Humorous memes for Covid-19 communications and carnivalesque functions

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	This study described the types and functions of humor in memes during the Covid-19 pandemic to have a better understanding of the content and the role of humor during a crisis. This study identified the general ideas that emerged from the Bisaya memes including the types and functions of Bisaya humor. Using the qualitative and research methods, the results revealed the general ideas which included health practices, security, and health behavior. Comparison, pun, and exaggeration predominated which could be attributed to the Filipinos' creativity and fondness of vivid images and by virtue of its repressive colonial history. For carnivalesque functionality, the exposition of social inequities, therapy, and subversion of social order prevailed. These imply the Filipinos' dissatisfaction with the government's programs, fight against information disorders, and parodying hierarchic authority in a comical manner. Consequently, memes cannot reflect Filipinos' knowledge of the pandemic because this is a new experience for us. Memes can express the basic needs of the people/platform to express our experiences brought by the pandemic. Lastly, humorous memes serve a dualistic function in the study: they both delight and criticize.

1. Introduction

The Coronavirus Disease (Covid-19) has caused huge concern to everyone all over the world. Because the virus is easily spread from one person to another through personal contact such as the spread of saliva, coughing or sneezing, or even touching surfaces that contain the virus (Singh & Ringo, 2017), the Philippine government immediately declared the suspension of group gatherings and enforced community quarantine regulations in most areas in the Philippines. This government-mandated quarantine required everyone to stay at home-if possibly at all times in order to lessen the transmission of the virus. Filipinos followed these health protocols and mandates but even during the Enhanced Community Quarantine (ECQ) period, people showed signs of normalcy in their day-to-day life by setting up regular routines every day.

As a matter of fact, the use of social media platforms has increased exponentially, especially among Filipinos. They consume social media to meet developmental needs such as performing adult-specific tasks, nurturing intimate relationships, and expressing cultural identities (Cleofas, Albao, & Dayrit, 2022); to acquire education through online learning platforms despite socio-economic and technological challenges; to connect-as linguistically revealed-to friends and relatives via Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram their worries, anxieties;

and even to communicate humorously as coping mechanism in the new normal (Torres, Collantes, Astrero, Millan, & Gabriel, 2020). Moreover, according to various research, people turn to humorous memes as a collective coping mechanism to stressful-critical situations during the pandemic (Flecha-Ortiz, Corrada, Lopez, & Dones, 2021); an escape from the life-threatening consequences of contracting the virus (Skórka, Grzywacz, Moroń, & Lenda, 2022); a source of a political narrative that exposes corruption, scandal, and protests (de Saint Laurent, Glăveanu, & Literat, 2021); as a positive frame of religion suggesting people's support of social distancing emerges from unforeseen situations. Finally, *exaggeration* is magnifying something of proportion.

The second framework is on the functions of humor via Bakhtin's theory of the carnival (as cited in Marais, 2018). Peculiar to the nature of the memes in this study is their carnivalesque style and effect. Derived from his dissertation, "Rabelais and His Work" in 1968, Russian philologist and critic Mikhail Bakhtin points out that the carnival is the site and space where the people organize reality in opposition to the prevailing norms and structures of hierarchic authority by way of laughter, mockery, parody, festivities, grotesqueness, and other ritualized forms of enactments and performances (Cohen, 2011; Lane, 2006). The term carnivalesque denotes a centrifugal style and approach (away from the establishment) aimed at promoting ambivalence and permitting transgressions of dominant forms such as social hierarchies and power structures, through the use of humor in order to challenge the status quo or satirizing social issues (Lachmann, Eshelman, & Davis, 1988).

Further, it presupposes a condition where people thrive in a double sphere of life; the first official sphere where the Church and the feudal state take control, and the unofficial phase where the people revel in mockery and absurdities like those in the Medieval and Renaissance carnivals, if only to revert the official system (Abraham, 2017). Such a stance can be traced back to the kind of political climate Bakhtin lived in. It is said that carnivalization was Bakhtin's form of political protest against the authoritative rule of Stalin; hence, he saw in carnival's brand of laughter a cure for the common man to appease him of life's atrocities and the oppressions wrought to him by hegemonic forces, preventing him to wage actual revolutions, rebellion, or insurgency (Abraham 2017). Robinson (2011) added that Bakhtin considered carnivalesque (or folk humor) as a speech genre that takes place in various cultural sites like the one in a carnival where creative thoughts are expressed. In effect, carnivalesque provides a lighter approach into encountering situations with humor and unity among the persons involved in the community. Nonetheless, it is also used as a subversive literary mode that interprets rational events by using non-human manners in confronting realities.

Carnivalesque style and references have already figured in studies focused on TV, film, advertising, and print media. For instance, Karimova's (2014) study revealed that advertisements (specifically JBS Men's underwear online commercial and MattelScrabble's 'The Beautiful World' ad campaign) that employed carnivalesque style and rhetoric not only attempted to promote such products and services but also downplayed their value. This seemingly paradoxical effect elicits ambivalent laughter, which is characteristically carnivalesque. In another study on a particular movie entitled "The Big Lebowski", Martin and Renegar (2007) uncovered how carnivalesque rhetorical strategies sought to confront hegemonies in the social order evoking in the audience a critical distance through their laughter. Such nuances also figured in the study of Achter (2008) who analyzed comic responses to the 09/11 catastrophe in the print and online news parody "The Onion". It was revealed that through comic framing, the audience's basis of morality is informed by the mistakes of the first world.

