

## The Search for New Roles for Cartoon Art: Promoting Democracy in Nigeria through Innuendos of Political Communication

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### Introduction

As Lamb Suggests, “maps fascinate us because they create an illusion of unmediated knowledge”. According to him, they represent the information of geography immediately, with sections of area knitted together in scale. Maps suggest comprehension and convey ease, even beauty, in recognition [1]. No doubt, cartoons are similar in this function, which may explain their popularity not only in Nigeria, but the world over. Their productions have played a significant role in Nigerian democratic process, social and political life. Even during the military era, cartoons often played a major role in the quest for democratisation process in Nigeria. Regrettably enough, though Nigeria is currently in the second decade of civil rule, the influence of ‘Khaki Rule’ has scarcely gone away from Nigerians and the Nigerian leadership and many Nigerians are yet to fully embrace the freedom of expression enshrined in the constitution. This is where cartoons in newspapers and magazines very aptly fit in, as they provide Nigerians, too scare to speak in plain communication, the opportunity needed to employ metaphors shrouded in innuendos presented in pictures, drawings, gestures, etc. to express their feelings and opinions. It is observable facts that over the years, cartoons have positively or negatively shaped public opinions on societal issues, not only in Nigeria, but globally. The incident of 2005 in Nigeria, where over 300 people were killed in the Northern part of Nigeria during a religious riot fuelled by a Danish Editorial Cartoon publication which satirized the Islamic religious leader, Prophet Muhammad, is still fresh in our minds. The global violence that erupted after a Danish newspaper (*Jyllands-Posten*) published cartoons of the prophet Muhammad indicates that editorial cartoons are consequential. Conversely too, it might be pointed out that Cartoons may convey information and elicit reactions, but they rarely influence the subject of their satire. The anti-Bush cartoons Lamb lauds did not meaningfully affect the Patriot Act or the invasion of Iraq. They were only maps of contradictions, caricatures of folly and brief respites for sad liberals in the United States. Importantly, such occurrences show that cartoons are a formidable force and could serve as mirrors of the society depending on the circumstances and the issue involved. In this article, attention will be on cartoons that are consequential to democratic actions in Nigeria. Cartoons published in the Newspapers are awash with various images accorded prominence in different ways, negatively or positively, depicting the ills in the society. The themes range from corruption, political instability to electoral fraud. Unfortunately, rightly or wrongly, most cartoons in Nigeria have often concentrated more on negative themes. Thus, the puzzle is, does this imply that newspaper cartoons should focus only on negative themes? It is in the light of this puzzle that this article attempts to examine the search for alternative role played by cartoons in promoting democratic ideals in Nigeria. Using two national dailies, the Guardian and The Daily Nation, we have attempted to beam the search light on the emerging political communication in cartoon arts in Nigeria using the 2011 general elections as a case study. One hundred and fifty-three published cartoons by The Guardian and the Daily Nation newspapers in Nigeria over the period of six months-January to June, 2011 were studied and analyzed through the content analysis method of research.

It is hoped that this would go a long way to encourage people in Nigeria who have something to say, but may be afraid to directly confront the “power-that-be, to resort to cartoons and satirical style they provide to express themselves without fear of harassment. It is believed that since communication through cartoon art is rather more symbolic, then, even less educated Nigerians would be able to appreciate and participate in confronting the influence of military dictatorship that has now created the culture of fear of the power-that-be in Nigeria without compromising objectivity.

