

**How do you Meme Trump, Noah?
Shaping a New Memescape in *The Daily Show with Trevor Noah*
(January 2016 – December 2019)**

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Nashwa Elyamany

Arab Academy for Science, Technology & Maritime Transport, Egypt

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Abstract: With *The Daily Show*'s popularity for late-night televised political satire, the infotainment genre has progressively turned into a major venue for mass-mediated political discourse in the US. Arguably, the show employs creative political memes in tandem with a plethora of multimodal strategies that all function in collegiality in revival of a journalism of critical inquiry showcasing how political dissent is negotiated and mitigated. Set against this backdrop, this paper argues for a new conceptualization of "digital memes" to incorporate the visuals integrated in talk show monologues. These visuals have undergone a shift from being merely "aesthetic-expressive" graphics to share many of the internet meme's features and hence make them mount to be a sub-genre of memes. More specifically, the study extends scholarship on political memes proposing a more nuanced methodological and analytical framework premised on meme-inherent news values and host-specific converging communication accommodation strategies. The paper is an attempt to introduce an inclusive approach that draws on various perspectives that can do better justice to the rich complexity inherent to memes. For the purpose, a corpus of 235 meme instances from January 2016 to December 2019 in *The Daily Show with Trevor Noah*'s entertainment-based, ideologically-driven political commentary was examined. This is to capture how the intervention of memetic aesthetics in the topical monologue of the show as far as Trump's administration is concerned can alter the trajectory of political satire. Findings showcase that the emerging memes in the late-night show, particularly image macro memes, have superseded late-night television as the leading edge of political satire.

Keywords: image macro memes, participatory culture, satirical trope, semio-discursive realizations, semio-pragmatic strategies, *The Daily Show with Trevor Noah*

1. Introduction

This research endeavor aims to: (a) pinpoint how the meme discourse of *The Daily Show with Trevor Noah (January 2016 – December 2019)* has the potential to serve as a catalyst for transformative collective praxis, and (b) unravel the multimodal satirical strategies employed by the show host to challenge Trump and his administration regarding key national and international issues in moments of newsworthiness. More specifically, the paper is concerned with the aesthetics in the "memetic discourse" as advanced by Seiffert-Brockann, Diehl and Dobusch (2017), that is, memes and the larger discourse context that encompasses them in

late-night satirical TV shows. As a ubiquitous, even dominant, feature of contemporary digital platforms, the term “*memetic aesthetics*” is coined in the present study to be inclusive of memes’ minute semio-discursive distinctions that demonstrate extraordinary sensitivity to and specificity of the digital contextual milieu they are embedded in for political expression. It is at this juncture that I argue for a new conceptualization of “digital memes” to incorporate the visuals integrated in talk show monologues. These visuals have undergone a shift from being merely “aesthetic-expressive” graphics to share many of the internet meme’s features documented in the literature and hence make them mount to be a sub-genre of memes. My particular interest is to stage an encounter between the meme and accompanying monologue text that are not placed in binary opposition, yet in complementary arrangements in peculiar memetic moments of analysis. This is to showcase how the two function in collegiality for substantial contextualization and satiric insight; adherence to factuality and topical relevance; and emotional, opinionated, and exaggerated expression.

Set against this backdrop, the paper argues that the monologue of *The Daily Show* draws heavily on memetic aesthetics replete with *news values* deftly used in tandem with host-bound *communication accommodation strategies*. As noted by Mortensen and Neumayer (2021), the playful manipulation of memes opens up new venues for examining vernacular political expressions and function as visual tools for negotiating norms (Mortensen and Kristensen 2020). This being said, the current study aims to capture how memetic intervention in the topical monologue as far as Trump’s administration is concerned can alter the trajectory of political satire, on the one hand, and how the latter functions apropos of mainstream US media and dominant ideology, on the other. For the purpose, the study opts for more versatile and flexible tools of analysis to uncover the participatory potential and ambivalent characteristic of memes and answer the following research questions:

1. What are the semio-discursive features that predominate the image macro meme artifacts in *The Daily Show with Trevor Noah (January 2016 to December 2019)*?
2. What are the semio-pragmatic strategies that the host manipulates in the memetic moments of the monologue to challenge and/or reinforce dominant ideologies and hegemonic ideals in *The Daily Show with Trevor Noah (January 2016 to December 2019)*?

2. Meme-ing forward and shaping a new memescape

In its initial conceptualization, the term ‘meme’ was etymologically analogous to the biological concept of gene coined by Dawkins (1976) in *The Selfish Gene* where he asserts that culture is the vehicle for non-genetic human behavior (Davison 2012:120). The term has come to describe the flow, flux, mutation, and evolution of cultural content across digital platforms (Gal 2018). In league with the popularity of memes is the ubiquity of social media across platforms and

personal devices, which furthers the notion of universality peculiar to memes (Jenkins, Ford and Green 2013; Shifman 2014a, 2014b). They have been referred to as mere “signifiers” (Dawkins 1976), as “artifacts” (Jenkins 2006), as “genres” (Wiggins and Bowers 2015), and as “cultural capital” (Nissenbaum and Shifman 2017). For Silvestri (2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2018), memes are cultural composites that spread in multiple forms through imitation and appropriation. In addition to being technology-mediated artifacts (Gal, Shifman and Kampf 2016), memes can be multimodal (Wiggins and Bowers 2015), polyvocal (Milner 2013a, 2013b), intertextual, and humorous (Shifman, Levy and Thelwall 2014). Across all these different conceptions, memes are invariably units of popular culture that are extensively remixed, adapted, and re-circulated by individual users, creating a shared cultural experience in the process at a high speed through digital participatory platforms (Gal et al. 2016; Nooney and Portwood-Stacer 2014) with recognizable visuals, fonts, video tropes, and other genre qualities for entertaining, informative, and persuasive purposes (Leach and Allen 2017).

