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RESEARCH ARTICLE

A THEORETICAL EXPO ON THE LIKELIHOOD OF CARTOON JOURNALISM TO DRIVE RURAL SUSTAINABILITY IN NIGERIA

***Essien Oku Essien**

Doctoral Fellow, College of Arts and Sciences, Drexel University, Philadelphia, USA

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ABSTRACT

Rural sustainability is a social construction that calls for deliberate considerations, inquiries and concerns. The advocacy role of the mass media in the furtherance of the strategies intended for the durable solutions to emergent issues in the rural areas cannot be undermined; on these grounds, this study addresses the position of cartoon journalism in the advancement of the rural sustainability strategies in Nigeria. The study defines the pattern and practice of cartoon journalism in Nigeria, it relates the bases for the attainment of rural sustainability and considers the advocacy position of cartoon journalism in the advancement of sustainability measures in the outlying areas. The agenda setting theory as well as the development media theory are adopted in the study to establish a workable theoretical framework and the case study research method which permits the consideration of many, related elements for the purpose of comprehension was employed. From the study, it is culled that for cartooned elements to play their role successfully in helping to propagate and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals in rural regions, they must be intentional, directional, persuasive, and creatively woven around strings of strategic messages.

INTRODUCTION

Cartoon journalism and comic journalism are popular methods of disseminating information in Nigerian newspapers, magazines, and other print media (Onakpa 2014). The news and information presented in these publications (especially when it concerns the government or other powerful groups or persons) is often highly critical, and the publishers prefer to do so in a discreet way. And as adopted or incorporated in Nigerian media, cartoon journalism has become a genuine platform for criticism and examination (Seymour-Ure 2010). Since the dynamic nature of cartoon journalism is the only reason why print media publishers favor it over other forms of journalism (for expressing personal thoughts, suggestions, corrections, and criticism), it is important to highlight how this dynamic nature has made cartoon journalism a viable platform for addressing social, political, and socio-economic issues. Social and economic policy in Nigeria places a premium on uplifting the nation's rural communities. Large numbers of Nigerians are forced to endure harsh conditions in the country's impoverished rural areas (Akindiya 2013). An all-encompassing method of development is required to improve rural areas and their economies, as well as the associated infrastructure and social services.

***Corresponding author: Essien Oku Essien,**

Doctoral Fellow, College of Arts and Sciences, Drexel University, Philadelphia, USA.

Combating poverty, illiteracy, and diseases like HIV/AIDS, as well as unemployment, underemployment, environmental degradation, food insecurity, and rural-urban migration, necessitates the harmonization and integration of sector policies into strategic measures. Agriculture, transportation, water, education, healthcare, and municipal government reforms are just a few examples of important sector policies that have a major impact on rural development. The sustainability strategies in rural areas are based on the recognition of the necessity of this form of unified and comprehensive approach. The rural sustainability strategies are the framework for the implementation of the rural development project, and these will enhance the realization of the poverty reduction strategy (Laah, Abba, Ishaya and Gana 2013). Building on the progress made at the international level, the rural sustainability strategies seek to accelerate the rural economy's social and economic development. Key instruments for the implementation of the rural sustainability strategy include the improvement of links between the micro and macro levels and the strengthening of the implementation of the Local Government reforms. If growth is spread out across more sectors and locations, it can help the poor significantly. Because of these vast disparities in agricultural potential between regions and industries, it is imperative that economic operations be based on the preponderant comparative advantage. Broad-based growth and rural development in general require that income-generating activities be diversified (Laah et al 2013).

In addition to decreasing the rural population's reliance on agriculture, diversification will offer options for some rural area's currently unproductive population, which in turn will boost the comparative advantage of farmers. Additionally, diversifying income streams has proven to be an excellent risk management strategy (Adegbite, Amiolemon, Ologeh, Oyefuga 2012). The growing number of young people who are out of work highlights the necessity of this policy. There is little doubt that fast-moving industries like tourism and trading will be the primary focus of small and medium-sized businesses. Raising the level of living of rural residents will require progress in several areas. To ensure the sustainable management of natural resources, it is important to engage in strategies like intensifying and commercializing small-holder agriculture; provide infrastructure and services; increase access to assets like education, health care, land, financial services, and markets; and provide infrastructure and services. Also crucial are the efficient allocation of resources, the promotion of social welfare, and the building of resilience to environmental, economic, and social hazards. When it comes to spreading information about sustainability initiatives in rural areas, cartoon journalism can play a pivotal role as a mass media strategy. The media is undeniably a rapid, extensive, and potent means of dissemination (Hussein and Li 2016). Its influence on the political direction of a country and the cultural fabric of a society is enormous, and it also appeals to a large audience. Cartoon journalism's subtle kind of instruction has led to profound shifts in how we view the status quo in fields as diverse as economics, politics, and the humanities at large. The importance of cartoon journalism in achieving sustainable rural development can be further defined by employing those cartoon typologies and figures strategically, beyond the bounds of political remarks and individual sentiments, to represent the plights of the rural populace.