### Theoretical Framework

Two theories providing guide for discussion in this article are cognitivism and realism states, “We often develop ideas in response to art (cartoon), moving cognitively from point A to point B, because of the fun or interest or satisfying quality of making the move”. The cartoon artist presents his point of view, but the readers also must receive discernment by cognitively associating and introspecting about the real acts committed by human beings, symbolized in cartoon arts. By keeping his cartoons seamless, the cartoonist seems eager to convince readers that what he is thinking in his head is really happening out there. By turning a collective notion of history into vivid scenes, the cartoonist relive events, thereby, validates his view on human conditions, consequently, invoking in the audience, desired actions. The view of reality of this article titled: “The Search for New Roles for Cartoon Art: Promoting Democracy in Nigeria through Innuendos of Political Communication” helps identify and clarify the valuable knowledge, in which Cartoon arts communicate in their types. In every good cartoon, we can find two layers of reality: sensory experiences and the mental process of understanding. The cartoonist depends on his mental activities to ruminate, organize, and judge the sensory experiences of his prospective audiences. For the cartoonist, the understanding of his motive, and how, to transfer this motive to his audience is the result of his previous knowledge and that of his audience, recognized in a culture, in relative to his epistemology, in terms of the development of the idea, and the technical skills of how the cartoons are constructed. The knowledge the newspaper cartoonist provides to readers and the “unpresen” substance that his cartoon arts try to present reflect his view on, and visualization of, human beings’ attempt to manipulate democratic structures and desire to control the

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society in which they are found. Cartoon audiences are thus given the opportunity to learn about the real events in the world of democracy from the fictional satirical portrayal of different issues. Therefore, in cartoon arts, cognitivism and realism can, ultimately, be communicated to newspaper readers in varying degrees of effectiveness, depending on the issues communicated in cartoons and newspaper positions on which the cartoons are placed.

### The concept of cartoon art

The word 'cartoon' is derived from the Italian word 'cartone' –meaning paper. The term was used by painters for preliminary drawings on paper which were then transferred either through tracing or punching, onto surface which may be a ceiling, a large canvas or a wall. The word cartoon is wisely used to describe any drawing originally published in a periodical that makes its own point, with or without caption.

The uniqueness of a cartoon is different from an illustration or sketch, in that, the cartoon strip or comic strip usually tells a story and often appears in periodical publications, whereas an illustration simply illuminates a scene or points to accompanying an extended text in a publication [2,3]. The history of cartoons can be traced back to the fifteenth century when it was used as an important element in the completion of stained glass designs as well as frescoes, a form of wall painting practiced by the Italians [2]. In fact, cartoon is generally understood as any drawing which uses humour, satire or caricature to provoke a response from an audience. It is this function that affords political communicators the opportunity to use the cartoon art, as alternative means of communication, not only in liberal democratic societies, but even in autocratic one. In this sense, it is otherwise known as political or editorial cartoon.

Editorial cartoons are designed to satirize current political matters and offer subtle criticism cleverly located with humour and satire [4]. Editorial cartoons as it is used today can be traced to the art of 'caricature' referred to as make-up features with humorous intention. The first picture to be called a cartoon was John Leech's drawing in 1843 in the 'Punch' newspaper in Britain. The word was first used when a great exhibition of cartoons were given for a competition, devised by Queen Victoria's consort for the new house of parliament. From the entries which were naught and ridiculous in subject matter John Leech drew a series of limitations in punch, satirizing them and railing at social and political abuses of the day [5]. Earlier than this, Britain, William Hogarth (1697-1674), had established a reputation as the first political cartoonist while, in Spain and France, Goya (1746-1828) and Honore Daumier (1808-1879), respectively, used the medium to launch vicious and satirical attacks on those socio-political practices which they considered repulsive to public sense of decency [2].

During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the general course of pictorial comedy was greatly shaped by the First World War [5]. The most interesting features of cartoons and caricature in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were the establishment of one. Line-Joke and the pictorial Joke without words with enormous diversity of styles of drawing. "The new Yorkers were probably the inventors of the one-line-joke; the joke without word, often in two or more frames was the extreme of economy of language" [6].

Cartoon got to an advance stage in American after a temporary imitation on European style. The American native school produced renowned cartoonist like Thomas Mast, who was hired by Harper's Weekly; a magazine founded in 1857 to draw pictures of new events.

His cartoon about the U.S civil war published on September 3, 1864, put him in the first rank of the U.S cartoonist. Mast's drawings were vigorous, simplified in idea and usually humorous.

