The Rhetoric of Tanzanian 3D Digital Memes on Meaning Making

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Abstract

This article explores digital memes as a form of communication in the contemporary world. It reflects the effectiveness of semiotic modes in digital memes disseminated by government agencies in Tanzania. The main objective focuses on the organisation of semiotic modes in 3D digital memes. Data collection was accomplished Microsoft's Snip & Sketch software on several government agencies' Instagram pages. Analysis of data was guided by documents analysis method in line with social semiotic multimodal theory. The findings reveal the combination of various semiotic modes which emulate real-life experiences, personal relationships, and connections between texts and visual representation. Furthermore, the findings show that various semiotic resources in the memes are arranged in respect to information flow, salience, and framing to reflect varying degrees of connectedness of the modes on making meaning.

Keywords: *Digital memes, Instagram, metafunctions, social semiotic multimodal theory*

Introduction

Online dynamics offer suitable platforms that 'netizens' exploit when interacting given that one's online experiences and social media knowledge is reasonable (Aguilar, Campbell, Stanley, & Taylor, 2017; DeCook, 2018). The rise of social media platforms plays a significant role in contemporary life endeavours. On the one hand, social media platforms are employed by netizens to access varieties of information, and to connect with friends and relatives (Chen, 2010). On the other hand, prominent figures such as politicians, utilise these podiums to promote their agenda (Fordjour, 2021). One of the endeavours in contemporary social media exchanges involves the use of digital memes. Dubbed as "the language of the internet" (Shifman, 2014:173), digital memes[8] have become a sensational form of online communication at the global and local levels. Digital memes are interactive tools that people use to engage in online and offline exchanges (Aguilar et al., 2017; Albarran-Torres & Goggin, 2021). Such kind of communication is often

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[8] In this article, 'digital meme' and 'online meme' are used synonymously.

humorous. However, this is not always the case (Davidson, 2012; Kuznetsov & Soldatkina 2017, in Al Rawi, Al Musalli & Rigor, 2021). In some situations, memes are utilized to challenge political regimes (Morternsen & Neumayer, 2021).

Historical accounts explicate that 'meme' is a Greek word that reflects 'something which is imitated'. Meme as a concept originated from Richard Dawnson's book 'The Selfish Gene' (Shifman, 2014; Aguilar et al. 2017). Similar to biological genes – which tend to replicate in its context – the earliest definition from Dawnson regarded memes as "small cultural units of transmission, analogous to genes, which spread from person to person by copying or imitating." (Shifman, 2014:10). By then, memes reflected melodies, catchwords, clothes, and intangible beliefs. However, following the discovery of the internet, conceptualisations of memes shifted to the cyberspace and derived new meanings contrary to Downson and Shifman (2014:41) who envisaged online memes as "a group of digital items sharing common characteristics of content, form, and/or stance, which were circulated, imitated, and or transformed via the Internet by many users." As such, netizens exploit these digital items for various drives including socio- political, cultural, and communicative exchanges.

Online memes, apart from expressing humor, are among the communicative tools which unearth and address diverse issues. For instance, given the restrictions on online contents, and strict follow up on government critics in China, netizens use online memes as a disguise to address social, economic, and political discontents (Shifman, 2014). In Mexico, digital memes are used to mock dysfunctional and corrupt government officials. Albarran-Torres and Goggin (2021) report that following the highly reported prison break of the drug lord Joaquín Guzmán Loera 'El Chapo', digital memes arose from various social media platforms. The memes reflected a weakened Mexican government which failed to contain drug dealers. The memes that comprised texts, images, and the shared meanings were associated with El Chapo. Apart from that, digital memes are utilized by marketing and advertising firms for business promotions (Börzsei, 2012). Online experiences from social media platforms (e.g. Instagram, and Facebook) in Tanzania show the utilitarian function of digital memes in marketing various products and services.

The construct of digital memes vary from context to context. Since the design of the memes is a work of an anonymous person or a group of anonymous people (Morternsen & Neumayer, 2021), the shape and content of the memes serve the interests of the maker. Therefore, a netizen decides the design and semiotic modes to feature on the meme. Börzsei (2012) and Aguilar et al. (2017) report that emoticons were the earliest

forms of digital memes created by using punctuations. By then, online content programmers were looking for ways which could help one create meaning without being taken out of context. For instance, a written text is accompanied by a laughing emoticon to express jokes (happiness). However, the technological growth enables online users to generate other forms of digital memes in which netizens begin using combinations of texts, images, videos (Hardesty, Linz, & Secor, 2019), graphic interchange formats (GIFs) (Al Rawi, Al-Musalli, & Rigor, 2021), and many others. The 'newer' form of online memes made up of 3D clip art figures was noted in Tanzania in March 2022 (Figure 1). The memes featured a combination of meaning making resources.