It has been argued that the sophisticated depictions made possible by cartoon journalism have contributed to economic, social, and political progress (Medubi 2014). To become fully civilized, every community needs the government's full support of rural development. Likewise, for them to understand the state economy's most fundamental requirements and current situation, it is now necessary to engage the mass media as the outstanding means of nurturing people on new developments. The ephemeral nature of cartoon journalism necessitates constant tweaking by print media outlets to stay abreast of industry norms. Today's cartoon or comic informative layouts stand in stark contrast to those of yesteryear, a result of the ephemeral nature of the approaches and concepts chosen in cartoon journalism. The use of comics as a journalistic medium is nothing new; indeed, visual narratives have been around for millennia. What is notable, however, is the obvious differences in approach and methodology employed by comic communicators in the various operating media houses, and the ways in which narrative differences and aesthetics patterns have been invested. Different media outlets have had differing degrees of influence on the problem of local sustainability because they have used different types of cartoon communication at diverse times, and the employment of these different types has had different results for the long-term viability of rural communities.

METHODS

This study employs a case study methodology to investigate the contributions of cartoon journalism to the development of rural sustainability methods in Nigeria's rural areas. An in-

depth, multi-faceted understanding of a difficult subject in its real-world setting is the goal of the research methodology identified as case study (Yom 2015). Examining reports of previous studies, as is done in case study research, enables the investigation and understanding of difficult subjects. It is a reliable research strategy, especially when a comprehensive and in-depth examination is needed. The case study methodology's importance to this research grows as sustainable rural development is hampered by concerns like poverty, unemployment, drug addiction, and illiteracy, all of which have their roots in the community. Therefore, this design is appropriate for this study since it permits the consideration of many and related elements for the purpose of discussion.

Theoretical Framework: The Agenda Setting Theory (AST) of McCombs and Shaw (1977) lends credence to this research into the role of cartoon journalism in promoting rural sustainability and the Sustainable Development Goals. This theory demonstrates that people in the society prefer to follow the agenda set by the dominant media. Given their power to grab people's attention, comics and cartoons are well-positioned to make rural sustainability a focal point of public debate. This will bring much-needed focus to the improvement of rural areas. According to Akeem (2013 cited in Wole-Abu 2018), one of the most significant effects of mass communication is the ordering and organizing of the world. Research conducted by McComb and Stone (1981 cited in Wole-Abu 2018) suggested that the time it takes for a topic to go from a media agenda to a public agenda is anything from two to six months. This establishes the idea that public awareness and support for rural development could be greatly increased if cartoon journalists spend more time reporting on the problems facing rural communities. According to the Development Media Theory (DMT), people in society benefit from media and communication because it encourages them to adopt modern lifestyles and increase their material wealth. In Nigeria, 40.1% of people are poor according to the 2018/19 national monetary poverty line, and 63% are multidimensionally poor according to the National MPI 2022 (NBS, 2024). Multidimensional poverty is higher in rural areas, where 72% of people are poor (NBS, 2024). Everette Rogers' innovation and diffusion hypothesis stated that development agencies transfer technological innovation to their customer through communication. This fosters a spirit of progressivism among the public, which in turn increases people's hunger for change. The purpose of cartoon journalism in this context is to help fund rural sustainability programs by spreading information that will encourage more people to get involved. Ronning and Orgeret (2006) claim that while developing countries' policies vary, the role of broadcasters and the press in informing the public about programs, their benefits, and the need for support for these initiatives is consistent across countries. Here, diffusion as opposed to participation; the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals relies heavily on interpersonal communication if it is to have any impact on social behavior, and the mass media, particularly the print media, can promote awareness of the need for sustainable rural development in Nigeria particularly.