### Politics and communication

Communication is at the heart of every human relationship including politics, and therefore the avenue through which ideas are relayed and transferred [7]. In his definition of political communication states that it refers to all forms of communication by politician and other political actors for the purpose of achieving specific objectives including the following:

i) Communication addressed to these actors by non-politicians such as voters and newspaper columnists and

ii) Communication about them and their activities, as contained in news reports, editorial and other forms of media discussion of politics. He is also of the view that political communication does not refer only to verbal or written statements, but visual means of significant communication, such as dress, make-up, hairstyle, logo design, and all those elements of communication which might be said to constitute apolitical "image" or identify excluding interpersonal communication.

In Lord Windleshman's view cited by [8], political communication is "the deliberate passing of a political message by a sender to a receiver with the intention of making the receiver behave in a way that they might not otherwise have done". The definition contains three components; a political message; a method of passing or distributing the political message; and an intention to make the receiver respond in a particular way" [8], this shows that political communication is purposeful.

However, communication being an indispensable tool in politics depends on the flow of information. The information sets in motion the process through which individual/public attitudes are formed and modified. "Information about politics reaching the public through the mass media changes the support accorded to parties and their leaders" [8].

Supporting this view, Udoakah, draws from the observation of Seymour-Ure that, "the press became not just the transmitter of the information but also the translator of that information, the definer of the truth "for the audience electorate" [8]. By this assertion, the media are seen to play the dual role of informing and unraveling the content of a message for audience understanding and acceptability.

However, before the information can be accepted by the audience, it must be able to evoke feelings appropriate to the message for it, to qualify as being effective. To this end, Thompson cited in [8] notes that "the effectiveness of the communication lies partly in the fact that meaning is conveyed by means of an expression which enables that meaning to be left rather than conceptually recognized". This means that for communication to be effective, the message must be felt. Hence, effective communication entails the presentation of messages in forms that can achieve what they are capable of achieving.

Effective communication is "a solid state" or the "structure in which significant vision appears" [9]. While Thompson cited in [8], says that effective communication "forms itself in a narrative and absorbs attention in such a way that the presence of something that is literally absurd, does not destroy our awareness of the content itself". By these submissions, the cartoon art becomes a representation of an alternative means of communication even in societies like Nigeria that sycophancy is often the tone of political communication. Thus, it is

evident that for any message to be effective, the content, ought to be presented in a manner that would make impact. This shows that, form brings the content of a message to life, making it an invaluable strategy in communication. When this is applied in political communication message in any form, the intention of the communication is realized. That is what political cartoons achieve.

### Political cartoon and communication

Scholars of political cartoons have described cartoons in various ways depending on their perception. According to Goldberg, Political cartoon is the graphic expression of an opinion relating to current news, politics or social injustices that may arouse public interest. It is generally printed on the editorial page of a newspaper and sometimes amplified the view expressed in the accompanying editorial ...it is an art of protest [10].

In the opinion of Udoakah, "political cartoon bridges over which political information is transported into the minds of readers with a view to mobilizing them against evil practices" [8].

Other scholars see cartoon as humorous but savage. Serving as small versions of editorials in satirical form and running commentaries intended as corrective measures to check social ills. They are focused on revealing mankind to itself, penetrate artificial armouries, expose hypocrisy, deflate pomposity, replace sham with truth; demands that political statement be accompanied with political action; draws attention to lack of political will; debunk and slowly destroy pretension through honesty [11].

In essence, political cartoons are intended to communicate meaning and achieve a goal. As vehicles of political information dissemination, cartoon has been used to penetrate every facet of the society in that it has been harnessed as a weapon, a mien of information and insight into political extents. It is not surprising that [8] remarks that both editors and cartoonists consider cartoons as a very effective channel of communication. Accordingly, he explains that they are "satirical representations in graphic form of the lives of political actors and actions as well as socio-economic, religious or cultural issue with political undertones."

