

**THE COMMUNICATIVE IMPORTS OF MEMES IN COMPUTER-
MEDIATED POLITICAL DISCOURSE: A CASE STUDY OF THE WIKE-
FUBARA POLITICAL CRISIS IN RIVERS STATE NIGERIA**

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NOVEMBER 2025

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AN ESSAY SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND LITERATURE, UNIVERSITY OF BENIN CITY, BENIN CITY, IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF BACHELOR OF ARTS(B.A. HONS.) DEGREE IN ENGLISH AND LITERATURE.

NOVEMBER 2025

CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this study was carried out by Beloved Olamiposi OLAJIDE (ART2100304) in the department of English and Literature, Faculty of Arts, University of Benin, Benin City.

Dr. A. M. Aikoriogie

Date

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to God Almighty for his grace , wisdom and infinite mercies throughout the course of this research, and to artists who puts so much efforts in creating cartoons. I also dedicate it to everyone, including myself who pushes forward in pursuits for knowledge and new innovations.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Firstly, I give all the glory , honour and adoration to God Almighty, for His divine inspiration, guidance and strength throughout the course of this research. Without His wisdom and substance, this work would not have been achievable. May His name forever be praised.

My sincere gratitude goes to my loving parents Rev'd and Dns Mrs Olajide for their unwavering love, support and encouragement at every stage in this journey. To my siblings, Heritage, Jennifer, and Evelyn, I cannot tell how much your support has inspired every steps in this journey, thank you for always believing in my ability to do better.

My heartfelt gratitude goes to my supervisor, Dr. A.M Aikoriogie, for his invaluable guidance, patience, and insightful feedbacks that shaped the direction and quality of this research.

To my lecturer, Mrs.U.U Kalu-Bazuaye, your direction and guidance has given this work a perfect light, I'm grateful for access. God bless you immensely.

To my senior colleagues, Dickson Kingsley, Egbo Peace, Okhaiefo Faith, and Victoria Oluwamayowa. Thank you so much for your time,dedication,and contribution towards my academics in terms of textbooks, and resourceful materials, both in soft and hard copies.

To the house of CASOR (Christ Ambassador Student Outreach), my fellowship on campus. CASOR has been a blessing to me both spiritually and academically. I'm indeed blessed to be a CASORITE.

To the Chairman, Winners Guests House Limited, Akure. Engr. Segun Olotu, I am sincerely indebted to you for your remarkable support towards my academics. God bless you immensely.

Finally, to every other person's who I could not mention due to limited space, that has contributed to this academic journey, I sincerely appreciate and did not take your support for granted. Thank you all for being a source of inspiration. May God continue to show up for you unexpectedly!

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the discourse of political ideologies surrounding the Rivers State politics in Nigeria by examining the communicative functions and socio-political implications of Internet memes within the context of the Wike-Fubara political crisis in Rivers State. It adopts the discursive use of Kress and van Leeuwen's Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) to analyze the multimodal nature of the cartoons that convey the Wike-Fubara political crisis. Overtime, memes have emerged to become a powerful multimodal tool in computer mediated discourse combining both visuals and written texts to convey political information. Through the analysis of memes, a discourse is engaged to intercept the Wike-Fubara political crisis, capturing the roles and influence memes have in contributing to public perception, and shaping the Nigerian politics. This research made the following findings: citizens use memes to mock and challenge political authority by turning serious issues into humorous visuals, godfatherism, security threats, and political tensions remains a dominant theme in Nigerian politics, and also that emergency rule is both a subject of satire and a source of anxiety. In conclusion, this study concluded that memes function as instruments of communication especially during the Wike-Fubara political crisis in Rivers State. It serves as the public voice expression frustration, hope and uncertainty.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the role and communicative imports of memes in computer-mediated political discourse during the political crisis between Nyesom Wike and Governor Siminalayi Fubara of Rivers State. This study aims to analyze the communicative imports of memes, investigate the platforms through which they are shared, and assess their contributions to the meaning-making process in discourse.

1.2 Scope of the Study

This study is focused on memes that directly relate to the political crisis between Nyesom Wike and Governor Siminalayi Fubara of Rivers State, between the period of May 2023 to March 2025. It is limited to contents shared on social media platforms; Facebook, YouTube and Twitter (X). This study will not cover other memes or political conflicts unrelated to the Wike-Fubara political crisis. The geographical focus of this study is Rivers State Nigeria, and the target population includes; social media users and participants engaged in political discussions online.

1.3 Methodology

This research work adopts the discourse-based methodology through the lens of Kress and van Leeuwen's Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) to evaluate the political memes within the Rivers State political context involving crisis between Nyesom Wike and Siminalayi Fubara. Memes, as complex semiotic resources combining text, images, and cultural symbol, requires an analytical framework capable of representing their multimodal nature.

The discourse-based methodology is grouped under the qualitative method, but it is treated as its own category with focus on language, visuals, symbols and communication. The Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) falls under this category. Halliday's systemic functional linguistics will help to fully comprehend the political messages embedded in the memes.

