

Zaria Journal of Liberal Arts (ZAJOLA)

Faculty of Arts, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria

Vol. 11, No. 1, June, 2023



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Zaria - Nigeria.

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ISSN:2141-3584

Published and Printed by

Ahmadu Bello University Press Limited, Zaria,
Tel: 08065949711
abupress@abu.edu.ng
info@abupress.com.ng
e-mail: abupress2013@gmail.com
Website: www.abupress.cong

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Zaria Journal of Liberal Arts (ZAJOLA) is a peer-reviewed journal, published bi-annually by the Faculty of Arts, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Nigeria. The journal welcomes manuscript of original articles, from scholars around the globe, in the various areas of Liberal Arts. The articles may be product of descriptive or analytical research, field research notes, reviews of publications and printed materials, drawn from, but not limited to Languages and Linguistics; Law; Environmental Sciences, Education; Management Studies; Cultural and Literally Studies; Theatre Arts; Philosophy; Religion; History and Strategic Studies; Archaeology and Heritage Studies; Developmental Studies and Social Sciences.

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EDITORIAL COMMENT

The Editorial Board of *Zaria Journal of Liberal Arts* wishes to announce the new Edition of its esteemed Journal after a short break. This Edition is made up of twelve well-researched articles drawn from seasoned colleagues and academics.

In the first article, Emmanuel Adeniyi examines the comic aspect of COVID-19 pandemic while Hauwa Mohammed Sani, in her article looks at the ethnographic study of language as a tool in resolving conflicts in Kaduna State.

Osakue Stevenson and Edorodion Agbon focus on the alternative paradigm of indigenous language film in Nigeria through *Agbon-Evuebo*, Muhammad Reza Suleiman examines Arts as drivers of African bilateral relations and regional integration. On their own part, Nura Lawal and Muhammad Rabiul Tahir (co-authors) and Isa Umar Al Musawi concentrate on the study of Hausa Proverbs and Hausa/Ganda burial rites respectively.

Participatory approach and sustainable development of world heritage sites in Nigeria retains the attention of Olufemi Adetunji while in their article, Abdulrasaq Oladimeji and Oluwaseun Yusuf Afolabi look at the teachers' perception of the integration of information and communication technology in public and private secondary schools with special focus on Kwara-Central Senatorial District of Nigeria.

In the area of French studies, Peter Akongfeh Agwu, Diana-Mary Tiku Nsan, Ashabua and Derick Achu carry out an evaluation of the influence of Africa in the poetic works of Charles Baudelaire. In a similar way, Babalola Jacob Olaniyi and Adelowo Kayode Olubukola study the contrastive linguistic divergence of nominal verbs in French and Yoruba languages.

Jamiu Saadullah Abdulkareem takes interest in the Arabic novel. In this article, Jamiu brings out the ideational dimensions and stylistic features of Abdul-Aziz Abdulkarim Burhanuddin's novel titled *Jamilah*. To round this Edition up, Nasiruddeen Ibrahim Ahmed studies the pragmatics of deixis in the poem "Independence of exploitation" of Salihu Alagolo.

It is important to note that the view and opinions presented in these articles are solely those of the authors. It is the hope of the Editorial Board that this Edition will enrich your curiosity.

Prof. Abubakar Sule Sani

Editor-in-Chief

31st May, 2023

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Humour, Slapsticks and Comedic Response to the Covid-19 Pandemic in Nigeria

Emmanuel Adeniyi

Abstract

This article discusses humour as an aesthetic experience possessing imagination and intrinsic value. It examines how Nigerians leveraged slapstick humour found in comedy skits, witty virtual conversations to secure psychological relief from the insufferable experiences of Coronavirus and several weeks of lockdown in 2020. While sketch comedians did comic improvisations sensitising the public to the spread of the virus, some Nigerians engaged in cognitive restructuring by posting hilarious comments on social media to probably relieve themselves of emotional crises induced by Covid-19. Using psychoanalytic release/relief and incongruous theories of humour, the article argues that Covid-19 provided comic irony and served as the object of comic amusement. The irony helps to reflect on the incongruities that greeted the virus outbreak and the socio-economic hardship the pandemic imposed on many Nigerians. Consequently, Covid-19 enhanced comedic imagination providing a break from psychic tension, thus enabling Nigerians to deal with the unpleasantness of having to stay off work and remain indoors for months. The comedic responses of Nigerians to the bugbear are interpreted as coping strategies deployed to overcome stressful conditions exacted on life in a nation that rarely pays attention to the welfare of its citizens.