This expression reveals the narrative power vested in cartoons. Udoakah [8] describes it in this manner, "narrative communication is a process that does not take place exclusively through linguistic medium but that all media, whatever their primary sensory basis, can serve as vectors of narrative". Here, the graphic syntax through which the cartoonists' intended messages are communicated becomes the vector of the narrative. As noted by [10], cartoons tell stories or express message, entertain, teach or comment on a person, event or state of affairs with or without words, and encourage the reader to develop an opinion about someone or something prominent in the news. It is not surprising then that to achieve this, cartoonist employ the tools of satire-irony, sarcasm, parody, and innuendo, mingled with humour in the packaging and presentation of political cartoons. However, Akpan holds a contrary notion; he opines that the meanings of cartoons are not easy to decode. In his view, Not most of us are familiar with the problems we often encounter when trying to interpret cartoons. The meanings are not usually easy to come by, because we have no formal interpretation rules for cartoons. In most cases cartoons have esoteric meanings, only the insiders can interpret the insider's message of a cartoon [12].

He bases his argument on the premise that cartoons are subject to semantic instead of syntactic interpretation. Moreover, the unkind

and exaggerated drawings of politicians or its related issues in political cartoons are intended to ridicule. This hard hitting posture of cartoons in the Nigerian press was popular during military dictatorship in the country.

### Power of cartoons as alternative means of political communication

The press has the role of helping people discover the truth through educating them on public issues and presenting all manner of evidence as back up to expose wrong doing in the society in the hope of making it a better place to live in. To facilitate this role, the press adopts the use of cartoons as one strategy for encoding and conveying meanings. In the estimation of [8], the Nigerian press seems to favour the use of cartoons as its strategy for disseminating information about politics in addition to other communicative forms. The fact that almost every Nigerian newspaper and magazine has allotted space for cartoons is a testament to how important they are viewed. Since political cartoons are symbols that task the intellect, it is believed that they have the power to intensify and clarify meaning.

Fiofori [13] supports this position with claims that credit to Nigeria as having wide readership of cartoons, attributing it to the fact that they are more easily understood by the less educated [8] buttresses the notion of the power of cartoons by saying that they are rich in political characters and provide negative images of politicians, or person who, regardless of their training and background, wield political power or are political activists. They pay scant regard to class and age, and feature the blunders of politicians as well as the electorate. In fact, the overall message of political cartoons according to him is indictment.

Indeed, the power of cartoons is not in doubt, since like pictures, they tell a story. This is achieved where cartoonists form mental and emotional images of politics into satirical drawings that transport them to the mind of readers.

According to Szabo cited by [8], political cartoons, with the use of humour and contrast, explain and make messages "even more digestible, thus becoming a perfect means of quick and effective education". He further avers that reading a political cartoon is like "turning the lights on". In fact, [8] submits that Nigerians cartoonists have agreed that their cartoons have resulted in litigations and warning "from above"

These evidences and opinions speak clearly of the power of cartoons to elicit attention from the less educated, the well educated, politicians and even the government. Indeed the power of cartoons is not in doubt as it seems to be in tandem which is worth than a thousand words. It has become an alternative means of opposition as Nigeria gradually, becomes a one-party state.

Political cartoons used in newspaper tell their own stories of societal issues in the political arena.

Marlette [14] explains that good cartoons are like what he terms visual rock and droll". According to him, "they hit you primitively and emotionally". There is something wild and untamed which cannot defend itself. In Marlette's view, a cartoonist's job is to attack a lampoon or carry out a satirical attack on a person(s). This is done through the convention of satire. Cartoonist do not present the daily news, rather, they interpret the daily news. He is also of the opinion that "most good cartoons attack, only the very rare cartoons applaud something like a peace treaty". In answering the question, do cartoons peddle the truth, or are they as fallible as their author? Marlette explains that, The answer

will be based on individual perspective as cartoons are propaganda. Noting that the root meaning of propaganda is in the formation, because from the little we do know about the psychology of political behaviour, it is likely that those cartoons, most effective as propaganda, have tended not to confront and to challenge, but rather to reinforce and build on a prior beliefs, values and prejudices [14].

Cartoons therefore, when appropriately designed and communicated, can play a significant role in the Nigerian democratization process. Similarly, when properly articulated, cartoons also serve as historical texts through which past societal events can be revisited and analyzed.

