



Article

Mainstreaming and Weaponizing Satire in Nigerian Journalism Practice

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Abstract: Satire has gained increased scholarly traction across journalism and related fields. The genre increases the entertainment value of journalism and broadens its appeal. Satirical news also serves as a catalyst to pique the curiosity of ordinarily disinterested audiences in news, particularly political news. However, there are some concerns emerging from the weaponization of satire in this contemporary period, which is characterised by the proliferation of fake news and misinformation. From the Nigerian context, there have been minimal empirical spotlights placed on satirical journalism. We employed semi-structured interviews to explore the views of Nigerian print satirical journalists and cartoonists. Our finding broadens scholarship in the evolving area of satirical journalism. It demonstrates how the mainstreaming and the weaponization of satire have changed the texture of satire in Nigerian journalism. Although ethical concerns are admitted, we argue that cartoonists and satirical journalists have a responsibility to adjust to the dynamic media ecology, where satire continuously provides insightful critique and entertaining commentaries.

Keywords: satire; satirical journalism; Nigerian journalism; political communication; cartoon journalism; fake news; weaponisation of satire; defamation



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1. Introduction

Satire has added an extra layer to the vibrant and dynamic Nigerian media landscape. Its function in Nigerian media has developed into a strong force that both entertains and influences. Satire, once a specialised style of humour and commentary, has morphed into a ubiquitous component of the global media landscape (Peifer and Lee 2019). It serves as more than just a means of amusement; it also serves as a platform for voicing disagreement, criticising the elite, and influencing public opinion (Brewer et al. 2018). The interesting world of mainstreaming and weaponizing satire within Nigerian journalism practise is explored in this article. We examine how satire has developed beyond its humorous origins to become a potent instrument with the ability to both delight and cause harm. We hope to shed light on the intricate relationship between humour, satire, and journalistic ethics in Nigeria. This area of scholarship remains underexplored, especially in the Nigerian context. Thus, in a country where freedom of expression and responsibility are constantly in flux, this article explores the influence and ramifications of satire.

Satire is a type of humour that uses irony, mockery, and sarcasm to criticise and critique various facets of society (Koivukoski and Ödmark 2020). In the realm of journalism, it has a lengthy and illustrious history (Hersey 2013). Satire in Nigeria has not only persisted but also undergone tremendous development, acting as a mirror to the country's dynamic political, social, and cultural landscapes (Bello 2022). Tracing its origins, looking at key figures, and grasping how it developed to hold a major position in the media are necessary steps in order to understand satire's place in Nigerian journalism today. Thus, in Nigeria, satire, memes, cartoons, and what Ellis (1989) termed "pavement radios" have

stepped up to fill the void and the shortcomings of the “captured” major media sources. In essence, satire has provided a voice to the majority of Nigerian audiences so that they can challenge the dominant narratives of the “captured” conventional media sources (Mano 2007), even though they may be appropriately referred to as “informal circuits of information” distribution (Ogbodo 2021). In this context, satirists, who were once viewed as jokers and fools, have gained enormous followings that include audiences who rely on them for amusement and for examining social anomalies.

With their clever and frequently provocative content, satirical journalists were instrumental in the struggle for independence (Newell 2016; Ogbodo 2021). The *West African Pilot* stands out among these newspapers for its satirical cartoons and commentary that were critical of colonial rulers (Newell 2016). The publication frequently employed caricatures of British officials and colonial customs to use humour to both amuse readers and covertly criticise the colonial regime. This early example of satire demonstrates the use of humour as a tool of expression and resistance in Nigeria.

Cartoons, on the other hand, are a hybrid genre that largely focuses on “distortions and exaggerations” (Eko 2007). As Farwell and Henning (1989, p. 9) rightly argued, cartoons “characteristically puncture pretension or single out vulnerable features in a target”. Through symbols and visual metaphors, cartoonists can “simplify and communicate complicated ideas and concepts” (Eko 2007, p. 221). Eko, who has written extensively on newspaper cartoons across Africa and Europe, examined how four African newspapers employed cartoons to “dehumanise and deterritorialize” African leaders. Despite its growing popularity and integration into the mainstream media, Eko (2015) rightly observed that cartooning remains a dangerous craft because African leaders generally hate to be ridiculed and offended. This political culture puts cartoonists and satirical journalists in difficult position.

The importance of satire in journalism expanded after Nigeria attained independence in 1960, reflecting the unprecedented freedom and the challenges ahead of the country. Theatre became an epicentre for political satire to pioneering satirists like Hubert Ogunde and Duro Ladipo (Olusegun 2018). They used play and folklore to criticise politicians and societal problems. These performances attracted sizable audiences and successfully conveyed their themes, demonstrating the popularity and relatability of satire among the general public.