1.4 Theoretical Framework

This theory will adopt the Multimodal Discourse Analysis as its framework to access the socio-political ideologies surrounding the Rivers State political crisis. Multimodality as a term refers to the application of different modes that extends beyond language thereby contributing to the meaning making process and understanding of communication.

Multimodality as the term implies, is the combination of multiple modes to collaborate with words and form a comprehensive meaning. Multimodality is supported by factors in semiotics such as; pictures, videos, films, images and sounds to achieve an effective communication. Multimodality explores how semiotic elements such as; colours, shape, image, lines, layouts and arrangements contribute to the meaning making process i.e multimodality is the use of multiple methods to convey information, (Kress, 35-36).

History and Development

According to history, Multimodality did not gain full recognition until 20th century. It then became standardized in the 21st century as it was introduced into arts, social media, literature, and advertising. The British linguist John Bateman is regarded as the first to present a systematic and theoretical approach to the description and analysis of multimodal documents, thereby laying the foundation for which both researchers and advanced students could now formulate a linguistic method of analysis that shows how different modes of expression such as; language , rhetoric, images, typography, colour and space work together to make up a comprehensible meaning, (Bateman, 144).

However, the multimodal discourse analysis approach to linguistics did not emerge all of a sudden, it has roots in the works of scholars like; M.A.K Halliday.

M.A.K Halliday in his approach to grammar introduces the Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG), it is a part of a social semiotic approach to language called (SFL) Systemic Functional Linguistics. In Halliday's work, SFL recognizes the roles language plays in semiotics and how it is often shaped by the contexts. The Systemic Functional Linguistics as a functional linguistics theory claims that both the emergence of grammar and the particular forms it takes should be explained in terms of the functions the language intend to serve. It views language from three meta-functions that captures how humans speak or write, that is "in terms of the purpose of that language, (Halliday, 436).

Multimodality plays a crucial role in representing communities by enabling communication across various modes that are easily interpretable. This flexibility promotes connection between language and culture. Kress and Bezemer describe modes as culturally and socially shaped resources used to create meaning. Bezemer further explains that for something to qualify as a mode, there must be a shared cultural understanding within a community about how resources are organized to produce meaning. Through multimodality, linguistic elements can effectively express cultural aspects, (Bezemer and Kress 166-195).

Multimodality In social contexts allows images to coexist with text and other modes, producing messages that embody social values and collective

identities. For instance, private photos shared online can serve as references to past experiences, enriched by captions that recall memories of friends, family, and colleagues, engaging audiences through shared social connections. In this same vein, multimodality in business communication enhances interaction by enabling employees and customers to connect through multiple channels such as phone calls, videos, chats, and screen sharing. These tools facilitate real-time visual communication, improving operational efficiency and fostering deeper interactions among business partners, (Pauwels, 38-48).

Halliday's systemic functional linguistics identifies three meta-functions inherent to all languages for analyzing clauses: ideational, interpersonal, and textual.

. The ideational meta-function involves representing participants, processes, and circumstances in communication, reflecting people's internal and external experiences and the logical relationships between events.

. The interpersonal meta-function views language as a means to perform social interaction, negotiate roles, attitudes, and relationships, involving features like mode (speech roles), modality (modal verbs), and polarity (positive or negative forms).

.Textual meta-function organizes language to ensure coherence in discourse, emphasizing how information is structured to fit contexts. An example is shifting the theme in clauses: "The Vice Chancellor shut down the University" versus "The University was shut down by the Vice Chancellor," where the theme changes focus from the actor to the recipient of the action, (Halliday, 17).

Aristotle's concept of rhetoric will be used to do the analysis of this study. Aristotle, the ancient Greek philosopher, contributed extensively across multiple disciplines including natural sciences, philosophy, linguistics, economics, psychology, politics, and arts, with particular focus here on his works in linguistics, politics, and arts. He defined rhetoric as the ability to identify the available means of persuasion in any situation. Since mastery of this art was essential for success in legal cases, political assemblies, or public speaking, Aristotle described rhetoric as a combination of logical science and ethical politics, (Aristotle , 17).

Aristotle identified three modes of persuasion targeting audiences: logos, pathos, and ethos. Logos, meaning "word" or "discourse," is based on rational and logical argumentation through inductive and deductive reasoning, aligning with the philosophical principles controlling the universe (Merriam-Webster). Pathos appeals to emotions and values, evoking feelings through devices like metaphor, anecdote, and passionate delivery; it can sometimes manipulate emotions

unethically, (Walker). Ethos, meaning "character" in Greek, concerns the moral nature and credibility of a speaker or group, reflecting the guiding beliefs and sentiments that define them, (Aristotle, 17)

1.5 Review of Related Scholarship

Limor Shifman, in her work discusses memes as multimodal cultural units that combine texts and visuals to convey social and political messages. Her study aims to understand how memes function as a form of cultural socialisation providing commentary in digital media. She finds out memes instigates imitation resulting to social commentary by fostering engagement on political and social issues. This background is relevant for analyzing how political memes during the Wike-Fubara crisis leverage multimodal communication to influence public opinion. Shifman concludes that memes are vital digital vernacular that shape political discourse by making complex ideas accessible and shareable, (Shifman, 37-45).