From a political campaign perspective, Janack's study (2006) on Jesse Ventura's (a political aspirant) employment of carnivalesque image and references profiled him as a political pariah which would be associated with that of the carnival jester who attacks the existing political system. In another study, Bahktin's carnivalesque style was also used as a framework to examine a fashion model show, as evinced in the study of Patton and Snyder-Yuly (2012). By investigating their carnivalesque rhetorics, techniques, and behaviors, the judges of the show put themselves in a position of power to influence the outcome of the competition, which they could not normally do in general society. The aforementioned review indicates that Bahktin's concept of carnivalization in media texts has been an interesting avenue for scholarship. However, there is more than meets the eye when it comes to carnivalization in online images and text such as memes, especially when one considers its generation, dissemination, and reception in the Covid-19 pandemic. To contextualize, the functions of humor in this present study were categorized into therapy, exposition of social inequities, and subversion of social order. First, therapy (THE) could be manifested through the following: healing power, revitalizing illness, acceptance of the inevitability of death, pain, and suffering be it physical or emotional, and acceptance of interpersonal challenges. Second, the Exposition of Social Inequities (ESI) might also be demonstrated by means of unfair/biased cultural models, norms and practices, social stratification, political conflicts, undermining the working class, and promotion of social change through reforms. Lastly, Subversion of Social Order (SSO) can be shown through the following: vulgarity is glorified or elevated, scandal is exalted or thought of highly, mock or ridicule liberty/state of being free, degradation of spiritual forms, exposition of vice and/or violence, dark comedy and mockery of the codes of conduct, laws, and regulation. While the first two frameworks looked at the actual faces of humor in terms of types and functions, further analysis of the memes' content might reveal hidden messages that the "memers" or the maker of the memes might convey. Ask and Abidin (2018) studied student problem memes and posit that networked publics position the makers and sharers of memes as active users and contributors and pose their own set of challenges.

A number of studies have also investigated what social media messages communicate especially during a crisis. Norstom and Sarna (2021) analyzed the way Covid-19 was communicated and narrated in Internet memes. This study also illustrated how the pandemic and its actors were responsible for fighting the pandemic. 1,763 memes from the six chosen media platforms were analyzed. The results showed that the memes are a commentary on the situation experienced by the Polish. Most memes were "bans and orders". Further, the predominant characters were ordinary citizens (commoners). Furthermore, the persons responsible for fighting the pandemic were portrayed as incompetent. In relation to the present study, the memes created in Poland were also classified according to themes. However, the current study only focused on the Bisaya memes found on Facebook. Taecharungog and Nungjamnong (2015) also analyzed the process of communication in Facebook humor memes using the categories of Catanescu and Tou (2001). They further tested the impact of various types of memes through likes and shares using the mixed method and content analysis of the 1,000 memes shared on a Facebook page. The results of their study demonstrated the frequently used types such as sarcasm, silliness, and exaggeration. However, the present study showed different types of humor except for exaggeration which was evident in the Cebuano Bisaya memes.

On the other hand, Bañez (2021) examined the exposure and assessment of literary memes as bibliotherapy for emergency remote learning. There were 64 English as a Second Language (ESL) preservice teachers who participated in this study. The key findings showed that the ESL preservice teachers were moderately exposed to literary memes as an alternative

relational communication to facilitate emotional connectivity through sending, receiving, saving, and sharing intelligently humorous memes with their friends and family members. This connectivity provided a positive mood despite the challenges of remote learning as these memes were constructed on literary allusions. The memes also provided them with a sense of enjoyment and entertainment making literary memes. This study is similar to the present study where memes could also be considered as therapy, but the present study focused more on humor memes, not literary memes.

Moreover, Oh, Lee, and Han (2020) explained that people's aim in using social media platforms is not only for information but also for emotion-filled dialogue about public health crises (Do, Lim, You, & Choi, 2016; Ofoghi, Mann, & Verspoor, 2016). As a result, this dialogue may influence their perceptions and behavior in responding to the crisis. They further posited that effective crisis management includes considering the public's emotional responses to the crisis on social media. Monitoring the ordinary citizen's emotions on social media could be done to communicate with ordinary citizens better during an infectious disease outbreak.

While there are studies done on humorous memes, only a few studies on memes used as tools to communicate have been conducted. This present study then attempted to fill in this research gap. This present study aimed to describe and analyze the themes that emerged from the Bisaya memes, and the types and functions of humor memes that were reflected. Specifically, this answered the following questions: (i) What general ideas emerged from the Bisaya memes posted on FB during the Covid-19 pandemic? (ii) What types of Bisaya humor based on Catanescu and Tou (2001) are prevalent in Philippine **social media during the pandemic?** and (iii) What functions of humor based on Bhaktin's framework are reflected by the studied memes?