The satirical tradition was further upheld in the 1970s and 1980s by individuals like Ken Saro-Wiwa, who published satirical newspaper columns and used humour to make political and environmental commentary (Dunton 1998). Satirical works by Saro-Wiwa were crucial in bringing attention to the Niger Delta’s destruction as a result of crude oil exploration. His sarcastic writing approach raised awareness of these important issues on a national and international level, demonstrating the effectiveness of satire in bringing about change (Pegg 2000).

The development of the Internet in the 1990s gave Nigerian media new satirical outlets. Websites and other internet platforms were used as forums for satirical content, which frequently targeted public figures, like politicians. Websites such as www.kraks.co, www.zikoko.com, and www.laugh.com.ng, designed for humour and entertainment, often exploit the inconspicuousness of the Internet to provide hard-hitting critiques without fear of repercussions (Ogbodo 2021). Although there are some legal concerns about these websites (Todd 2016), the emergence of such online channels challenges the dominance of conventional news outlets by providing an avenue for more nuanced debates through the use of satire.

Satirical TV shows and online channels also started to become more popular in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Satire was used in shows like *The New Masquerade* to mock different actors in Nigeria, using subtle and, sometimes, harsh ways (Nwankwo 2015). These programmes, which frequently included skits and parodies, made satire accessible to a wider audience by targeting people of different backgrounds.

The emergence of some radio stations and their talk programmes in the 2000s also marked another watershed moment in the history of satire in Nigerian journalism. Satirical radio programmes, such as Unity FM's *Enyo*, gave satirical journalists the opportunity to interact directly with the listeners, as well as offer real-time analysis on breaking news. This programme frequently featured personas who mocked public personalities, politicians, and notable people, illustrating how satire can be used to monitor and expose people involved in social anomalies. Satire's rise in Nigerian media, meanwhile, was never devoid of obstacles. For their scathing humour, satirists often face legal quagmire, censorship, and, sometimes, bodily harm. For example, the 2015 "cyberstalking" arrest of well-known blogger and satirist Maik Nwosu highlighted the persistent conflicts between satirists and the government; it also highlighted the thin line between satire and perceived falsehood (Ashiru 2021). Moreover, Agba Jalingo, a journalist with *Peoples Gazette* and publisher of *CrossRiverWatch* has been arrested a number of times on charges of defamation and other allegations. Similarly, a report by the Committee to Protect Journalists detailed how two journalists—Alfred Olufemi and Gidado Yushua—were convicted in Kwara State magistrate court for defamation and conspiracy. The satirical report deemed defamatory, entitled "Inside Kwara Factory where Indian Hemp is legalised" by Alfred Olufemi, was published on 19 May 2018. The two journalists were arrested and charged in 2019.

Thus, as the foregoing has demonstrated, satire in Nigerian journalism adds to the changing value of satire and wit in the country's media environment. From its intent as a means of entertainment and resistance, satire has witnessed a dynamic evolution in the digital media era as a tool for social and political commentary. The propensity of satire to entertain, attack, and inspire change in the society remains its outstanding strength (Keane 2008), particularly in the complex and multifaceted world of Nigerian journalism.

1.1. Mainstreaming Satire in Nigerian Media Sphere

In this study, mainstreaming of satire has to do with integrating satirical elements or techniques into the conventional news reportage. It is the fusion of criticism and entertainment into news reporting. The mainstreaming of satire in journalism marks a fundamental shift in the Nigerian media environment. Satire, formerly confined to journalism's periphery, has evolved into a strong and pervasive force, smoothly blending wit, humour, and incisive criticism throughout the nation's news channels (Amaefula 2023). This change is a reaction to the complexity of Nigerian society, as well as a change in how news is processed. One must first recognise the convergence of the digital revolution with satirical journalism in order to comprehend the increasing acceptance of satire in Nigerian journalism (Bello 2022). Satirical content is now more widely available than ever, making it possible for individual artists, as well as established media outlets to reach audiences across the globe (Tang and Bhattacharya 2011).

Satire-oriented websites and social media pages have gained massive followings. A few instances include *Keepin it Real with Adeola* by Adeola Fayehun, which airs on numerous digital platforms, and *Pararan Mock News* by Ken Nwadiogbu, which is very popular on Facebook and YouTube. The shows give a well-liked Nigerian viewpoint on both local and global affairs. The growing popularity and profitability of these shows demonstrate how much satirical journalism is spreading. These websites create satirical material that appeals to Nigerians at home and in the diaspora. Social media's ability to spread swiftly increases the effect and audience reach of satirical content (Ogbodo 2021).

Additionally, the growth of satirical YouTube channels has given comedians and satirists opportunities to interact with viewers through videos (Amaefula 2023). Also, channels such as Bovi's *Back to School* and Mark Angel Comedy have amassed millions of subscribers and engagements, demonstrating the impact of satire as an alternative journalism in Nigeria.