Alexander J. Hartley focuses on the role of internet memes as computer-mediated technologies that facilitate shared meanings and political critique. His objective is to explore how memes convey political ideas in viral formats. Hartley's research highlights the multimodal function of memes: as tools of resistance and as communicators of humor and critique within political contexts.

This is directly applicable to the current study, providing insights into how memes related to political crisis act as accessible vehicles for political discourse. He notes that memes simplify complex political sentiments, allowing wide audiences to engage with and participate in digital political debates, (Hartley 45-63).

Emma Vossen and Philip N. Howard analyze memes as interactive social "games" where digital users compete for visibility and influence. Their purpose is to understand memes' roles in political mobilization and identity formation. They find that memes trigger or challenge political narratives by facilitating social competition and identity expression. This is relevant to understanding the power dynamics and social functions of memes in the Wike-Fubara crisis, where memes contribute to shaping political identities and mobilizing supporters. Their conclusion underscores that memes are not just humorous artifacts but strategic tools in political discourse, (Vossen and Howard, 44-60).

Chika Obi-Okoye applies a multimodal critical discourse analysis to Nigerian political memes, aiming to reveal how verbal and visual modes work together within political messaging. Obi-Okoye finds that memes' impact is significant in shaping public opinion by blending text and visuals to frame political narratives during elections and crises. This research is closely tied to the current study's focus on multimodality in the Rivers State political crisis. The

observation emphasizes that memes are powerful rhetorical tools that influence social attitudes and political allegiance, (Obi-Okoye, 112-129).

Agboola Adewale investigates the role of memes in engaging Nigerian youth politically. His study examines how memes serve as tools that promote political awareness, resilience, and activism among youth. He finds that memes foster youth participation by offering relatable, humorous content that connects them to political processes. This insight supports the examination of youth engagement through memes in the Wike-Fubara crisis, underscoring the socio-political impact memes have in mobilizing younger generations, (Adewale, 21-44).

Chinedu Nwafor studies the use of digital media in the Wike-Fubara political conflict. He reveals that memes have played a diverse role in both escalating political tensions and providing a platform for satire and public resistance. This work is directly applicable as it focuses on the exact political crisis issues,, illustrating how memes contribute to the dynamics of political communication and conflict in Rivers State. Nwafor concludes that memes serve as complex communicative agents that can influence crisis narratives while also empowering citizen expression and participation, providing a player form for public commentary, (Nwafor, 33-58).

1.6 Justification and Research Gap

Despite the growing popularity and widespread use of memes and political cartoons in shaping public discourse worldwide, there remains a notable scarcity of empirical studies focusing on their communicative functions within the Nigerian political context. This gap is especially apparent concerning political crises such as the Wike-Fubara feud in Rivers State.

While scholars like Hartley and Shifman have extensively examined memes as aspects of digital culture and political phenomena, their research largely focuses on Western contexts or broad meme theories, (Hartley, 45 & Shifman, 37). These works tend to overlook the specific political dynamics and semiotic practices found in African settings. Additionally, research on Nigerian political communication rarely employs a multimodal discourse analysis that integrates both visual and linguistic modes in meme studies.

The political crisis between Wike and Fubara presents a unique case marked by complex power struggles, political rivalry, and digital activism, yet it remains underinvestigated through multimodality and social semiotics. Since memes significantly influence public opinion, reflect political institutional changes, and challenge political narratives, this study aims to address the gap by exploring the communicative roles of memes within this context.

This research is therefore justified as it advances empirical and theoretical understanding by using multimodal analysis to investigate political memes in Nigeria. It provides practical insights into how political communication, combined with digital tools, shapes contemporary political discourse and engagement in Rivers State, thereby offering valuable knowledge for scholars, media professionals, and political stakeholders.

1.7 Thesis Statement

Cartoon memes are powerful multimodal tools for accessing the ideologies of godfatherism, political tension, security threats, and the subsequent emergency rule surrounding the Rivers State political tussle.

CHAPTER TWO

GODFATHERISM AND POLITICAL TENSION

2.0 Introduction

This chapter examines what godfatherism means in the Nigerian context, how political tension erupts within the same system, and how these concepts are vital in shaping political results. By drawing on scholarly literature and recent observations, this chapter builds a comprehensive picture of how these forces operate in the political crisis involving a predecessor "god-father" (Nyesom Wike), and his successor "god-son" and incumbent Governor (Siminalayi Fubara).

