HUMOUR AS A CRISIS COMMUNICATION STRATEGY: CONTENT ANALYSIS OF SELECTED COVID-19 FACEBOOK CARTOONS, IMAGES AND SKITS IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

That the virtual space is a fertile sphere for robust contestations and discourses is no longer news. The fact is equally settled in communication scholarship, cultural studies, psychology and other fields that humour plays significant roles in public exchanges, no matter how serious. Apart from its catharsis and therapeutic effects, humour is often used to speak truth to power just as those in power can creatively deploy it to meaningfully construct reality. The question however is how effectively is this vital genre of communication being utilized in the digital space and especially during crisis? This study examined through Content Analysis, the categories, patterns and directions of messages in selected *Facebook* cartoons, images and video skits in Nigeria in the heat of the global Corona Virus Pandemic (COVID-19).A total of 105images, cartoons including video skits that trended on the pandemic between March and July 2020 were purposively selected and analyzed. A coding manual and scheme were designed with content categories such as irony, satire, parody, satire, caricature etc. while forms of humour like written text, image or video were also taken into account. Findings revealed that a lot of Nigerians hid under humour to ventilate their emotions against perceived inconsistent government actions during the COVID-19 crisis and that the preponderance of ironies, sarcasm, parody and satires in the analyzed humours betrayed people's skepticism of Government policies. The study concludes that because of its appeal and potency, Government and its agencies should incorporate humour in their crisis communication strategies.

Keywords: Humour, COVID-19, Catharsis, Virtual Space, Crisis Communication.

Introduction

The therapeutic effect of humour has been acknowledged in researches across different disciplines globally. As a concept, humour involves any spoken, written or published joke which provokes or elicits laughter or smile in the audience. There is a common saying that laughter is the best medicine. This is because spontaneous laughter is physiologically derived through a motor reflex produced by the coordinated contraction of not less than fifteen facial muscles in a given pattern that is followed by altered breathing which in turn stimulates and elicits the laughter reflex. As a cross-cultural phenomenon, humour is often used to pass a message across to others, they are messages behind messages, and consequently not many people decode or appreciate the essential information they are meant to convey. While some people are just excited, amused and laugh off the underlying meaning humorous messages intend to convey for their education, knowledge or sensitization, studies have suggested that the purpose of humour is not only to make others laugh or amuse targets but to communicate serious messages in such a way as to relieve the receivers of emotional burden. Similarly, psychological studies have equally shown that exposure to humorous stimuli produces an increase in positive "affect" and mood" of the audience. (Miltner,2014, Boxman-Shabtai, 2015, Shifman, Coleman &Ward, 2007).

As a communication strategy, humour is enacted by means of top-down, lateral and bottom-up communication process. Although it often takes

many forms and shapes, and most times it is not taken seriously, humour communicates underlying messages that only the initiates have the cerebral capability to decode or comprehend. In the print media for instance, humour comes alive by means of cartoons, satirical constructions and sometimes riddles or articles. The digital media typified by the Internet also provide an avenue for the showcasing of creative ideas in which through which humour and other positive emotions have become a major strategic method and means of communication. Hence, as the world continues to be enmeshed in one crisis or another the role and place of humour as a crisis communication tool is increasingly attracting scholars' attention.

The recent outbreak of Corona Virus as a global pandemic has brought to the fore the creative ingenuity of media consumers, especially in the digital and virtual space, the use of humour to mitigate the psychological impact of the tragedy that has claimed over a million lives world-wide. Nigerians are not left out of this trend as her digital platforms like *FaceBook*, *WhatsApp, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube* etc. are suffused with diverse forms and genres of humorous images, texts and audio-visuals communicating one message or the other. The Internet is sensationalised with different kinds of humorous messages aimed at passing the messages about Covid-19 across to the people. As a melting pot of diverse ideas and pieces of information, the Internet empowers citizens to make and share their news on different platforms which have empowered individuals to employ humour to create 'funny' messages about Covid-19 and share same for the information of people and provoke some laughter. The emergence of Covid-19 pandemic propped up a manifold of issues regarding how people should be informed or enlightened on the pandemic. Such humours, in the form of cartoons, texts and images are not only domiciled in the newspapers or magazines but also take the form of drama on television for the education of people about the menace of the pandemic. Drama programme is also featured on radio for the education of people about the menace of the disease. It is therefore against this backdrop that this study sought to examine the usefulness of humour as a crisis communication strategy in the context of the Corona Virus (COVID-19)