3. Methodology

This study used the qualitative method that combined exploratory or interpretive research and content analysis designs. First, it is exploratory because it analyzes the types and functions of humor present in the published memes. Moreover, it used the content analysis method because by examining the written language and visual art aspects in the memes, and their relation to the contexts these memes are created to further understand the message of these graphic arts in real-life situations.

To identify the data to be studied, the following parameters were set as bases: a) all memes studied must be collected from the Facebook posts; memes must be published in Bisaya from March 16, 2020 - May 16, 2020, during the peak of the Covid-19 pandemic. Memes must reflect Covid-related messages. Moreover, these memes must generate a "humor" emoticon as a reaction or comment.

The analysis commenced by identifying and classifying the collected memes. Then, these memes were categorized into emergent themes. These data answered research question #1. Coded similar themes on types and functions of humor and answered research questions #2 and #3. "Open coding is a form of coding by which the analyst is open to anything possible" (Merriam, 2009, p. 178). The researchers used coding guides based on the frameworks of Catanescu and Tou (2001) for the types of humor and Bhaktin's functions of humor. Further comparison and analysis were done to refine the codes and generate other themes.

For ethical considerations, the researchers did not collect any identifiable markings or identification information. Because the memes were posted or published, they were considered public domain. The researchers believe that seeking permission from the authors was no longer

necessary.   According to Facebook's Terms of Service, any content submitted, posted, or displayed publicly is by default for public consumption. Part of Facebook's terms of service for academics and researchers is to give information and content in conducting research that advances scholarship and innovation to support its business or mission. Also, Facebook abides with the discovery, and innovation on the following topics: general social welfare, technological advancement, public interest, health, and well-being.

4. Research and discussion

4.1. Research results

The findings of this study are presented in three main sections. First is on the themes that emerged from the memes; second on the types of humor presented by the memes; and lastly is on the functions of these identified humor.

4.1.1. Emergent themes of the memes

General ideas emerged from the analyzed memes. These ideas were further identified into four major categories of themes: namely, *health practices, security, people behavior, and civic awareness.*

Table 1 shows a summary of the themes found in the analyzed memes. The theme related to health practices topped the list with 26 occurrences, followed by the security theme (23), people behavior (13), and civic concern (3).

Table 1

Emergent themes in memes

Emergent themes in memes	f	%
Health practices	26	33.76
Security	23	29.87
People behavior	13	16.88
Civic-concern	3	3.89

4.1.1.1. Health practices

The dominant theme that surfaced among the published memes is health and health practices apparently due to the health crisis that the citizens are all experiencing. Most of the health-practice-related memes illustrate observance of health protocols such as the practice of social distancing (physical distancing), washing hands frequently, wearing face masks, and the use of guns to discourage violators.

4.1.1.2. Security

The second most occurring theme is on security, particularly about food and finances. The Covid-19 pandemic has impacted people's means of securing their life necessities. Some of them lost their jobs. Others have reduced income because their companies and organizations had limited operation hours, or had temporarily closed, and even permanently. In addition, the theme of security includes the idea of financial instability and the need of the people to get any monetary support from the government.

4.1.1.3. People's behavior

Another striking theme that surfaced from the memes is people's behavior towards the entire health crisis and its repercussions. A display of the different types of attitudes is clearly noticed in the memes. Although the approach to expressing this behavior is humorous because they are presented through memes, the underlying messages reveal a deeper dimension of the people's experience with the crisis.

4.1.1.4. Civic concern

The published memes reveal another theme that focuses on the government's concern over its citizen's welfare. The government has ordered a stay-at-home regulation so that the people are safe; however, the citizens are seen violating it. Instead, they are seen playing outdoor games defying the physical-distancing protocol.

4.1.2. Types of humor in memes

Table 2 presents the types of humor evident in the memes posted on Facebook.

Table 2

Types of humor memes N = 82

Types of humor	f	%
Comparison	19	23.17
Pun	14	17.07
Exaggeration	13	15.85
Sarcasm	12	14.63
Personification	9	10.97
Silliness	7	8.53
Surprise	6	7.31
Irony	1	1.21
Ridicule	1	1.21

Note: *multiple answers

The predominant memes involved comparison, pun, and exaggeration. This study manifests the colonization and playfulness of Cebuanos. Memes manifest the creativity of the creators of Bisaya memes.

4.1.3. Functions of humor in memes

Table 3

Functions of humor N = 75

Functions of humor	f		%
Exposition of social inequities	29		38.66
A form of therapy	23		30.66
Subversion of social order	23		30.66

Note: *multiple answers

4.1.3.1. Exposition of social inequities

From what can be gleaned, the exposition of social inequalities obtained a frequency count of 29 (38.66%). This is followed by the form of therapy and Subversion of social order which garnered each a frequency count of 23 (30.66%).

4.1.3.2. Therapy

In the study, therapy (THE) could be manifested through the following: healing power, revitalizing illness, acceptance of the inevitability of death, pain, and suffering be it physical or emotional, and acceptance of interpersonal challenges.

4.1.3.3. Subversion of social order

Lastly, subversion of social order is also manifested. A distinct Bakhtinian concept of the carnivalesque is its supposed attempt to subvert the social order by way of parodying high culture or hierarchization.