2.1 Godfatherism

Godfatherism in Nigeria politics refers to a term that describes the relationship between a powerful sponsor (the god-father) and a political beneficiary (the god-son). As Omilusi explains, it is “a system where an influential individual provides political support, financial backing, and legitimacy to a less influential political actor in exchange for loyalty and returns” (Omilusi 44). In other words, the god-father uses money and political influence to help someone gain political office, expecting obedience in return. Unfortunately, this system often undermines democracy. Gambo observes that “godfatherism has become a recurring pattern in Nigeria’s democracy, weakening the autonomy of elected

officials and promoting corruption” (Gambo 12). The sponsored politician is rarely free to make independent decisions, leading to friction when they attempt to break free from control.

This dynamic is clearly reflected in the relationship between Wike and Fubara. As the former governor, Wike played a huge role in Fubara’s rise to power. However, when Fubara began to assert his independence, tensions quickly surfaced. Their once cordial relationship deteriorated into a full-blown political crisis that divided the state.

Godfatherism as regards the Wike-Fubara political crisis is depicted in the following memes:

Fig 1 caption "" Battle of wits vs brute force. Who wins?" (Orhue, fig.1)



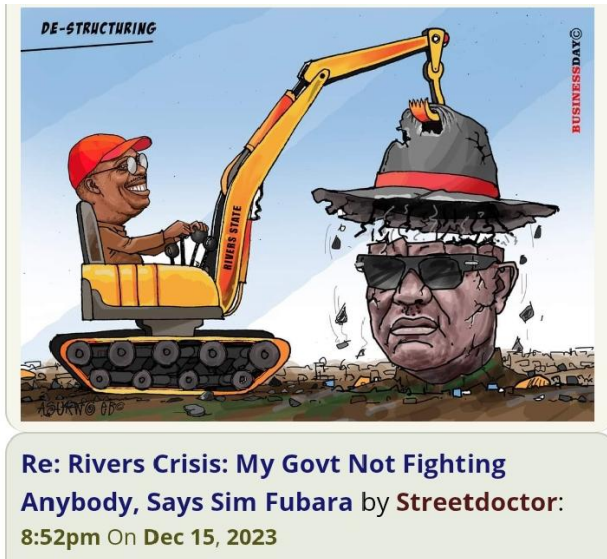
In fig.1, this meme captures Fubara as he sits calmly on a rug, reading a book titled "How to finish Wike", while Wike is seen trying to pull the rug from under him. Wike's presence in this setting, that is, inside the Governor's office trying to disrupt governance cunningly sends a strong signal of his influence "god-fathers' status" in the Rivers State government. The caption "Battle of wits vs brute force. Who wins?" depicts a political environment where a god-father still influence the stability in governance of his successor god-son. The setting of an office marked with the Nigerian flag and the "GOV" inscription on the chair, represents legitimate political authority. The meme humorously suggests that Fubara is using strategy "wits" , to outsmart his political god-father who uses "brute force", this is marked by the piled up book's with the title "Wike" on Fubara's desk. This also depicts an inexperienced godson whose reliance is on books. The contrast between Fubara's composure and Wike's aggression captures a frustrated god-father due to the lack of submissive response to him by his god-son. In the context of Nigerian politics, where power often depends on loyalty to a "god-father", this image celebrates a god-son daring to stand his ground. Kress and van Leeuwen note that positioning and gaze in visuals can indicate power relations; here , Fubara's central and steady posture communicates self-control, while Wike's unbalanced stance shows desperation (Kress and van Leeuwen 65).

Fig 2 "Structure Demolition ongoing" (BusinessDay, fig.2)



In fig.2, a bulldozer tears down a wall labeled "Wike Structure", this demolition is symbolic to the destruction of a political structure built by a god-father "Wike" by his god-son "Fubara". The phrase "Structure Demolition is ongoing" refers to the strategic move of a god-son aimed at restructuring the politics surrounding the influence of his god-father in Rivers State. This meme depicts the fall of god-father's political empire. This image convey the destructive cycle inherent in godfatherism, where power is repeatedly contested through forceful restructuring. This demolition further depicts godfatherism impact in terms of political reforms and cleansing where established structures "powerful network" built by god-father"s within political system are dismantled when god-son seeks political autonomy

Fig 3 "DE-STRUCTURING" (BusinessDay, fig.3)



In fig.3, Fubara is smiling inside a bulldozer as he digs out Wike's image. This cartoon symbolizes Fubara as a seating governor, his posture inside the "bulldozer" refers to his position as the governor stirring the political affairs of his state(Rivers State). The bulldozer becomes a symbol of independence and change. This cartoon uses metaphor to convey the political change in Rivers State by Fubara's restructuring and excavation of (Wike's) buried image from the ground. This action is symbolic to the evacuation of an established political structure of a political god-father. This process instigates conflict between a predecessor (god-father) and his rebellious successor (god-son). The label "De-Structuring" brings up the theme of deconstruction, reflecting the dismantling of Wike's political

foundation by Fubara. As Omilusi points out, "when god-son's revolt, they challenge not just individuals but systems of control" (Omilusi 48). Through humor and exaggeration, these memes communicate a serious message that Fubara is freeing himself from his political god-father's grip. Fubara's facial expression signifies pleasure in doing so with no sense of remorse.