While memes remain a relatively under-researched contemporary phenomenon rooted in the new media discipline, the extant body of literature covers various aspects of meme production, dissemination, meaning, and interrelationships across cultural, political, and media studies (See, for example, Davis and Love 2018; Neumayer and Rossi 2018; Wasike 2022) in conjunction with ideology, social semiotics, and intertextuality (For a comprehensive review of the varying theoretical underpinnings of memes through relevant and engaging case studies, see Wiggings 2019). Existing scholarship is geared toward content analyses (Bayerl and Stoykov 2016; Shifman 2014a, 2014b), pertinent political imports (Milner 2013b), capacity as catalysts for political activism (Bayerl and Stoykov 2016), and ideological bearings from critical and feminist perspectives (Shifman and Lemish 2010). Let alone Internet memes that have gained popularity within politics as ideologically versatile and a genre of visual rhetoric in its own right (Fang 2020; Moreno-Almeida 2021; Phillips and Milner 2017; Soh 2020). Peculiarly, the works of enthusiastic language and communication scholars have contributed to the rise in popularity of *memetics* (i.e. the study of memes), the memefication of politics (Dean 2019), and memefication of political discourse (Bulatovic 2019). A prominent line of research acknowledges the enormous impact of memes as political forms of expression (Tuters and Hagen, 2020), namely in democratic societies, in relation to collective identity building (Gal et al. 2016), public discourse (Kligler-Vilenchik and Thorson 2016), activism (Milner 2013b), power relations (Chandler 2013), commentary in a participatory media environment (Ross and Rivers, 2017), and satirization of political figureheads (Chagas et al. 2019; Peters and Allan 2022).

Despite the plethora of robust timely studies on online memes as the primary target of investigation (See the works of de Saint Laurent, Glăveanu and Literat 2021; Dynel and Messerli 2020; Literat and van den Berg 2019; Makhortykh and González Aguilar 2020; Marlin-Bennett and Jackson 2022; Newton et al. 2022; Penney 2020; Smith 2019), to date, no studies have been

carried out to showcase their multimodal expressive repertoires and the diversity of ways in which they function politically (Mortensen and Neumayer 2021), particularly out of their traditional setting (i.e. the internet) and in creative digital media. While memes may not be quite a *cause célèbre* in the literature to date, with the radical changes in the way they are politically employed in the shifting media environment and changing demographics of journalism consumption, there is a need to revisit them, taking into consideration the inherent diverse sets of social dynamics, discursive repertoires, and interactional complexity that render a distinct hybrid news genre (Kirner-Ludwig 2020). Against this backdrop, the core argument of this study – that is, the new conceptualization of digital memes outside of their traditional setting – is premised on several considerations that give rise to a re-evaluation of what makes a meme, namely their:

- constant flux in conjunction with unconventional ways of expressing political dissent with the rise of the digital technologies and AI-assisted content creation readily available at the fingertips of professional visual designers not just amateur internet users.
- exhibition of sufficient mutation, adaptability, and reliance on visuals that share affinities with advertising posters, political cartoons, and protest signs (Denisova 2019) which can be integrated in other digital media, aside from the internet, in creative ways as powerful expedient means of political expression;
- spreadability not necessarily in terms of virality online but through emergence across a variety of digital forms that resonate with netizens (be it WhatsApp, Telegram, Twitter, pop songs, hashtags, emails, and, arguably, talk show monologues) since they are, in Dawkins' (1976) words, 'a unit of cultural transmission' that sensitize a wide array of virtual communities on various political discourses.
- shareability not in the conventional sense but, following Thurlow's (2021) logic, in a mediated and remediated manner across several other media apart from the medium where they originated (just like those in talk show monologues that are eventually shared on Facebook, either on the official website of the show or on other Facebook users'). To Thurlow (2021), remediation "describes the recycling and broadcasting of individual/personal texts or actions. Remediating practices thereby create – or may create – opportunities for the transformation of ordinary, personal experience into shared public culture" (p. 127).
- invasion and proliferation into several other media, creating in the process several other types of ecologies and further sub-genres such as the "audio memes" in alignment with the 'aural turn' (Abidin and Kaye 2021).

This being said, rather than adopting the existing frameworks of analysis for internet memes, new models of analysis are urged to pinpoint the new patterned combinations and pragma-stylistic features that distinguish the memes infused in

late-night talk shows, which have not been explored in the literature to date. This is mandated to showcase the tension between the creative alterations and patterns that make the images integrated in the monologues prime candidates for memes. Since the concept of memetics implies “aggregate texts” (Milner 2016), memes should be understood as a public conversation with intertextual connections. Since many facets of popular meme culture and aesthetic cannot be understood without context (Williams 2020), the paper argues that the talk show memes need to be explored from a fresh new perspective that pays close attention to the additional accompanying text they heavily rely on (i.e. the talk show monologue) and the viewer-netizen’s sophisticated stock of knowledge and “inside jokes” (Lerat and van den Berg 2019) that metaphorically stand for key issues.

Arguably, the inherently transdisciplinary and intertextual nature of memes makes it difficult for them to neatly fall within a singular discipline or approach. With intertextuality a key feature of the show’s monologue, in general, and memes, in specific, can political satire disguised in the emerging meme discourse of the monologue be a complementary news source with a remarkable impact on political discourse? Given the multimodal nature of memes and their tendency to convey messages emerging from the ideological position of the creator(s), can such memes have a powerful impact on politicizing Gen-Z that is always connected? Can they shape the way social actors are represented to the intended audiences? Can they help the show’s host to communicate ideological gate-keeping practices? An inquiry into how aesthetics is imbricated in political memes necessitates a study of their efficacy, which, in the context of this study, is dependent on several sociopolitical features, namely *news values*. In this paper, *news values* are understood as “the (*imagined*) preferences of the expected audience” (Richardson, 2007: 94) about what is newsworthy from a ‘discursive perspective’ (Benarek and Caple 2016). On a different note, although sarcastic and satirical in nature, Noah’s monologues significantly mirror the content of actual news broadcasts, albeit with an emphasis on humor and exaggeration rather than hard facts. Fashioned in this manner, they act as an editorial that discusses political and social issues deemed salient in a filtered manner through a satirical lens. Informed by Communication Accommodation Theory (Giles and Giles 2012), it is crucial to capitalize on the varying verbal and nonverbal communicative processes Noah deploys to reflect interpersonal diversities, temperaments as well as social roles, distances, and identities during social interactions in his topical monologues.