pandemic. The specific objective of this research is to content-analyse some selected humour messages in order to identify the categories, prominence in terms of the frequencies cum salience of such messages, including the directions. This task becomes more relevant and instructive because answers to the questions would enable the researchers to fully appreciate the significance of humour as a crisis communication strategy in the Nigerian context more so when previous studies have affirmed the potency of humor as a tool for social interactions and community building germane to the communication of a people's common value system in order to engender status differentiation as well as develop social cohesion thereby reducing interpersonal stress within a social group (Proekt , 2019, Robinson and Smith-Lovin, 2001).

Statement of the Problem
Crisis times are usually characterized by dislocations and incongruities in the social dynamics of societies which ultimately culminate in anxiety, trauma and sometimes deaths. Of late, the Internet has become popular in its role in crisis communication due to its increasing ubiquity, speed of information dissemination and cross – platform accessibility (Starbird, Palen, Hughes &Vieweg, 2010). While several studies have been conducted in the print and broadcast media in a bid to unravel the role and effectiveness of humour as a communication strategy during crisis, however, not much work has been done to discover how people make utilize social media communications engendered by the Internet to meet their needs during crisis.

Besides, the global pandemic COVID-19 is a rare phenomenon that seems to have defied the established crisis management templates and postulations of many experts and is therefore being studied across disciplines. Against this backdrop it would indeed be instructive to determine how Nigerians used humour to ventilate their feelings during the pandemic. Specifically study investigated the nature, categories, patterns and directions of messages in selected *Facebook* cartoons, images and video skits on the Corona Virus Pandemic (COVID-19) in Nigeria. This is necessary to provide insight into the use of humour

as a crisis communication tool as Psychological studies have shown that exposure to humorous stimuli produces an increase in positive "affect" and "mood", hence we intend to determine whether or not the application of humour in the context of a solemn occasion such as the pandemic as a coping mechanism against serious and life-threatening diseases such as Covid-19 indeed has some inherent benefits and at the same time, some manifest risks.

Research Questions

The study sought to provide answers to the following research questions:

1. How did Nigerians deploy humour as a communication tool during the Coronavirus pandemic?
2. What were the most prominent categories of humour used by Nigerians to communicate during the pandemic?
3. What are the dominant frames of the messages in the analysed humours?
4. Which Genres of Humour were prominent in COVID-19 communication by Nigerians?, and
5. Who were the main speakers in the COVID-19 humours?

Literature review
Humour and Crisis Communication

From time immemorial humour has been a potent tool in human communication. Its usefulness dates back to the days of feudal kings when palace or court jesters adroitly used it to communicate some salient but bitter truths to power in a rather mild, amusing but yet effective manner. Apart from allowing people to touch sensitive and at times threatening subjects in a non-threatening way, a major strength of humour as a communication device lies in its ability to break down barriers between people and the fact of its being couched in a language many can connect with. Highlighting the importance of humour as a communication tool, Tabares (2009) writes:

> Humour is a model of efficiency. It can generally get your point across with less verbiage! A picture is worth a thousand words, and humour is worth a thousand dollars! Entertainers make good money. Is it because they cure cancer? Solve world hunger? No, it's because they solve world boredom! They make you laugh, and the really good ones make you think!

