

# Memeiology: A Content Analysis on the Viral COVID-19 Memes

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## **Abstract**

During the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, memes were mass-produced, and it was observed that they featured humor, entertainment, and awareness. This study aimed to analyze the images used and text placements of selected viral COVID-19 memes. Semiology concepts from Saussure (1984) and Peirce (1991) were employed amidst the content analysis of the aforementioned. The images used and text placements were identified as the semiotic patterns of each meme. The study found that the image selection is based on popular culture. Photographs of people and screen capture images from movies and TV/cartoon shows are mostly used. The texts used in the memes are mostly placed in the center, overlaying the image or background used. An all-white Arial typeface with 28-48 pt. is the most used typography. With this text-image relationship, the memes are read more easily, leading to better comprehension and virality. Hence, the study concluded that memes may be utilized to a) associate or represent people, emotions, experiences, and sentiments and b) communicate using another form of media. The study recommends the integration of memes in teaching a lesson, specifically in English at the secondary level, to promote humor and creativity in the language classroom.

## **Introduction**

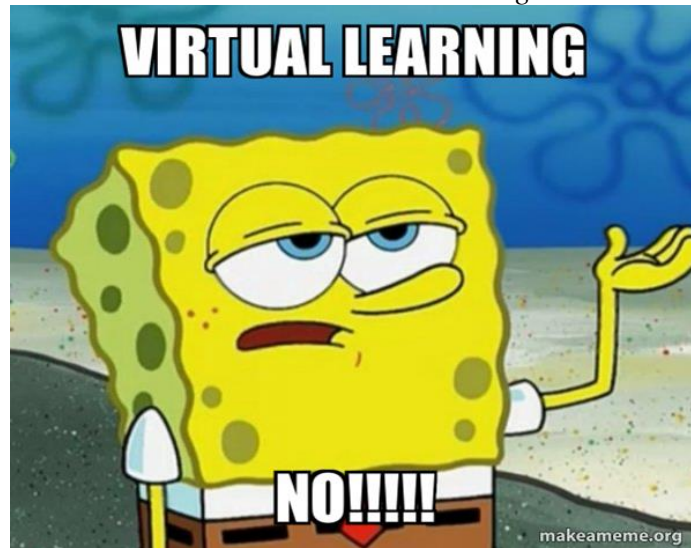
The active users of various social media platforms would consider memes as a source of online entertainment and humor; however, these may also serve as digital artifacts, preserving the socio-cultural and economic status of their creators and their origin countries.

Memes resemble genes in that the transmission of cultural units is like the transmission of genes (Aslan, 2021). Closely observing the viral memes across social media platforms may provide a glimpse of how digital citizens use it to create discourse in a creative and funny manner. The meme creators utilize images from widely known sources such as cartoon shows, news personalities, and politicians. Using the idea that these images are known by the public, when added to a text, like a catchphrase or a touch of sarcasm, the public will easily associate both elements with understanding the message conveyed by the meme creators.

During the transmission process, the images used change, such as editing, to fit in with the intended meaning from the creator; hence, the cultural units or memes of a society reflect deep

social and cultural structures and can reveal the hidden ideologies rooted within them (Aslan, 2021).

**Figure 1**  
*A meme on virtual learning*



*(from makeameme.org)*

Figure 1 is an example of a meme that can be treated as a digital artifact. Using the image of SpongeBob SquarePants would lead to an understanding that it is intended for children. The statement added to the image to create the meme strongly contradicts virtual learning. Overall, the meme may be interpreted as a public sentiment and decline towards the implementation of virtual learning for young students. This meme can be treated as a humorous social media post and a symbolic manner to provide a stance on a societal issue. It also embodies a collective voice of people since this meme went viral and can be treated as something that most people on the internet agree upon.

Defined by Shifman (2014) as a group of digital items sharing common characteristics of content, form, and stance, which were created with awareness of each other and were circulated, imitated, and/or transformed via the internet by many users, internet memes can take numerous forms, such as videos or photoshopped images. These internet memes can be multifaceted in a way that they can be applied to other disciplines. Hence, for a meme to go viral, it must have a viral phenomenon that will encourage internet users to engage in various forms of derivative work. Most viral internet memes are from news, sensationalized media moments, or music videos that spread through digital word-of-mouth.

Memes can be used in various contexts aside from humor and entertainment; hence, Baysac (2017) concluded that memes can also be applied in the 21<sup>st</sup> century learning. In this context, memes served as classroom tools for students bringing both humor and creativity as indicators of innovation in the classroom. Applying this finding resulted to establish memes as a creative tool that teachers can use in their classrooms, especially on virtual classrooms where both students and teachers use various digital resources to enrich virtual learning.