3. Political meme discourse analytical framework (PM-DAF)

Since the present study is premised on a close reading of image macro memes in conjunction with the spoken monologue, the proposed Political Meme Discourse Analytical Framework (PM-DAF) deals with memes as “semioscapes” (Thurlow 2021) in their own right which can only be examined with attention to the interplay of: 1) *meme-specific efficacy features* and 2) *host-specific*

communication accommodation strategies in the “memetic moments” of the monologue. In the context of this study, memetic moments are understood as these moments in which an initial meme artifact is introduced in the monologue which allows for a high degree of intertextuality on the part of the show’s host.

3.1 Discursive news values analysis (DNVA)

To address how news values are *memetically* constructed, it is imperative to lay bare the multiple instantiations of *newsworthiness* (Bednarek and Caple 2012, 2016). In line with Joye, Heinrich and Wöhlert’s (2016, 19) call “to extend the study of news values beyond traditional newsrooms”, an analytical model that examines the multiple instantiations of newsworthiness in memes is mandated. Memes, as a portmanteau of mimesis and genes, have been explored by linguists using cognitive (Dancygier and Vandelanotte 2017; Lou 2017) and social lenses (Varis and Blommaert 2015), but not from a news values standpoint. Since news reporting is driven by *news values* as central to journalism practices, the paper takes Bednarek and Caple’s (2017) *Discursive News Values Analysis* (DNVA) theoretical framework as a point of departure. The taxonomy offers a comprehensive analytical framework for the analysis of multimodal media texts (See Table 1 for the news values which, albeit intimately interlocked, are demarcated for operationalization purposes). As argued by Wu and Pan (2022), the open-ended nature of the framework allows for the exploration of the lexicogrammatical structures peculiar to news. Within this logic, only through close examination of textual and visual features can this investigation shed light on which values are emphasized (foregrounded), rare, or absent (backgrounded).

Table 1. News values in the Discursive News Values Analysis (DNVA) approach

News Values	Operational Definition
Negativity/Positivity	The discursive construction of the event/issue's negative aspects (e.g. how <i>disastrous</i> , <i>controversial</i> , or <i>illegal</i>)
Timeliness	The discursive construction of the event/issue's relevance in terms of time (whether it is <i>current</i> , <i>recent</i> , <i>ongoing</i> , or <i>seasonal</i>)
Proximity	The discursive construction of the cultural/geographical nearness of the event/issue (in relation to <i>target audiences</i> , <i>publication location</i> , etc.)
Superlativeness	The discursive construction of the event/issue with special regard to <i>high intensity</i> and <i>large scope/scale</i>
Eliteness	The discursive construction of individuals/institutions/nations involved in the event/issue with special regard to their <i>high status</i>
Impact	The discursive construction of how significant the event/issue is in terms of effects/consequences (e.g. <i>impact on target audiences</i>)
Unexpectedness	The discursive construction of the new/unexpected aspects of the event/issue (e.g. how <i>infrequent</i> , <i>unusual</i> , <i>bizarre</i> , or <i>rare</i>)
Personalization	The discursive construction of the event/issue with special regard to the personal or 'human' face of non-elite actors, namely <i>eyewitnesses</i>
Consonance	The discursive construction of events/issues as stereotypical (limited here to memes of <i>social actors</i> in relation to <i>social groups</i> , <i>organizations</i> , and/or <i>nations</i>)

3.2 Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT)

Communication Accommodation Theory (henceforth CAT) is an interdisciplinary and versatile pragmatic theory of language and communication. In CAT terms, communicative behaviors can be *accommodative* or *non-accommodative*. Speakers accommodate when they want to affiliate, decrease social distance, or facilitate comprehension, and non-accommodate when they want to disaffiliate, increase social distance, or hinder comprehension (Maria Luef et al. 2020). Accommodation is mainly about *convergence* and *divergence*. Whereas *convergence* involves shifting a wide array of their linguistic, paralinguistic, and nonverbal behaviors to resemble the pattern or style of another participant in conversation (accent, pitch, speech rate, discourse style, lexical choices, humorous remarks, gestures, body language, etc.), *divergence* pertains to the manner in which speakers disassociate themselves from their hearers in intergroup communication by accentuating linguistic dissimilarities in communicative behaviors. Convergence does not only affect the speaker who accommodates (i.e. who gains approval); the intended audiences (i.e. receivers/viewers) are likely to experience higher status, social identity, and social power. The greater the need for approval or affiliation, the stronger the likelihood that a speaker will converge to adopt patterns of the speaking partner. Because convergence enhances the effectiveness of communication and enables speakers to "seek approval, affiliation and/or interpersonal similarity as a manner of reducing social distance," it is perceived to be more efficient as well as more cooperative than divergence (Soliz and Giles 2014: 108). Although convergence and divergence represent the

opposite ends of the accommodation continuum, they are not mutually exclusive as communication can simultaneously contain elements of both strategies.

Accommodation and non-accommodation can be enacted by means of at least five sociolinguistic strategies: *approximation*, *interpretability*, *interpersonal control*, *discourse management*, and *emotional expression*. *Approximation* strategies pertain to the ways an interlocutor adjusts their messages in response to the other across a range of lexical, phonetic and morphological features, among others. *Interpretability* strategies relate to attuning to the hearer's language-comprehension abilities by decreasing the complexity of vocabulary, simplifying syntax and/or speaking louder to increase clarity and enhance comprehension, which can change during the course of interaction as interactants continuously reassess each other's ability to understand. *Interpersonal control* strategies attend to how individuals attune their communicative behaviors (based on relative power and status) through the use of interruptions or various forms of address based on their perceived or actual relationships and statuses. Working closely with interpretability and interpersonal control, *discourse management* strategies pertain to the adjustment of communication based on the perceived or stated conversational needs of the other interlocutor (including topic selection and actions aimed at maintaining face). *Emotional expression* strategies have to do with responding to the other's cognized or reported emotional and relational needs.