As Tabares posits, the utilitarian value of humour does not end in eliciting laughter alone. Humours are message behind message, and consequently not many people decode or appreciate the essential information humours are meant to convey, rather many are just excited, amused and laugh off the underlying meaning humorous messages intend to convey for their education, knowledge or sensitization. Booth-Butterfield and Wanzer (2018) aver that while the use of humour in social interaction has the potential to elicit positive perceptions, improve interpersonal interactions, reduce conflict, aid in coping, and even facilitate health outcomes, in contrast, poorly communicated, ill-timed, or maladaptive humour is often detrimental to both personal perceptions and relationships.

Humorous enactments, Booth-Butterfield and Wanzer contend, are goal-oriented form of communication that involves social, cognitive, emotional and behavioral elements. According to these scholars, an individual intends to accomplish some goal through communicating humour, no matter how obscureor subconscious the act might seem. Hence the communicator encodes verbal and /or nonverbal messages to achieve this aim. By comparison however, genuine responses to humour (whether a trait pattern or situationally immediate) are not goal-oriented, but rather spontaneous reactions to humorous messages.

There are many ways to interrogate crisis as a research variable. Crisis is generally seen as a moment of anxiety and high stress in the life of a people or organization. Ajala (2005) sees crisis as an unexpected development which very often embarrass an organisation, frightens the public and puts a company's credibility and decency under intense scrutiny. In worse instances like a pandemic, crisis creates the threat of death and loss of property. In Communication parlance, particularly, Public Relations crisis could be functional or dysfunctional. A crisis is functional if its eventual resolution will enhance the greater harmony and engender progress within a people or organisation. A dysfunctional crisis on the other

hand is a crisis of centrifugal forces which poses a great threat against the internal harmony among stakeholders and structures of an organisation, people or nation. Jaques (2009) classified the definitions of crisis communication into two : crisis as an event and crisis as part of a process (Pauchant & Mitroff, 1992; Roux-Dufort, 2007; Shrivastava, 1993). In this study we adopt Coombs's (2015) definition regarding crisis as 'an unpredictable event that threatens important expectancies of stakeholders and can seriously impact an organization's performance and generate negative outcomes'.

The Internet, as Proekt (2019) observes, manifests itself as a space of collective creativity where humor and positive emotions' representation are dominant strategies of communication. Nothing best exemplified this reality than the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. The various social media platforms became active public spheres and turfs for diverse narratives on the global scourge for which mankind and the power gladiators had no immediate solution. Part of the challenges of the digital age is the fact that the modern man indeed lives in a hybrid space which comprises both the physical and virtual realities at the same time. With this development, he has the potentials and indeed the prospect to interact with others at any time when he uses digital tools for virtual communication. Consequently, the emergence of COVID -19 pandemic propped up a manifold of issues regarding how people should be informed or enlightened on the pandemic. Humour thus naturally assumed a prominent space and role as a means of education and enlightenment of the citizenry with regard to the pandemic.

Coronavirus originated in Wuhan, China in December 2019 and has since become a global health concern. The World Health Organisation (2019) notes that COVID-19 is caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-COV-2). The most ecological reservoirs for SARS-COV-2 are bats, but it is believed that the virus jumped the species barrier to humans from another intermediate animal host. This intermediate animal host could be domestic food animal, a wild animal or a domesticated wild animal which has not yet been identified (WHO, 2019). Different kinds of species of bats are believed to harbour a large number of diverse viruses including filoviruses,

lyssavirus and paramyxoviruses among others. Coronavirus has ravaged the world and caught many countries off guard, with over two million deaths recorded, even in the most technologically and economically advanced nations of the world.

The emergence of the Internet-mediated digital platforms otherwise known as the social media have provided opportunities for organisations and people across the world to interact and interface on a wide variety of issues from formal to informal. Many scholars like Benoit, 1995; Coombs, 2014, 2015; Jin & Liu, 2010 have conceptualised crisis and how organizations and individuals apply different strategies to manage crises under various circumstances and what tools can be used to measure the effectiveness of crisis communication (Cheng, 2016). The social network sites (SNS) like *Facebook, WhatsApp, LinkedIn, Flickr, Google Plus, Twitter* among many others provide avenues for User Generated Content (UGC) by giving people opportunity to ventilate their views and emotions on salient socio-political and economic and health issues like the COVID-19 pandemic through dialogic and fast media communication.