Figure 1: A Football Meme on Instagram

The present study stems from 3D clip art memes on various social media platforms (WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram) in Tanzania. Contrary to the previous studies which relied on meme macros (images and videos) and GIFs to examine potentialities of memes, this study introduces another form of memes which has not been observed in the previous studies. It focuses on three-dimensional (3D) clip art memes. Apart from being used by netizens in social media, the same design was adopted by Tanzania's government agencies such as Jakaya Kikwete Cardiac Institute, Ocean Road Cardiac Institute, University of Dar es Salaam (UDSM), Tanzania Revenues Authority (TRA), to name a few, to create awareness of diverse matters including tax, health, tourism, academic publishing, and electricity. The contents and creation of the memes integrate various semiotic modes. For that reason, this study examines tri-metafunctions and configuration of various semiotic modes in the digital memes. In this pursuit, social semiotic multimodal theory by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) is adopted.

Theoretical Foundation: Social Semiotic Multimodal Theory
Scholarship on human communications recognize complementarity of various interactive meaning-making resources. Human communications involve multiple semiotic modes which, in their entirety, help one to make meaning (Finnegan, 2002). Most often, the semiotic modes are culturally bound (Kress, 2011). This supposition is understood through social semiotic multimodal theory. The core postulation of the present article is that meme designers exploit digital technologies to combine diverse semiotic modes to generate contents. Such modes, however, are organized in specific ways to simplify meaning making.

Social semiotics originated from Halliday's (1978) Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). The main view of SFL is that language is a social phenomenon (Jewitt & Henricksen, 2016). Through language, speakers can achieve social requirements. The crucial components of social semiotics is that of sign, signified, and sign maker. Speakers use the signs as representational material for objects, and those signs express meanings. Halliday and Matthiessen (2004:30) argue that speakers can manipulate language to construct human experiences. In a sentence, 'John's son is going to school', for instance, one can assume the presence of person known as John, a male child, and a school. This is ideational metafunction. In the same sentence, one may observe the relationships between John and his child as father and son. This is interpersonal metafunction. Furthermore, Halliday and Matthiessen (ibid.) posit that in the process of construing life experiences and interpersonal relations through language, the context and information flow must be cohesively embroiled altogether. They call this process textual metafunction. They suggest that interactors choose and construct meaningful signs relevant to the specific discourse in which they are used. In short, social semiotics deals with meaning making and meaning makers (Bezemer & Jewitt, 2010).

However, metafunctions in respect to Halliday and Matthiessen (ibid.) are restricted to the construct of language and manifested in clauses and sentences. As such, Kress and van Leeuwen (1996; 2006) comprehensively extended this approach to analyse visual artefacts. They adjusted ideational, interpersonal, and textual metafunctions to elaborate meaning making in relation to visuals. They suggest that semiotic modes which express ideational metafunction mirror the mind of the maker and what is featured in the visuals to represent day to day activities. The semiotic modes in images reflect human activities, entities, facilities, ideologies and so forth. For instance, images of products such as cars and smart-phones in print or digital advertisements represent actual merchandises. In interpersonal metafunction, Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), and O'Halloran (2011)

suggest that semiotic modes in any visual materials should indicate relationships between them or that of the maker and the entity itself. For example, in an image that consists of face-to-face interactions of two individuals, nonverbal cues such as facial expressions and distance between two people may reveal their relationship (Xu, 2012). In textual metafunction, emphasis is capitalized on the role of texts to complement other modes. The visual semiotic modes in the images must be explainable using texts. Occasionally, visual semiotic modes such as images can be blurry or vague semantically. In that regard, texts are added to disambiguate or clarify the intent of the maker. Apart from clarifying other modes, texts provide more information other than description of images or concepts.