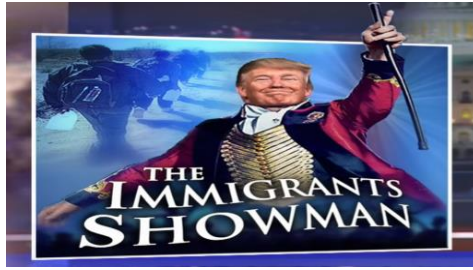
4. Dataset and methodology

This research endeavor is part of a larger multimodal project that examines the meme discourse imbued in the satirical late-night topical monologues of *TDS* from January 2016 to December 2019. YouTube was chosen as the benchmark for the access, download, and archive of episodes. Memes that lacked clear references or were incomprehensible were excluded. The remaining memes that featured Trump, retrieved from a total of 235 episodes from the 4-year span, were taken as a point of departure to answer the two overarching and interlocking questions of the study. For the purpose, the paper adopted a mixed-methods research design (Perry 2017), relying primarily on *subsequent triangulation* (Creswell 2012) – i.e. multiple data obtained via multiple levels of quantitative as well as qualitative analysis to pinpoint patterns and/or (in)consistencies of representation coupled with rich description. The rationale for this type of design is two-fold: first, *subsequent triangulation* helps overcome the limitations of a single design and addresses the questions of the study on different levels; second, it positions the research work in a transformative framework and interprets data by combining results given equal weight to cross-validate and corroborate the findings yielded. Before starting off with the quantitative analysis, the study relied on the inductive approach (Van Gorp 2007) in the identification of memes. That is, there were no memes defined *a priori*; the identified memes emerged exclusively from explicit clues that co-existed in the sample under scrutiny. These memes were collected, coded, and archived for subsequent analysis. Coding was established in light of a

detailed code book for coders to follow on two levels: the meme's "news values" level and the host's "communication accommodation strategies" level.

On the meme level, trained coders were requested to examine the 235 memes and identify the type of memes (*image*, *image macro*, or *video*) that ran across the designated episodes then make sure that they neatly and correctly fall into each coding category. All memes were eventually arranged in tables with their corresponding type. They were then arranged in terms of frequency: *video memes* (12 instances), *image memes* (64 instances), and *image macro memes* featuring textual overlays (159 instances) (See Figure 1 for a sample of each type from the corpus under study). What is of interest in the current study is the *image macro meme*, the template-based single images super-imposed with text, by virtue of their predominance as recurrent tools for Noah to actively, and semio-discursively, participate in the digital public sphere. As artefacts of visual rhetoric, image macro memes are ideologically versatile and can indeed be understood as "essentially speech acts" (Grundlingh 2018:147); they require the "context of the meme (the text and the image) to be interpreted within the context of the larger communication" (159).

Having identified and grouped the resulting 159 image macro memes, the researchers coded the news values that dominated each meme instance. To ensure consistency of coding, it was essential that the coders have received explicit, consistent, and well-defined rules and instructions for coding the news values (with reference to the DNVA). This was to ensure that the content of the media messages was analyzed and measured consistently among the researcher and coders. Having coded the nine news values in the 159 image macro memes, the free-marginal multi-rater kappas were identified with the help of the Online Kappa Calculator (Randolph 2008) to measure inter-coder reliability. Satisfactory inter-coder reliability was reached (see Table 2). A subsequent step was to calculate the frequency of the news values in Trump's image macro memes in attempt to have a deeper insight into the use of news values for convergence and/or divergence purposes.



A sample *image meme* describing Trump's tactless, flat-out weird way of engaging with world leaders (namely Macron), October 24, 2018.

Retrieved from:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?reload=9&v=OTWkeN2Gyz8>



A sample *image macro meme* describing Trump's crackdown on legal immigration, January 19, 2018.

Retrieved from:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tmsC-7QwRjU&t=90s>



A sample clip of a *video meme* describing Trump's reaction to the impeachment decision, December 19, 2019.

Retrieved from:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7fE5ljMUsAw&t=94s>

Figure 1. Samples of image memes, image macro memes, and video memes from *TDS Monologues* (January 2016 – December 2019)

Table 2. A summary of inter-coder reliability percentage of agreement

News Value in the Dataset of Image Macro Memes	Percentage of Agreement (%)
Negativity/Positivity	96.2
Timeliness	97.7
Proximity	95.6
Superlativeness	97.4
Eliteness	96.9
Impact	99.5
Unexpectedness	94.3
Personalization	91.5
Consonance	97.8

Note: Each news value was independently coded by the three trained coders. The Online kappa Calculator was utilized to calculate the average percentage of agreement.

On the monologue level, the researchers coded the Communication Accommodation Strategies (CASs) that Noah employed in tandem with the emerging image macro memes in the designated “*memetic moments*” of the monologue. The linguistic and (non/para)-linguistic realizations of each strategy were then identified, coded, and tabulated to examine their purpose (i.e. either for *convergence* or *divergence*). Having coded the five CASs in the 159 image macro memes, the free-marginal multi-rater kappas were identified with the help of the Online Kappa Calculator (Randolph 2008) to measure inter-coder reliability. Satisfactory inter-coder reliability was reached (see Table 3). A subsequent step was to calculate the frequency of the CASs in Trump’s image macro memes.

Table 3. A summary of inter-coder reliability percentage of agreement

CASs in the Memetic Moments	Percentage of Agreement (%)
Approximation	92.8%
Interpretability	98.1%
Interpersonal control	95.3%
Discourse management	97.9%
Emotional expression	93.4%

Note: Each communication accommodation strategy was independently coded by the three trained coders. The Online kappa Calculator was utilized to calculate the average percentage of agreement.

The qualitative analysis followed to showcase how the emerging image macro memes in the talk show, with their shades of frivolousness, function as substitutes and augments of conventional news and are as a consequence unanticipated avenues of media literacy. Thematic analysis was carried out to provide possible explanations for the observed distribution and variation of embedded news values in the corpus under scrutiny.