1.2. Mainstream Media's Adoption of Satire

The attractiveness of satire and its capacity to engage people has also been noted by Nigeria's mainstream media sources. Satirical columns, articles, and cartoons have been included in national dailies like *The Guardian* and *The Punch*. These periodicals draw a wider readership by using satire as a method to present novel viewpoints on political and social topics (Olaniyan 2015). Radio and television also carry mocking talk shows that mix humour and current events, while mocking news segments are a staple of television newscasts (Koivukoski and Ödmark 2020).

The unique feature of satirical journalism is that it is based on the writer's perception and subjective stance. This is unlike the traditional form of journalism built largely around objectivity. This kind of journalism employs comic strips and caricatures to convey insights to audiences. As Abioye (2009) rightly pointed out, the use of satire in newspaper discourse has expanded with time. A satirical journalist is typically never tired of identifying and criticising the different problems afflicting the society and, in some cases, recommending solutions. Therefore, satire emerges when social issues need to be addressed. In fact, satire is becoming more and more prevalent in Nigerian print media.

Newspaper satirists like Olatunji Dare of *The Guardian*, who later worked for *The Nation*, have employed this stylistic device to attack social ills in the society. Newspaper satire that is done well is, in fact, topical. This implies that the reader/audience must find it interesting and timely in general. Not only must the topic be of interest, but the writer also has a responsibility to connect with the reader on a level playing field. According to Zakaluk and Samuels (1988), satirists typically presume that the audience possesses the skills and resources needed for a thorough understanding of their style.

In *The Guardian* and, more recently, in *The Nation* newspapers, Olatunji Dare utilized satire to question why academics at universities suddenly became "patently irrelevant" and "downright subversive". Famous among Olatunji Dare's satirical pieces is "The 100-days game", which is just as important now as it was back then. In this instance, Dare trivialises the "100-day game" to the point of absurdity. Similarly, and by lexical expansion, he compares the first 100 days of any public officeholder anywhere to his five years as a writer for *The Guardian*:

"A new game's come to town. Actually, it is not so new. . . .The 100th day itself has become a quintessential pseudo-event for government as well as the news media. For the government it is an occasion for flaunting real as well as contrived achievements, for putting the best face on failures, and for remarking the good fortune of the people. . . .It is, most significantly, an occasion for demanding sacrifices and giving fair warning that whereas constructive critics are ever so welcome, fault finders no matter how highly placed should be prepared for the consequences of their temerity.

"For the newspapers it is an opportunity to coax professional congratulators and would-be contractors to buy advertising space to express their pride and satisfaction in being associated with an administration that has done such wonderful things in only 100 days in office" (*The Guardian*, 12 April, 9, cited in Abioye 2009, p. 145).

Dare further suggests that, in accordance with the above new reality,

"contractors ought to be willing to celebrate the 100th day of winning a major contract and that swinging men and women should jubilate over the first 100 days of their latest dalliance. Couples need not wait for a year to celebrate their wedding anniversary when they can, while the romance is still torrid, have a 100th-day bash. And why wait for your baby's first birthday when you can celebrate his first 100 days on earth? Why can't undergraduates celebrate their first 100 days in the university? On graduating, why can't they celebrate their first 100 days of liberation from those tyrannical lecturers and professors? . . ." (*The Guardian*, 12 April, 9 cited in Abioye 2009, p. 145).

Dare begins by explaining to his audience where the 100-day game came from. In order to commemorate these 100 days, he satirises public officials who plan talks, symposia, prayers in churches and mosques, commercials and non-commercials, congratulatory messages, and solidarity rallies, among other activities lined up to celebrate little or nothing. According to the conceptual interpretation, there are various ways that people commemorate reaching 100 days in office. But the writer's goal is very different. He is implying that this is no longer a time to evaluate accomplishments but rather that it has turned into a competition where everyone must demonstrate that he has made progress.

It is quite another matter completely whether this aligns with the reality on the ground. Dare makes fun of media outlets who beg for ads, even though they are aware that these people have accomplished nothing. Dare bemoans *"the sheer vulgarity of the self-congratulation that many a public officer is wont to indulge in, and the brazen sycophancy of hangers-on that fuels it . . . when much of it is paid for with public funds, it is all the more disquieting when we add that what is being celebrated is hollow achievement, then it is positively reprehensible"* (The Guardian, 12 April, 9 cited [Abioye 2009](#), p. 144).

1.3. Theoretical Underpinning

This study is underpinned by perception theory, which focuses on the nature of satire and how it is de/constructed in different discourses. The theory was propounded by Koenraad [Kuiper \(1984\)](#). The theory explains how audiences make sense of the satirical discourses directed at government, prominent personalities, and public officers, who are usually the targets of the satirical attacks. Perceptual theory explores a range of elements that influence our perception of reality, including sensation, attention, and interpretations.