To stress the accomplishment of these metafunctions, the notion of multimodality cannot be left unattended. The main assumption of multimodal theory is that in human interactions, language (in speaking or writing) is just one among the available meaning-making repertoires (Jewitt, 2007; Paulsen & Kvåle, 2018). Thus, in the analysis of visual properties such as still images and moving pictures, semiotic modes other than language must be taken into consideration. A mode is envisaged as "conventionalized means of communicating meaning that are organized around a particular set of material resources and means of and tools for manipulating these resources." (Bezemer & Cowan,2021, p. 110). In this view, resources such as sounds (van Leeuwen, 1999), images (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006), space (Kenner, 2004), clothing (Owyong, 2009), advertisements (Ilonga & Mapunda, 2021), drawings (Jewitt, Kress, Ogborn, Tsatsarelis, 2001), layout (Djonov & van Leeuwen, 2018), reading activities (Bezemer & Cowan, 2021), and so forth are recognized as semiotic modes. The present study adds 3D clip art figures as semiotic modes in the digital memes.

Methodology

This is a qualitative case study of the effectiveness of digital memes published on Instagram. As a social media avenue, Instagram is a multimodal platform which gives the subscribers access to share audiovisual materials which comprise various semiotic modes (Jovanovic & van Leeuwen, 2018). Since its inauguration in 2010, the platform has attracted many users, including government agencies. Data for this study was obtained from Instagram pages of Tanzania's Ministry of Health and its agencies including Jakaya Kikwete Cardiac Institute (**JKCI**) and Ocean Road Cancer Institute (ORCI) as well as other institutions; namely, the University of Dar es Salaam (UDSM), Tanzania Revenues Authority (TRA), Tanzania Electric SupplyCompany Limited (TANESCO), and Tanzania Telecommunication Regulatory Authority (TCRA). As shown in Figure 1, these agencies

exploited the same strategy to compose and circulate digital memes on Instagram to raise awareness of several issues.

This study surveyed the agencies' Instagram pages mentioned between March and April 2022 and randomly screenshot 30 memes using Microsoft's Snip & Sketch tool. The next step involved creating and defining categories of the data obtained from the Instagram. In this step, six (6) categories were generated depending on metafunctional and compositional properties, i.e., ideational meaning, interpersonal meaning, textual meaning, salience, framing, and information flow. Thereafter, the data were placed in the categories (computer folders) based on the above-mentioned criteria. Purposive sampling was adopted to sample the data from the categories for analysis. The analysis of data was carried out by using document analysis in conjunction with social semiotic multimodal theory. Interpretation of the sampled data in respect to the objective of the study was the last step which helped to establish various insightful findings on metafunctions and composition of the digital memes.

Results and Discussion
This section addresses the objective of the study. It presents the manners in which the life experiences are represented through digital memes. It draws on the relations between distinct semiotic modes and how they generate meaning. Furthermore, this section discusses the configuration of the semiotic modes in the digital memes.

Ideational Metafunction in Digital Memes
Ideational metafunction suggests that semiotic modes in visual resources tend to represent realistic experiences that includes the relevance of the disseminated information. For instance, in Tanzania, there are cases confirmed by the Tanzania Revenue Authority (TRA) of business persons who unlawfully share Taxpayer Identification Numbers (TIN) against the prescribed terms and conditions of 'one TIN number for one person'. In addressing this matter to the public, several approaches have been adopted including the provision of education to the public. In addition to that, TRA created digital memes to raise awareness and educate the society. The choice of the semiotic modes from numerous meaning making resources is one of the interesting phenomena.

Figure 2: Ideational Metafunction in Digital Memes

Figure 2 features two participants which resemble human beings. One is seated on a stool, bowing, and covering his face with his bare hands (ashamed) and another standing with his hands spread toward the seated one; definitely awed. The one standing asks *Umekumbwa na kitu gani?* 'What has happened to you?' The seated one replies *Nilimpa mtu mwingine TIN yangu ili afanyie biashara, sasa amenisababishia madeni ya kodi ambayo hayanihusu* 'I gave a person my TIN to do business and now he has left me with unpaid taxes'. The bottom text reads: *TAHADHARI*: *Mpendwa mlipa kodi, jiepushe kutoa TIN yako kwa mtu mwingine maana atakusababishia madeni ya kodi yasiyokuhusu* 'CAUTION: Dear taxpayer, avoid sharing your TIN with other people because they will cause you to pay tax debts which are not yours'. This meme exemplifies authentic life experiences which business persons carry out in business dealings. TIN sharing and tax evasion are vexing issues TRA is fighting. In addressing these matters, the meme makers have recreated the context of sharing TIN and warn about repercussions. Humorous as it may appear, indicated by the seated participant, this meme addresses this critical matter which can affect country's economy. The implication of the ideational meaning extends beyond the mentioned warnings. Rational decisions are called upon to mold law abiding citizens who respect government authorities. The meme aims to advocate behavioral change which business persons are required to embrace.