Fig 4: Leadership Newspapers."The Trials of Nyesom Wike" Ishiekwene,Azu.



In fig.4, Wike stands alone while stones and spears are thrown at him. The meme uses traditional symbols of a rejected person, by portraying the punishment of a once powerful man now facing public rejection. The image conveys that Wike,

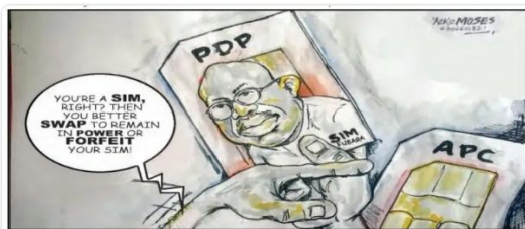
a god-father who used to command Fubara, his god-son, has lost favour in the sight of his god-son and with the people of Rivers State. Gambo notes that "god-father's" eventually face rebellion when their god-son seeks independence and legitimacy from the people " (Gambo 19). The meme turns this reality into a visual story that mixes humor with truth.

Fig 5 " SIM swap or keep facing WIKEDness" (Moses fig . 5)

CARTOONS

June 19, 2025

Cartoon: SIM swap or keep facing WIKEDness



Vanguard News

In fig.5, This meme uses a clever pun on "SIM", linking the political discourse to that of technology concept of sim card swapping to address issue of political loyalty, and allegiance associated with godfatherism. "SIM swap or keep

facing WIKEDness" depicts the consequences of a rebellious god-son(Fubara) who risks chances of political attack from his god-father(Wike). Two SIM cards are captured: one with Fubara's face under the PDP logo and another with the APC logo. The word " WIKEDness" and also "SIM" are neologism, merging Wike's name with " wickedness ", mocking his perceived god-father status and authoritarian behavior, and also using the short form of Siminalayi to mean "sim" card. The idea of the word "WIKEDness" is not far fetched as it emerges from the attributive nature of (Wike), referring to evils Wike is capable of doing. The caption " YOU'RE A SIM RIGHT? THEN YOU BETTER SWAP TO REMAIN IN POWER OR FORFEIT YOUR SIM!, employs the metaphor of a Sim card to represent the pressure on political figures to shift thier loyalties to another party or risk facing the consequences of "WIKEDness" from their god-father's. This further shows the only alternative available for a god-son to escape the wrath of his god-father is to seek federal backing by decamping from his current "PDP" party to "APC".

Through humor and wordplay, the meme encourages " god-son's" who seek independence from the influence of their "god-father's" should seek federal backing "swap" their political allegiance to the ruling party.. Shifman explains that memes " use familiar cultural language and humor to invite shared understanding"

(Shifman 52). This meme does exactly that, using a popular phrase to criticize godfatherism in Rivers State.

Fig 6 "Father and Son Have Resolved Their Issues" (FREDOLUTION-NOW, fig. 6)



In fig.6, the caption "Father and Son have resolved their issues", highlights the theme of godfatherism in their relationship. Wike is portrayed as the dominant figure "father", while Fubara is seen as the subordinate "son", demonstrating how godfatherism impacts politics in Rivers State. The word "Father and son" is a metaphor that lays the background for hierarchy in political status, reflecting the power imbalance and mistrust that define god-father to god-son relationships. This meme shows Wike and Fubara shaking hands, a sign of agreement between each other, contrary to each hiding a weapon behind his back. Wike hides cutlass

behind, while Fubara hides axe. The label "TV" identifies the presence of the media, highlighting public communication through broadcast. It satirizes the media's action in disseminating false political information to the public questioning their credibility. This action of the media "TV" here is ironic, the reconciliation publicly shown by the media house is not the reality. The image speaks volumes about the performance nature of Nigerian politics. As Alabi observes, "political reconciliation in Nigeria is often an act for the public, not a genuine resolution" (Alabi 83). The "father and son" metaphor reinforces the power imbalance and mistrust that define god-father to god-son relationships where political conflicts is humanized using family relationship and the media "TV" presence to shape public perception of the Wike-Fubara political crisis in Rivers State.

2.2 Political Tension.

Political tension arises in the Rivers State political landscape as a result of the heightened state of rivalry, conflict, and political instability between Nyesom Wike and Siminalayi Fubara. This political tension revolves around the struggle for influence, power, and control that plays out through confrontation unresolved disputes and conflicting ideas on political dominance.

Political tension in the Rivers State political landscape is depicted in the following memes:

Fig 7 caption " Rivers Power Tussle" (thewill news media, fig.7)



In fig.7, this meme depicts Wike and Fubara locked in an arm-wrestling contest, each trying to overpower the other. Their strained expression and clasped hands symbolize the struggle for control in Rivers State. The presence of Tinubu watching signals a federal authority turning deaf ears concerning this political conflict. Their hands locked together suggests that neither can escape the conflict. This visual metaphor shows how political rivalry has stalled governance. As Alabi remarks, " elicit conflict often turn democratic spaces into battlefields of ego and dominance" (Alabi 90). The meme capture this truth through relatable humor.