The mainstreaming and weaponization of satire in Nigerian journalism practice can be underpinned by this theory. Satire has been used in Nigerian journalism to express ideas, critique social mores, and, occasionally, even to challenge politicians. Satire depends on the perception and interpretation of both the satirist and the audience and is frequently a mixture of humour and criticism. Perceptual theory becomes important in this scenario since it affects delivery, comprehension, and reactions to satirical information.

When weaponised in journalism, satire can sway public opinion. According to perceptual theory, a person's perception is shaped by a combination of sensory information, attention, and interpretation ([Kuiper et al. 2010](#)). When satire is infused into journalism, it uses humour to draw readers' attention, while also delivering deeper messages. However, depending on the satirist's unique characteristics, cultural background, and social situation, satire can be interpreted in many different ways ([Rookes and Willson 2005](#)).

In Nigeria, where media usually covers sociopolitical concerns and barriers to free press, the weaponization of satire has served as both a tool for societal critique and a source of contention. Satire often highlights cultural norms, governmental inefficiency, and societal evils in order to elicit critical thought from the audiences. However, satire's effectiveness as a weapon in journalism depends greatly on how the audience perceives and understands it.

In analysing how various satirical journalists construct their realities using the tenets of perceptual theory, different meanings can be deduced. Some journalists may view satire as a light-hearted kind of amusement on political commentary or underlying criticism that is present. However, others see it as a potent kind of protest that questions authority and promotes social reflection. Various interpretations are shaped by various factors, such as exposure, education, and political opinions. Furthermore, how humour is interpreted might be influenced by perceptual biases ([Buijzen and Valkenburg 2004](#)). For example, confirmation bias may cause people to read satire in a manner that supports their preconceived notions or ideas. This prejudice may lessen the effect of the satirical content by either amplifying the intended message or causing misunderstandings.

The difficulty of cultural nuances arises when sarcasm is weaponized in Nigerian journalism. In certain cultural contexts, satire that is deemed appropriate may be interpreted as insulting or misinterpreted. The significance of comprehending cultural variations in

perception is emphasised by perceptual theory, which also highlights how satire can be interpreted very differently by different groups (Rookes and Willson 2005). Additionally, when it comes to how satirical content is received, perceptual adaptation is in effect. People who often read satirical journalism may experience a desensitisation effect, in which they grow acclimated to the tone and purpose of satire and eventually change how they perceive its impact (Ogbodo 2021).

Ethical issues are brought to light in relation to Nigerian journalism's weaponization of satire. Although satire may be a powerful tool for critical discourse and social change, its weaponization necessitates a careful balancing act between ethical journalism and freedom of speech. The ethical duty of media outlets to think about how their satirical content can be seen and its possible ramifications in a varied and frequently divisive society is highlighted by perception theory.

Thus, the application of perceptual theory offers a framework for comprehending how people perceive and comprehend satirical content in Nigerian media. While satire is a potent tool for social criticism, its weaponization depends on perception complexities, cultural quirks, and ethical issues. Applying perception theory within an ethical framework that takes into account the duties of cartoonists and journalists is, therefore, important. When navigating the ethical limits of satire, these frameworks may take into account ideas like honesty, justice, and a dedication to the common good in order to prevent defamation, disinformation, or injury while providing critical commentary.

There has been a minimal empirical spotlight placed on the fusion of satire and journalism practice in the Nigerian context. A lot is not known about how the mainstreaming and weaponisation of satire shape the work of journalists and cartoonists. We attempt to broaden scholarship in this area. Therefore, relying on the views of Nigerian print journalists and cartoonists, we addressed the following research questions:

RQ1. *How has the mainstreaming of satire in Nigerian journalism influenced the work of satirical journalists and cartoonists?*

RQ2. *How do print media satirical journalists and cartoonists view the ethical boundaries of satire in Nigerian journalism, and how do they navigate these boundaries in their work?*

RQ3. *In the face of the weaponisation of satire in Nigerian journalism, how do satirical journalists and cartoonists respond to the challenges of misinformation, defamation, and ethical concerns?*

2. Materials and Method

Semi-structured interviews with satirical journalists and cartoonists were conducted to elicit information about their viewpoints on satire, its influence on journalism, and the ethical concerns it raises. This approach made it possible to explore their experiences, difficulties, and moral questions about satire in greater detail. According to research, the semi-structured interview technique is useful for analysing the explicit and implicit conceptualizations of work practise that may be inferred by attentively listening to the participants (Schultz 2007). The opinions of those who create satirical journalism and cartoons must be heard in order to deepen our grasp of this insufficiently studied subject in Nigeria.