5. Analysis

5.1 Quantitative analysis

The quantitative analysis of the inherent news values showcases an uneven construction of news values. More specifically a convergence of *Negativity*, *Timeliness*, *Proximity*, *Impact*, *Superlativeness*, and *Eliteness* is foregrounded (with the highest occurrences) whereas *Unexpectedness*, *Personalization*, and *Consonance* are backgrounded (with the lowest occurrences) (See Table 4). The most frequently constructed and foregrounded news values in the image macro sub-dataset were prioritized through linguistic and visual resources to tactfully contribute to the negative representation of Trump. Arguably, it is in and through these semio-discursive choices that the host encodes his semantic and geopolitical stance toward Trump and his administration (See Table 5 for some examples of the semio-discursive realizations of the embedded news values in the image macro memes). Relatedly, the different communication accommodation strategies Noah employed, to formalize and ritualize audiences' relationship with sophisticated meta-narratives of journalism and emerging forms of news and news commentary, were examined (See Table 6). Although Noah is not engaging in one-on-one conversations with visible audiences, he addresses the studio audiences who directly express their emotional responses through either clapping or laughter. His idiosyncratic style is characterized by optimal levels of accommodation via a full manipulation of convergence strategies in all memetic moments of the monologue (See Table 7 for some examples of the semio-pragmatic strategies employed in the "memetic moments" of the *TDS* Monologues).

Table 4. Frequency of the news values in Trump's image macro memes in the monologue of *The Daily Show with Trevor Noah* (January 2016 - December 2019)

Communication Accommodation Strategy	Occurrence in “Memetic Moments”	Number of Memetic Moments per Occurrence	Purpose: Convergence/Divergence
Approximation	√	158	Convergence
Interpretability	√	147	Convergence
Interpersonal control	√	132	Convergence
Discourse management	√	142	Convergence
Emotional expression	√	157	Convergence

Table 5: Examples of the semio-discursive realizations of the embedded news values in the “memetic moments” of the *TDS* Monologues (January 2016 – December 2019)

Semio-Discursive Realizations of New Values in Image Macro Memes
<i>Negativity</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (Binary) opposition • Diminution • Visual repetition • Super-imposed text
<i>Proximity & Timeliness</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Iconic figures, geographic landmarks, recognizable artefacts, and symbols from popular culture that resonate with the target audience • Use of visuals and texts replete with cultural resonance
<i>Eliteness & Superlativeness</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visual display of recognizable power elite figures and/or institutions • Placement/Repetition of key elements in the image frame in different sizes and extreme emotions/behaviors/occurrences and of high intensity and large scope/scale/size/extent
<i>Consonance & Personalization</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Display of events similar to past occurrences • Visual display of American citizens (e.g. eyewitnesses, survivors, laypeople, or other non-elite individuals)
<i>Unexpectedness & Impact</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Display of shocking repercussions and/or national/global impact (e.g., insurrections, strikes, and oppositions) • Juxtaposition of elements in the image frame to for stark contrast

Table 6. Frequency of communication accommodation strategies in the memetic moments of the monologue of *The Daily Show with Trevor Noah* (January 2016 - December 2019)

News Value	Occurrence in Image Macro Memes	Number of Image Macro Memes per Occurrence
Negativity	√	154
Timeliness	√	151
Proximity	√	148
Superlativeness	√	136
Eliteness	√	137
Impact	√	143
Unexpectedness	√	97
Personalization	√	91
Consonance	√	119

Table 7. Examples of the semio-pragmatic strategies employed in the “memetic moments” of the *TDS* Monologues (January 2016 – December 2019)

Communication Accommodation Strategies

Approximation

- Explicit/Implicit references to negative emotion and attitude/ evaluative language/ lexis/ descriptions via satirical tropes
 - Vocal variations (e.g. pitch, speech rate, dialect, etc.)
-

Interpretability

- Amplitude/Simplified syntax and lexis
 - First and second person pronouns
 - Direct/indirect imperatives
 - Constant references to comparisons, quantifiers, and intensifiers
 - Occasional use of metaphors, similes, and comparison
-

Discourse Management

- Topic selection, back-channeling, and cohesion
 - Occasional references to officials, political parties, recognized politicians, rituals, sacred places, achievements and fame
 - Explicit deictic expressions of space, time, and person
 - Frequent use of social deixis: status markers and role labels Embedded temporal references prompted by real-life events and perceptions
 - Lexical time references of currency, urgency seasonality, change, or current trends
-

Interpersonal Control

- Interaction with the studio's audiences (e.g. laughter, pauses, etc.)
 - Occasional references to stereotypical attributes or preconceptions; assessments of expectedness/ typicality; and similarity with past
 - Explicit references to general knowledge and traditions
 - References to ordinary people as well as their emotions and experiences
-

Emotional Expression

- Regulation of kinetic and haptic movement (head/eye/hand); posture and body orientation; paralinguistic; and pauses/stress on words
 - Spectacularization and rich description of the consequences
 - Assessments of significance and relevant consequences, including abstract, material, and/or mental effects
-

5.2 Qualitative analysis

In this section, I delve deeper into a random selection of 3 instances from the “meme pool” (Knobel and Lankshear, 2007) for the pressing national and international issues they subsume as points of reference. This is to pinpoint how “the semio-discursive realizations of news values” and “the semio-pragmatic strategies of convergence” form one unified, coherent model of analysis. A careful explication of the visual components, and consideration of how the visual intersects with the spoken monologue to construct multi-layered satirical critique, is introduced in the investigation of each meme instance.