Keywords: Covid-19, President Muhammadu Buhari, Mr Macaroni, Social Media Skits, Incantatory Poetry

Introduction

The whole world was hit by Coronavirus (Covid-19) in 2020, leading to the death of millions of people in different countries. The pandemic affected the global economy and social interactions adversely, forcing many nations to shut down in order to curtail its spread. Africa, and particularly Nigeria, had its fair share of the pandemic, as the continent/country lost many citizens, including prominent people to the virus. Nigeria especially witnessed social unrest during the pandemic due to its poor management of seething anger occasioned by the imposition of lockdown that disrupted socio-economic activities (Adeniyi, 2022). Interestingly, different people worldwide adopted different coping mechanisms to overcome the boredom and depression imposed by Coronavirus. While some engaged in physical fitness activities, online tutorials, and reading; some spent quality time watching comedy skits on YouTube and other social media micro-blogging sites. The lockdown also afforded Nigerian content creators and online

(sketch) comedians an opportunity to make humorous skits to deliver satire, entertain viewers, throw jibes at the power elites in the country, and criticize government activities (Ojaide & Ojaruega, 2020). As an imaginative, creative expression, sketch comedy arguably helps youths in the country to deploy their energy productively. It also provides a coping strategy for many Nigerians forced to remain indoors during the pandemic to relieve themselves of boredom, stress, and possibly overcome depression.

The use of humour and sketch comedy during the pandemic, therefore, ingeminates the importance of the art forms as a creative tool to entertain, criticize, evoke laughter, and, by extension, relieve stress or tension. This equally demonstrates the socio-medical functionality of comedy skits and the healing powers of humour or laughter which, in some studies, is believed to serve as a complementary medicine. Comedy skits, similarly, help to x-ray the dysfunctionalities in society. This has largely been demonstrated by Nigerian comedy skit makers who use their creativity to make social commentaries about happenings in their country (Ogba, 2021; Ojomo & Sodeinde, 2021; Adekunle, 2014). Coronavirus offered these skit makers a platform to criticize political leaders and sensitize Nigerians to “safety protocols [thus making them] become strategic partners in the war against Covid-19” (Ogba, 2021, p. 93). Another unique function performed by Nigerian social media skits during the pandemic is in serving as “as key behavioral assessment variables to study, clarify, envisage and sometimes correct human behavior, give perception to the pandemic cutting across aspects of Nigeria society viz- politics, religion, health care management, economy among others enunciated the failure of government’s campaign to elicit significant changes in Nigeria’s social culture” (Amonyzeet al., 2022, p. 41).

Humour and its relevance to human health have continuously enjoyed enormous attention in scholarship. The appreciable attention given the phenomenon in clinical and psychological sciences further underscores its usefulness in helping people overcome certain health challenges using non-therapeutic methods. It also enlivens individuals encouraging them to take an amusing or comical view of life rather than remaining downbeat and taking a gloomy view of life circumstances at all times (Gordon, 2012). Being a witty communication text that generates amusement, mirth and produces positive emotions and cognitions in persons (Sen, 2012; Gordon, 2012; Ritchie, 2004; Critchley, 2002), it is believed that the phenomenon is a major stress reliever helping to stimulate effective functioning

of human brains. Brandon Savage et al. (2017) claim that humour has the capacity to stimulate “multiple physiological systems that decrease levels of stress hormones” (p. 341). Increase in stress level in human body is believed to be dangerous and can overwork mind and body or lead to complete breakdown of human system. In their study on the curative effects of laughter on cardiovascular diseases, Kei Hayashi et al. (2016) posit that laughter could serve as a complementary medicine assisting in ameliorating symptoms of depression, dementia, insomnia and cardiovascular diseases. It is a valuable art form helping people to confront and overcome stressful life situations (Martin, 2007).

