the consequent persuasive effects on an audience. Visual rhetoric implicates the use of images. Using images is apparent to visual rhetoric because these visuals or images help in forming the case or arguing the point that the writer formulates. Similarly visual rhetoric encompasses how people arrange segments of visual text on social media. Visual rhetoric also involves the selection of different fonts, contrastive colors, and graphs, among other elements, to shape visual rhetoric text. One of the ideas one can apply, when analyzing a visual text is to look for its significant meaning.

In the application of visual rhetoric, scholars like Msughter (2018) and Gwandu (2019) are of the view that the meaning should be deeper than the literal sense that a visual text holds. In this perspective, there is a need to dissect a visual text to understand the meaning behind the image or text. Analyzing a text that includes a photo, painting, or even cartoon of the bold eagle with additional written words, would bring to minds the conceptions of strength and freedom rather than merely a conception of a bird.

This, including an understanding of the semiotics creative and rhetorical choices made with coloring, shaping, and object placement. Visual rhetoric view images as sensory expressions of cultural and contextual meaning, as opposed to purely aesthetic consideration. Visual rhetoric has been approached and applied in a variety of academic fields including art history, linguistics, semiotics, cultural studies, business, and technical communication, speech communication, and classical rhetoric. Visual rhetoric seeks to develop rhetorical theory in a way that is more comprehensive and inclusive about images and their interpretations. Within this context, there is a nexus between the theory and the study as people used social media platforms globally to respond to the threat posed by the coronavirus pandemic. Citizens were engaged in using social media during the period to create awareness and sensitize people as well as calling on the government to help prevent the spread of the virus while others were also using Internet memes to attack the government.

VI. Research Method

Using Semiotic and Qualitative Content Analysis approach, the study seeks to critically examine internet meme as a campaign tool to the fight against Covid-19

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in Nigeria. Semiotic analysis, which studies the signs in images, was used in this study in order to answer the research question based on the signs and photographic image of the internet meme. As Rose (2001) explained, semiotics "offers a very full box of analytical tools for taking an image apart and tracing how it works in relation to broader systems of meaning" (p. 69). The major strength of semiotics is that it is a sophisticated analytical tool for explaining how signs make sense (Rose, 2001). In conducting the semiotic analysis, the study interpreted the photos by looking at the colors, angles, background settings, eyes contact, dressing, and gestures poses in the photos.

Besides the photos, the study looked at the captions accompanying the photos to read the dominant, preferred ideology of the photos. Because images can be polysemic and therefore open to interpretations, considering captions along with the photos can help a researcher to find out which signs to read, and which signs are privileged. As Barthes (1977) had argued, captions are like anchors; they help the readers to choose the correct level of perception.

Therefore, with the aid of qualitative content analysis, the study looked at the text to determine the dominant, preferred meaning of the photo. The study discusses purposively selected sample units of analysis of internet memes that were used to create awareness on Covid-19 in Nigeria. What makes the sampling purposive is the fact that there were many social media platforms that were used to campaign against Covid-19. However, Facebook seems to be used predominantly by the citizens and most of the pictures or cartoons on Covid-19 were found on Facebook pages. The content categories of the study are similar to the proposition of Buchel (2012) that Internet memes are used as attack tools, a platform for sharing sensitive ideas, a tool for responding to incidents or previous posts, pulling a prank, and derailing a topic.

VII. Findings and Discussions

Internet Memes were used in Nigeria to campaign or create awareness on Covid-19 in the following ways:

a) Internet Meme as an Attack Tool

Internet memes have been used to attack or attract the attention of other social media users. This is because getting attention is the first step to any meaningful campaign. Numerous Internet memes were used to portray the love for money, and the Governor of Kano State, Abdullahi Ganduje, has been used in this direction. For instance, an internet meme on Facebook 28 of April 2020 shows how excited the Governor was when the President promised to render the necessary assistant needed in the state to fight Covid-19.



Based on the intended message, the internet meme must have been produced by the member(s) of the opposition of the government. It was meant to depict the climax of how the Governor loved collecting money in dollars. It shows how the Governor is ready to siphon the money or to put it in his *babanriga* or *agbada* (big clothe) rather than using the money to fight Covid-19 in the state. The implication is that most of the citizens are of the view that the Nigerian government is using Covid-19 as an avenue to generate money.