Image Macro Meme #1:

The first image macro meme shown in the memetic moments (02:36 – 03:02) of the monologue of the episode reachable through <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vflifd3BtPE> accentuates Trump's cliché practice of *self-contradictions* that often hit fever pitch. In one week, he addressed the American nation in three back to back speeches (concerning Afghanistan, the big Rally, and the American Legion) adopting three different styles, manifesting three different personas for the same president (*somber* Trump, *free-style* Trump, and *sincere* Trump). This has been baffling to the American people and the media who found it difficult to keep up with these conflicting statements. In full expression of this inconsistency, in the five-persona image macro meme infused in the day's monologue, Trump is depicted as similar to the petulant, irrational, and tyrant teenage Joffrey Baratheon in HBO's *Game of Thrones* (See Table 8). The foregrounded negative faces accentuate "cruelty", "distortion", "deception", "recklessness", "snobbery", and "violence" – all of which collude with corrupt powers and doing anything for the throne. Just like Joffrey who became the pinnacle of hatred for fans of the show, Trump is notoriously known for making conflicting statements that not only create chaos but also reduces one of the most powerful countries in the world to a laughing stock, leaving his people feeling utterly irked. Interestingly, this dilemma is intensified by the super-imposed text "*The Game of Tones*" that alludes to "*Game of Thrones*" to describe Trump's multiple personas in different speeches that are more appalling than the fictional world. In fact, this image macro meme blurs the line between fact and fiction and several compelling parallels to real-world politics can be detected. With all of the backstabbing, political machinations, shifting alliances and hidden agendas, scheming in every level of government, factions among even the staunchest of allies, drama among allies and enemies on the hit television show, it is inevitable that Trump's administration and the country at large would be compared to the current drama unfolding in *Game of Thrones* whereby players all fight for power and are in a constant ego-driven, murderous struggle in a fictional land.

In tandem with the convergent semio-discursive strategies of *negativity*, *proximity*, and *timeliness*, the intensity of Noah's negative stance toward Trump is expressed at the level of embodiment (i.e., the image of Trump's faces with the memetic super-imposed text) and at the level of the semio-pragmatic features of the monologue (i.e., the utterance that express a confrontational stance). Constant negative references to Trump in the memetic moments are characterized by mockery, verbal diminution, jokes, and sarcastic remarks; use of metaphors and comparison; simplified syntax and lexis, and colloquial expressions for *approximation* and *interpretability* purposes to reduce the complexity of his speech, increase clarity and attention to topic familiarity, and to attend to the full spectrum of culturally and politically diverse viewers at the other end of the screen. The incongruous effect of the strategies above invariably draws a laugh from the in-studio audience. Noah goes the extra mile and expresses his genuine emotions to the content, often laughing with his audience at the absurdity of the

news in the video clips that relate to the meme on display. His vernacular-based, vocally-accommodative style, symptomatic of *approximation* is characterized by a range of *prosodic features* (exaggerated intonation, high pitch, and changing rate of speech to project a concerned citizen while passionately giving his opinions on political topics) especially when he mimics Trump's idiosyncratic speech style to demonstrate how his responses are ridiculously inadequate. Examples to cite for the semio-pragmatic strategies from the memetic moments of the monologue are bolded in the italic utterance below:

*“All politicians adjust their performance for different crowds, right? Uh, Obama speaks differently in a black or a white crowd. Bush spoke differently to farmers and bankers. Ted Cruz speaks differently to people than **the pile of human heads in his basement that he says are his friends [JOKE]**. It always happens. But Trump is different. When he talks to different audiences, even within just a few days, he doesn't just tweak his style, he changes his message.....**Trump's swings are only surprising if you expect Trump to actually be president [SARACASM]**. But **Donald Trump isn't a president. He's just playing one on TV [VERBAL DIMINUTION]**.”*

Image Macro Meme #2

The second image macro meme shown in the memetic moments (02:28 – 02:45 and 03:13 – 03:32) of the monologue of the episode reachable through <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tmsC-7QwRjU> relates to the apprehensions at the US-Mexico border, interior arrests, and deportations that have changed under Trump's administration that long pushed for a tougher approach on illegal immigration, both on the U.S.-Mexico border and elsewhere in the country to reduce illegal crossings. In this regard, just like the fabled huckster and impresario PT Barnum in *The Greatest Showman*, Trump is portrayed as a master manipulator who values entertainment over truth, pulling his 'Immigrants Showman' act on the American people (See Table 9). The impersonation of Trump as Barnum is very telling; it is intrinsically appealing and culturally recognizable by the collective public and connect with their social stock of knowledge. A century or so prior to the birth of Trump, Barnum was attracting enormous crowds and headlines thanks to his inflated ego and personality, as well as his deft deal-making and sleazy frauds. In order to get attention (and, in the case of Barnum, ticket sales), both Trump and Barnum are infamous for dodging the truth, exaggerating, and in some cases, outright lying. Their professional paths resembled one another in various respects; both were land developers who later entered politics. They both leveraged their forays into entrepreneurship to establish themselves as household names that the average person could relate to. Overall, notable meaning linkages are created through the strategic manipulation of iconography (such as brightness, compositional balance, and negative social actor depictions). Represented in a large, full-color, salient, and conspicuous image, Trump is foregrounded in superlative terms as a Republican who has made

cracking down on illegal immigration a centerpiece of his administration and an achievement he boasts of. In the background, the unauthorized immigrants are seen leaving the American lands on account of immigration enforcement. This may have major effects on the national and international levels. In collegiality with the convergent semio-discursive strategies of *superlativeness*, *consonance*, and *impact*, the intensity of Noah's negative stance toward Trump is expressed through explicit references to some of the immigrant families' emotions toward Trump's and his administration's immigration rhetoric; *deictic expressions* prompted by the pressing national events and perceptions; and *lexical time references* suggesting currency and urgency of the event to make the critiqued situation geographically and culturally proximal to the American audiences. Examples to cite for the semio-pragmatic strategies from the memetic moments of the monologue are bolded in the italic utterance below:

“For Trump that was based on a true story. But here’s the thing. If you have a green card, you can’t just bring your whole family. You can only bring your unmarried children and your spouse. And even if you go on to become a US citizen, the time it takes to bring your family is a lot longer [INTENSIFIER] than Donny and the Trumpettes make it sound.”

“That’s right. It could take up to 20 years [TEMPORAL DEIXIS] to bring a foreign member to live with you in the US [SPATIAL DEIXIS], which for some relatives is going to mean some hard choices. It is like, “Grandma, look, I love you. But 20 years, I mean... It’s a lot of paperwork and I mean I don’t know if you’re going to make it, and...I’m just saying.”