Theoretical Framework

Because humour is a multidisciplinary field of research this study is anchored on the principles of the conventional postulations on humour, that is, the Relief and Incongruity theories. The Relief theory, according to Anindya (2012) citing Cooper (2008) has its origins in the ideas of Sigmund Freud who believed that the pleasure obtained from a humorous event or utterance originated in the unconscious realms of our mind. The process of humour is therefore seen as a defence mechanism on the part of the ego and the superego to circumvent reality and protect themselves from the emotional consequences of adverse real-life situations. Freud also believed that humour (primarily in the form of jokes) was a means by which people could release their suppressed aggressive and sexual instinctive urges in a socially acceptable manner. Humour is therefore seen a vent through which people get relief from the tensions that originate in their desires or fears (Anindya, 2012).

The Incongruity theory of humour, on the other hand, is a linguistic theory and it is the most influential approach to the study of humour and laughter. The theory is credited to Immanuel Kant,

in the eighteenth century. The theory posits that the cause of laughter in every case is simply the sudden perception of the incongruity between a concept and the real objects which have been thought through it in some relation, and the laugh itself is just an expression of this incongruity.

The incongruity theory holds that when jokes are examined, two objects are presented through a single concept, or 'frame'. The concept becomes applied to both objects and the objects become similar. Hence, as the joke progresses, it becomes apparent that this concept only applies to one of the two objects and thus the difference between the objects or their concepts becomes apparent. This is what is called incongruity(Rutter,1997).

To many people however, it is not the incongruity itself, but the congruous resolution of the apparent incongruity that makes a certain situation funny. That is why we speak of the incongruity resolution theory. As a linguistic theory, incongruity explains how jokes are structured and does not pay attention to the influence of the surrounding factors. Besides, some critics are of the opinion that this theory cannot explain why the audience can hear a joke more than one time and still find it funny and why not all incongruities are funny.

to tease out usable data relevant to the focus of the research from the gamut of messages on the *Facebook* walls of selected contacts. A total of 105 images, cartoons including video skits that trended on the pandemic between March and July 2020 were purposively selected and analyzed from the pages of 422 contacts. The Coding Scheme was based on humour types – irony, oxymoron, parody, satire, sarcasm, jokes, caricature and mischief; while the units of analysis included written texts, images and videos. A coding manual was designed to capture exclusively the content categories (in this case, the humour types), the direction i. e Positive, Negative or Neutral and the possible frames of the units of analysis. Entries were done in coding sheets by two coders specially trained on the use of the coding manual. Inter-coder reliability co-efficient was 82.6 through Holsti's (1969) Reliability Coefficient of

$$R = \frac{2M}{Ni + Nj}$$

(where M = total items agreed upon by coders , Ni = total items Coder I selected and Nj = total items coder J selected).The data were thereafter analysed inferentially.

Method
The study adopted the Content Analytical method

Table 1: Patterns of the deployment of Humour as a Crisis Communication Tool during COVID-19

Themes	Frequency	%
Education/Enlightenment	07	6.6
Gender Relations	02	1.9
Cynicism	13	12.4
Expose Contradictory Govt. policy	19	18.1
Reveal People's ignorance on issues surrounding COVID-19	26	24.8
Expose economic hardship on lockdown	22	20.9
Family/ Domestic issues	10	9.5
Social Problems	06	5.7
Total	**105**	**100**