Kayali and Altuntas (2021) utilized memes in their classrooms for vocabulary revision. Based on their study, Turkish students had difficulty remembering vocabulary items; thus, the researchers used memes in classroom activities to encourage the students' proficiency level. Applying their study to this research may view memes as an effective tool to teach vocabulary while upskilling their digital literacy.

The study aimed to analyze whether viral local COVID-19 memes can also be utilized in the Philippine classroom to teach and learn English, specifically in Olongapo City. The study attempted to contextualize the COVID-19 memes as potential classroom tools to promote English language proficiency, creativity, and humor in the digital classroom.

Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the semiotic patterns used on the viral COVID-19 memes in terms of:
  - 1.1 text placement; and
  - 1.2 images used?
2. What are the overall characteristics of the viral COVID-19 memes?
3. What output can this study contribute on the field of Education, specifically in teaching-learning of English at the secondary level?

The study focused on analyzing the capability of memes to serve as potential classroom tools in teaching English at the secondary level. However, participants and research instruments are not used since the study is content analysis, specifically unobtrusive research; hence, it only examined the patterns and overall characteristics of the viral COVID-19 memes.

The viral COVID-19 memes are from the article published last April 1, 2020 entitled 25 of the funniest memes we saw online since the lockdown by Chris Clemente from a well-known TV network. This is the chosen source for the memes because it curated the memes that transpired and mass-produced in the first 17 days of the pandemic in 2020. Despite the memes being viral from March 16 to April 1, 2020, these are still the chosen memes of the researchers for this study because when the pandemic started to hit the Philippines, the local memes also started to emerge more. The researchers aimed to observe and analyze this phenomenon, where memes are rapidly mass-produced across numerous platforms. It happened through the identification of the images used and text placements of each meme, then analysis of the relationship between the two that made each meme viral and still relatable today.

As a delimitation, only the local memes about COVID-19 are included in this research because the locality of the researchers can relate more into it. There is a total of 10 randomly handpicked viral COVID-19 memes out of the 25 curated memes from the source online article that underwent content analysis using semiology to determine their capability as potential classroom tools. The memes used are chosen because of their social relevancy and social representations as based on the evaluation of the researchers. The selected memes depicted the various situations and sentiments that transpired during the pandemic. Amongst the rest, these 10 memes are not only humorous but also attempted to connect people and their experiences. Thus, these 10 memes are best to utilize for this study since they are not only sharing humor, they are also transmitting messages that can inform the internet users while being entertained.

The inclusion and exclusion criteria were determined by the researchers only. Aside from the aforementioned social relevancy and social representations, the researchers expanded it so the handpicked memes are aligned to the objective of the study. The study attempted to determine the capability of the memes as potential classroom tools; hence, the following criteria is determined by the researchers themselves:

- a. *cultural relevance* – guided by social relevancy and social representations as its main selection, the memes are selected through identifying its appropriateness to the target locale of the study. The target locale of the study is Olongapo City through this, the selected memes are determined whether the culture of the Olongapo City can relate to what the potential meanings of each meme.
- b. *relatability* – the memes used in the study are identified by the researchers themselves whether it is developmentally-relatable to the secondary English students or teachers in Olongapo City.
- c. *overall visual appeal* – since the memes from the article went viral during the onset of the pandemic, this can translate that the text-image relationship evident of these memes contributed to its virality. However, to be selected in this study, the researchers themselves examined each meme whether its texts and images can provide something else aside from humor since the selected memes must be aligned towards the objectives of this research.

The study is of great significance in the field of education, specifically in the teaching-learning of English at the secondary level. In addition, this will help certain groups, such as secondary English teachers and learners, to view and employ memes as classroom tools in their virtual learning. Therefore, the findings from this study can be used as a basis for teachers to incorporate memes in teaching lessons in English.

## **Methodology**

### ***Research Design***

The study is a content analysis and defined by Leedy & Ormrod (2015), as *a detailed and systematic examination of the contents of a particular body of material to identify patterns, themes, or biases*. In this context, it viewed the memes as one form of human communication because it transmits messages through virtual means, such as being created and shared across various social media platforms like Facebook.

The researchers chose this design because the study aimed to identify and describe specific characteristics of the viral COVID-19 memes. During the content analysis, the researchers determined the potential meanings of each meme that can be used to observe what capability it has in relation to being potential classroom tools.

### ***Data Gathering Procedure***

There is a total of 10 local memes from an online article published on the website of a well-known TV network. This website is the only website that curated the viral COVID-19-related memes that has been mass produced during the first 17 days of the pandemic in the country, March 16 to April 1 2020. The memes were broken down into two parts text and image as its general characteristics.