Image Macro Meme #3

The third image macro meme shown in the memetic moments (02:27 – 02:36 and 03:38 – 03:46) of the monologue of the episode reachable through <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oUA-aYI6m8Y> relates to Trump's first formal three-day trip to the UK. While his long-delayed state-visit to Britain was replete with full honors – including ceremonies, government meetings and a Buckingham Palace banquet – he received a less-than-presidential welcome by the British people who protested against his presence. Tens of thousands crammed in Parliament Square in London to vent their anger over Trump's first official visit to Britain, blowing horns, waving banners, and hoisting a bright, six-meter high, orange effigy of the US president flying outside the Houses of Parliament. More specifically, the image macro meme in Table 10 depicts Trump as a clown by virtue of his demeanor during the UK visit. After a dinner at Buckingham Palace surrounded by royalty, Trump praised the Queen saying she is “a great, great woman” and unexpectedly broke the British royal protocol by touching her back as she stood up (when touching the Queen is strictly forbidden). Making things worse, the outfit he wore for dinner was improper and misfit for a royal occasion. This being said, “The clown” super-imposed text is a transposition of Trump

taken as a pop culture reference to Netflix's "*The Crown*", the historical drama TV series on the reign of Queen Elizabeth II. Because viewers tend to recognize, experientially and thus intuitively, the immense blunder made by Trump, reality is inevitably one of complicity. However, this involvement leads to a correlative critique of spectacular interactions and provides the opportunity to think of novel possible relations within the social and political registers when it is coupled with an ironic approach to truth and politics. In fact, a myriad layers of ironic and satirical nuance with intertextuality is evident in the juxtaposition showcased in Noah's comments during the memetic moments. Examples to cite are bolded in the utterances below:

*"And while Trump spent the evening **being embraced by the royal family**, there was a ...there was a **whole different kind of party going on outside the next day.**" [ROYAL WELCOME VS PEOPLE'S PROTEST]*

*"Now, obviously **British protestors are taking to the streets to make Trump feel unwelcome in the UK but for Trump protests are like Eric – he just pretends they don't exist....and here's the thing, people in the UK weren't just protesting because they hate Trump, right? They're also against the potential UK-US trade deal which would bring American insurers into Britain's healthcare system, which they don't want.**" [PEOPLE'S PROTEST VS TRUMP'S INATTENTION]*

Table 8. Instances of visual news values and communication accommodation strategies in the “memetic moments” of the image macro meme describing Trump’s multiple personas in different speeches


Image Macro Meme #1	Instances of Visual News Values	Instances of Communication Accommodation Strategies
 <p data-bbox="293 637 506 663">Memetic Moments</p> <p data-bbox="325 696 474 723">02:36 – 03:02</p>	<p data-bbox="630 368 750 395">Negativity</p> <ul data-bbox="630 400 959 458" style="list-style-type: none"> • Multiple faces of Trump in opposition <p data-bbox="630 489 753 516">Timeliness</p> <ul data-bbox="630 521 997 579" style="list-style-type: none"> • Trump’s analogy to Joffery Baratheon in <i>Game of Thrones</i> <p data-bbox="630 610 750 637">Proximity</p> <ul data-bbox="630 642 1035 727" style="list-style-type: none"> • The super-imposed text <i>Games of Tones</i> as an allusion to <i>Game of Thrones</i> 	<p data-bbox="1071 368 1245 395">Approximation</p> <ul data-bbox="1071 400 1645 610" style="list-style-type: none"> • Explicit references to negative attitude via a multitude of satirical tropes (namely, parody, allusion, exaggeration, analogy, joke, and irony) • Vernacular-based and vocally accommodative style • Prosodic features (exaggerated intonation, high pitch, changing speech rate, and change of dialect) <p data-bbox="1071 642 1249 669">Interpretability</p> <ul data-bbox="1071 674 1645 830" style="list-style-type: none"> • Mockery, verbal diminution, and sarcastic remarks • Metaphor and comparison • Simplified syntax and lexis • Colloquial expressions/Slang <p data-bbox="1071 862 1321 889">Emotional Expression</p> <ul data-bbox="1071 895 1645 1037" style="list-style-type: none"> • Rhythmic synchronization of talk and body language • Mimicry of Trump’s idiosyncratic speech style • Spectacularization and rich description of the consequences

Table 9. Instances of visual news values and communication accommodation strategies in the “memetic moments” of the image macro meme describing Trump’s crackdown on illegal immigration



Image Macro Meme #2	Instances of Visual News Values	Instances of Communication Accommodation Strategies
 <p data-bbox="293 673 506 696">Memetic Moments</p> <p data-bbox="325 733 476 787">02:028 -02:45 03:13 – 03:32</p>	<p data-bbox="634 400 814 423">Superlativeness</p> <ul data-bbox="634 431 1054 491" style="list-style-type: none"> • Foregrounded Trump VS backgrounded immigrants <p data-bbox="634 521 773 544">Consonance</p> <ul data-bbox="634 552 972 612" style="list-style-type: none"> • Images of illegal immigrant citizens <p data-bbox="634 642 725 665">Impact</p> <ul data-bbox="634 673 1054 767" style="list-style-type: none"> • Display of shocking repercussions • Juxtaposition of Trump and immigrants for stark contrast 	<p data-bbox="1077 400 1348 423">Discourse Management</p> <ul data-bbox="1096 431 1686 619" style="list-style-type: none"> • Back-channeling and cohesion • References to officials and political parties • Deictic expressions prompted by the pressing events and perceptions • Lexical time references suggesting currency and urgency <p data-bbox="1077 649 1334 672">Interpersonal Control</p> <ul data-bbox="1096 680 1686 801" style="list-style-type: none"> • Explicit references to general knowledge and traditions • References to immigrant people as well as their emotions and experiences

Table 10. Instances of visual news values and communication accommodation strategies in the “memetic moments” of the image macro meme describing Trump’s UK trip