Interpersonal Relationships in Digital Memes

In visual grammar, semiotic modes reveal relationships between the artefact maker and the target audience, or the relationship between two or more entities on an image. To substantiate this metafunction, the digital meme as shown in Figure 3 from Ocean Road Cancer Institute (ORCI) was analyzed. The makers created the meme as a response to the behaviour of cancer patients and community in general. There are some reported cases about unsubstantiated decisions of cancer patients on suitable treatments. Some patients forsake modern cancer treatments over traditional healers, witchdoctors, and preachers. As in Figure 3, the left participant asks: *Kafanya nini huyu*? 'What happened to him/her?' the other replies: *Aliambiwa atibiwe saratani akakimbilia kwa waganga wa kienyeji, amerudi saratani imesambaa* 'He/she was asked to receive conventional treatment for cancer but ran to native doctors, now the cancer has metastasized'. The caption at the bottom reads: *Kumbuka: saratani inatibika ikigundulika mapema. Fanya uchunguzi, okoa maisha* 'Remember: cancer can be treated if detected early. Take early tests, save [your] life'.

Figure 3: Interpersonal Relationships in Digital Memes

Despite the humorous appearance of the participants, the semiotic modes here portray relationships between the participants - the meme maker, cancer patient, and the community. The meme (Figure 3) has two participants carrying on a stretcher someone representing a cancer patient. The hands of the patient are placed on the head and stomach signifying confusion and/or excruciating pain. On the one hand, the relationships between the participants in the meme can be established. In this discourse, the two participants carrying the other one depicts

human experience when one falls sick. The neighboring individuals may support the victim. On the other hand, the interpersonal relationship in this context positions ORCI at the centre as the caretaker of the community in respect to cancer. The digital meme information seeks to mold the society to consider cancer as a medical condition that can be treated if detected early. ORCI plays an advisory role of informing the community about severity of the problem, and directs how to address them.

Textual Materialization in Digital Memes
The textual semiotic modes in the digital memes, as in any other semiotic artefacts, carry the same weight in making meaning. Despite the fact that it is the most privileged mode in most linguistic analyses, semiotic multimodal studies acknowledge the complementarity of all modes featured in any image (Kress, 2011). This postulation is as suggested by Johnson (1992) that the representational and interpersonal meanings of semiotic modes are more elaborated using texts than language. Figure 4 perfectly exhibits the role of textual modes in complementing other modes. This meme from TANESCO comprises two participants carrying the one on the stretcher. Thecarried participant seems incapacitated. However, at this point, the circumstance is full of uncertainties. The meme is imprecise. Nevertheless, the rear participant probes: *Kafanyaje huyu?* 'What has this one done?' The other replies: *Alijifanya kishoka, umeme ukampiga shoka* 'He pretended to be a specialist, he got electrocuted.'

Figure 4: Textual Materialization in Digital Memes

The textual materials used in this discourse are cultural and contextual bound. As Kress (2011) emphasizes, the meanings shared through semiotic modes are shaped and acknowledged by users. The term*kishoka* with a *ki-* affix (small) comes from Kiswahili (language of wider communication in Tanzania) and means 'small axe'. It is a slang referring to unlicensed electricians who purport to be employees of TANESCO who are sent to homes and business buildings to do maintenance. This meme was created to warn people from using *vishoka* (*ki-* 'plural affix) 'small axes' following frequent incidents of fire outbreaks in homes and business places. As a result, TANESCO created a meme to discourage people from contracting *vishoka* in any electrical work in their homes or business buildings. As Halliday and Matthiessen suggest, textual meaning encompasses the discourse that surrounds the text in conjunction with the flow of information. In visual artefacts, textual material plays a complementary role with images by clarifying fuzzy images or providing additional information. As it appears in Figure 4, it is unclear why one of the participants in the image carry the other one on the stretcher. However, the texts that accompany the 3D figures clarify the ordeal. It suffices to suggest that the figure on the stretcher represents a *kishoka*, a fraudulent electrician who got electrocuted while doing maintenance on electricity.