Humour and laughter are used interchangeably in this paper in view of the closeness of the two phenomena, even though it is argued that both are not the same, and that while humour leads to laughter, not all laughter is induced by humour (Filani, 2016; McDonald, 2012; Attardo, 1994). The relationship between the two concepts is further explained by the belief that laughter is “the physical expression of amusement resulting from the perception of humour” (Straus, 2014, p. 5). It is, however, argued that their conflation in this study facilitates their seamless rendition as overlapping phenomena and for ease of reference, since the focus of the study is not to engage in comparative study of the art forms. The study aims to discuss humour as an aesthetic experience possessing imagination, insights, and intrinsic value for human beings (Morreall, 1981). It seeks to examine how Nigerians leveraged humour found in comedic video skits to secure for themselves psychological relief from the insufferable experiences occasioned by Covid-19, several weeks of lockdown, hunger, and emotional distress in 2020. While sketch comedians employed humour to throw jibes at the unpreparedness of Nigerian government to fight Coronavirus, cast jokes and make fun of the virus; some Nigerians, similarly, made hilarious remarks on social media to make sense of the absurdity imposed on them by the pandemic. The comedic responses of Nigerians (either as comedians or non-comedians) are interpreted in this study as a coping strategy deployed with a touch of creativity to solve problems and manage stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

It is claimed in the present study that humour is one of the potent coping mechanisms used by Nigerians to overcome the stressful conditions imposed on life and living during the Coronavirus lockdown period. Being a bugbear evoking fear and hopelessness, Nigerians created positive distractions out of the global pandemic to stay alive, keep their mental health intact, and laugh off preposterous Covid-19 emergency responses from their governments and leaders. Many of

them did comic improvisations and videos to warn and create sensitisation about the spread of the deadly virus. Some equally used hilarity conveyed through various comedic mediums to criticise government officials and agencies perceived to have mismanaged relief materials earmarked for indigent people. Those who did not engage in virtual comedic creations used micro-blogging sites – including Youtube and virtual conversations, especially online (news) comment sections – as a platform to express their minds about the absurdist state of their country and its leadership in relation to the breakdown of social infrastructure and brutish life conditions there.

Of importance are those sketch comedians who used comedic expressions in mediums such as, video skits, comedy, music, cartoons, writings, informal verbal expressions to entertain, lampoon, and comment on the global Coronavirus zeitgeist. This is possibly due to their conviction that Covid-19 is the object of comic amusement pointing to the incongruities surrounding the virus outbreak, the peculiardersive remarks that greeted its outbreak, and socio-economic hardship the pandemic imposed on the generality of Nigerians. Using the psychoanalytic release/relief and incongruous theories of humour as a theoretical standpoint, I argue that Covid-19 comedic creations generated slapstick humour providing a break from psychic tension, depression that accompanied the pandemic, and enabled many Nigerians to deal with the unpleasantness of having to stay off work and remain indoors for months (Filani, 2016; Imo, 2016; Attardo, 1994). It is argued that the pandemic built up psychic tension, emotional and psychological trauma in many Nigerians which humour helped to relieve by providing cathartic affects conveyed through jokes and laughter. This is because jokes, according to Sigmund Freud, help in the “release of [...] psychic energy we normally invest in maintaining certain socially essential inhibitions” (Eagleton, 2019, p. 11). The incongruous conditions and responses that greeted Covid-19 outbreak in Nigeria wetted the grounds for hilarity and comedic content ideas, providing justifications why the pandemic became the object of comic amusement and why some people made side-splitting comedies out of it.

Comedic skits made by Fatboiz, Realmofy, Mr Macaroni, Broda Shaggi, Crayfish Boys, King Zina, and Tuns Toon, as well as virtual conversations of some Nigerians were analysed as data to evince how sketch comedians and Nigerian tweeps employed humour as a coping mechanism to remediate or purge themselves of negative impulses during the Covid-19-induced lockdown. The data

were also interrogated to determine their incongruous or absurdist content, thus helping the researcher to answer the questions: What factors predisposed the Coronavirus outbreak in Nigeria to comedic expressions? Why did some Nigerians resort to slapsticks at the most inauspicious time laden with poignant memory? What does the bathetic transformation of the *sublime to the ridiculous* within the context of Covid-19 comedic creations reveal about the Nigerian identity? How did Nigerians perceive and leverage humour from Covid-19 comedic creations to address mounting psychic energy during lockdown? The article asseverates the healing powers of humour, emphasising the importance of humorous exchanges between online comedians and their fans to release their pent-up frustrations, emotions, and thoughts about the disruption of life process during the Covid-19 lockdown. It is believed the study will further increase awareness about the socio-medical significance of humour/comedy, and particularly grow public understanding of the Nigerian setting as a site of limitless possibilities where talented persons often turn societal ills and inadequacies into imaginative creations.

