

Chapter 16

Intermediality and Critical Engagement in Nigerian Twitter Memes

Timilehin Durotoye

University of Ibadan, Nigeria

ABSTRACT

The ingenious deployment of the digital media by online users in Nigeria offers opportunities in this chapter to monitor the trajectories of netizens' engagement with public dialogues on Nigerian Twitter. By exploring the dimensions of intermedial exchanges (i.e., intermediality), this study will analyze how digital users explore innovative digital media tools such as Twitter memes in reinstating their views on critical discourses in the Nigerian polity. The author adopts a mixed methods design, which includes quantitative content analysis, discourse and semiotics analyses. Two prominent Nigerian Twitter accounts—@KraksTV and @I_pissVodka—are purposively selected for this chapter, and the author will evaluate memes posted between April 2018 and May 2018 by paying close attention to the themes and issues propagated. The author concludes that intermediality promotes a dynamism of opinion characterized by technological innovation, in which Twitter meme is categorized, enabling the expression of political agency and furtherance of critical engagement.

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INTRODUCTION

The creative use of Twitter memes by young online users in Nigeria provides a window of opportunity in this chapter to monitor and report the details of their engagement in issues surrounding Nigerian mainstream politics, which cut across the digital world. Twitter memes are seen as subaltern tactics for participating in public discourses. In this essay, intermediality refers to how contemporary and digital media borrow and reinterpret contents as a common wheel of culture and, sometimes, remediation. It is in this light that the author will engage the memes tweeted by Nigerian Twitter users. The author will examine the ways in which intermediality features in contemporary Nigerian media, and how memes deployed by Nigerian netizens signify intermedial relations in the digital media space. That is, how intermedial exchanges on social media, in this case the use of Twitter memes, is able to provide an avenue for political participation in Nigerian politics.

BACKGROUND

Intermediality in contemporary Nigerian media

Intermediality is an integral part of contemporary Nigerian media; it features prominently in the contents of both print and electronic media platforms. The traditional broadcast media borrow much from texts, images, and the cinema; the print media also draw from the screen and literary texts in its production of cartoons and comic strips. News recast programmes on television and radio, for example, pull their content from news stories published in print. The introduction and dominance of new media have not ended this feature; rather, it has resituated such exchange and appropriation, expanding the scope and reach. As Jensen (2016:1) argues: “different media refer to and depend on one another, both explicitly and implicitly; they interact as elements of various communicative strategies; and they are constituents of a wider social and cultural environment”. Of course, his argument is tenable both in the interdependence of the media as an institution and in the exchange and appropriation of content.

There have been enquiries into the use of images and image-based contents, especially cartoons and comic strips, in the media by scholars (e.g. Mcloud, 1993; Mitchell, 1994; Olaniyan, 1998; Lent, 2009; Medubi, 2009). Scholars have also contributed to the discourse on new media technologies and social media networks (e.g. Blackmore, 1999; Ferguson & Perse, 2000; Quan Haase & Young, 2010). These perspectives suggest that media, as commonly understood public resources of representation and interaction, are structured and transformed as an intermedial whole and as part of broader economic, political, and technological transformations (Jensen, 2010). Furthermore, research by Shifman (2014) explains that the evolution of internet memes, such as those on World Wide Web 2.0, occurred because of the obvious limitations of the mainstream media in encouraging participatory citizenry and accessibility of media contents by individuals.

In addition, the evolution of intermediality is based on conventions that are largely historical, as well as owing to technological change (Tötösy de Zepetnek et al., 2011). Therefore, the growing interest of intermediality is owing to the emergence of the new media in the digital age. For instance social net-

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