Placement of Semiotic Modes in Digital Memes

Information flow in visual materials depends on the arrangement of semiotic modes. Each direction carries specific interpretation. The arrangement of communicative modes, for instance, from left to right, top to bottom, or center to margin relates to the modes placed on the opposite sides. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) argue that the left-to-right direction marks the newness of information from what is already known to what is new. That is, the left side of artefacts usually features the known. However, as reader's eyes move to the right, the hypothetical vector leads the reader to new information, hence, it marks continuousness. The top-down layout itself unearths distinct interpretations. The semiotic modes placed on top consists of the 'promise' (Ideal) and the bottom often materializes the promise (Real). At times, the modes protrude from the center (core) to the margins (subservient). Thus, semiotic modes situated on the margins are obviously reliant on the core for interpretation. This type of flow is believed to be commonly used in Asia. Each placement of the modes help readers to comprehend information.

Memes here demonstrate three information flow layouts: right-left, top-down, and left-right. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) propose that the right-to-left approach is common in Arabic as its writing system moves from right to left. As regards Figure 2, the right-standing participant

solicits information from the left-seated participant. Appearance of the seated participant signifies that something happened. The reader of the meme would then move eyes from right side to left side for key information. The point of departure here is that, the text (question) on the right is already known given the expression of the seated participant, and new information is accessible from the left side.

Figure 5: Placement of Semiotic Modes in Digital Memes

The information flow, i.e. left to right, is illustrated by the arrangement of semiotic modes in Figure 3, 4, and 5. As it appears, the information flows from left to right. Two active participants who are seen carrying the inactive one on the stretcher is a matter of concern. Once the reader of the meme captures the question asked by the left-sided participant, eyes would lead to the right side for new information. The horizontal alignment of the participants accentuates the known to unknown information flow. Furthermore, it is the middle part occupied by the incapacitated participant that probes the situation. It is the part which makes the reader brainstorm what happened. Thereafter, the eye gaze is headed to the left part in which the participant inquires information, and to the right for new information.

Furthermore, the semiotic modes are positioned in the top-bottom direction too. As it appears in almost all memes in this study, the top-left, top-center, or top-right layouts display the name or the logo of the agency. For instance, the top-left part of Figure 2 features TRA's logo. In Figure 3, the left-side consists of the national emblem. The texts at the top-center reads: *Jamhuri ya Muungano wa Tanzania* 'United Republic

Of Tanzania', *Wizara ya Afya* 'Ministry of Health', *Taasisi ya Saratani OceanRoad* 'Ocean Road Cancer Institute'. The logo of the Institute is on top- right. Similarly, in Figure 5, the national emblem is on top-left, and the center's text reads: *Taasisi ya Moyo Jakaya Kikwete* 'Jakaya Kikwete Cardiac Institute'. Basically, the top side of the memes introduces the names/logos of the issuers. The middle part of the memes features the conversations in which the texts precede the participants. In this regard, the text is Ideal –hypothesizing the situation, whereas the participants below the texts reveal the criticality of the situation (Real).The bottom part of the memes varies too. The bottom texts in Figure 2 and 3 are closely linked with the cases presented at the middle section. The middle part reports the incident followed by the warning at the bottom. These two sections are related. However, Figures 4 and 5do notprovide any kind of additional warning other than social media logos and hash-tags. The design of memes diverges in respect to the elementsof the memes.