Methodology and Theoretical Framework

As hinted earlier, comedic skits sourced online and some jocular opinions expressed on Twitter/X, Youtube, and online newspaper readers' comment sections were examined to explore the earlier highlighted research questions. Their choice emphasises the significance of social media to the new genre of comedy, since it has reshaped "consumption, participation, expectation, and production of entertainment" (Ojomo & Sodeinde, 2021, p. 1) for content producers, sketch comedians, and their audience. Social media provides a platform for talented persons to showcase their creative potentials and ventilate their opinions; hence the production of comedy sketches offering supplementary or alternative means of fulfilling entertainment gratification to the audience, rather than just for information sharing and communication (Ojomo & Sodeinde, 2021). Though comedic mediums are plural, the researcher settled for online comedy skits and virtual conversations because of their availability, ease of accessibility, and due to the fact that humour found in audio-visual texts are performative in nature (Chiaro, 2014). While the study relies on qualitative and interpretive research to interrogate the selected short videos and conversations as data, the researcher engaged in meaning-making process and data interpretation, so as to make sense of the texts in relation to humour production of Covid-19-related comedy skits and hilarious remarks.

The psychoanalytic release/relief and incongruous theories of humour are employed to help the researcher examine, understand, and explain observable constructs in humour and comedy studies within the context of Coronavirus comedic expressions in Nigeria. Incongruity theory of humour is useful in helping the researcher explain why people laugh and find certain expressions hilarious, or why certain things have the potential to be funny, or why people consider such things funny (Eagleton, 2019; Straus, 2014). The theory “essentially posits that people feel amused when they have an experience that violates the normal order of things according to their own subjective understanding of what the normal order of things is” (Straus, 2014, p. 6). It also believes that “humour springs from a clash of incongruous aspects – a sudden shift of perspective, an unexpected slippage of meaning, an arresting dissonance or discrepancy, a momentary defamiliarising of the familiar [...] the disruption of orderly thought processes or the violation of laws or conventions” (Eagleton, 2019, p. 67). The theory’s object of amusement is the incongruous, as it believes that humour comes from an unusual experience contrary to normal order of things (Filani, 2016; Straus, 2014). In the present study, the theory helps to explain or establish the grounds for hilarity in the outbreak and spread of Coronavirus in Nigeria, and humorous responses that greeted the evolution of the virus in the country. Nigeria as a cultural context projects seemingly contradictory or incongruous elements, positioning it as a natural milieu for weirdness. The contradictions are observed to have forced many Nigerians exhibiting “mannerisms and behavioural dispositions suggestive of psychological trauma” (Imo, 2016, p. 3). It is a postcolonial society with poor social infrastructures, where its leaders engage in medical tourism and fail to develop its healthcare system (Adeniyi, 2021). Considering the rate of endemic corruption, several acts of criminality, and seemingly insuperable inter-ethnic conflicts, the country naturally provides more than enough data for a study in incongruity.¹

Release/relief theory holds that people get relief from unpleasant situation or experience when they laugh. The laugh-out-your-sorrow dictum common with adverts of many stand-up comedy shows in Nigeria sums up the import of this theory. While it explains how laughter or humour helps to take away repression (Eagleton, 2019), the theory believes that humour or laughter has cathartic effects,

¹See Anver Versi’s “A Heap of Contradictions”, <https://newafricanmagazine.com/17533/>.

helping people to relieve pent-up energy or let off steam in order to get rid of their psychic energy or bottled-up tensions (Filani, 2016; McDonald, 2012; Attardo, 1994) capable of damaging their mental health. According to Filani (2016), the theory holds that “in everyday living, humans are faced with lots of social inhibitions which lead to storing up of psychic energy, which is then released (or expressed) through laughter when things that are related to such inhibitions are mentioned” (p. 21). In this study, the researcher is interested in how Nigerians employed Coronavirus comedic creations to let off mounting psychic energy, pent-up frustrations and anger owing to the existential threats that the virus outbreak and the attendant lockdowns posed to them. This is determined through their utterances or online texts (posts/tweets), responses and comments on Covid-19 comedy skits. The selected skits provide data used for interrogating the catharsis of humour and incongruous elements providing basis for laughter. The virtual conversations, similarly, help to ascertain the emotional reactions of some Nigerians in pointing out absurdities that shape their country and its response to Covid-19 outbreak. The foregoing draws on the hypothesis in social psychology that the words people use reflect their mind-sets. While both incongruity and relief theories are similar in approach (McDonald, 2012), it is argued that the contradictions that the country projects justify their choice and serve a dual purpose in this study: they push Nigerians towards emotional trauma, needing purgation; and provide sufficient ground for humour, owing to their staggering level of unusualness.