Source: Research,2020

Results in table 1 show that out of the eight classifications of the themes and focus of the 105 humour messages analysed during the research period, 26 (24.8%) were used to reveal the people's ignorance and lack of awareness on the basic issues on the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria. Next to this in terms of prominence were messages exposing the economic hardship which the lockdown occasioned by the pandemic foisted on the people. 22 (20.9%) of the humour themes captured this. Messages that revealed the contradictions in Government policies and actions on the pandemic featured in 19 stories (18.1%) , followed by messages which revealed the people's unbelief of government's sincerity on the pandemic 13(12.4%) while family feuds and domestic issues arising from the lockdown featured in 10 times ,that is 9.5% of the incidences selected analysed. Themes bothering on education/enlightenment on Coronavirus appeared 7 times (6.6%), while those focusing on social problems like the inability to worship in churches and mosques, ban on social gatherings etc. had 6 appearances (5.7%) while issues that bothered on Gender relations featured least with 2 items (1.9%).

The implication of the data in Table 1 is that Nigerians used humour as a deliberate strategy to identify the basic fault-lines in government's policies and actions on the pandemic. At a time when billions of naira were reportedly donated and voted to combat the COVID-19 scourge the humour messages revealed a great hiatus between government's claims and the actual reality on the ground. For instance, as revealed by the data in table 1, many of the jokes that trended both in the skits, cartoons or images were on the confusion generated by the name of the pandemic. Many Nigerians due to illiteracy and inadequate awareness could not pronounce Coronavirus let alone understand what it stood for. Hence we heard "Corolla or Corombiafilus", "Kolona "vailus" etc. In one of the instances, a fifteen year old school boy explained his understanding of the COVID-19 concept thus:

> *Korombiafailus is kinnikanbayi, to ma npayanlatiChina.That if you do like this Haaatchi!!!! Otikoo…*(Translation: Corona virus is something like this that kills people from China, that if you sneeze,you are already infected!!!)

In another skit to show people's unbelief and contradiction in government's policy on the pandemic, a comedian @ *Socrates – Classified* produced the following dialogue:

Interviewer: How do you see social distancing?

Interviewee: *How can you see what is not there? There is nothing like social distancing in Nigeria. Whether you like to hear it or not, people are still gathering together in this country somewhere. Although we accept the apology from the Federal Government for violating the social distancing order during the funeral of the Chief of Staff, I am talking about Abba Kyari. Because the way people gather at that man's funeral, even the man was not comfortable with it. So, make Nigerians no de complain. If not for what people would say, do you know that the heat those crowd generated would have been enough for that man to resurrect? But the man say no; if he resurrect now Nigerians no go believe, they will say nawayo.*

Let's first thank God that corona in Nigeria is different from the one in Italy and the one in US. Do you know the corona virus in our country is so merciful, patient and full of understanding? It does not spread through social gathering. The one here, it works with time and date. How now? Our leaders are the one regulating our corona virus. That's why they always tell us; from 7 am to 3 pm, market will open. Then, from 3 pm onward, we can go home and start hiding from the virus. In other places, market now holds 3 days interval. Oh! Nigeria, I hail o! If not that the corona virus in Nigeria had a listening ear, people for don die just like fowl!

Do you know as you are talking now, a football match took place in Kano yesterday, with massive turn-out? People were celebrating and violating the social distancing order. While in Lagos State we have another group called themselves "One million boys". They are in the streets terrorising the streets of Lagos, looking for million. I don't think there

is corona virus in Nigeria o. Because if e dey, so many souls would have gone. What are you telling me?
On this note, on behalf of my fellow Nigerians, I want to appreciate the corona virus in Nigeria for not spreading through social gathering like other countries and also for giving our leaders a listening ear. And lastly, for not taking advantage of our ignorance. Make I drink water before I go die.

Many instances of comical productions like the ones highlighted featured in the analysed skits, cartoons and images hiding some sad truths on the Nigerian realities in the cloaks of entertainment. This corroborates Tabares (2009) position on the capability of humour to excite and at the same time provoke deep reflections.