We have therefore, decided to conduct a limited study of political cartoons in two selected Nigerian newspapers-The Guardian and the Nation to determine the issues, directions/slants and prominence employed by the cartoonists in promoting democratic principles in Nigeria. Consequently, one hundred and fifty-three political cartoons contained in the 120 editions of these newspapers were carefully studied to obtain the relevant data relating to the six specified issues as follows:

- Corruption
- Electoral malpractices
- Human right issues
- Squandering of public funds
- Misdeed of politicians
- Others.

The cartoon arts were studied and analyzed in terms of the following directions/slants

- Confrontational,
- Non-confrontational,
- Satire, as well as,

Prominence, which focuses on the level of importance of the cartoons in the following divisions:

- Editorial page (E.P.),
- Back page (BP) and
- Cover page (CP).

## Discussion

The results of the data gathered and analyzed for this article are evident that during the period under review, cartoons on the misdeeds of politicians and electoral malpractice were frequent. However, cartoon classified as 'others' were the most frequent in both papers, giving the indication that cartoons on related electoral issues out-numbered those listed within our categorization in the 2011 general election. What this implies is that cartoons on other issues, particularly, regarding the 2011 general elections reflected the multiplicity of election-related offences by politicians as well as communication on such issues by the media. See details in Table 1.

From the result of the study, it can be said that the cartoons depicting the 2011 general elections in Nigeria, were mainly satirical because they represented 68% of the total number or 102 out of 150 cartoons studied. Most of the confrontational cartoons were also satirical. The confrontational cartoons were 37 (24.7%), while 11 cartoons representing 7.3% were non-confrontational.

Corruption	10 (16.6%)	15 (16.7%)	14 (9.3%)
Electoral malpractice	13 (21.6%)	9 (10.0%)	16 (10.7%)
Human Rights Issues	4 (6.6%)	7(7.78%)	4 (2.7%)
Squandering of Public Funds	8 (13.33)	6 (6.7%)	8 (5.3%)
Misdeeds of Politicians	4 (6.6%)	20 (22.3%)	20 (13.3%)
Others	21 (35.0%)	33 (36.7%)	88 (58.7%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>60 (100%)</b>	<b>90 (100%)</b>	<b>150 (100%)</b>

Source: Field survey By Agba, 2013.

**Table 1:** Frequency/Type of Issue Displayed.

The Guardian Newspaper had 40 (75.4%) cartoons that were satirical in nature; 11 (20.7%) confrontational cartoons and 2 (3.77%) non-confrontational cartoons. The Nation had 62 (63.9%) cartoons that were satirical, 26 (26.8%) confrontational cartoons and 9 (9.27%) non-confrontational cartoons. This depicts a wide margin between those cartoons that were purely satirical in nature. Those either laced with satire, those either laced with a little satire and those that are entirely not satire.

These deductions show that the cartoons were laced with ironies (innuendos) and therefore took the direction of satire in the expression of issues on the 2011 general elections. It is evident that Nigeria Newspaper cartoonists make mockery of the political situation in the country and the actions of politicians without mentioning anyone by name; thus, 2011 general elections were not an exception. See details in Table 2.

From the result of the study, it is observed that much prominence was given to political cartoons depicting the general elections, in that both papers studied showed much emphasis on the political events that happened during the period under review. The cartoons were political in outlook and The Nation newspaper particularly, carried more than one or sometimes three cartoons in one edition, all focused on politics. From the presentation and analysis of the data gathered, it is observed that political cartoons published in the two newspapers studied, were mainly satirical in nature. This reflected events that happened during the build up to the 2011 general elections. More of the cartoons that were confrontational also qualify as satirical cartoons. One of the findings of the study indicates that the editorial page of the Guardian Newspaper played host to more cartoons than other pages in the Newspaper, while in The Nation, political cartoons were carried on a page that can be described as a cartoon page because it played host to other cartoons that were not political. So, we grouped it under editorial page. From the result of position of content prominence, it can be explained that, the more prominent the position of display of a cartoon, the more visible the cartoon and the more accessible it is likely to be to readers.

See the detail tabulation of the result contained in Table 3.