The researchers analyzed the texts and images using semiology. These memes were viewed as a sign that is composed of a signifier (the images used in each meme) and a signified (the texts in each meme).

Aside from the concept of signifier and signified, the study adapted the concepts of typology of signs from the Theory of Signs by Peirce (1991). According to him, signs can be categorized into three modes: symbol, icon, or index. A sign is symbolic if it *does not resemble the signified but which is fundamentally arbitrary or purely conventional* (Chandler, 2007). Examples of symbol modes are national flags, traffic lights, and morse code. A sign is iconic if it is *perceived as resembling or imitating the signified—being similar in possessing some of its qualities* (Chandler, 2007). Examples of icons are cartoons, portraits, and metaphors. Lastly, a sign is indexical if *the signifier is not arbitrary but directly connected in some way—this link can be observed or inferred* (Chandler, 2007). Examples of index modes are smoke, thunder, and directional signpost.

The researchers used the concepts of signified, signifier, and typology in analyzing and interpreting the memes, so that the extracted meme creation process can be used as a guideline for the target beneficiary of this study.

According to Wiggins (2019), semiotics in analyzing memes is vital since the conveyance of ideas and ideologies occur within deliberate semiotic and intertextual construction, especially with the absence of human speech. In analyzing the memes, it is significant to have a step back and consider what the big picture is, to see beyond the humor of the initial moment, and to view a particular meme, its iteration, or even a series of memes as a discourse and not a simple hoax.

To apply semiology in this study, the researchers modified the semiotic analysis process from Semiotic Analysis of the Four Popular Memes in Memecenter.com (Putra et al., 2017). Modifications occurred to align the semiotic analysis to the objective of this study: to observe only the patterns and overall characteristics of each meme through the images used, text placements, and their inter-relationships.

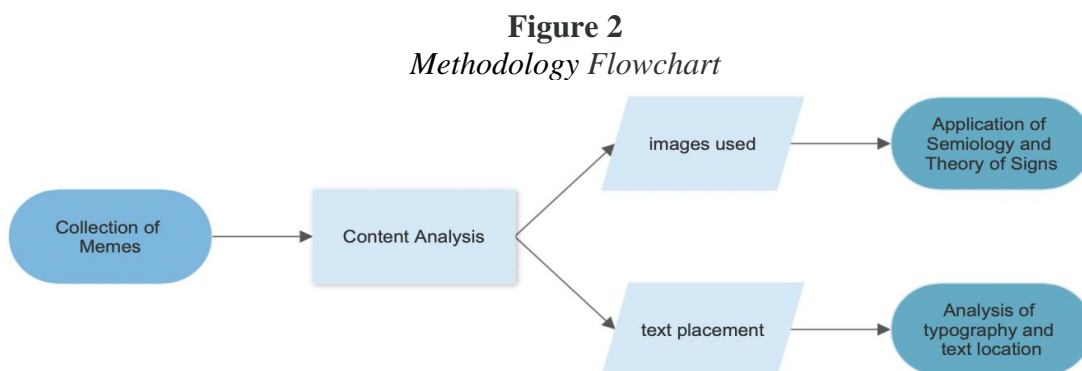
Hence, the researchers collected the memes from an article entitled 25 of the funniest memes we saw online since the lockdown by Chris Clemente, published last April 1, 2020. Among the 25 memes featured in the article, only ten were randomly picked because of their social relevancy and social representation, as based on the researchers' evaluation. These chosen memes depict the various situations and sentiments that transpired during the pandemic.

After collecting the memes, the researchers proceeded to the analysis of images used and text placements for each selected meme. In this process, the researchers used the Google Vision API, an image analyzing software that assisted on identifying the image, labels, and text blocks present in the chosen memes. The researchers chose this image analyzing software to streamline the identification of images used and text placements for each meme.

For the images used, the researchers applied the concepts of the signifier and the signified and the images used were categorized using the Theory of Signs by Peirce (1991). For the text placements, the researchers observed and analyzed its typography, specifically through the

following: a) text location and number of text blocks on the memes; b) typeface and sizes; and c) font colors.

After analyzing the texts and images, the two are combined to determine the possible meanings for each meme based on their specific and overall compositions. The interpretation of the possible meanings for each meme is organized and analyzed through a software called NVivo. The researchers chose NVivo to assist them during the content analysis process of all the collected memes since the software streamlines data organization, analysis, and storage. Additionally, the researchers used the NVivo software to create a tag cloud containing all the memes' dominant characteristics to come up with guidelines that can be used as a basis for secondary English teachers to incorporate the usage of memes in their classrooms.