Research Question 2: What were the most prominent categories/forms of humourRepresentation by Nigerians in COVID-19

Table 2: Forms of HumourRepresentation

Forms of Humour	Frequency	%
Textual	13	11.4
Images	29	27.6
Audiovisuals	64	60.9
Total	**105**	**100**

Source: Research,2020

Data in table 2 show that Audio-visuals (skits, i.e short drama sketches) were the dominant forms of humour representations on the COVID-19 by Nigerians. This category alone feature 64 times (60.9%) from the 105 total items selected. This was followed by images 29 (27.6%) and humorous textual messages which had 13(11.4%) mentions. This clearly reveals that the proliferation of recording and editing devices in phones and other communication gadgets and appliances have contributed to the growing popularity of Audio-visual skits as a mediumof public communication on *Facebook* and other social media platforms by Nigerians. The average Nigerian Facebook or Social Media user has thus become a producer of what is now known in digital communication parlance as user generated content (UGC).

Research Question 3: What were the dominant frames of the messages in the analysed humours?

Table 3: The Dominant Frames of COVID-19 Humours

Frames	Frequency	%
Condemn	33	31.4
Neutral	05	4.8
Sympathetic	24	22.8
Cynicism	43	40.9
Total	**105**	**100**

Source: Research, 2020

Results in table 3 show that 43 (40.9%) and 33(31.4%) of the messages in the selected humours generally tilted towards cynicism and condemnation of government's policies and actions on the pandemic respectively. 24 of the stories which constituted 22.8% adopted sympathetic, that is, tone or frames supportive of government's position on COVID-19 while 5 (4.8%) maintained a neutral/ non- committal stance. This revelation appears consistent with the pervading distrust of government and its handling of the Coronavirus pandemic. Many Nigerians, including some governors believed that the COVID-19 narratives were heavily politicized because of the anticipated foreign aids as exemplified in the following transcription from one of the skits:

> **Speaker:** There is a lot of mad man[sic] among you. What is the name of the corona in Nigeria? It is not original Covid-19. If it is original, will a Covid-19 patient protest? Will he be eating turkey, goat meat and moin-moin, big ones like this. You put them in Gombe Barrack, you said they have Covid-19. They don't have anything, they are out there protesting. They have mixed with people without covid-19. Don't you see that the country is in chaos? Who is lying? What is the name of Covid-19 that Nigeria has? What I want to say is that why is Nigeria thing always different? The other countries having covid-19 show covid-19 patients in the news, so that people will know that there is covid-19 and be cautious of it. It is only live scores that Nigeria do show us on television, that it has increase [sic]**.** Why is Nigeria Covid-19 different? Have never seen a Covid-19 patient eating big turkey, goat meat, moin-moin in the hospital and his doing very fine.

This scenario confirms McQuails (2010)'s position that the audience adopts the frames of reference offered by journalists and to see the world in a similar way.

Research Question 4:Which Genres of Humour were prominent in COVID-19 Communication by Nigerians?

Table 4: Prominent Genres of Humour in Nigerian used by Nigerians on COVID-19

Humour Genres	Frequency	%
Irony	08	7.6
Oxymoron	02	1.9
Parody	09	8.6
Satire	33	31.4
Sarcasm	19	18.1
Jokes	24	22.8
Caricatures	06	5.7
Mischief	04	3.8
Total	**105**	**100**

Source: Research, 2020

Table 4 reveals that Satires constituted the highest genres of humour used by Nigerians as COVID -19 communication strategy at a frequency count of 33 (31.4%), followed by Jokes 24 (22.8%) and Sarcasm 19(18.1%).Parody, in the context of this study refers to a form of humour which dwells on the imitation of real characters of key government officials cum politicians through mimicry or deliberate exaggeration for comic effect, recorded 9 frequency counts amounting to 8.6% while humours bothering on irony had 8 (7.6%), Caricatures 6(5.7%), Mischief 4(3.8%) and Oxymoron recorded 2(1.9%) frequency counts respectively. The difference between Satire and Parody in the instance of the skits analysed in this study consists in the observation that satire combines irony and exaggeration in a bid to expose, ridicule or criticize the observed stupidity the errors/vices of people in the corridor of power. Examples of these abound in the COVID-19 humours. In one of the skits, for instance, a senator wearing nose mask at the senate chamber