DISCUSSION

Cartoon journalism may be the most up-to-date example of the convergence of journalism and literary prose fiction. According to Kenan (2017), "news is a phenomenon with volume, materiality, dimension, depth, and possibly complexity," and cartoon journalism adds another layer to this

container using images or drawings. Comic journalism is a fictionalized depiction of an actual news medium in which drawings are used to deliver news. While academia generally agrees that journalism is multifaceted and primarily a profession or specialty that necessitates qualification earned through education and training, this perspective does not necessarily hold true when applied to comic or cartoon journalism. This idea relies on the artist's skill (particularly the capacity to draw pictures that accurately reflect reality in terms of composition and "balloons" discussions). To keep the public informed and updated on current events, cartoons in newspapers serve an important educational purpose. No sphere of human existence is immune to the influence of media coverage, whether it be the social, political, or economic spheres. Cartoon journalism plays the role of an educator (Nwabueze 2007). What occurs is that individuals get so reliant on it that they begin to adopt the practices and beliefs that it promotes. Cartoon journalism's most common and widely acknowledged function is as a kind of amusement. People who are looking for information to assist them deal with or overcome stress are the target audience for this type of writing. The topics of these comedic works range from regional to national to international.

Over time, cartoons have risen to prominence as an important part of the content of newspapers and magazines in Nigeria and currently, this is fast filtering into the internet as media houses set up social media presence. From a critical perspective, cartoons and comic strips of varying types are regularly featured in most newspapers and periodicals. Numerous Nigerian newspapers, such as "The Punch," "The Guardian," "The New Nigerian," "The Nigerian Tribune," "Tell," "Newswatch," "The News," etc., regularly feature cartoons and comic strips that comment on or illustrate editorial content related to the country's social, political, and economic climate. Some of these cartoons have become so well-known that some readers actively seek out specific newspapers and magazines just to see what cartoons they have published. The editorial opinion is condensed into a cartoon for easy consumption by the reading public in the hopes that at least some of society's woes may be alleviated (Ugande 2005). In this case, the cartoons' illustrative graphics and commentary on social and political concerns are not just there to make people laugh; they are also meant to pique the readers' interest and get them to demand reform in the political system. Most editorial cartoonists via newspapers express their thoughts, displeasure, and goals using the one-panel exposition (consisting of a single picture representing a frozen movement which is usually not broken up, and thus lacks continuity).



Figure 1. One-panel exposition sample (Gado, 2012)

However, this was not the case with the Guardian. The Guardian comic journalists, led by Bisi Ogunbadejo in the early 1980s, fashioned and produced the 'conversational cartoon' for the newspaper in response to a barrage of bothersome verbal harassments and subtle, indirect innuendos intended to scare the various governments (Irek 2016). Characters were just archetypes in this system, standing in for real people, usually in authoritative roles, who serve as the focal points of narratives.



Figure 2. Conversational Cartoon Sample (Obe, 2019)

The plot is advanced by extensive dialogue and believable characters to a climax where the moral is usually revealed, mirroring the '5Ws and H' as supported by traditional news format. The cartoonists at the Guardian newspaper have adopted and supported this style of indirect explication, which frequently spans two or more panels (Irek 2016). Even more so, cartoon journalists from other newspapers have entered the contest in recent years. Because of the widespread belief in the effectiveness of cartoon journalism, large national and state newspapers almost never publish without at least one cartoon. To create a social structure that benefits the typical Nigerian, this cartoon focuses on eliminating all political and social problems as well as judicial errors that are harmful to the common man (Aleshinloye, 2005). Maintaining and creating "healthy" rural communities where economic, social, cultural, political, and environmental values are compatible and which respond to any imperatives in these dimensions over the long term is the goal of rural sustainability, which can be defined as the ongoing search for development strategies (aimed at a general improvement of the human condition) to achieve this goal (Eugenio-Vela and Barniol-Carcasona 2015). Thus, it is identical to "urban sustainability," with the exception that the changes in environment, population density, and activity base lead to variations in problem formulation and solution construction. The concept of sustainable rural development is a social construction (McKee 2015). As knowledge, insight, and priorities regarding the various facets of rural sustainability develop through time, it becomes clear that the search for it is an ongoing process.