## Results and Discussion

**Figure 3**  
*Mental Health and Staying Positive*



*Translation:* They say that I have to surround myself with positive people, but now, I do not think I can do that.



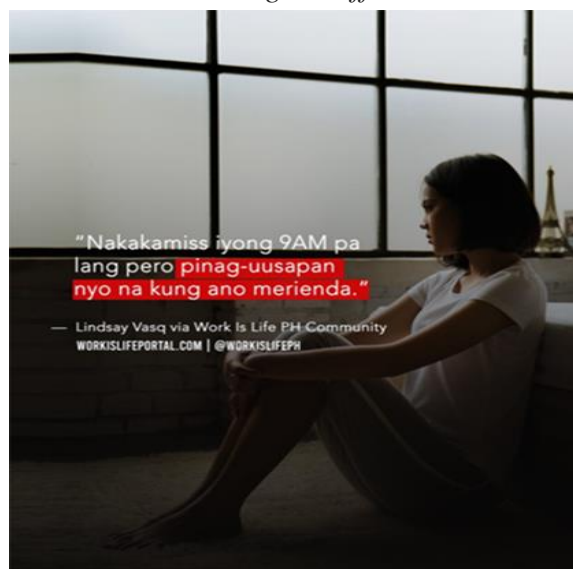
Figure 3 has three text blocks that used an all-white Arial typeface in all-uppercase. The text is placed in center and has around 48-72 font size. There is no image used, only a plain black background where the text blocks overlay.

Despite the absence of an image, this is still considered a meme because originally a meme is defined as a *unit of cultural transmission* (Dawkins, 1976). The meme successfully became a unit of cultural transmission because it transmits a message that every digital citizen agrees upon leading this meme to be one of the viral COVID-19 memes in 2020. Hence, the vague concept of Dawkins (1976) on memes implied that any visual media can be a meme only if they can be able to transmit cultural messages through derivative work and replication. Thus, Figure 3, as a meme, serves as a cultural message (Dawkins, 1976) that has been viral during the beginning of the pandemic in the country.

Combining the black background and the text led to the establishment of the intended meaning of the meme: the usage of pun to share the mental health and COVID-19 situations in the country.

According to Simon (2019), puns in memes bring people and ideas together; therefore, people are not only being entertained but also decoding a second meaning from the meme. Thus, through puns, the people are inspired to recontextualize the original post; hence, create more puns for memes. Overall, the text-no image relationship still made this meme a success because it both delivered a public sentiment and a cultural message through the pun. Hence, the usage of pun in memes can bring experiences and people together.

**Figure 4**  
*Missing the office*



*Translation:* We are missing the feeling of talking about break time as early as 9:00 A.M.

Figure 4 shows an image of a woman looking outside a window. It is also observed that the woman in the meme has a background that resembles a room with a window and an Eiffel tower display. Figure 4 has two text blocks where white sentence case Arial typeface with around 16-18 font size is used. The half of the first text block is highlighted in red.

The meme features an image of a woman who seems to be inside a room looking outside a window and there is also an Eiffel tower display seen at the right side of the background. Since the image used is a woman, it directly associates itself to the remark of a woman featured in the meme that is Lindsay Vasq from Work Is Life PH Community.

Thus, the combination of the texts and the image used led to an interpretation that this meme presents a longingness towards that scenario where you and your workmates are talking about the snack you will be eating even though it is as early as 9:00 A.M. *In the workplace, memes can be really entertaining* (Andujar, Nijholt & Gilbert, 2017) which is why a meme like this can also be treated as a form of recorded workplace memory that can be both happy or sad to recall given the situation. Therefore, according to the study, memes have the potential to provide an opportunity to have some humor amidst the current workplace situation and setup.

**Figure 5**

*Who said we can't take our politics with a side of humor? (1)*

**Patients Under Investigation:**



**Koko Pimentel:**



Figure 5 used two images: a) image of an injured Pikachu who has bandages and is lying on bed; and b) image of Arcanine, Ash and Pikachu running in a green grassy field. There are three text blocks used in this meme, where the text has around 20-28 font size: a) the first text block is placed at the topmost of the meme with an all-black Arial typeface in sentence case; b) the second text block is placed in the middle, on top of the second image, sharing the same typography from the first text block; and c) the third text block is placed in the bottom using the same typography but with an all-white font color which overlays the second image.



Both images used for Figure 5 are screen captures from an episode scene and the opening scene of the Pokemon series. The images used are in indexical modes because these images are directly connected to the idea being presented in the meme (Chandler, 2007). The images are used to stand for people experiencing distinctive experiences related to the pandemic. Through the application of the idea from Chandler (2007), the indexical modes utilized refers to the interrelated relationships of the images used and the idea being portrayed. Therefore, through the selection of the images used, the association of the people being referred to and the meaning Figure 5 wants to transmit became evident.