Covid-19 Comedy Skits and Release of Psychic Energies

There are quite a number of Coronavirus comedy skits produced and posted online when the virus broke out in Nigeria. The skits were used to perform many functions, including creating awareness about the virus and its spread, satirise the government and its officials, portray poor healthcare system in the country. Besides, they were used to demonstrate the resilience of Nigerians who are daily confronted with more serious existential threats than Covid-19 and, therefore, indicate that the virus was in a wrong place. Sketch comedy, thus, afforded some Nigerians the opportunity to pass social commentary on the foregoing. They arguably used their skits to purge themselves of repressed frustration and anger bottled up in their unconscious whose release is conceivably enhanced by the Covid-19 outbreak and the lockdown imposed on the nation by the government. Using jokes as a prototype of verbal humour (Dynel, 2009), the sketch comedians demonstrated certain incongruities shaping Coronavirus narrative in Nigeria. One

of such is utter display of ignorance, despite heightened campaigns and sensitisations about the virus outbreak. This ignorance is fuelled by the belief that Nigerians (blacks) are immune to the virus, that Covid-19 is only killing the rich, the tropical Nigerian weather wouldn't allow the spread of the virus, and that Indigenous concoctions are potent medicine that can fight off the virus. Some of these fallacies are dramatised in King Zina's skit. In the skit, two characters (a police officer and a civilian) are involved in a dialogue during the Covid-19 lockdown. The police officer is on the street to enforce the restriction on movement order, while the civilian is on his way to a beer parlour to drink:

Civilian: Ha, officer! (walks closer to him)

Police Officer: Where are you going?

Civilian: I just want to join my friends in this place (points behind him). I just want to take one or two bottles.

Police Officer: Join your friends? You've not heard that people should not engage in any form of gathering?

Civilian: Ìwọńán bèrù kòrónà? (You too are afraid of Corona?) (laughs)

Police Officer: You think Coronavirus is a joke, right?

Civilian: Kíni kòrónà? (What is Corona?) See officer, if I finish one or two of my bottles, if I carry like 20 Chiloquin *wham*, Corona will flee. Even if I don't take Chiloquin, if I drink *àgbojèdi*² of Iya Bashiru, if I just drink two shots, Corona will flee. Don't you know Coronavirus and alcohol don't agree? By the way (makes an attempt to touch the officer).

Police Officer: If you touch me, thunder go fire you!

Civilian: Why are you afraid with your weapon and everything? Let me even tell you, this Corona does not affect poor people. It starts from big big people, you know; it will be coming down. Big people will now give him transport. Before it gets to the poor, they will find the cure.

Police Officer: Okay, you want to use your poverty as a defence? You're proud of your poverty, abi? You're under arrest.

Civilian: For what?

²Herbal concoction

Police Officer: For Coronic ignorance.

The above funny dialogue reads like an excerpt from a shaggy-doggy story. It, however, has both the build-up/setup and punch-line, therefore making it a prototype of a joke (Dyner, 2009). While the build-up is the narrative yarn of the dialogue, the punch-line ending the conversation with a touch of surprise and *incongruity* (Dyner, 2009) sums up the joke's object of amusement, which is the perception of many Nigerians about Coronavirus and the nation's power elites. This perception partly indicates the ignorance of many Nigerians about the pandemic when it first broke out, ingrained social inequality in the country, self-medication and the pervasive mistrust of the Nigerian government. In their qualitative study examining the perception and knowledge of Nigerians about the disease, Amoyeze et al. (2022) affirm the "inadequate knowledge of the nature of COVID-19, its transmission mode and prevention mechanism" (p. 40), claiming that "government failed to contest myths, perceptions about the nature, transmission and methods of preventing the spread of corona- virus" (p. 41). They argue that "social media skits could be important tools to spread awareness about government's health initiatives [and how they] positively influence people's health behavior and perception" (p. 43). The Nigeria's social media space, however, seemed to have behaved differently while the lockdown lasted, thereby implicating governmental failures to fully explore it to drive its health and social welfare programmes or disseminate right information about the pandemic to Nigerians. These failures arguably manifested in various myths spread about the virus and other unhealthy practices that many Nigerians engaged in, believing that such practices could prevent or cure Covid-19.³ This view is also contestable in view of the belief that government at various levels engaged in meaningful health awareness programmes, ran various sensitization campaigns on social media, and used comedic skits to pass across important messages to Nigerians during the lockdown.