4.2. Discussion

This section provides a discussion of the key findings in the previous section by focusing on the themes, types, and functions of humor memes.

4.2.1. Themes

4.2.1.1. Health practices

As revealed in the results that most of the health-practice-related memes illustrate observance of health protocols such as the practice of social distancing (physical distancing), washing hands frequently, wearing face masks, and the use of guns to discourage violators, this study supports Nostrom and Sarna (2021) that the memes were on bans and orders in Poland while health protocols were implemented in the Philippines.

These messages indicate that the people have understood the instructions set by the government. To avoid getting infected, they must follow the health protocols. Other health-related memes talk about traditional medical practices such as eating eggs or taking in supplements such as an herbal tonic to fight against the virus. This type of message also reveals that people may desperately resort to using traditional practices if only to combat the deadly virus. These are examples of memes demonstrating health practices in Figures 1 and 2.

Figure 1. Meme 21: Wearing of face mask

Figure 2. Meme 8: Hand washing

Translation:	Translation:
Me: Ma, let us buy face masks for the house. *Mama: No. We have face mask in the house face mask in the house*	*Woman: DOH said that the hands should be clean. Why are plates included* (in hand washing) *Ma?*

4.2.1.2. Security

Moreover, the government placed restrictions and lockdowns in different areas all over the country to limit people's mobility and physical encounter with others to avoid viral transmission; therefore, it was difficult to get a job during this time. All these scenarios are reflected in the messages that the published memes convey. People were worried about their food availability and security.

Due to movement restrictions, people could not go out easily; hence, they were forced to feed on whatever food was available even if this would mean having to eat the same kind of food every day. Some of them depended on the food aid provided to them and usually, these relief goods consist of cheap canned goods such as sardines, meatloaf and instant noodles.

The theme of security includes the idea of financial instability and the need of the people to get any monetary support from the government. As mentioned earlier, due to work stoppage, people did not receive the usual take-home pay anymore. This phenomenon led them to crave financial or food aid. Others asked for relief goods. These are the examples of security shown in Figures 3 and 4.

Figure 3. Meme 62: Need for food variety	**Figure 4.** Meme 7: Desire for Food
Translation: *Man: Lord, thank you for the rice, it still lacks sardines.*	Translation: *Me: Ma, I'm hungry already. What is our viand?* *Mama: sauteed fish in stewed tomato, with secret herbs and spices* *Me: What is that?* *Mama: ..*

4.2.1.3. People's behavior

Because motorcycle back-riding is prohibited due to close contact between the driver and the passenger, people could go around the policy by letting the passenger sit in front. This is just one example to illustrate people's mockery of the policy. Despite the gravity of health and life threat brought by the virus, people could still be complacent in following the protocols. This finding is supported by Norstom and Sarna's (2021) discussion on how the public could ridicule restrictions on "bans and orders" during a pandemic. They further explained that people criticize these regulations as pointless and unnecessary. People find the quarantine requirement unfair and unjust, especially for those who are working overseas as revealed in Meme #68. The policy and practice are not favorable to them because they would end up being deprived to spend time with their families due to the quarantine protocol.

A closer look at this kind of behavior may imply that people may not have fully fathomed the threat of the virus to their lives and their loved ones because, despite physical distance protocols, people still express their desire to be physically closer to other people. In a similar

study by Norstom and Sarna's (2021), they said that people during a pandemic could be careless about preventing contamination of viruses or following restrictions and regulations. On the other hand, some memes reveal the creativity of the people to deal with their boredom brought about by the stay-at-home regulations. In the absence of an internet connection, people could still while away their time by doing some things to entertain them as in the case of Meme #28. The meme shows that the man is really bored but he could still amuse himself by doing make-believe fishing. Further analysis may suggest that people are resilient and creative in dealing with the pressures caused by the crisis.

Figure 5. Meme 61	**Figure 6.** Meme 68	**Figure 7.** Meme 28
Translation: *Rider: Wouldn't we caught Maam? ((taking his passenger at the front seat of the habal-habal (motorbike for fee)* *Woman Passenger:* *They meant back riding not sitting in the front seat!*	Translation: *OFW: I was quarantined in Dubai for 14 days...14 days in Manila...14 days in Bohol* *When I arrived home, I was told to go abroad because the Covid crisis is over. ((swearing))*	Translation: *Man: When you are quarantined for one month...but you don't have wifi*

4.2.1.4. Civic concerns

A pandemic always puts to test the government's actions and policies toward public safety and welfare; interestingly, this message surfaced in the Bisaya memes. This theme can be viewed from two perspectives: first, it may suggest that the kind of help the government extends to its citizens is not sustainable and long-term, especially those related to hunger control and health and well-being. Mere provision of food aid such as those relief goods and financial help like the "*ayuda*" (assistance) is not lasting. This aspect of civic concern could mean a silent demand of the people to have a more sustainable means of livelihood to keep them afloat especially during a crisis. These are illustrated by the memes in Figures 8 and 9.