Fig 8 caption " OGA BIG FISH PLEASE EASE UP AND LET THE WATERS SETTLE" (SYMFONI, 2:25, fig.8)



In fig.8, this meme captures Fubara standing in a canoe on a river holding a "spear" weapon of violence pointed at Wike, while a caption "please" indicates a plea for peace by acknowledging the powers of a political god-father. This phrase " Oga Big Fish Please Ease Up And Let The Waters Settle" captures the political tension as a result of the conflict between both actors. The phrase " big fish" playfully refers to Wike's political weight, and the "river" setting symbolizes the state itself (Rivers State). The canoe bears the seal of the Rivers State Governor, representing Fubara's official authority navigating through troubled water " Rivers State ". The image of the spear piercing two fishes symbolizes the effect of the conflict on the river dwellers "fishes" (Rivers State people).

Fig 9 caption " YOU PEOPLE SHOULD STOP FIGHTING AND START EATING! "(BusinessDay, fig .9)



In fig.9, President Tinubu is portrayed in a woman's attire, serving fish to Wike and Fubara. Wike receives a larger portion, while Fubara gets a smaller one. The meme humorously highlights favouritism and federal interference, also the fish divided unevenly on a plate labeled " Rivers State" visually criticizes governance partiality which triggers political tension. The caption " You people should stop fighting and start eating" identifies the ongoing political tension, the text uses the metaphor of "fighting" to refer to political rivalry and "eating" serving a symbol of cooperation and fair sharing of state resources. The domestic

imagery that is; Tinubu as a mother figure adds a comic tone but also criticize unequal treatment that triggers violence. Shifman notes that memes "condens complex political sentiments into simple, sharable images" (Shifman 61).

2.3 Conclusion

Godfatherism remains a deeply rooted problem in Nigerian politics. It limits the independence of leaders and often leads to political tension when the balance of loyalty shifts. The conflict between Wike and Fubara clearly shows how such relationships can collapse into tension and division. However, the rise of digital communication has provided new ways for people to engage with these issues. Through memes, ordinary Nigerians, most especially the youth can engage in the political discussion of their country by analyzing, criticizing, and even ridiculing political power plays. This form of online participation not only reflects public opinion but also reshapes how political stories are told and understood. In this way, memes serve as both mirrors and mediators of political tension in Nigeria's democratic experience.

CHAPTER THREE

SECURITY THREATS AND EMERGENCY RULE

3.0 Introduction

This chapter explores how security threats and emergency rule are represented in the Wike-Fubara political crisis, especially through the use of memes and political cartoons circulating online. Drawing on Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) and Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA), the chapter examines how ordinary Nigerians use visual and written humor to express anxiety, disapproval, and even hope amid political chaos

3.1 Security Threats

Security threats refer to situations or actions that undermine peace, public safety, or the stability of the state. In Nigeria, such threats often stem from political conflicts, ethnic tensions, and economic inequality. As Adebayo notes, “security in Nigeria has become increasingly politicized, with political actors weaponizing violence and disorder to achieve their interests” (Adebayo 74). The Wike-Fubara crisis is a reflection of this broader problem. The breakdown of trust between the two leaders has triggered a series of confrontations within the state’s political system ranging from legislative divisions to violent street protests. In some instances, clashes between supporters have led to the destruction of property

and threats to human life. According to Nwokoma, “political instability in Nigeria often blurs the line between governance and insecurity, as institutions become tools for settling political scores rather than instruments of order” (Nwokoma 57). This reality is visible in Rivers State, where political control has become deeply entangled with security management. The deployment of police and security agents around the State House of Assembly and Government House has transformed political disagreement into a matter of public safety.

The theme of security threats in the Wike-Fubara political of crisis is depicted in the cartoons below:

Fig 10 caption " Fubara's Rough Road" (Elazeh, fig.10)