'unconsciously' removed his mask, sneezed and thereafter replaced the mask to the consternation and amusement of his colleagues. This action was the exact opposite of what the mask was meant for. Other instances that the satires, irony and parody highlighted were the contradictions in government actions such as the mammoth crowds that witnessed the burials of Politically Exposed Persons (PEPs) who were victims of the pandemic in spite of protocols on social distancing.

Research Question 5: Who were the major speakers in the humours / whose viewpoints were mostly expressed in the humours?

Table 5: Main speakers whose viewpoints were captured in COVID-19 Humour Communication

Main Speakers	Frequency	%
Politicians	04	3.8
Ordinary Folks	36	34.3
Comedians	57	54.3
Nollywood OAPs	03	2.9
Government/ Health Officials	02	1.9
Religious Leaders/ Groups	03	2.9
Total	**105**	**100**

Source: Research,2020

From table 5 it is obvious that comedians formed the bulk of the main speakers in the humours captured in the COVID-19 exchanges with a frequency count of 57 (54.3%) of the total 105 messages analysed thus being the primary definers of the agenda pushed to the digital sphere for public discourse. This was followed by messages from ordinary folks with 36 (34.3%) of total stories selected for analysis. 13, that is 2.9% of the humours had On - Air- Personalities from the Nigerian movie industry , otherwise known as Nollywood as the main speakers. Politicians constituted 4 (3.8%) of the main speakers in the humour communication while Religious leaders and Government Officials formed the least group of main speakers with 3 (2.9%) and 2 (1.9%) respectively. The implication of this data is that the viewpoints majorly espoused by the messages of humour during the COVID-19 pandemic were basically those that emphasized the salience of issues that affected the masses as highlighted by the voices of comedians and ordinary folks as main speakers. It is however interesting to discover that government including health officials did not maximally exploit the growing popularity of humour as an effective crisis management tool to communicate on the pandemic. This could have accounted for the high level of cynicism and distrust of government policies and actions on the pandemic.

Recommendations
Based on the findings from this research, the following recommendations are hereby proposed.

i. Government in Nigeria is yet to fully appreciate the communication value of humours as a crisis communication tool. This was reflected in the fact that only in a few circumstances were humour deployed as a strategy to create awareness on the COVID-19. Consequently the Nigerian , should as a matter of deliberate policy inject humour in its communication plan especially during crisis periods both as a means of defusing tension and also to communicate salient truths such as it is being done in the White House Correspondents Dinner speech in America and other developed nations.

ii. This study has shown to a large extent that humor is a powerful instrument for engendering human relations and improving communication interaction among people. But a lot the humour exchanges are still being done in largely loose and uncoordinated manner. Scholars, Regulatory bodies like the National Broadcasting Commission and associated groups should come up with

ways and means of moderating exchanges in the digital space to make such communications align with ethical and public taste.

Conclusion.

This study examined the use of humour as a crisis communication strategy during the COVID-19 pandemic. The basic engagement was to determine through content analysis the , the pattern of humour messages, including their direction, speakers, forms of representations and the main themes of the prominent humours that trended during the pandemic in the Nigerian digital space, especially Facebook. Findings showed that Nigerians, because of its light-hearted nature, used humour as a potent tool to communicate hard and pungent truths to power --- a feat which they would not have had the opportunity to accomplish through other means. This confirmed the thesis established in the literature that through a shared experience, humour helps us to recognize reality as ridiculous, inexcusable and needing change. Hence, instead of abandoning humour in the hands of the people alone, government can, and should creatively pro deploy humour in its public communication blueprint to manage crisis by defusing tension as it is done other developed economies of the world.

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