## Conclusion

We started this paper by showing how cartoons have often played a major role in the democratisation process in Nigeria, even during the military era, popularly referred to in this article, as 'Khaki Rule'. We also stated that, though Nigeria was in the second decade of return to democratic rule, yet the influence of 'Khaki Rule' has scarcely gone away from Nigerians and the Nigerian leadership and many Nigerians are thus, yet to fully and confidently embrace the freedom of expression enshrined in the constitution. Thus, it has become imperative to ascertain the new roles and the slant of innuendos in which the newspapers can communicate with both the masses and the political elites in the country. The puzzle posed in this article is

The Guardian			The Nation				
Slant	Editorial	Feature	Opinion	Editorial	Feature	Opinion	Total
Confrontational	9 (25.7%)	2 (25%)	0 (0%)	4 (6.6%)	3 (60%)	19 (16.3%)	37 (24.7%)
Non-confrontational	1 (2.9%)	1 (12.5%)	0 (0%)	1 (1.6%)	1 (20%)	7 (22.6%)	11 (7.3%)
Satire	25 (7.4%)	5 (62.5%)	10 (100%)	56 (91.8%)	1 (20%)	5 (16.1%)	102 (68%)
Total	35 (100%)	8 (100%)	10 (100%)	61 (100%)	5 (100%)	31 (100%)	150 (100%)

Source: Field survey by Agba, 2013

Table 2: Observable Slants.

The Guardian			The Nation			
Subject	Editorial page	Cover story	Back position	Editorial page	Cover story	Total
Corruption	7 (20%)	2 (25%)	0 (90%)	3 (4.9%)	2 (5.6%)	14 (9.3%)
Electoral Malpractice	5 (14.3%)	2 (25%)	4 (40%)	3 (4.9%)	2 (5.6%)	16 (10.75%)
Human Rights Issues	2 (5.7%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (3.3%)	0 (0%)	0(4.27%)
Squandering of Public Funds	7 (20%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (1.6%)	0 (0%)	8 (5.3%)
Misdeeds of politicians	3 (8.6%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	11 (18%)	6 (16.7%)	20 (13.3%)
Others	11 (31.4%)	4 (50%)	6 (60%)	41 (67.2%)	26 (72.2%)	88 (58.7%)
Total	35 (100%)	8 (100%)	10 (100%)	61 (100%)	36 (100%)	150 (100%)

Source: Field survey by Agba, 2013.

Table 3: Degree of Content/issue Prominence.

how cartoonists can overcome extremities and remain objective in cartoon form of communication. Consequently, we used one hundred fifty cartoons in two Nigerian national dailies, The Guardian and The Daily Nation, published over six months-January to June, 2011, to examine the redefinition and nature of new roles played by cartoons in promoting democratic ideals in Nigeria. The results are evident that during the period under review, cartoons on corruption, the misdeeds of politicians and electoral malpractice were frequent in that order. However, cartoon classified as 'others' were the most frequent in both papers, giving the indication that cartoons on related electoral issues out-numbered the six listed within our categorization in the 2011 general elections.

It can be concluded that the cartoon depicting the 2011 general elections were mainly satirical. Most of the confrontational cartoons were also satirical. These deductions show that the cartoons were laced with ironies or innuendos and therefore took the direction of satires in the expression of issues on the 2011 general elections. As a clear vision of new functions for cartoons in promoting democratic ideals in Nigeria, we therefore, need to re-examine the concepts of nationalism, which are not to be confused with patriotism. According to Lamb [1], "confusing patriotism with nationalism is like confusing faith with blind obedience. Patriotism allows for questioning; nationalism does not. Nationalism is understood as an ideology that demands absolute loyalty and, in doing so, exacts a high price." Lamb [1] argues, more or less, that the distinction between patriotism and nationalism collapses "when sensitivities are particularly rarefied" (i.e. moments of crisis), and that patriotism is then incorporated into the category of nationalism, with criticism situated as antithetical to the latter category. Thus, cartoonists that must promote democratic ideals must not allow any crisis to lure them away from true patriotism towards "the so-called, nationalism." This way, no matter the slant of innuendos involved in cartoon art communication, the objectivity of the propaganda will be retained, the purity of the art will be respected and the dignity of the communication effort will always be the pride of all.

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