The most bewildering part of the dialogue is the belief that Covid-19 is the disease of the rich, and that poor people are immune from it. While this serves as a blatant display of *Coronic* ignorance, as the Police Officer remarks, the statement can be read as an innuendo making oblique remarks about the pervasive

³A good example is the unscientific claim that salt water bath could prevent or cure the virus. This claim was denounced by a member of the Presidential Task Force on Covid-19 and the then Minister of Aviation, HadiSirika. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=prfmvX6qDf0>

absurdities in Nigeria. It is a satiric barb against people trusted with position of leadership in the country, but mismanaged its resources. It also serves as a gross indictment on the endemic social stratification in Nigeria. The civilian's viewpoint in the dialogue is validated by the tweet of a viewer of Mr. Macaroni's Coronavirus skit, noting that: "Something must kill man, but in Naija corona no fit. If corona kill any Naija man, check am well, na politicians kill am".⁴ This innuendo is intensified in the comment of **a news reader who took a swipe at political leadership in the country:**

We don't have Corona virus in Nigeria, we have Corona leaders. Do you know that the problem of this country is this country? Do you know that since Corona entered Nigeria nose masks moved from 60 naira to 6 thousand naira? You want to make profit so that the people will go 6-feet? [Between] you and the Corona virus, who is more deadly? We can't have [two] diseases in one country, [it's] either Corona go or bad government go. You can wear nose mask to prevent Corona virus, but can you wear nose mask to prevent Corona leaders??? Do you know Corona leaders have killed more people than Corona virus?⁵

These viewpoints of are enthralling. They reveal problem of leadership in Nigeria, the acquisitive, exploitative nature of Nigerians who often explore other people's misfortune to enrich themselves. From the comment and many others in this study, it is established that most Nigerians do not hold many political leaders in high esteem, owing to their corrupt practices; hence the belief that they are worse than Covid-19. The dialogue further reveals the effect of poverty on cognition, which Jennifer Sheehy-Skeffington and Jessica Rea (2017) posit can "affect the thinking processes of all people, regardless of intelligence level" (p. 2). The civilian believes in the potency of local herbs, thinks restriction on movement is unnecessary, and, at some point, doubts the reality of the virus. All these point to some of the incongruities shaping the outbreak of the virus in Nigeria.

In Fatboiz's and Realmofy's skits, the entrance and exit of Coronavirus from Nigeria is dramatised with a view to portraying Nigeria as a hostile,

⁴With minimal editing, see <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2020/03/nigerians-hilarious-comments-on-covid-19/>

⁵@LemeahhP (01 March 2020)

unaccommodating site for the virus. The skit makers hilariously limn how environmental factor, resilience of Nigerians, local herbs help the country defeat Ebola, HIV, and other deadly diseases. Punctuated with one-liners, the skits provide uproarious humour generated through dramatic and anthropomorphic representations of Coronavirus and other diseases, hilarious word usage, costumes, and props to emphasise the punch-lines of the comedic performances. Nigeria is also depicted as the burial ground of the virus in Tuns Toon's animation skit. With beautiful rendition of transliterated Yorùbá incantatory poetry, Ifá oracular verses, chants of ancestral cults, and proverbs (Olajubu, 2003), the video presents the animation of Abija, a character in popular Yorùbá theatre, who is prompted by his personal deity to engage Coronavirus in a mortal battle:

Personal God: A baby's head does not bend when an elder is in the market.

Abija: That is it *baba*.

Personal God: Abija, it is a shame that you are alive and a terrorist Corona is killing my people. I thought you call yourself a tiger, but all I can see now is a mere cat.

Abija: I, Abijawarabiekun, remain a tiger and will never be a dog's steward. Never!

Personal God: You'll go to the hills ...

Abija: A man who fetches an infested firewood brings invitation to the lizard. Corona has invited death today and die he must. Ofe!!!

Corona: Welcome, Abija. I know what you are here for. I hope you know the day a dog visits a tiger, that day the dog will bathe in his own blood.