The texts-images relationship clearly established the idea of comparing the status of the PUIs and Sen. Pimentel. As visual representations, the Pokemon characters and scenes serve as its intertextual element where *internet memes tend to draw on previously known cultural texts and make cross references to different popular culture events, icons or phenomena* (Aslan, 2021). Thus, the usage of these images may be intended for the teenage audience since most of them are fans or familiar with Pokemon. Since teenagers are more active when it comes to any issues related to politics, drawing upon their popular culture (i.e., using Pokemon in memes) then combining it in politics would result in social relevancy of these memes towards them.

**Figure 6**  
*General vibe*



*Translation:* When you're just lying in bed, but you're helpful in the community.  
This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, better perform it well!

Figure 6 shows an image of a woman wearing a full-face makeup who is lying in bed. There are three text blocks used in Figure 6 that has an Arial typeface in sentence case. The font color used is white, but there is also a red highlight used in the half part of the statement in the first text block. The font size is around 16-18 pt. As for the text placement, the text blocks are placed in the middle-left, overlaying the image used.

The image used resembles a woman lying down in a white bed while wearing a full-face makeup. This image can be categorized as icon or in iconic mode because it stands directly for the idea being presented in Figure 6. Peirce (1991) stated that iconic mode bears a physical resemblance of what is being represented. Hence, for this image, it is evident that the image represents a woman, who is Leira Oipracilop from Work Is Life PH Community.

The text-image relationship that is evident in Figure 6 shows attribution of the direct quotation to a woman. The direct quotation can be interpreted as a message from a woman that aims to reiterate that staying at home and lying in the bed can make a significant contribution towards the COVID-19 situation in the country. Therefore, this meme campaigns for maximizing the stay of people in their homes because through that they can help with the safety of themselves and of others.

**Figure 7**  
*Truth bomb*



Figure 7 used an image from one of the characters from the movie *The Witches* (1990). It also used four text blocks in Arial typeface and used white font color. The text is placed at the bottom of the image used and there are also emojis included in the first three text blocks. The text used a font size of around 16-20 pt. A combination of all-uppercase and sentence case are used.

The image used features a scary character from the movie *The Witcher* (1990). This image can be categorized as an icon or in iconic mode. Peirce (1991) stated that icons are used to directly refer to an idea through providing a visual representation to it. Hence, it can be perceived that this image is a direct association to the people currently experiencing the pandemic. Thus, through iconic mode, such as the image used in Figure 7, the target audience of this meme can comprehend easily the intended meaning of this image since it directly resembles the appearance of people once the mentioned salons in the text are closed.

Aslan (2021) observed that most images used in the memes came from cartoon shows, TV shows or movies. This is because they are part of popular culture which is the criterion for meme creators on selecting an image that will fit the text and meaning they want to incorporate and convey. As seen in Figure 7, the image used is from a movie. Despite the movie being screened in 1990, that image is still used due to being a part of popular culture. The image accurately depicts the appearance the meme creator wants to share. Moreover, on the image used, there is a watermark that contains the letters E. R. J. that can be assumed to be the initials of the meme creator. Overall, the text-image relationship builds a mood giving way to this meme being perceived as a direct association between people and experience (i.e., the closing of salons due to the pandemic).

**Figure 8**

*Grocery shopping now*



*Translation:* Due to the long queue, the banana I'm buying is now ripe.

Figure 8 used two images but almost had the same contents, the only difference between the two images are the images of the banana. As a meme, Figure 8 is a screenshot from Facebook where the two images are evident as well as the caption that used an all-lowercase Arial typeface in black font color. The font size used is around 10-12 pt. The text, as the captions of the images, are placed on top.

As observed, in the text-images relationship, it can be inferred that both compositions are co-existent. Due to the fact that the images used are in iconic modes (Bradley, 2016) and the text placement follows hierarchy (Hayward-Cole, 2019), both compositions create visual connections so that it can directly stand in for the meaning the meme intends to convey. This meme can be interpreted as a social representation of a situation that happened during the pandemic. The long queue is a product of the panic buying every Filipinos did or experienced when the pandemic

began in the country. Ortiz, Corrada, Lopez and Dones (2020) found out that memes can be social representations that stand in for some circumstances of a social event. Applying this to Figure 8, they assert that this meme is a social representation of the panic buying incident that occurred in the Philippines resulting in the meme to represent an exaggeration giving the people an idea how frustrating it is to be in a long queue due to panic buying.