Prominence of Semiotic Modes in Digital Memes

Positioning of semiotic modes in images may determine the level of importance. Given the layout of visual artefacts, it might be easy to note salient and less salient semiotic modes. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) argue that the modes placed in the background are less prominent compared to the ones in the foreground. The use of bright colours as opposed to dark colours may signify "a hierarchy of importance" (p. 201). Varying sizes of textual shapes (bigger/small, bolded/etc.) denote what the fabricator of the images desires the reader to focus on. In addition to that, they argue that the semiotic materials positioned on the top of an image are more salient than those at the bottom. The presence of human figures and other modes such as cars, houses, animals such as dogs and cats may discriminate the salient and the less salient ones. Furthermore, Finnegan (2002) points out culture, expectations, or one's receptivity as determinants of salient modes in images.
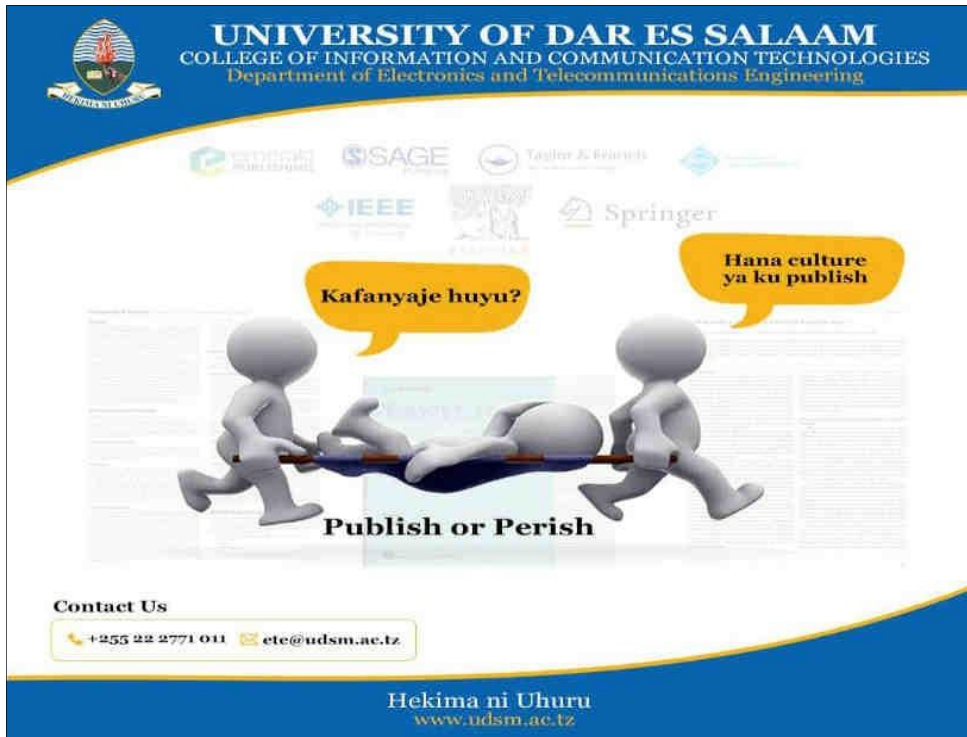
Figure 6: Prominence of Semiotic Modes in Digital Memes

The focus in Figure 6 is on textual properties, colours, language, and positioning of the semiotic modes. To begin with textual features, the top texts are more salient given the size of the texts. The name of the university is in bold, capitalized, and the biggest in size. This textual property positions the university's name as the most prominent compared to the name of the college which is relatively small in size. The text for the department's name – Department of Electronics and Telecommunications Engineering – the maker of this meme – is relatively smaller and not in bold. Basically, the salience of the information positioned on the top of the meme is based on the size and shape of the texts. The texts at the middle part illustrate interesting insights. The texts *Kafanyaje huyu?* 'What happened to him?', and *Hana culture ya kupublish* 'He lacks a publishing culture' are in bold, hence making them salient in this context. The other text, 'Publish or Perish' – a motivational phrase used by the University to encourage publishing culture to lecturers, is in a sentence case, and it is relatively bigger thanthe text just above it, making it more salient. The text size of the contacts (telephone number and email) at the bottom are the smallest of all, hence less salient in this context. But, the sentence case of the University's motto *Hekima ni Uhuru* is in sentence case, making it more salient than those placed at the bottom of the meme.

The colour palette is interesting. In Figure 6, colors differentiate information shared by the meme. For instance, blue, white, and yellow are the brand colors of the University of Dar es Salaam and are used in almost all visual material. In this context, yellow colour distinguishes the name of the college and other information on top of it. The website ofthe University at the bottom is yellow too. The texts in black and white colours are more salient than those in yellow colour, of course, in conjunction with the size of the texts.

Language as a semiotic resource is bound to culture. In Tanzania, Kiswahili and English are official languages; nevertheless, the domains of use vary. Code-switching is a ubiquitous communicative culture in Tanzania. The same practice is apparent in Figure 6. The code-switched response, *Hana culture ya ku-publish*, the phrase 'publish or perish', the University's motto *Hekima ni Uhuru*, lit. 'Wisdom is freedom', and other details in Kiswahili, English, or both, establish code-switching as a modal affordance regularly used in formal and informal matters. Apart from code-switching, lexical borrowing is another modal affordancesalient in this matter. Words related to science and technology often derive expressions absent in Kiswahili. Therefore, borrowing becomes imperative to address such lexical requirements. The word *kliniki* 'clinic' presents a perfect example of this process. Slang as shown in Figure 4 in the word *shoka* 'axe', exhibits another fascinating sensation that reveals slang as the salient word in this context. Thus, code- switching, borrowing, and slang in these memes are salient as they replicate the actual use of language in other contexts.