Sample Selection

Four journalists were purposively selected for this study. They include experienced journalists who have written satirical pieces. Three cartoonists were then chosen based on their popularity in satirical cartooning. Two of the cartoonists have shared their work on well-known platforms and in print publications. The other one was contacted via snowball sampling. To obtain a diverse perspective on satire in Nigerian journalism, particularly in the context of mainstreaming and weaponizing it, we ended up with seven participants.

3. Results and Discussion

The results from this study are discussed in themes derived from the research questions. They border on how the mainstreaming of satire in Nigerian journalism influenced the work and attitudes of journalists and cartoonists; how journalists and cartoonists view the ethical boundaries of satire in Nigerian journalism, and how they navigate these boundaries; and the weaponisation of satire in Nigerian journalism, and how participants respond to the challenges of misinformation and defamation. In the results and analysis that follow, participants were anonymised. J represents (satirical) Journalist, and C = Cartoonist. Then, J1 and C1 = Journalist number 1 and Cartoonist number 1, respectively.

3.1. Mainstreaming Satire into Nigerian Journalism and Its Influence on the Work and Attitudes of Journalists and Cartoonists

Participants provided contexts regarding how the mainstreaming of satire in Nigerian journalism influenced their work and attitudes. To this end, one of them notes that, “as a journalist in Nigeria, I have personally seen the changes that the mainstreaming of satire has made to our industry. The inclusion of satire in Nigerian journalism, formerly thought of as a specialised type of entertainment, has had a huge impact on our job as well as attitudes” (J1). The participant continued by saying that “mainstreaming of satire has increased audience involvement. . . satire has dramatically increased audience engagement with our work”. Research suggests that, due to their humour and relatability, satirical contents frequently draw more readers and viewers than other some news stories (Bello 2022). The participant notes that “this has inspired us as journalists to use more captivating storytelling tactics in our reporting, opening up the news to a wider audience” (J1).

Regarding the influence of satire on journalism practice, J1 notes that “the influence of satire on my work and attitudes has been nothing short of revolutionary. . . Satire is no longer restricted to the margins, it now occupies a central position in journalism. This has helped me reach more people and have a bigger impact on the public conversation”. Elaborating this further, J1 notes that “satire provides a unique avenue for me to express my opinions, critique bad governance, and comment on social issues”. Thus, it is safe to say that satire’s mainstreaming has highlighted the value of freedom of expression by allowing satirists to push the boundary and challenge the status quo through wit and humour.

On the other hand, J2 points out that satire offers the audiences an alternative viewpoint. “Satire provides a different lens through which to see complex topics as a result. It inspires us to think creatively about how we convey information and challenges the conventional approach of simple news reporting. This effect has encouraged many of us to investigate fresh perspectives for our articles, fostering a more vibrant and diversified journalism environment”. Scholarship in this area suggests that satirical discourse has the ability to address topics that conventional media might not adequately cover. In fact, Asher et al. (2021) observe that satirists frequently shine their spotlights on the underrepresented or underprivileged groups. By giving a voice to those who might not otherwise have one in mainstream media, satirical content can bring attention to problems like social injustice, corruption, or violations of human rights.

Indeed, J3 notes that “satire stimulates critical interaction with current events and political developments. . . My capacity to analyse complicated problems, discover unspoken truths, and expose follies through humour has improved as a result. I take my work seriously because satire is about more than just making people laugh; it’s also about holding the authorities accountable”. The challenge here, as J2 suggests, is that “the mainstreaming of satire has presented ethical dilemmas that one must navigate”. Despite the fact that humour is one of the aims of satire, participants appear to be aware of its potential to offend or do harm.

J3 also emphasises that “the presence of satire in journalism has led to greater creativity in our work. . . We’ve mastered the art of writing and reporting with humour, wit, and satire while upholding the fundamentals of journalism. This has enhanced our storytelling and increased our ability to adjust to shifting audience preferences”. Indeed, satire has

contributed to the practice of journalism by adding an additional layer of distinctiveness, as Bailey (2018) notes.

J4 responds by stating that editorial choice has been the key area where this mainstreaming has had an impact. As a result, “satire has changed not only how we report but also what we choose to report on. The satirical presentation of previously unappealing or irrelevant topics has made them more appealing and pertinent to our audience”. The range of subjects that satirical journalists cover has indeed increased as a result of this change in editorial priorities. However, satirical journalists must deal with the difficulties of navigating the ethical lines (Botha 2014). Thus, “while satire has facilitated new creative paths, it has also presented ethical difficulties” (J2). It might be challenging to strike the ideal mix between laughter and responsibility. As such, “Journalists frequently have to walk a fine line between satire and potentially dangerous material, so we must carefully evaluate the effects of our words” (J2). Contributing, J4 adds that “it [satirical journalism] has improved our creativity, audience engagement, and willingness to try out novel storytelling techniques. However, it also challenges us to uphold ethical standards and make responsible editorial choices in our pursuit of engaging and informative journalism”. This implies that the mainstreaming of satire in Nigerian media has altered the way that journalists think and behave towards their craft.