Other memes in this category is those showing how incompetent the Nigerian government is in the fight against Covid-19 in the country. The picture shows how *Almajiri* are using the already used sachet of pure water to make face mask to protect themselves from Covid-19 in the country.

Another internet meme in this category shows how the *Almajiri* carries food in polyethylene bags and are begging from door-to-door to feed themselves. This is an indication that the Nigerian government is

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incapable of providing food for the commoners in the country during the Covid-19 lockdown.

The picture is indirectly showing how people from the grassroots are suffering due to the negligence of the government. The more reason why these children cannot afford face mask rather, they are using waste bags of pure water to construct face masks to protect themselves from Covid-19.



Another internet meme under this category was the one that shows how President Muhammadu Buhari and Vice President Yemi Osinbajo are making jest of Lagos State amidst the Covid-19 pandemic.

This shows that Lagos area boys were complaining over the first two weeks lockdown in the state without knowing that an extra two months will soon be added. The response of the President shows that Lagos State will be shocked when extra two months will be added instead of two weeks. The implication is that instead of the President and the Vice to feel remorseful over the plight of Lagosians, they are busy making a caricature of them.



b) Internet Meme as Platform for Sharing Sensitive Ideas

Social Media users find the Internet memes handy in the dissemination of awkward ideas. Because of the humorous nature of memes and lack of attribution to most of the Internet members, citizens find the Internet memes as a veritable campaign tool for the spread of nasty ideas that may warrant societal detest. For instance, Internet memes were used to show how other countries are releasing a huge amount of money to fight Covid-19 while countries like Nigeria is simply advising people to stay at home and wash their hands.

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Internet meme was used in this perspective to show how police officials were chasing Nigerian citizens who flout the stay at home order. This depict scenario or paint a picture of a lack of appropriate measure in handling the Covid-19 pandemic in Nigeria. It is apparent in the picture that, instead of the Nigerian government to provide palliative just the way other countries are doing to fight the virus, the government is busy using uniform men to force people to stay at home.

Another Internet meme shows how the citizens are making an effort to adhere to the guidelines that were put forward by the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) in the country. This is apparent as some of the citizens are doing everything possible to maintain social distancing. For example, the picture shows how some bike men are trying to maintain distance by creating space between them and the passengers.



Internet Meme on Facebook March, 2020

The picture shows that Nigerian citizens are law-abiding as far as the fight against the Covid-19 pandemic is a concern. That was why the bike man sat on the tank of the motorcycle and allowed the woman to sit on the passenger's sit while leaving his normal sit to create two meters distance as approved by NCDC.

In another internet meme, the real danger of coronavirus was shown how people could potentially die from the economic impact of Covid-19. It is apparent in the literature that more than 300 people who died since March 19, 2020, mostly during the first two phases of the coronavirus lockdown, lost their lives to hunger, financial distress, and the inability to get timely medical attention. Nigerian government claims its system is robust and capable of providing support to vulnerable people. However, ECOWAS warned that the impact of the coronavirus pandemic could increase the number of people at risk of food insecurity and malnutrition from 17 million to 50 million people between June and August 2020. The findings by the ECOWAS coincided with the

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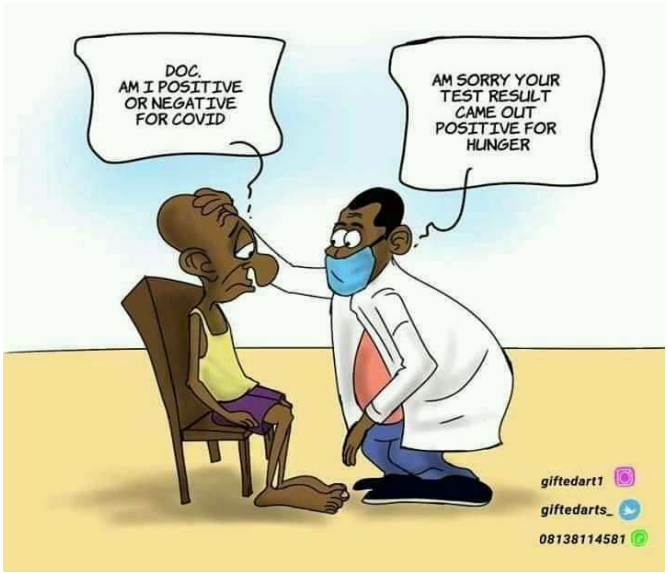
category that shows how the *Almajiri* are begging from door-to-door to feed themselves. Evidence in the meme shows how the doctor remarks that, someone's test result came out positive for hunger instead of Covid-19.