Figure 8. Meme 51: Budget appropriation dissatisfaction	**Figure 9.** Meme 56. People's dissatisfaction towards government's food aid
Translated Version of Meme 51: *Pres. Duterte: medicine for gastric pain was asked for the budget seeping through BINIGNIT** **binignit refers to a sweet dish made of yam, sticky rice and coconut milk (www.binisaya.com)*	Translated Version of Meme 56: *Pres. Duterte: Sus! Forbid! Why do (they) complain when the rice is inky black is received (as aid). Think about it that your rectum is much inky blank than the rice.*

On the other hand, the theme may also be viewed using the lens of the government. It may show that the people should at least be appreciative of the efforts extended to them by the government, especially during this time of crisis. The government has done some measures to ensure public safety and welfare and the people should do their part too by observing the regulations set in order not to be infected by the virus. The theme may also be viewed using the lens of the government. This is clearly manifested in Meme #58.

	Translated Version of Meme #58: *es. Duterte: I said, "stay at home". You played baPrsketball instead.*

Figure 10. Meme 58: Government's frustration over people's violation of regulations

The government has ordered a stay-at-home regulation so that people are safe; however, the citizens are seen violating it. Instead, they are seen playing outdoor games defying the physical-distancing protocol.

4.2.2. Types of humor

The predominance of comparison, pun, and exaggeration could be attributed to the Filipinos' creativity and fondness for vivid images in comparison and exaggeration. Filipinos prefer exaggeration to understand the meaning of humor aside from being playful in using puns. MacDonald (2020) (as cited in Nostrom & Sarna, 2021) described the way people use intertextual references to popular culture as they express their frustration against neoliberal dogmas. The citizens focused on memes as they commented on intergenerational tensions caused by self-isolation.
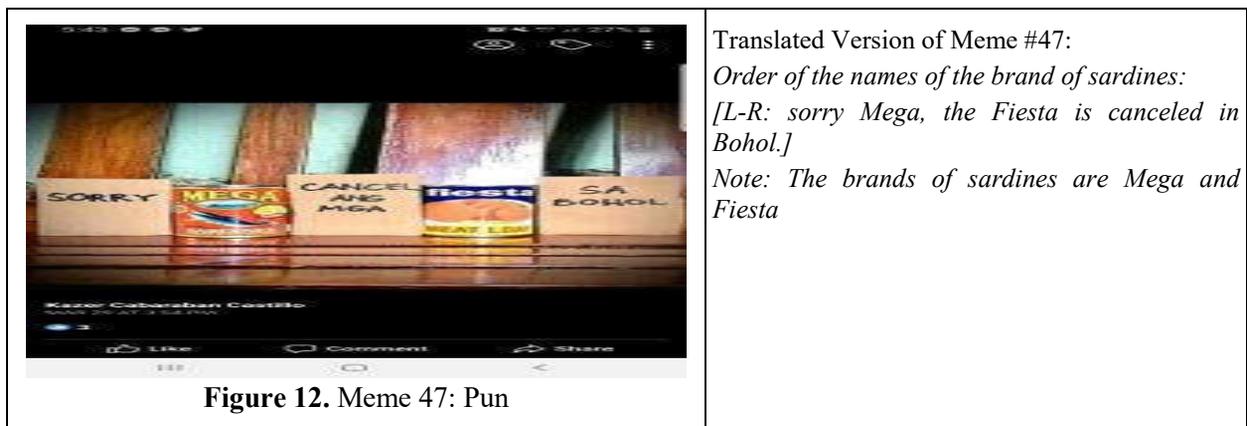
The use of puns in the Philippine context was supported by Villaruel (2014) who argued that humor reinforces solidarity. Aarons (2010) (as cited in Villaruel, 2014) also posited those products of humor instances were the results of playing around with language to see what was possible and what occurred. The findings of the study on the evidence of puns support the study of Villaruel (2014) on puns or wordplay as the primary basis of humor. They also added that humor strengthens the immune system. This study supports the use of humor in memes during this global health crisis. The evidence of comparison, puns, and exaggeration could demonstrate cognitive flexibility that fosters creativity as mentioned by Curseu and Fodor (2016) on humor and group atmosphere.