Abija: It is either you stop these killings or today I, Abija, will destroy you.

Corona: See this firefly that wants to extinguish a naked flame. Abija, you will end up killing yourself. You will die. (He hits Abija, leaving him breathing heavily). Did you feel that? Hahaha! Abija, stop forcing me to destroy you! You can still return home in peace.

Abija: No matter how strong the wind blows; a river will never flow backwards. Never! I'm here on a mission, and I will accomplish it.

Corona: (Hits Abija) Die Abija, die Abija!

Abija: If one persists in flirting with disaster, disaster is liable to befall such a person. Corona, you have taken more than you can chew, and today, you'll be destroyed. The word of the giant rat is accepted by the gods. No matter how long the night is, the day is sure to come. The day lizard decides to swim that day he meets his death. I say die, die ...

Abija succeeds in defeating the virus using his mystical powers, thus saving humanity from death and sorrow. The animation invokes humour and its comedic effect is not lost on viewers. The hermeneutics of this animation accentuates the belief among Africans that health and healing have religious/spiritual implications (Onongha, 2015). The imaginative way of resorting to Indigenous oral resources to portray the possibility of employing ancestral cultic powers to combat the virus goes to validate the trust of many Nigerians in traditional medicine and Indigenous medical practices. It, similarly, validates their belief that diseases, evils, crises are the handiworks of malevolent spirits. Such spirits are not to be fought with modern medicine, but through mystical and invocation of preternatural forces. The animation also helps to foreground the validity of African epistemology over orthodox knowledge system.

Mr. Macaroni, Broda Shaggi use their skits to sensitise Nigerians to the danger of the virus. In doing so, they educate them and correct various myths and insinuations about the disease. Crayfish Boys' skit, similarly, comments on the break in communal relationship in Nigeria due to Covid-19 outbreak. Giving a temporal comparison of then and now, the skit makes viewers believe that coughing wouldn't scare people away in the past, as individuals would rally round the sick to ensure their recovery. However, reverse was the case during the outbreak as people ran away from anyone that coughed, believing that the person must have contracted the deadly virus.

Of interest to this study, on the one hand, is how these skits help to purge emotion and facilitate release of bottled-up frustrations in Nigerians. On the other hand, how the skits provoke humour having foregrounded absurdist realities that shape Nigerian situation is equally captivating. While submitting that the skit makers and sketch comedians are Nigerians who arguably used their comedy videos to release pent-up tensions in their psyches, it is argued that they can be positioned as representatives of other Nigerians who sought different mediums to let out negative energy stored in their unconscious before and during Covid-19 outbreak. However simplistic this interpretation may appear; it holds some validity in view

of the attendant hardship that the virus outbreak brought on Nigerians who were forced to stay indoors without any means of surviving the harsh economic realities confronting the country. Perhaps, the comments of some viewers who watched the skits are useful in determining how they eased off tension during the lockdown. By implication, these Nigerians are bifurcated into skit makers/online comedians and viewers or consumers of the skits. As explained earlier, the skit makers/online comedians used comedic mediums to purge themselves of negative energy, among other functions. The viewers, having seen the videos, commented on the hilarity of the skits and remarked about how the skits' humours helped them to overcome boredom, tension, and stress. In one of the replies to Mr. Macaroni's Coronavirus skit posted on Twitter/X, one of the skit's viewers writes: "Ooin you will not kill me with freaky freaky laughter [...] After all the wahala from @FBN_help and @gtbank_help and IBEDC_NG, you @mrmacaroni just made me smile away all the stress".⁶ A viewer with the Haruna Maina, also commented on Broda Shaggi's Coronavirus skit, noting that "Shaggi name, , you're doing well! Thank you for helping us stay happy during this isolation period". These online comedians really used comedy to instigate humour as an art form to help Nigerians battle boredom, stress, and depression during the Covid-19 lockdown.