c) Pull a Prank

Internet memes were shown ridiculing the evil of Covid-19, showing how God will defeat and shame the devil. People believe that coronavirus will not succeed in Nigeria just the way Ebola was completely defeated. Many people also believe that the virus was created, which is an evil act to destroy or shake other countries' economies. Some people also see it from the political point of view, that the government is only increasing the figure of Covid-19 in the country to enrich themselves.



Internet Meme on Facebook March, 2020

Another Internet meme also shows how Abuja and Lagos were under lockdown for weeks. Going by the statement made by the President that the lockdown will be eased in Abuja and Lagos on 4th May 2020, there was a meme demonstrating how people in these places will be celebrating the good time after being under lockdown for weeks. The creature in the form of a devil carrying a sharp object indicates an evil ploy by the devil to spread more of the Virus on Nigerians.

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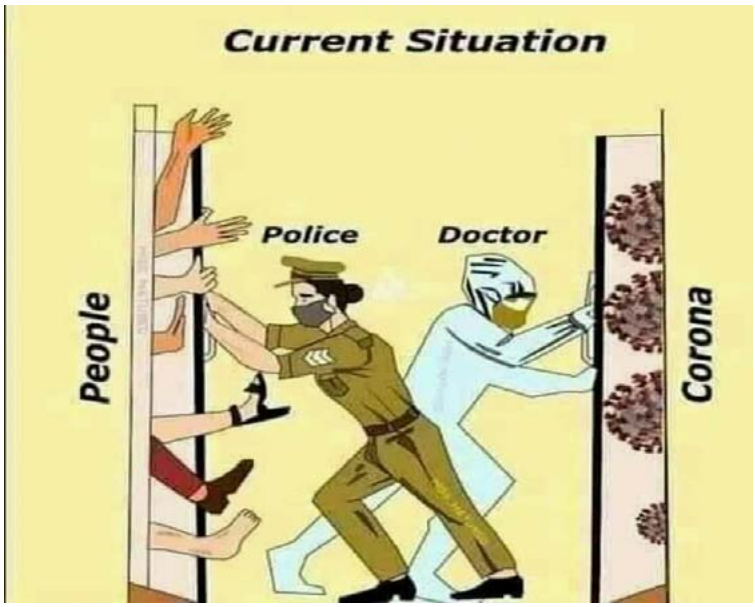
Another example of such meme is the one that shows how the Nigerian doctors are trying to stop Covi-19 in the country. This is apparent in the meme as the doctor is pushing the door so hard to prevent the coronavirus from coming out. This shows that the doctors in the country are working hard to curtail the spread of the virus. On the other hand, the police are also doing their job to ensure that people are in-door. This is evidence in the meme as the police person is trying to push people inside. It also means that force can be apply to people that want to go contrary to the instruction. Therefore, the current situation in Nigeria is how both the police and the doctors are doing their best to ease the wide spread of Cvid-19 in the country as shown in the meme.



d) Derail a Topic

It was on record that Chinese doctors visited Nigeria about the Covid-19 pandemic. However, the decision to welcome the Chinese doctors prompted a backlash from the Nigerian Medical Association, who argued that Nigeria does not need external intervention to manage the ongoing pandemic. But top government officials, including the Health Minister, defended the deployment stressing that the Chinese team will help advise local authorities on handling the pandemic.