**Figure 9**

*Keepin' it real (1)*

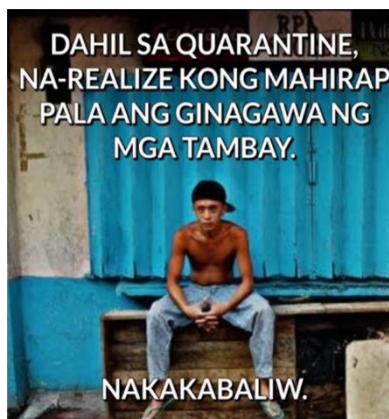


Figure 9 shows a logo of St. Peter Life Plan and Chapels, a famous death care services company. It has three text blocks placed in the middle. The typefaces used are Calibri and Times New Roman with around 35-48 pt. as its font size. The typefaces used green fonts, but the first and third text blocks are in all-upercase while the second text block is in sentence case.

The logo of St. Peter is considered to be a symbol or in symbolic mode (Wu, 2017). The image used symbolizes death since St. Peter is a popular deathcare company in the Philippines. Wu (2017) asserts that in Figure 9 it can be easily interpreted as a symbolism for death because many Filipinos are well-aware of what this company offers.

As to what Wu (2017) stated, this meme brings a cultural message while marketing a product or service. Thus, the texts-image relationship used for Figure 9 attempts to both market the deathcare company while embedding a warning to its internet audience.

**Figure 10**  
Muni-muni realizations



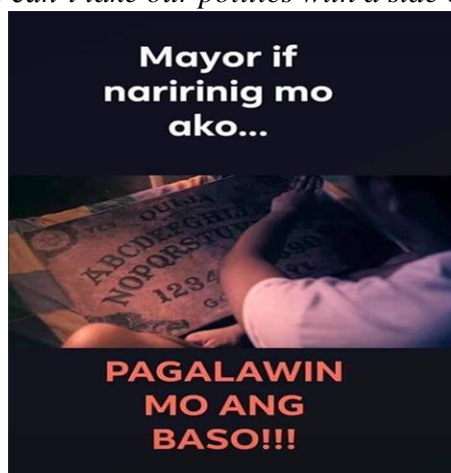
*Translation:* Due to the quarantine, I realized how hard is to be a bystander. It's deranging.

Figure 10 used an image of a male bystander outside a closed store. It also has two text blocks in an all-white Arial typeface with around 36-48 pt. as its font size. The text is in all-upercase and placed in the upper-center and lower-center.

Combining the texts and images used, it can be interpreted that Figure 10 aims to share an experience that relates to a bystander. MacDonald (2020) concluded that memes share collective and individual voices that relate to the community discourse. This is evident through the image used and the language used. Figure 10 used a language that combined English and Filipino (*popularly known as TagLish*); hence, creating a meme that can be applied more into local community settings as to what MacDonald (2020) stated. Thus, Figure 10 communicates both sentiments and experiences every Filipino is sharing, and that is feeling “deranged” due to the unending lockdowns.

**Figure 11**

*Who said we can't take our politics with a side of humor? (2)*



*Translation:* Mayor if you're hearing me... move the glass!!!

Figure 11 has two text blocks placed on top and at the bottom of the image used. The first text block used a sentence case Arial typeface in white color, while the second text block shares the same typeface but in all-uppercase and in red color. The font size used in the texts is around 28-36 pt. The text is placed in the middle aligning the middle placement of the image used. Figure 11 used an image of someone playing a Ouija board, but only the board and the glass are more evident.

Combining the text-image relationship, this meme may serve as a mode for delivering public sentiment. Yus (2018) stated that memes can yield eventual relevance. This is seen in Figure 11 where the addressed mayor seems to be missing-in-action, so the speaker of the meme resorted to contact him through a Ouija board. Thus, as to what Yus (2018) stated, Figure 11 can be interpreted as a meme that depicts an eventual relevance about the presence of some mayors amidst the pandemic.

**Figure 12**  
*Keepin' it real (2)*



Figure 12 has one text block that uses an all-lowercase Helvetica Neue typeface in black font color and has around 16-20 font size. There are images evident in Figure 12: a) the display picture of a Twitter user named @dailycath\_; and b) the logo of FTTM that stands for Filipino Tweets That Matter which is a Facebook community that features viral tweets on their Facebook page.

The text-images relationship evident in Figure 12 highlighted the tweet more to become a tool for expressing thoughts. Since the meme is a screen capture of a tweet, Figure 12 serves as an opinion-sharing meme (Lainesk, 2016). With this, it gives an avenue for the meme to contain not just humor but also public opinions that can spread fear to whoever will consume this meme. Thus, it can be concluded that memes like Figure 12 can be a vital part in social media life of the netizens because if someone encounters this meme, the warning embedded in it may be perceived



leading that someone to strictly follow the stay-at-home protocol in order to avoid to the dangers of contracting the virus.