Covid-19, Season of Gaffe and Social Media Humour

While online humourists took to social media during the Covid-19 lockdown to entertain, educate, and relieve stress, some Nigerians similarly used the new media space to ventilate their opinions about their country, its leadership, and the Coronavirus pandemic. Their humorous comments arguably reflect their perspectives of the nation and its leadership. The comments are witticisms since they are clever, humorous, context-bound texts occurring in non-humorous conversational environment and interwoven into a conversational exchange (Dynel, 2009). The witty comments convey meanings, facilitate humour, and perform various communicative purposes (Dynel, 2009). One of such comments is in response to the remarks made by the former acting chairman of Nigeria's anti-corruption agency, the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), Mr. Ibrahim Magu, that "even the Coronavirus is caused by corruption".⁷ A tweep, Michael Emerue, commented on this opinion: "Clowns. What next? Corona caused by corruption and then the comedy continues. Nigeria is a giant

⁶@dadebayo8, 29 February 2020

⁷See the *Premium Times* "Coronavirus is caused by Corruption – Magu", 19 February 2020.

stage for comedy. Sad”.⁸ Another person, Olayiwola Akintola, commented on the news story that: “If Corona Virus is caused by corruption, it should not have started in China but Aso Rock Villa. Mumu raised to power 1000!”⁹

In a response to President Muhammadu Buhari’s 29th March, 2020 address to the nation on Covid-19 pandemic, a viewer (Emily) who commented on the address on Youtube, threw a salvo at the president that it “seems they’ve taught him how to read and pronounce corona & covid well”.¹⁰ Before then, the social media was awash with humorous mimicking of President Buhari’s gaffe in his mispronunciation of Covid-19 as *Covid One Nine* in a short video address released by one of his media aides. Apparently surprised by the *lapsus linguae*, a tweep, AyeMojubar,¹¹ remarked jokingly: “Buhari said COVIK-1-9-Virus? I warned you guys. Corona Vasis”. Another tweep said: “#Buhari has spoken oooo COVIK 1, 9. Nigeria is gone”,¹² just as another said hilariously: “He said Covik 1-9 birus? No wonder they’ve been hiding him from addressing Nigerians”.¹³ Similarly commenting on the president’s 29th March, 2020 address, another viewer on Youtube, Kenneth Ijoma, dropped a one-liner revealing the biting socio-economic conditions created by the Coronavirus lockdown in Nigeria. According to Ijoma: “Locked down without food is like telling a child to go and sleep without any bed or space to lay his head. Mr President, give your people food and they will comply with the lockdown policy”.¹⁴ Other humorous comments include: “Did anyone notice that since this coronavirus outbreak in Nigeria, there has been less news of Bandits/herders/BH attacks, because those behind it are on safe quarantine?”¹⁵ and “Gone are [the] days someone will ask me to stay positive, no go there this time”.¹⁶

⁸(@tonimikie) 19 February 2020

⁹See <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/more-news/378028-coronavirus-is-caused-by-corruption-magu.html>

¹⁰<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cPG8S0gW9MI>

¹¹(@ayemojubar) 22 March 22 2020

¹²@Real_ETM) 22 March 22 2020

¹³(@ostro44) 22 March 2020

¹⁴<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cPG8S0gW9MI>

¹⁵Ezinna Nwachinemere’s remarks. Cited with minimal editing. See <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2020/03/nigerians-hilarious-comments-on-covid-19/>

¹⁶Nkemdi Peter’s remarks. As above.

These and other similar comments perform three functions: to reveal absurdist satire in the trajectory of Covid-19 narrative in Nigeria, indicate incongruities that shape the running of the country, and demonstrate the comedic responses of Nigerians, either as skit comedians or citizens, to Coronavirus outbreak in the country. Though a major public health challenge, Covid-19 provided comic irony for Nigerians to instigate humour, indicate socio-economic divisions, disconnect between Nigeria's political leaders and ordinary citizens, and the vacuity of living in a country that pays lip service to developing infrastructure, and rarely pays attention to the welfare of its citizens. These comments, therefore, become a form of coping mechanism used by Nigerians to relieve stress and anxiety. Rather than engaging in mere emotional ventilation, they resorted to cognitive restructuring as a means to confront Covid-19 pandemic and bear out their minds on the mismanagement of the country which became conspicuous during the attendant lockdown of the nation in 2020.

Conclusion

The comedic response of Nigerians to Coronavirus outbreak in their country is the focus of this article. It has examined the utilisation of comedic skits and virtual conversations during the outbreak of the virus and the attendant lockdown that accompanied the outbreak as a coping strategy to escape emotional crises induced by the execrable Covid-19 situation in 2020. The article submits that comedy, humour, laughter provided a comic irony for many Nigerians enabling them to release their pent-up frustrations, ventilate their minds on the state of affairs in their country, and escape becoming emotional wrecks during one of the most appalling social crises ever recorded in the history of the country.

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