The mainstreaming of satire in Nigerian journalism practice is also aided by cartoonists. According to C2, for instance, “as a cartoonist, the mainstreaming of satire in Nigerian journalism has had a major impact on my art and attitudes, offering numerous possibilities and challenges. . . the acceptance of satire in popular culture has given me more leeway to address pressing issues in a witty and visually appealing way. It enables me to take on challenging subjects and convey them in a clear but powerful manner. This freedom inspires me to think creatively beyond the box and to try out new artistic innovations”. This viewpoint is somewhat consistent with the innovation that journalists emphasised earlier. This also touches on audience involvement raised by journalists (participants). As a result, “satirical cartoons have a wider audience reach due to their enjoyable and thought-provoking nature. This has encouraged me to write material that appeals to a wide range of readers, which has improved engagement and recognition” (C3). In addition, C3 also acknowledges that satirical cartoons are effective tools for social and political commentary. Thus, “they provide me the opportunity to voice my ideas on current affairs, criticise public individuals, and bring to light important social issues”. Such cartoons now have a higher prestige as a result of the growing acceptance of satire which has disrupted journalism as it were.

Cartoonists, like journalists, think that satire encourages “creative expression” and “challenges the ethical boundaries of my work” (C2). In this case, it is vital to strike the correct balance between amusement and serious subject matter. C2 continues, “I must ensure that my cartoons do not harm people or reinforce stereotypes while pushing the boundaries of critical commentary in order to negotiate the difficulties therein”. This opinion was supported by C1, who thinks that, in order for satire to become mainstream, “I must adjust to shifting social and cultural norms. . . In order to maintain the relevance, respect, and social responsibility of my work, it is crucial that I keep aware of the shifting sensibilities of my audience”.

Participants have thus far shown how the mainstreaming of satire in Nigerian journalism has changed cartoonists’ roles. It has given them the confidence to interact with their audience on important topics and offer alternate viewpoints through humour and creativity. Tellingly, it also offers the responsibility to address the ethical concerns and adapt to the ever-evolving media ecology, while continuously providing insightful and entertaining commentaries.

As a result, the mainstreaming of satire in Nigerian media has changed the way satire is presented. It has provided a larger platform from which to interact with a variety of audiences, exercise the right to free speech, and critically evaluate societal and political

issues. While it invites imaginative and funny comments, it also calls for moral deliberation and a dedication to having a significant influence on public opinion.

3.2. Navigating the Ethical Boundaries of Satire in Nigerian Journalism

Views from Nigerian journalists suggest that they see the ethical limits of satire in journalism with a mixture of admiration for its creative potential and a sense of obligation to tread carefully within those limits. A participant notes that “print journalists realise the crucial function satire plays in casting light on societal and political concerns. They value satire’s capacity to hold an audience’s attention and present a different point of view on issues of general concern. This respect encourages journalists to use satire as a vehicle for social analysis and criticism” (J4). The participant adds that managing these limits necessitates striking a delicate balance between responsibility and humour. Because of this, “satirical journalists must know that satire blurs the line between laughter and serious commentary. They must understand the moral obligation to refrain from harm, spreading false information, or defamation. They must ensure that they keep their satirical works within the bounds of acceptable criticism”. Indeed, research argues that satirists should take caution in their craft and be conscious of the possible harm their work can cause in order to navigate the ethical concerns (Ödmark 2021). As such, when targeting people or entities that lack the ability to mitigate the harm, they must take into account the possible effects of their content.

J2 comments and emphasises that staying within these lines is necessary for accuracy and fact-checking. As a result, “satirical journalists should take great care to fact-check the information presented in satirical pieces in order to uphold ethical standards”. Elaborating further, J4 adds that “I am aware that inaccurate information or deliberate misrepresentation can damage reputation of the journalism profession”. Satirical journalists may occasionally experience physical assaults. Indeed, J1 warns that “[Satirical] journalists must avoid using satire as a pretext for personal attacks or character assassinations. . . . They may criticise prominent personalities, but they don’t have to go too far and resort to personal assaults that can damage people’s reputations”. This dedication to responsible satire protects journalistic objectivity (Koivukoski and Ödmark 2020).

Being culturally sensitive is another safer method to navigate these borders. Journalists working in Nigeria’s multicultural and diverse society must be sensitive to cultural nuances. As one of the participants recommends, a satirical journalist must “understand that what may be offensive to one group may be humorous to another. . . . journalists should strive to respect cultural [religious] nuances while parodying by avoiding any material that can alienate or hurt certain populations” (J3).