The study used 10 viral COVID-19 memes to analyze and identify the specific semiotic patterns leading to interpreting the possible meanings of each meme based on the text-image or text-only compositions of these memes.

**Figure 13**  
*Overall characteristics of the viral COVID-19 memes*

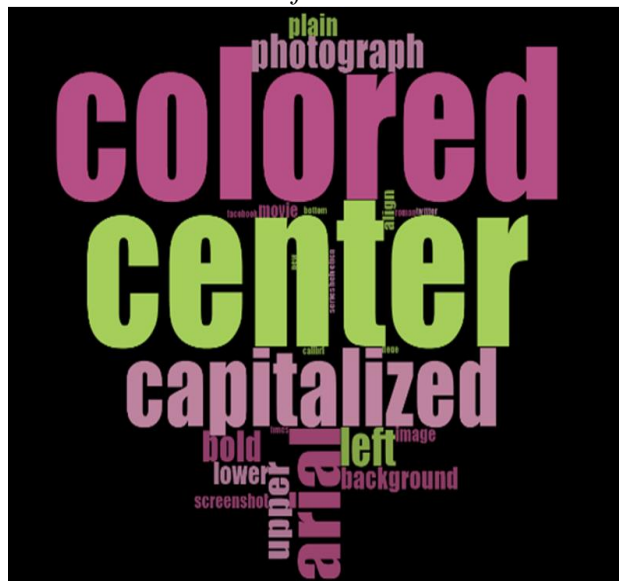


Figure 13 showed the overall characteristics of the memes used in the study. These characteristics came through NVivo and allowed the researchers to analyze the similarities of each meme and its uniqueness. Based on NVivo, the most prominent characteristics were the following: colored, centered, capitalized, Arial, bold, photograph, background, and plain.

As observed from the 10 viral COVID-19 memes used in the study, most of them are colored. The colors used in the text and images are associated with various negative and positive emotions (Sutton & Altaribba, 2015). Generally, the memes used in this study provide not just humor, but also dissent, frustration and rage. The colors used assisted the texts and images on each meme to create an emotional appeal in line with these components. As a result, there are memes that can be interpreted as related to death or attacks to someone due to the color of the images and text used.

Most text placements adhere to the principles of hierarchy, contrast, alignment and proximity, which is why most text placements are in the center. Hayward-Cole (2019) stated that center text placements assisted on bringing out the text amongst the compositions involved in a meme. Through center text placements, the message conveyed within the text can be easily read and comprehended.

The usage of Arial typeface, especially in boldface and in all-uppercase helped in bringing more emphasis as to what the memes wanted to convey. Arial is observed to be the most used typeface on the memes used in the study due to its perceived legibility in line with what Bernard, Lida, Riley, Hackler & Janzen (2002) stated in their study. This legibility brought by Arial typeface also affected the readability of the text. The reading speed and reading comprehension are affected by the usage of Arial (Shaikh, Chaparro & Fox, 2006). As such, being able to create a meme that has legible typeface, such as Arial, brought significant impact towards how easy and how fast the internet users read and comprehend their intended message.

Photographs are commonly used in the memes since they are part of popular culture (Aslan, 2021). Whether it is from a movie, a show or a daily life photograph, this is established for a more visual representation of a meme. Through edited photographs, it can possess qualities, directly represent or build indirect association of ideas, people, sentiment, emotions, and experiences (Chandler, 2007). Therefore, the usage of photographs as plain backgrounds or the highlights of the meme strengthened the purpose of the meme itself.

For a meme to become a meme, it must have the following: stance, content, and form as to what Shifman (2013) formulated. These guidelines advise meme creators to make their memes for whatever purpose they may serve. Memes are communicative tools (Pulos, 2020), political tools (Calimbo, 2016), and social representations (Corrada et al., 2020), depending on how they are created by the guidelines proposed by Shifman (2013).

Regardless of the typeface or the image used, what is vital for a meme is to have a stance, which is why memes are political tools (Calimbo, 2016) because these memes communicate their stances regarding an issue or situation through text-image or text-alone relationships.

A meme must have a content. The usage of text or image in a meme builds visual connection and visual representation on what meaning is being conveyed (Yus, 2018). The content of the meme must be present through direct or indirect association or representation of meaning as based on the images used and text placements.