In Figure 6, salient and less salient modes are distinguished. As explicated by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), semiotic modes in the foreground are typically more prominent than those in the background. The above meme comprises the foreground and the background placed modes as opposed to Figures 2, 3, and 4 whose backgrounds feature white color. In that regard, the whitish background improves clear visibility of the greyish participants, hence, it is salient. But, the design in Figures 5 and 6 are different. In Figure5, for instance, the foreground appearance shows two active participants carrying the inactive one. The foreground positioned images are designed to draw reader's attention. However, the background image demonstrates the JKCI building located at Muhimbili National Hospital. In this discourse, the modes in the foreground are more salient as they communicate the intent of the meme's maker. The message from the participants is essential in this context than the building in the background. Similarly, in Figure 6, the meme encourages academic publishing, the background placed semiotic modes illustrate names of top publishers: Emerald Publishing, Sage Publishing, Taylor & Francis Group, IEEE, Elsevier, and Springer.

Although the background placed information is imperative in the academic world, the foregrounded information on publishing has beenprioritized by the maker, thus, making it more salient than the fainted/blurry background.

Framing of Semiotic Modes in Digital Memes
Visual materials consist modes which are linked in some way. The connectedness of the modes may indicate their relationships – whether strong or weak (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). Strong framing of the semiotic modes in visual materials is signaled by strong separation of semiotic modes. Fragile or absence of framing signifies firm connectedness of the modes. Visual resources such as images may comprise different ways of separating or merging the elements. For instance, as explained by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), stronger lines in a collage of pictures establish uniqueness or individuality of the modes. But, thin lines or absence of lines manifest the associative nature of the modes.

Figure 7: Framing of Semiotic Modes in Digital Memes

Data from the present study demonstrate several methods employed by meme makers to isolate or combine sections. The methods include the use of rounded rectangle (Figure 2 and 4), and oval shapes (Figure 7). These shapes contain texts spoken by participants. On other memes (such as Figure 3), quotation marks, instead of shapes, have been used. These framing methods basically distinguish parts of the memes. Nevertheless, the association of these parts is relatively strong as they unveil questions and responses. Apart from shapes and quotation

marks, color markings differentiate parts of the memes. Whitish or blurry background distinguishes the top part, the middle part, and the bottom part of the memes. In Figures 2, a white background separates top and middle placed information. In Figures 4 and 7, a white background splits the middle part and the bottom part of the image. In Figure 6, a whitish background in the middle part separates the top and bottom parts. Likewise, in Figure 2, the information at the bottom is colored orange in *TAHADHARI* 'caution', while other information is in a red background. Other background colors include green (see Figure 4) and blue (see Figures 5, 6, 7). Apart from colored backgrounds, in Figure 5, the background features blurry building image which also functions as a framing style. The other framing style is the use of thick and thin lines. For instance, in Figure 3, grey (top) and red (bottom) lines separate the two parts of the image, whilst in Figure 6, yellow lines detach the top and bottom parts from the middle. All these framing styles indicate varying degrees of connectedness of the elements in those memes.

Conclusion

The rhetoric of the digital memes in this study is grounded on the meanings and composition of digital memes. Contrary to other related studies whose memes are made-up by disguised makers, memes in this study were shared by government agencies. Such agencies have been disseminating information through formal communication channels. However, given the current trend of using social media platforms to circulate information, the agencies employed this method to reach the public and raise awareness. This study demonstrates the power of social media and popular culture which inspired the agencies to construct and employ digital memes in the cyberspace.

Apart from sharing jokes (humour) as the prominent characteristic, the findings of this study depict these memes as communicative tools used to raise awareness of various matters which affect the wellbeing of people and the country. Through social semiotic multimodal theory in analysis, the findings reveal the implications of the contents in terms of the shared message and use of semiotic modes such as the 3D clip art for personification of human beings. In replicating real-life experiences, these memes unveil interpersonal relations between meme makers and audiences. They draw and bring to the fore linguistic and cultural tendencies which are regular to Tanzanians. Moreover, the composition of the memes reflect the conventional characteristics mostly applied worldwide in terms of information flow, salience, and framing. The semiotic resources on the memes have been organized in appropriate ways which stipulate the objectives of the memes' makers.

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