In response to the same question above, C2 states the following: “As a cartoonist working for a Nigerian newspaper, I approach the moral limits of satire with a great feeling of duty. . . . of course I enjoy using satire to critique and remark on societal issues in a humorous manner. . . . I am aware of its capacity to pique curiosity in viewers, encourage critical thinking, and spark debate—all of which are crucial for a healthy democracy”. The participant further notes that “cartoonists are careful not to do injury or propagate defamation through their work. Although exaggeration and caricature are permitted in satire, I personally avoid making personal insults or disseminating untruths that can harm someone’s reputation. By adhering to moral guidelines, I can continue to use satire as a weapon for constructive criticism” (C2).

Like journalists, cartoonists feel that accuracy and fact-checking are important. In fact, C3 advises that “to preserve ethical standards, cartoonists should stay diligent in fact-checking whatever they utilise as the foundation for their satirical work. It is essential to ensure the accuracy of their information because even satire should be based on reality and errors might damage the reputation of their profession” (C3). Additionally, C1 acknowledges that “cartoonists are aware that their work affects public perception. They want to employ satire for the greater good since they are aware of their influence on how the public perceives them”. To prevent self-serving actions that can weaken the “substance”

(accurate message) while highlighting the “nonsense” (humour), the concept of basing satirical content on the public benefit is crucial (Ogbodo 2021). Additionally, this calls for “avoiding information that can be construed as objectionable to certain cultural or ethnic groups. . .” and “striving to utilise satire to bridge gaps, rather than expand divides” (C2).

For the cartoonists, ethical requirements demand that satire is approached with a blend of artistic licence and societal responsibility. The freedom of expression that satire offers is something that gives satirists the opportunity to critically and creatively challenge the status quo in a fun and interesting way. Nonetheless, policing satirical journalism could create a risky precedent for the right to free speech (Lichtenstein et al. 2021). Thus, while satire encourages humour and irreverence, ethical concern requires satirists to recognise the responsibility to avoid causing harm. Indeed, C3 states that, in order to serve the audience better, “we must understand and demonstrate awareness of the ethical implications of our work. . . we make sure that our work is easily identifiable as humour in order to assist the audience understand the message intended clearly”. As a result, satire in Nigerian journalism has two sides: one is meant to incite change and sway public opinion, and the other is aimed at making those in authority answerable. It also presents moral and legal dilemmas, posing a danger of harm to people and institutions (Ödmark 2021). Satirists, media outlets, and society at large must consider the nuanced effects of weaponised satire as the delicate balance between humour and responsibility continues to be debated. It serves as a reminder that, when used responsibly and with caution, satire may be a force for good.

3.3. Weaponisation of Satire in Nigerian Journalism in the Era of Disinformation

The weaponization of satire refers to the use of satire as a means to attack, ridicule, criticise, and undermine people, authorities, or ideas. Apart from using satire for humour and wit, the weaponization of satire describes the intent to attack or shame the subject of satire. Journalists in Nigeria respond to the issues of false information and defamation with a complex strategy intended to protect the integrity of their profession in the face of the weaponisation of satire in the country’s media. Indeed, J1 asserts that “journalists understand the value of combating misleading information. . . We increase our vigilance in fact-checking our sources and confirming the facts we report in order to handle this difficulty, especially when satire is involved”. J2 continues, “it is a priority to ensure the accuracy of our content in order to stop the spread of hoax. We remain committed to appropriate reporting. We take care not to utilise satirical material that might cause injury to people, damage their reputations, or stir up unwarranted controversy”. Indeed, Daskal (2015) and Ödmark (2021) show how the distinction between satire and harassment can be muddled when it is weaponised. They contend that the immediate nature and ease of access provided by the Internet can magnify the damage done by weaponized satire, particularly when its targets are private individuals with limited means of self-defence. The weaponisation of satire has new dimensions and resources thanks to the digital era. Social media has particularly made it possible for anyone to instantly spread satirical content to a large audience. Journalists must consider the intentions and goals of weaponised satire in order to dissect it for their readers, exposing any potential biases and manipulations.

Satire has developed into a significant instrument for humour and criticism in Nigerian journalism, as well as for the ability to destroy people and institutions. Exploring the effects of “weaponising” satire on journalism and society is necessary in light of the significant ethical and legal issues it poses (Peters and Allan 2022). Journalists are aware of their responsibility for setting satirical content in perspective. They help audiences distinguish between satire and news by describing to the audience the sarcastic nature of the stuff they report on. An audience that is more informed benefits from this transparency. As J1 insists, “many media institutions in Nigeria have developed unambiguous ethical standards for the use of satire in their journalism”. The framework provided by these rules helps journalists to use satire ethically while navigating the difficulties presented by ethical dilemmas and false information. This is crucial because, when used excessively, satirical content might

take the form of character assassination (Dixon and Traninger 2019). This implies that there is a thin line between employing satire to critique public personalities and doing so in a way that is personal. Dixon and Traninger (2019) contend that the latter can cause significant harm and enduring effects for people who are the target.