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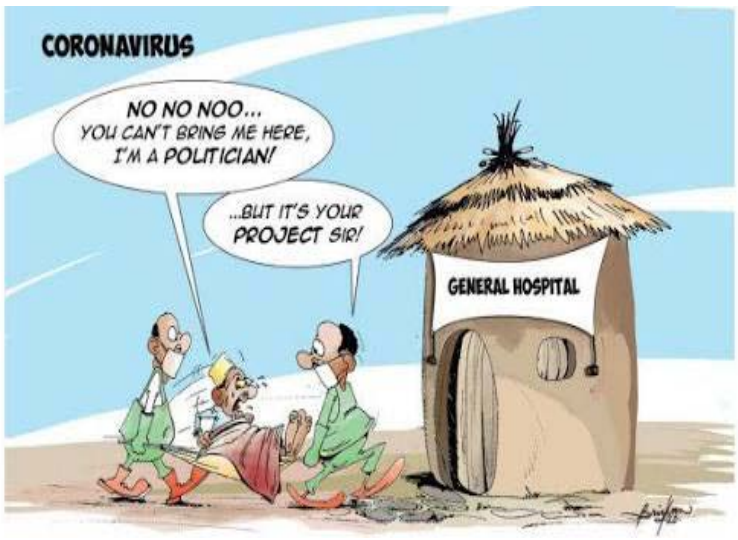
Internet Meme on Facebook April, 2020

Internet meme was used to ridicule Nigerian doctors of incompetence in handling Covid-19 cases in the country. The importation of the Chinese doctors into Nigeria is a big slap to Nigerian doctors. Some lamented that Nigerian citizens are also in China, but why can't Nigerian doctors be sent to China to take care of Nigerian citizens that are affected with Covid-19. Within this context, Internet meme was used to ridicule the Nigerian government, while some said the decision is purely based on politics and not to protect the lives of Nigerians.

Internet meme was also used to demonstrate how Nigerian politicians are not putting in place good hospitals in the country; rather, they prefer to go abroad for treatment. Others were of the view that rich people especially politicians do not believe in Nigerian doctors and that could be the reason why they are always traveling abroad to seek medical attention. Still, now that Covid-19 is here in Nigeria, and there is no way for them to travel out, they will attend the same local hospitals that the commoners or poor people are attending. Internet meme was used to portray this where a politician was taken in a local hospital and when he complained, he was told that it is his project.



Another internet meme was used to show how Kaduna tightens lockdown on Eid especially the trucks that were coming from Kano to Kaduna. It is on record that most of the Coivd-19 patients tested positive in the state were the *Almajiris* (Islamic pupils) repatriated from Kano to Kaduna as well as other people from Kano coming into the state. The meme shows that the youth, traveling from Kano to Kaduna were hiding inside a truck loaded with cattle, as most states in Nigeria have banned people and vehicles from entering their states as a measure to halt the spread of the novel coronavirus.

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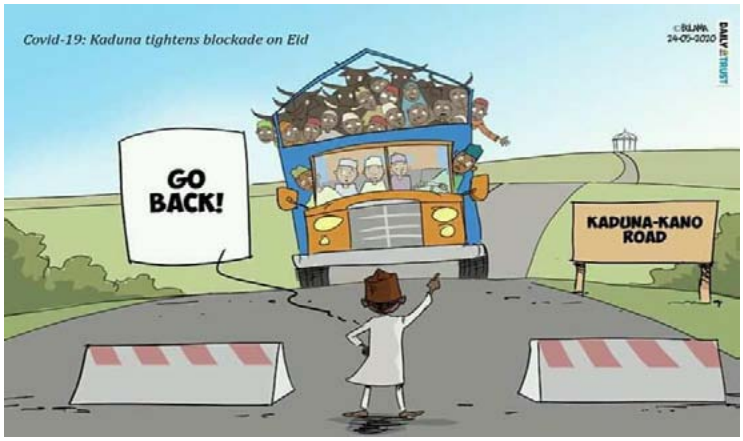

Internet Meme on Facebook May, 2020

VIII. Conclusion

The findings of the study indicate that social media serves as an avenue to campaign against Covid-19 in Nigeria. Social media has remarkably contributed to citizen engagement to the fight against Covid-19. The study captures and highlights how the social networking sites served as an avenue that contributed to the citizen engagement as well as the application of unhindered freedom of expression, via the use of photographs, vanishing of authorship about the creation, distribution, and consumption of internet memes to create awareness on Covid-19. Empirical evidence from the study shows that Internet memes were used as a tool for conveying messages to the general public. As a tool for the fight against Covid-19, the study found that Internet memes were used to attack, share sensitive information, pull a prank, and derail a topic. The paper articulates that internet memes serve as an avenue for direct communication, which contributes to creating awareness on Covid-19 in Nigeria.

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