As argued by Catanescu and Tou (2001), studying the typology of humor might help in understanding the effects of the types of humor in achieving effective communication. However, the results of the present study contradict the study of Catanescu and Tou (2001) since sarcasm and silliness were predominantly used in the humor memes of their study conducted in Russia. This could be attributed to the different contexts and intended audiences where memes were posted. In the present study, these memes were posted during the enhanced community quarantine due to the Covid-19 pandemic where comparison, pun, and exaggeration could be the effective ways to communicate with the netizens.
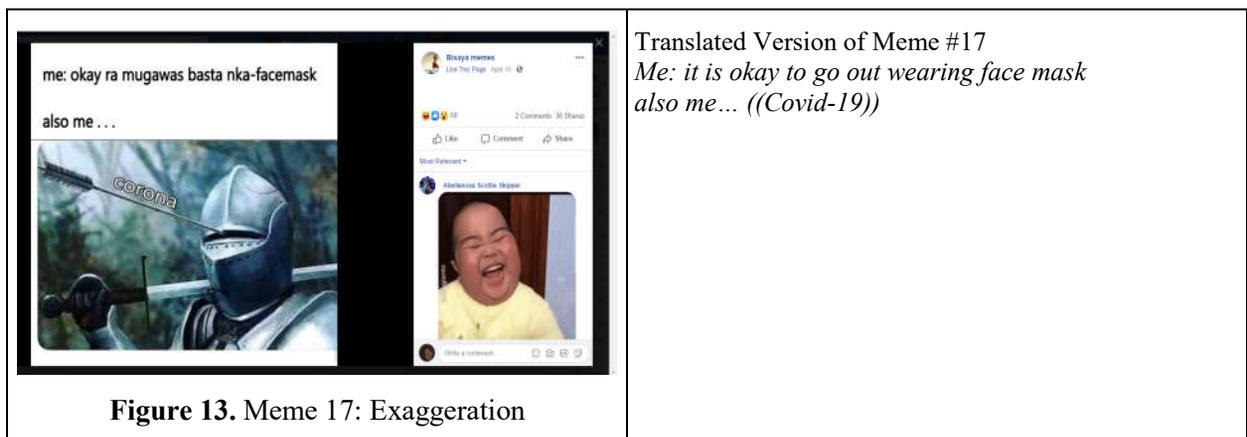
Mimicry could be demonstrated in these memes due to the colonial mentality because of colonization. These are the following sample memes of the types of humor. Figure 11 shows demonstrates the comparison.

	Translated Version of Meme #42:
Figure 11. Meme 42: Comparison	*Translated Version:* *Picture 1: Sad Truth (smiley) Before, when you arrive from Cebu ((people are running towards you)).* *Picture 2: Now, when you arrive from Cebu ((people are running away from you)).*
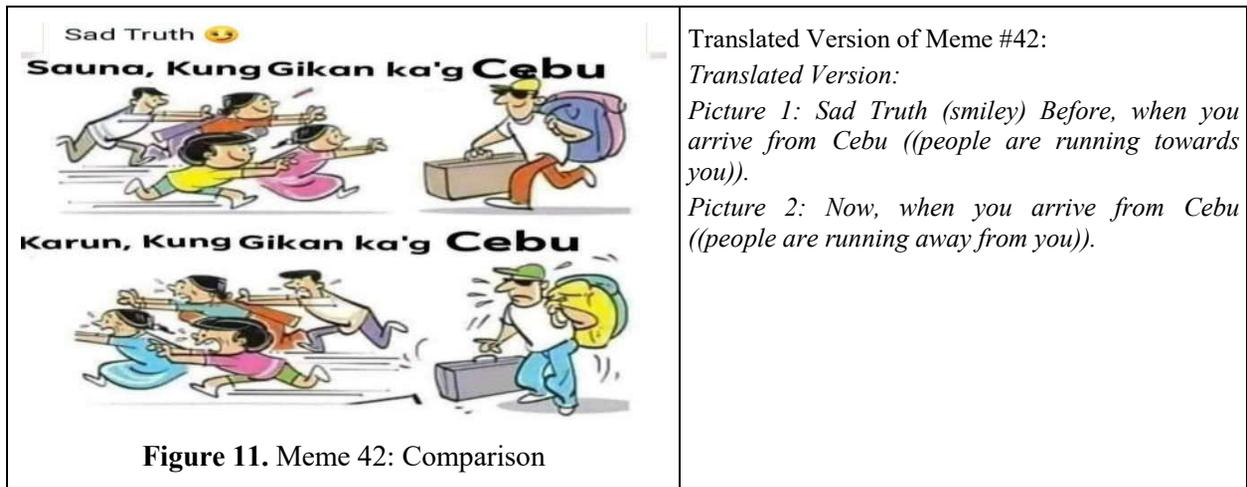
In Meme #42, the situation of an overseas contract worker before and during the Covid-19 pandemic. Before the pandemic, the family was so excited to see the Overseas Filipino Worker (OFW) upon arrival. However, the mindset was changed with the onset of the pandemic because of the fear of transmission. The pun which is another type of humor meme that predominates is evident in Figure 12.

Figure 12. Meme 47: Pun

Translated Version of Meme #47:
Order of the names of the brand of sardines:
[L-R: sorry Mega, the Fiesta is canceled in Bohol.]
Note: The brands of sardines are Mega and Fiesta

In Figure 12, the brands of sardines Mega and Fiesta were used to express the sentiment in canceling the annual festival (fiesta) in Bohol. Finally, exaggeration is shown in Figure 13.

Figure 13. Meme 17: Exaggeration

Translated Version of Meme #17
Me: it is okay to go out wearing face mask
*also me... ((Covid-19))*

Meme 17 illustrates exaggeration. The person said that he would leave his residence when he was wearing the face mask. The exaggerated part was the wearing of a combat shield with the arrow that symbolizes the Covid-19.

4.2.3. Functions of humor

4.2.3.1. Exposition of social inequities

Nostrom and Sarna (2021) pointed out that memes are forms of commentary on the pandemic. Nowakowski (2008) (as cited in Nostrom & Sarna, 2021) also noted the low level of trust in government officials. Besides, the services had been conditioned culturally and historically. Bañez (2021) found that literary memes could be a form of therapy. The evidence of the exposition of social inequities and subversion of social order supports the theory of Bakhtin's carnivalesque. In this connection, Filipinos who are dissatisfied with the programs of the government face serious situations in a comical manner. The citizen's lack of trust in government officials was shown in their humor memes.