Fubara's Rough Road

Muazu Elazeh — 1 year ago



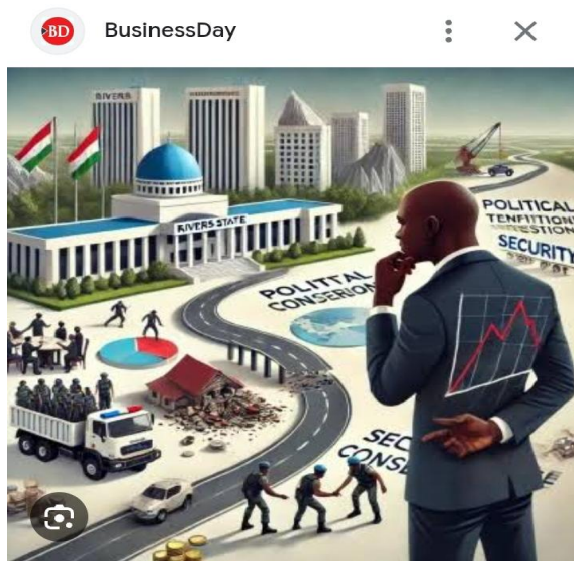
In fig.10, this meme captures Fubara as he paddles the canoe across a river towards an ambush of crocodiles. The setting on the river refers to the "Rivers State ", the presence of the "crocodiles" inside the water is symbolic to Wike's political influence in Rivers State. The river represents uncertainty, an island, and the crocodiles symbolizes hidden political dangers that threatens security. The meme dramatizes Fubara's journey as governor as being one with risk, unpredictable, and filled with traps a security threat to safety. It reflects the public fear that the security of the Rivers State is being threatened. Thus, Rivers politics is becoming a battlefield rather than a democracy.

Fig 11



In fig.11, Wike and Fubara are shown smiling warmly while each hides a knife and cutlass behind their backs. The meme captures the dual nature of political relationships that is; friendship in public, dangerous in private. This idea aligns with Okoli's view that "political elites in Nigeria often disguise hostility with symbolic gestures of peace" (Okoli 107). The image reminds viewers that reconciliation may only be an act.

Fig 12 (BusinessDay)



In fig.12, this meme shows a chaotic state, the presence of heavy security in the area where a building identified as "Rivers State" government house. The police van surrounded by officers, standing in the environment where a damaged building is identified, with labels of political tension, security in the floor. The

message is clear: politics has become so tense that it resulted to security threats requiring constant police involvement. Yet, the presence of armed forces suggests fear, control, and breakdown of dialogue. It also depicts the presence of the armed forces in Rivers State, i.e the military administrator. Rivers State is no longer under a democratic government but now under a military rule. Adebayo notes that "state coercion without conversation deepens political insecurity" (Adebayo 79).

The conflict between Wike and Fubara did not begin as a security issue, but it has gradually taken that form. Initially, it was a power struggle between a godfather and his successor, but as both sides sought to demonstrate control, their followers began to act out physically. Reports of attacks on government buildings, arson at the House of Assembly complex, and confrontations between loyalists have heightened fears of a breakdown of law and order.

As Okoli explains, "when political elites mobilize security institutions to protect their interests, the result is a security dilemma that threatens the safety of the wider society" (Okoli 103). In Rivers State, the crisis has placed security agencies in a difficult position caught between maintaining order and appearing partisan. The growing tension has also caused anxiety among residents, especially given Rivers' importance as an oil-producing state where instability can have national economic consequences. The widespread circulation of memes online

reflects how citizens perceive these events. Many memes depict the situation humorously, showing Wike and Fubara as wrestlers or soldiers locked in an endless democratic institutions and the inability of political actors to resolve conflicts through dialogue” (Eze 89). Discussions about declaring a state of emergency in Rivers State surfaced in late 2023, as the crisis between Wike and Fubara deepened. Some political observers saw it as a necessary step to prevent chaos, while others believed it was a political tool to intimidate the governor and his supporters.

Online, Nigerians reacted to this possibility with a mix of fear and satire. Memes portraying soldiers “taking over Port Harcourt” or the state “under lockdown” circulated widely. These memes reflected both the anxiety surrounding a possible federal intervention and the public’s tendency to use humor as a coping mechanism in the face of political uncertainty.

3.2 Emergency Rule

Emergency rule is a presidential declaration that calls for the termination of a democratic government. Hence, a military action is taken. As a result of the lingering political tensions, and security threats. The federal government made a declaration of State of Emergency on the Rivers State government. This federal government act, ultimately leads the the impeachment of the democratic Governor.

Emergency rule refers to a temporary suspension of normal constitutional procedures in response to a crisis that threatens public order or national stability.

Fig.13 caption " Impeachment" (Agomuo, fig.13)

 Zebulon Agomuo - March 20, 2025



In fig.13, a bomb cannon machine labeled "Impeachment" is aimed at Fubara with his image at the mouth piece, while Wike holds a match and Tinubu holds the wire, symbolizing the readiness to ignite the political weapon of destruction. The imagery turns the political threat of impeachment into a literal weapon. It shows how impeachment can be used as a tool of intimidation rather than democracy. The meme conveys the idea that powerful individuals control political events from behind the scenes, leaving the targeted (Fubara) vulnerable. The appearance of the label in capital letters "IMPEACHMENT" on the bomb

cannon machine signifies the immediate effects as a result of the involvement of a superior authority represented by the image of Tinubu representing (federal powers).

Fig 14 THEWILL NIGERIA , fig.14)



In fig.14, this meme uses written texts to perform speech acts of positioning such that the viewer's can easily identify political actors and actions by their labels that is; "Wike", "Tinubu", "Fubara", "Governor", and "Rivers State". This meme shows Tinubu as a referee issuing a red card to Fubara, who leaves the boxing ring. The red card symbolizes punishment and bias, implying that Tinubu's intervention favors one side, i.e "partial". Eze warns that "when central authority oversteps its bounds, federalism becomes fragile " (Eze 91.