Image Macro Meme #3	Instances of Visual News Values	Instances of Communication Accommodation Strategies
 <p data-bbox="295 584 514 611">Memetic Moments</p> <p data-bbox="323 638 485 698">02:27 – 02:36 03:38 – 03:46</p>	<p data-bbox="637 369 761 396">Negativity</p> <ul data-bbox="637 403 1142 463" style="list-style-type: none"> • (Binary) opposition (Trump VS British royal soldiers) <p data-bbox="637 490 761 517">Proximity</p> <ul data-bbox="637 524 1142 645" style="list-style-type: none"> • Iconic figures (British royal soldiers) • Symbols from popular culture that resonate with the target audience (<i>The Clown</i> as an analogy to <i>The Crown</i>) <p data-bbox="637 678 752 705">Eliteness</p> <ul data-bbox="637 712 1142 772" style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognizable power elite figures and institutions <p data-bbox="637 806 828 833">Unexpectedness</p> <ul data-bbox="637 840 1142 920" style="list-style-type: none"> • Display of shocking repercussions (Trump’s analogy to a clown on account of his demeanor) 	<p data-bbox="1161 369 1342 396"><i>Approximation</i></p> <ul data-bbox="1161 403 1694 524" style="list-style-type: none"> • Explicit references to negative emotion and attitude/evaluative language • Vocal variations (high pitch and serious tone) <p data-bbox="1161 557 1342 584"><i>Interpretability</i></p> <ul data-bbox="1161 591 1551 651" style="list-style-type: none"> • Simplified syntax and lexis • Use of similes and comparison <p data-bbox="1161 685 1437 712"><i>Discourse Management</i></p> <ul data-bbox="1161 719 1694 806" style="list-style-type: none"> • Explicit deictic expressions • Use of social deixis, namely: status markers and role labels <p data-bbox="1161 840 1418 866"><i>Emotional Expression</i></p> <ul data-bbox="1161 873 1694 1055" style="list-style-type: none"> • Regulation of kinetic and haptic movement (head/eye/hand) • Spectacularization and rich description of the consequences • Assessments of significance and relevant consequences

6. Conclusion

This paper was an attempt to introduce an inclusive approach that can do better justice to the rich complexity inherent to memes. In expanding the categories of memes and in re-association of memetics with prior scholarship, I particularly positioned the memes integrated in the talk show monologues as highly medium-specific expressions that respond to challenging events based on thematic and structural templates, and hence provide a timely and even reactionary response to political debates. Remarkably, the meme discourse introduced in the satirical monologue showcases the emergence of a new paradigm for social actor representation in which dissemination is driven by an individualized, creative, and memetic dynamic. The monologue draws heavily on multimodal aesthetics replete with *news values* deftly used in tandem with host-bound *communication accommodation strategies*. The close examination of news values along with key visual resources and accompanying communication accommodation strategies in Noah's monologue yields intriguing finding.

First, the emerging image macro memes in the late-night show, with their shades of frivolousness, have superseded late-night television as the leading edge of political satire, have come to function as substitutes and augments of conventional news, and are, as a consequence, unanticipated avenues of media literacy in the contemporary media environment. As the foregoing analysis shows, these memes acquire prominence in the eventual interpretation and Trump's images elucidate what the super-imposed text amplifies, often radically. In tandem, Noah extensively depends on the use of factual information and expert opinion in the "memetic moments" segment in addition to montaged and assembled soundbites to (a) connects voices from across a range of sources, and outlooks, (b) illuminate fallacies and interrogate their logic and hidden motivations, and (c) manifest well-informedness in the issue he is commenting on. With the witty deployment of a wide array of tropes, Noah's monologues become conversations grounded in the style of casual, interpersonal exchange, thus afford deliberation and collusion on the part of viewers. His accompanying commentary not only evokes Trump's diminutive nature and showcases the incongruity between the image macro meme and Noah's words, but also entices viewers to re-evaluate Trump's contradictory and incongruous statements, as well as critique his policy positions.

Second, the emerging meme discourse of *TDS* not only timely responds to challenging and pressing national and international issues, but also bears ideological potentials for political expression. The political memes, along with their pertinent multimodal affordances and iconography, represent and co-construct the political landscape in the episodes of the show. A juxtaposition is evident between the memes and the show host's comments. This is wittily crafted to expose hypocrisies in media coverage, illuminate inconsistencies, and facetiously reveal follies. In the talk-show mediascape, it is precisely this complexity that makes memes ripe for subversive play and academic inquiry. With its viral parodies of Trump, the monologue provides satire that is visceral

and informative. The semio-discursive features of image macro memes in conjunction with the semio-pragmatic strategies in the monologue do not only communicate with viewers in logical, well-structured arguments but they lean on affective and emotional discourses as well. While the memes have the potential to emotionally engage with their intended audiences, the monologue succeeds in communicating nuanced and detailed information on the referenced political players and issues. Far from being mere visual artifacts, such memes are better perceived of as catalysts of alternative journalism.

This paper is just a point of departure but a crucial one. Using *TDS*'s image macro memes as a benchmark dataset for meme sentiment analysis can be of substantial significance not only to NLP researchers but to MCDA scholars, too. Future studies can opt for the conceptualization of technological mimesis and run sentiment analyses or other AI-assisted techniques (namely, RF, MLP, and IL algorithms) to perform classification and provide interesting inferences on the memes integrated in *TDS* on both intellectual and humorous levels. In tandem, the intriguing findings Abdel-Raheem (2022) recently accentuated within his long-standing work on metaphorical creativity can be extended to the memes integrated in *TDS* to scrutinize how they contribute to the literature to date on taboos and multimodal impoliteness from sociolinguistic gender-based vantage points. On a different note, memetic scholarship can extend to other digital platform, particularly Instagram, TikTok and WhatsApp stickers as under-researched memetic texts, and examine their potential for “metaphorical creativity”.

Assoc. Prof. Nashwa Elyamany
College of Language & Communication (CLC)
The Arab Academy for Science, Technology & Maritime Transport (AASTMT),
ORCID Number: 0000-0002-3385-194X
E-mail: nashwa.elyamany@aast.edu

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