Social inequalities are one of the issues commonly confronted or problematized in studies on the carnivalesque because the very notion of the carnival itself strips the people from their "official phase or function of life" and expose their "unofficial" side which empowers them to question, express dissent, and criticize all forms of inequalities brought upon by the structures, hierarchy, and power. Consequently, memes in this sense are vulnerable to carnivalization as the public's way to express criticism or dissent equivocally. According to Denisova (2016), the meanings derived from memes are ambiguous; what one reads as a political claim, another may interpret as a light-hearted joke. Moreover, Denisova (2016) contends that such empowerment is associated with networked individualism. In this way, users do not necessarily swear allegiance to any political party or organization. Figure 14 illustrates the social inequalities.

Picture Frame 1: Thief!
Picture Frame 2: Murderer
Picture Frame 3: Koko Pimentel!
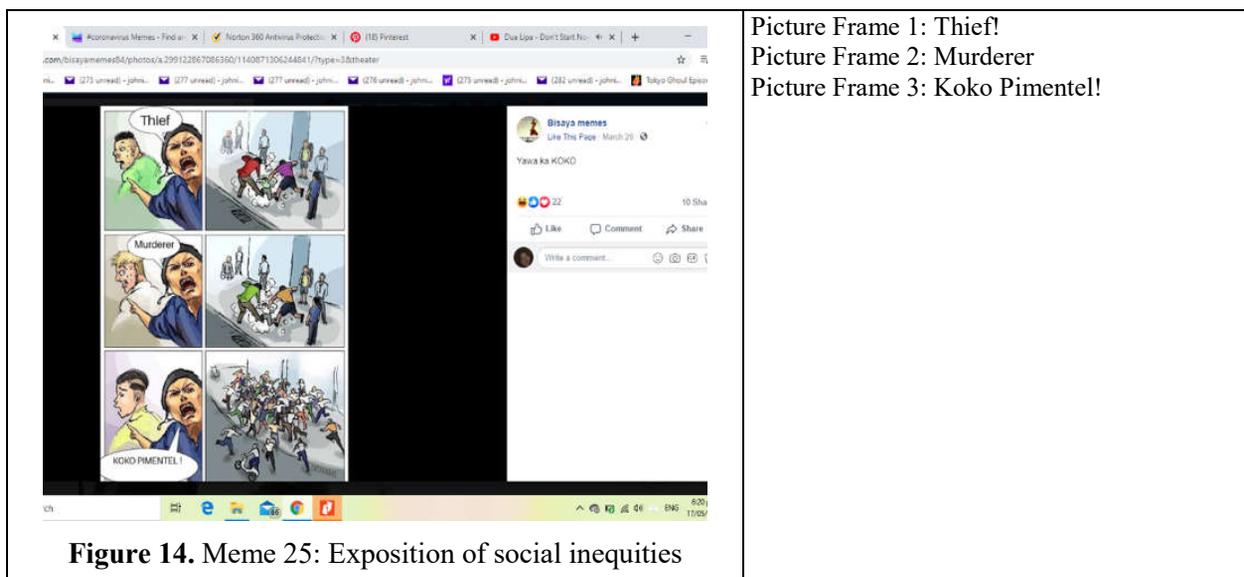
Figure 14. Meme 25: Exposition of social inequities

To illustrate, meme 25 as shown in the slide suggests the exposition of social inequalities. One can see that the meme portrays in graphic detail the controversy surrounding the special treatment involving Senator Koko Pimentel. In frames 1 and 2, the man on the right screamed "Thief" and "Murderer" respectively. The two corresponding narrative frames on the left visually depict men beating the "thief" and "murderer". Whereas in the third frame, the man screamed "Koko Pimentel" and what appears on the left are more men (more like a throng of men) who beat graphically "Koko Pimentel".

This meme is suggestive of the public's indignation over Koko Pimentel's quarantine violation at the height of Covid-19 in the country, and for escaping liability and accountability. It can be remembered that Quicho accused Pimentel of violating health protocols when he brought his pregnant wife to Makati Medical Center on March 25 for her caesarean delivery. Pimentel learned that he had tested positive for Covid-19 when he was already at the hospital. As a consequence, Makati Medical Center denounced Pimentel's "irresponsible and reckless action" which resulted in the quarantine of their depleted medical staff due to possible exposure to the Covid-19 virus (Pazzibugan, 2020).

In January 2021, however, the Department of Justice cleared Senator Aquilino "Koko" Pimentel III of quarantine breach. This decision demonstrates the shrinking of the scope of Republic Act No. 11332, the same law that the DOJ has used to warn quarantine violators of warrantless arrests. "Senator Koko Pimentel is not a public health authority, therefore, not obliged to report under RA No. 11332. The mandatory reporting under RA No. 11332 was meant for public health authorities only," the DOJ's office of the prosecutor general highlighted in a statement on Thursday, January 21 as cited in Rappler (Buan, 2021).