Fig 15 caption "Tinubu Declares State of Emergency in Rivers State "(DailyTrust, fig.15)



In fig.15, the caption "Tinubu Declares State of Emergency in Rivers State" signals the intervention of an higher authority (federal), situating the political crisis as critical requiring extraordinary measures. This action leads to the disregard of the "1999 Constitution" inside a waste bin, limit of the powers of the legislature and executive as both are captured tied with "ropes", the door of the "RIVERS STATE GOVERNMENT" shut with a padlock. The image dramatizes fears that democracy could be suspended under the pretext of "emergency rule." The padlock symbolizes authoritarian control, while the discarded constitution suggests that the rule of law no longer matters. Through satire, the meme captures the deep anxiety surrounding governance and freedom in Nigeria. Humor becomes a way to speak truth to power.

3.3 Conclusion

Across all the memes, one clear pattern emerges: Nigerians use online creativity to express their views about power, corruption, and insecurity. These memes do not just entertain, they communicate frustration, resistance, and hope. By combining words, images, and humor, creators transform political tension into digestible social commentary. As Shifman observes, “memes are collective conversations that allow citizens to build shared meanings” (Shifman 72). In the Wike–Fubara case, memes have become tools for ordinary people to participate in political discourse, exposing the reality of godfatherism, rivalry, and fragile peace in Rivers State.

CHAPTER FOUR

SUMMARY, FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

4.1 Summary

This chapter explored the data collected on the Wike-Fubara political crisis using Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) and Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA). The opening chapter introduced the study's objectives, scope, methodology, theoretical underpinnings, review of related literature, justification, and thesis statement. The research utilized a discursive approach combined with Kress and van Leeuwen's framework for analyzing digital discourse. Central to this investigation were political cartoons and memes viewed as multimodal texts, which anchored the data presentation and analysis. The literature review underscored the significant communicative role memes play in computer-mediated discourse, providing a solid foundation for this study.

Chapter Two concentrated on the written texts within memes examining captions, speech bubbles, and labels across Wike-Fubara cartoons highlighting their multimodal complexity.

Chapter Three unpacked how memes operate as strategic linguistic tools that criticize, endorse, question, satirize, and employ humor to deliver political messages effectively (Halliday and Matthiessen 45; Kress and van Leeuwen 23).

4.2 Findings

The study revealed that memes, especially through their written components and combined multimodal strategies, powerfully influence public opinion. The strategic use of language and visuals within political memes shapes narratives around the Wike-Fubara crisis, prompting public engagement and gaining local and global attention. Political memes serve as a catalyst for dialogue, using humor, satire, and critique to comment on the ongoing power struggle and political dynamics (Halliday and Matthiessen 52).

4.3 Recommendations

From the findings of this study, it is evident that memes play a major role in shaping how people perceive and engage with political issues in Nigeria. They are not just tools for humor but have become strong instruments of political communication, reflection, and resistance. Based on this understanding, the following recommendations are made:

Promote Digital Media Awareness among Citizens.

Many Nigerians consume and share memes daily without fully understanding their influence on public opinion. There is a growing need for digital media literacy programs that will help citizens interpret online content more critically. Schools, civil society organizations, and the media should teach

people how to identify bias, satire, and misinformation in memes. Such awareness will help reduce the spread of false political narratives.

Encourage Responsible Use of Political Memes.

While memes are a powerful form of expression, they can also be used to insult, mislead, or provoke conflict. Content creators and social media users should therefore adopt responsible practices when creating or sharing memes. Humor should not be used to promote hatred or disinformation. A culture of respect and accuracy in digital communication will make political conversations healthier and more constructive.

Recognize Memes as Tools for Public Engagement.

Political leaders and institutions should acknowledge the communicative power of memes. Instead of ignoring or condemning them, public officials can use memes creatively to simplify policy issues, engage with younger audiences, and promote civic education. This approach would help close the communication gap between the government and the governed, especially in an age where digital platforms dominate public discourse.

Encourage Academic Research on Memes and Politics.

More scholarly attention should be given to the study of memes within Nigeria's political landscape. Future researchers can explore how memes influence

voting behavior, public opinion, and social mobilization. Comparative studies across different states or political events can also help uncover broader trends in digital political communication.

4.4 Conclusion

This research sought to investigate the communicative functions of memes in computer-mediated discourse through the lens of the Wike-Fubara political crisis in Rivers State, Nigeria. Employing Kress and van Leeuwen's approach to discourse analysis revealed the intertwined relationship between visuals and written texts in conveying complex political messages. The findings highlight that analyzing memes requires attention to both linguistic modes and visual semiotics to fully grasp their persuasive and educational impact in political communication (Kress and van Leeuwen 58).

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