J3 says in a different comment that “journalists take on the role of educators, helping the public comprehend the potential impact and limitations of satire. They produce articles and reports that explore the moral issues related to satire in an effort to cultivate a more educated and discriminating audience”. In response to fake news, J3 also states that “journalists actively promote critical thinking among their audiences”. The participant stresses the value of cross-referencing material and avoid relying entirely on satirical content for news.

As a result of the aforementioned, weaponizing satire is the deliberate use of sarcastic material to hurt, weaken, or discredit people, groups, or political figures. In fact, according to Kulkarni (2017), satire that is used as a weapon against political persons or organisations has the power to alter popular perceptions and opinions. Decision making and political results may be impacted as a result. This suggests how political actors mock their rivals and frequently amplify their ideas through echo chambers of like-minded supporters. Due to this, public conversation has become more divisive, and dissenting voices have been silenced. The use of humour to purposefully target, insult, or defame particular issues is known as “weaponising” satire. It has always been a type of commentary on culture and politics (Vasilev 2022).

As a cartoonist in the era of the weaponization of cartoons in Nigerian journalism, C1 further asserted, “I respond to the challenges of misinformation and defamation with a commitment to our craft and ethical principles”. As a result, “we are careful in choosing the content we satirise. . . We avoid content that might be false, libellous, or encourage disinformation. We have a duty to entertain and stimulate thought, not to misinform or hurt people”.

C2 notes that “we are aware that satire should not be used to defame people or disseminate untruths. While upholding ethical boundaries, our cartoons seek to engage, challenge, and spark discussion”. Additionally, the participant states that “We take the duty of fact-checking seriously. We make sure the data is accurate before using it as the basis for satirical cartoons. This dedication to accuracy provides protection against the spread of false information” (C2). By putting their work into context, cartoonists make it apparent that their work is sarcastic. This can present some challenges. As C3 admits, “some people might not recognise satire right away, and this clarity helps prevent misunderstandings”.

Indeed, C3 observes that cartoonists also give critical analysis of weaponized cartoons when reporting on them. As such, “we want to provide readers a broader understanding of the possibilities for manipulation or misinformation by analysing the reasons and intentions behind such drawings”. Contributing, C2 asserts that, in this situation, “we engage in discussions on ethical boundaries and the responsible use of humour as a tool for critique and social commentary”.

Thus far, it has been demonstrated that disinformation poses a serious challenge which is often difficult to control, but the actors must ensure that their work is founded in facts and reality. When this is not the case, audiences should be made aware that satirical content is not necessarily a literal representation of fact, rather it is a sort of commentary and humour. This instruction makes the people more aware of the subtleties of satire. Therefore, as the participants said, they understand that their crafts can be weaponised, but the ethical ideals place a premium on truth and actively encourage responsible satire in order to combat the issues posed by these forms of media. While navigating the ethical and misinformation issues that may result from the weaponization of satire in journalism, they seek to uphold the integrity of their profession.

4. Conclusions

Satire is a powerful and important force in Nigerian media that has developed over time, embracing both public acceptability and the possibility for weaponization. Satire's power resides in its capacity to amuse, criticise, educate, and mould public opinion. It serves as a useful tool for demanding accountability from those in power and offering different viewpoints. Satire can occasionally cross the line, thereby leading to defamation or false information. As such, the ethical issues surrounding it are complicated. Satirists, media outlets, and society must navigate carefully in order to strike the correct balance between humour and responsibility.

The participants provided context into how the mainstreaming of satire in Nigerian journalism shapes their work and attitudes. They demonstrated how the mainstreaming and weaponization of satire have changed the texture of satire in Nigerian journalism. This has made cartoonists and journalists more confident to interact with their audience on important topics and offer alternate viewpoints through humour and creativity. Moreover, this offers the responsibility to address the ethical concerns while adjusting to the dynamic media ecology, where satire continuously provides insightful critique and entertaining commentaries.

Newspapers have played a crucial role in shaping the future of satire in Nigerian journalism. While maintaining the crucial function of satire in critiquing, enlightening, and entertaining the people, cartoonists and media institutions must readjust to conform to the ethical concerns of their craft. Satire continues to be a crucial part of the Nigerian media landscape as it develops, representing the always-shifting dynamics of a diverse and vibrant culture. However, care must be taken to respect the boundaries and differentiate between defamation and satire.

Limitations and Future Focus

The study relied on the views of seven Nigerian participants (cartoonists and journalists). Although these participants are from diverse backgrounds, the extent to which these findings can be generalised remains unclear. Again, while the use of semi-structured interviews provided some contexts to the study, we believe that a mixed-methods approach would have yielded more robust and complementary findings. Future studies might consider combining qualitative and quantitative methods to interrogate the mainstreaming and weaponization of satire in the contemporary period.

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