This further implies in the public imagination that the enforcement of the Covid-19 protocols is selective. Anyone in power or with influence can go scot-free. Such ambivalence in the implementation of the law is similar to the ambivalence of the carnival experience which is seen as the means to break down barriers and overcome inequalities brought about by oppressive systems (Cohen 2011).

4.2.3.2. Therapy

That carnivalesque evokes therapeutic effect can be found in Lev-Aladgem (2010). Bakhtin's concept of the carnivalesque was used as theoretical underpinning and the enactment of carnivalesque, an acting style based on illogical and most absurd form of acting to child patients at a hospital.


Translated Version of Meme #44
The banana is not the cure of Corona (Coronavirus). Look at the pimples. The monkeys don't have pimples.

Figure 15. Meme 44: Therapy

4.2.3.3. Subversion of social order

The meme illustrates subversion of the social order on two levels: first, it decries the perceived failure of the public to prescribe to the newly established social order in the new normal where everyone should strictly observe social-physical distancing, wearing of face masks, and uphold the protocols set forth by the IATF. Second, it can also be interpreted as the failure of the local government to execute the protocols promulgated by the IATF. According to Barahmeh (2022), Bakhtinian humor serves as a revolutionary apparatus that attacks as well as exposes the inadequacies of the political power. In this sense, social media becomes a space for

protest. Lastly, subversion of social order is also manifested. A distinct Bakhtinian concept of the carnivalesque is its supposed attempt to subvert the social order by way of parodying high culture or hierarchization. In literature and popular culture, it is used as a form of rebellion or protest against hierarchic authority (Davis, 2014).
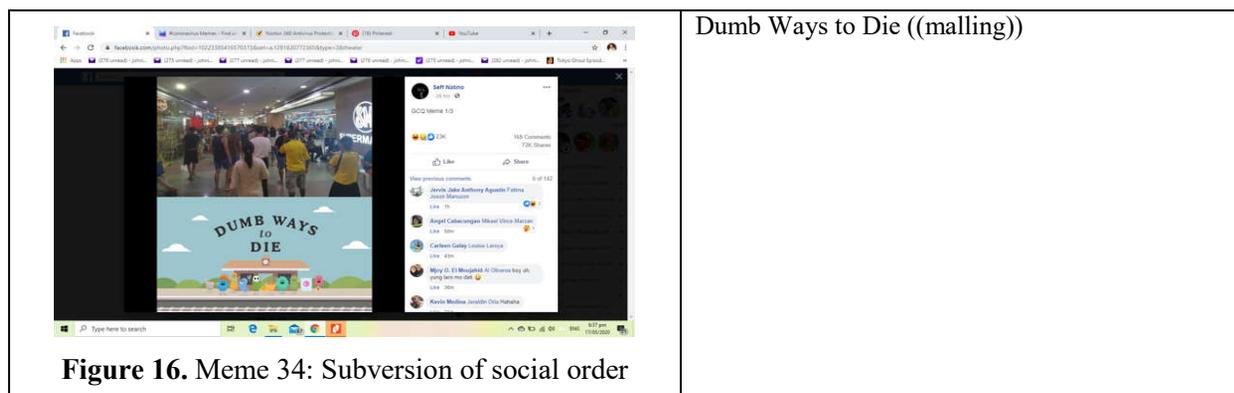
	Dumb Ways to Die ((malling))
Figure 16. Meme 34: Subversion of social order	

5. Conclusion

Based on the results, these conclusions were made: First, memes cannot reflect Filipinos' knowledge of the pandemic because this is a new experience for us. The pandemic was a phenomenon never experienced before by Filipinos and at a scale that occurred during the conduct of this study. Cancelas-Ouviña (2021) stated that memes are capable of conveying information and feelings and therefore relay meaning and significance. The memes did not reflect the lack of knowledge about the virus but rather only the Filipinos' reception and perception of the pandemic.

Second, memes can express the basic needs of the people or as a platform to express our experiences brought about by the pandemic. People were physically isolated in their homes with very limited contact with the outside world. Social media and the internet in general became the only source for information from government agencies and the mainstream media. Memes became the solace amidst the uncertainty and distress brought about by the pandemic. Memes showcased what was happening in our homes and became the real-time chronicle of daily life.

Third, humorous memes serve a dualistic function in the study: they both delight and criticize. Any pandemic is a serious issue to be dealt with because it directly impacts human life. A pandemic is literally a matter of life and death and yet, humorous memes were used to mask the gravity of the situation. The memes communicated the serious concerns of the people such as the need for assistance and clear health guidelines in the guise of the types of humor. Furthermore, humor was used to express dissatisfaction with the government's response the pandemic and the blatant display of social inequality. Traditional propaganda and criticism of the government would usually be heated and cause a negative uproar among the public. However, the memes in this study did not do this but rather facilitated an online discourse where people were freer to comment and engage and not be afraid of political prosecution and backlash.

Humor is relative and dependent upon certain environmental factors such as culture. What is funny to some, may not necessarily be funny to others. This was not included in this current study but future research on humorous memes could examine specific factors that make a meme funny in the context of the Filipino psyche. This has important implications, especially in the areas of health communication and policymaking at the grassroots level. If humor can effectively be used to communicate pertinent information between policymakers and the ordinary citizen, then it is crucial to identify these determining factors.

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