Lastly, memes must have a form. Combining text and images or using text alone contributes to how memes are multimodal (Yus, 2018). Through this, the memes can go viral because the images and the texts used contribute to the creation of a visual representation that may bring ideas, emotions, and experiences to be seen physically through how the form of the meme looks. Applying these characteristics to the study established that memes have the potential to be classroom tools, specifically in teaching English at the secondary level. Booth & Clark (2014) noticed that memes could bridge the gap between the characteristics of the students, rapid technological advancements, and the ongoing need to expand efforts to improve the student's performance. With this observation, these overall characteristics of the viral COVID-19 memes can be a basis for secondary English teachers to create their own or guide their students upon its creation as part of their activity in their English lessons. As a result, memes assist the upskilling of the learners regarding their digital literacy and their communication through other forms of media.

Lin (2017) claimed that using memes in teaching in the classroom can caught the attention of the students leading them to be more participative. In line with the study, the memes can now be viewed as both creative and communicative tools that may encourage the creativity of the students, not just in terms of meme creation, but also in meaning making through this media.

Lastly, since humor is essential for a positive learner-teacher interaction (Ashipaoloye, 2013), memes can be a good resort to maintain this. As mentioned, memes are sources of humor and entertainment, but since this study aimed to contextualize memes into potential classroom tools it still cannot be denied that the humor from these memes may positively impact the learning of the students in various English lessons.

Therefore, the characteristics on Figure 13 can be a basis for a novel graphic design strategy in accordance with the integration of educational technology in the classroom.

### **Conclusions**

Based on the summary of the findings, the researchers made the following conclusions:

1. The identified semiotic patterns common to all the ten local viral COVID-19 memes in terms of text placement and images used are:
  - a. The typeface commonly used in the texts of the memes is Arial with 16-72 pt. font sizes, but the recommended size is 28-48 pt.
  - b. Most texts used in the memes are placed in the center, overlaying the image or background used in the meme. This text placement adheres to graphic design principles: proximity, alignment, and contrast.
  - c. The commonly used images in the memes are photographs of people and screen captures from a movie or a cartoon show. Hence, the images used are in an iconic mode that establishes a direct association of the images used with the intended meaning of the memes.
2. The identified overall characteristics of the local viral COVID-19 memes as potential classroom tools in teaching English at the secondary level are the following:
  - a. The memes can be used to encourage communication, such as impelling certain advocacies.
  - b. Font sizes vary, and it significantly impacts how internet users interpret the text's meaning since font sizes affect the readability of the text used.
  - c. Placing the text in the middle of the image or background used attracted the internet users more, leading them to read the text first. With this text placement, the text used is emphasized more since it becomes easier to read, and being in the center significantly impacts the readability of the text.
  - d. Through the images used, memes can also visually represent ideas, people, sentiments, and experiences. Popular culture is the main criterion being considered when selecting an image to be used in the memes.
3. The study can be used as a basis for secondary English teachers to use memes as their additional classroom tools, especially when encouraging creativity and humor in their virtual classrooms.
4. The memes as potential classroom tools can assist the students in bringing innovation to their virtual language classroom.

## Recommendations

Based on the study and analysis, the researchers made the following recommendations:

1. The study recommends the following specifications on creating memes as potential classroom tools:
  - a. Arial typeface must be used on the texts on the memes since it is eligible for web-based texts and it can be easily read and comprehended by the internet users.
  - b. The images to be used must be part of popular culture so many internet users can understand the connection of the image to the intended meaning of the meme. As such, images must be from popular movies and cartoon/TV shows.
  - c. The text must be placed in the center, overlaying the image or background used so that internet users will pay close attention to reading the text first.
  - d. The large font sizes are more preferred by the internet users since they can read it faster and leads to a better comprehension of the meaning of the text. The range of 16-72 pt. must be used on the text. The font sizes will vary depending on the level of emphasis in the text.
  - e. The contrasting colors, such as black and white, must be used since it establishes a pleasing visual appearance to the internet users. However, other colors, such as red and green, can also be used given that proper color-emotion association must be employed. Thus, the selection of font colors must be aligned with the intended emotional appeal the memes want to convey.
2. The pre-service teachers at the College of Education, Arts and Sciences may consider creating activities that involve the creation or usage of memes to promote innovation in line on the teaching-learning of English, specifically at the secondary level.
3. The secondary English teachers in Olongapo City may consider using memes as communicative tool, so learners can communicate and be creative at the same time. Moreover, they may also use memes as their innovation towards their pedagogy as it may assist them on exploring novel graphic design strategies.
4. The future researchers may consider using virtual ethnography as their research design to explore more the potential of memes as a computer-mediated communicative tool. Using this, the future researchers may observe and analyze how the internet users produce, share, and replicate memes; hence, making it viral.

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