One can also expect that as socioeconomic growth continues, the requirements of the relevant populations will change as well. This means that as other changes occur, what was formerly acceptable in each area may no longer be, and this fact must be considered when devising strategies for rural sustainability (e.g. as people become more sensitized to their lot in life, as they are able to fulfil certain of their needs, and as they change their view of their world and that of others). What is acceptable in one setting at one moment may be completely out of place in another. Of course, in the field of international development, everyone is aware of the risks associated with importing preexisting development approaches and institutional frameworks. Some of the worst cases of the transfer of unsuitable technology into emerging countries have occurred during agricultural reform and modernization (Gorka 2016).

Several arguments can be made for the long-term viability of rural settings; the biophysical environment remains crucial to a wide range of characteristics and functions of rural communities and their inhabitants. What many people think of as rural is grounded in the biophysical environment; it entails green (in the developed world and where climate permits) and open areas. This is fundamental to how city dwellers conceptualize rural areas and how rural communities have developed over time. Many rural people's incomes are still critically dependent on the abundance of various natural resources found in the surrounding biophysical environment (Spina and Menec 2013). This is most glaringly the case in relation to farming, which continues to dominate the rural areas outside of many cities across the world. However, this is also true of forestry and woodland management, as well as certain types of mining like sand and gravel extraction. Activities like these highlight the intrinsic connections between human endeavors and the natural environment. The print media has been shown to be one of the most immediate and successful forms of communication when handled properly. Print media can be used in conjunction with other forms of media to reach a wide audience in rural areas about ideas, products, or information that can better their life. This is an accurate description of print media like newspapers and magazines that frequently employ cartoons to convey important messages in a compact style. There can be no real rural development without changes in attitude, beliefs, and skills, all of which can be influenced by cartoon journalism (Asemah, 2011).

To be of great use in achieving rural sustainability, cartoon journalism must be included in the processes of goal setting, progress reporting, and evaluation. Journalists cannot accomplish their jobs effectively without the graphical and interpretive skills necessary to do so. Access to information by the people, access to justice, capable institutions to push the process, accountability and transparency, peace and security, an informed media, and support from the civil society are crucial factors for achieving rural sustainability. The goal of rural sustainability cannot be attained without changes in behavior, and according to Harne (2013) cartoon journalism can only work if it is given the freedom to do its job in the community. Thus, cartoon journalism is a viable agent of change because it uses hilarious paradigms to include all parties involved in the communication process. By this time, all media-based exchanges may simply be referred to as "communication," making them an essential tool in the pursuit of progress. For this reason, Santas (2013) proposes classifying messages into five distinct categories: those aimed at altering

people's actions; those aimed at reaching large audiences; those aimed at gaining support for a cause; and those aimed at creating long-term change in society's foundations. Cartoon journalism unintentionally relates to these aspects of verbal exchange.

The Nigerian rural areas are still lagging in the attainment of the sustainable development goals and this calls for the adoption of every possible and viable methods in the advancements of these goals (Essien and Ineji 2022). Undoubtedly, if cartoon journalism prioritizes reporting the news and sharing information on SDGs along its critique of public figures or airing hurt feelings, it will help accelerate progress toward the sustainable development objectives and bring virtually, all parts of Nigeria up to speed, particularly in the rural populace. In general, the media may inspire and motivate people to act. Cartoons in the comics sections of newspapers and periodicals are one way to raise awareness and get the word out. Cartoon journalism serves a trifold purpose of informing, educating, and entertaining through its satirical threads. However, it is crucial to critically monitor and analyze the development of these features towards pointing out biases due to their extensive influence on individuals' everyday existence.

CONCLUSION

Cartoons can be misinterpreted as a means of trivializing significant political and social issues that confront humanity. However, the contrary is true. Most forms of art, including theatre, music, painting, prose writing, and poetry, parody serious circumstances while also launching scathing attacks on the people in those situations. The cartoons capture the mood of the country. The social contradictions of society are revealed in exquisite ways. Additionally, they serve as a method of enlightening readers and providing thought direction. Inevitably, it is the cartoonist who allows a culture to do some introspection. It is clear that a viable way to propagate rural sustainability is through information, education and entertainment by the media. In this paper, cartoon journalism is identified as the best means of achieving this objective because of its all-inclusive nature. Both urban and rural residents of Nigeria have access to the print media that features the cartoons. However, it is important to note that for such cartoons to play their role successfully in helping to propagate and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals in rural regions, they must be intentional, directional, and very persuasive; these can be achieved through strategic message crafting and professional art drawings.

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