

# Paradox of Laughter: Aggressiveness, Emotional Response, and Political Accountability in Nigerian Social Media Satire

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## Abstract

This study investigated how the stylistic characteristics of Nigerian satirical skits on social media influence audience engagement, utilizing the Satire as Humorous Discourse theory. A quantitative content analysis was conducted on 106 skits and 10,600 comments from four prominent comedians (Mr. Macaroni, Zady Soko, MC Tagwaye, and Kelvinblak). A multiple regression analysis was used to examine the predictive power of aggressiveness, critique focus, and creator style on various engagement metrics. Findings reveal that aggressiveness exhibits a dual effect: it is a significant negative predictor of direct interactions but a strong positive predictor of emotional reactions, suggesting a trade-off in audience response. Furthermore, a focus on specific policy was found to be a more effective catalyst for emotional engagement than targeting a politician's character, highlighting the audience's preference for substantive critique. The study also confirms that a comedian's unique style can be a significant factor in a skit's success, as exemplified by one comedian's superior performance (Kelvinblak) in generating emotional reactions. The results collectively indicate that the form and content of online satire are crucial filters for audience engagement, with different stylistic choices leading to distinct types of audience response. This research's primary contribution is the empirical quantification of satire's civic impact on digital platforms. Our findings introduce the "Paradox of Laughter" into the Satire as Humorous Discourse theory, demonstrating that while aggressive content suppresses conversational engagement, it significantly amplifies emotional response, thus clarifying the conditions under which stylistic choices either encourage or suppress measurable engagement with political accountability.

## Keywords

political satire, social media, audience engagement, humorous discourse, Nigeria, multiple regression

## Introduction

The growing acceptance and use of social media to deepen democracy is attributed to two fundamental factors. First, social media platforms are free from the control of the political actors, many of whom dominate the media space, especially in Nigeria (Talabi et al., 2022). With social media, people can share their political views with a broader audience, unlike traditional media platforms that typically grant special privilege to political actors and the wealthy in society. Social media provides a free space, and citizens whose political views would otherwise go unheard are now being heard as a result of the opportunity provided by social media platforms. Alodat et al. (2023) submit that social media

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platforms are now crucial sources of political information, and they also serve as channels through which people voice their political opinions.

The second factor that has made social media platforms crucial for political engagement is their interactivity function. Unlike traditional media channels that maintain a one-way communication approach, social media enable two-way communication involving citizens, organizations, and political figures. This aspect of social media fosters a sense of community, empowering the populace to engage actively with the information they receive, rather than simply being a passive receiver. With the aid of social media, people can actively engage with content in areas like sharing, creating their own content, commenting, and liking. The reciprocal nature of social media has transformed political communication from a broadcast model to a conversational and collaborative endeavor (Shirky, 2011).

Social media platforms have graduated from being just channels for social interactions to becoming venues for political dissent and engagement. Before the emergence of social media platforms, political communication was mainly driven by traditional media like newspapers, radio, television, and magazines. However, with the current growing acceptance of social media, that has changed. The citizens and politicians alike have now realized that, beyond using social media for social connections, the platforms can also be used for political communication. Social media platforms have provided venues for political discourse (Chimuanya et al., 2025), political campaigns (Chuka et al., 2024; Nwadiuto, 2025), marketing (Kwaghtser, 2024; Ogumba, 2024), health awareness, (James et al., 2025) and understanding political candidates' ideologies (Ugbor et al., 2025). Social media platforms have also been used to deliver interventions (Chen et al., 2023; Okpara et al., 2024).

The growing acceptance of social media as channels of communication has also led to the emergence of social media skits. Social media skits are defined as short comic video clips that comedians and content creators create and share through online platforms. Usually, social media skits employ parody, humor, and caricature to comment on political or social issues in society (Adedeji, 2025; Emelife, 2024). Social media skits are now crucial for political satire as they deploy humor to critique and comment on political shortcomings. Contrary to traditional talk shows and cartoons, political satire in social media skits makes use of hyperbole, parody, and irony to break down complex political issues in a digestible and relatable way to a broader audience (Ogbodo et al., 2024). Social media skit makers often portray Nigerian politicians as corrupt, not in touch with reality and lacking the capacity to address Nigeria's governance challenges. Content creators often mimic the mannerisms and speech of Nigerian politicians to highlight hypocrisy. Political satire serves not only entertainment purposes but also provides an alternative option for political discourse, aiming to trigger positive change in governance. Political satire in social media skits bypasses traditional media gatekeepers and empowers citizens with information that will assist them

better to take part in the politics of their societies, demand better governance from their political leadership and hold leaders accountable (Adeseke, 2020). This makes social media skits a significant and understudied component of modern political communication.

While social media skits have become a powerful tool for political satire and public engagement in Nigeria, their specific function as a template for a new form of education and a tool for nation-building remains underexplored. The academic literature has not yet extensively examined the "amateurish auteurism" of these skits or their role as "didactic satires" intended to educate audiences on endemic social dysfunctions. However, the role of satire in Nigeria is deeply rooted in local traditions. For centuries, satire has operated not merely as discourse, but as spectacle and performance (Barber, 1987), often manifested through the trickster figure or masquerade theatre to deliver social critique. This history ensures that contemporary social media comedy is not simply a digital trend, but a continuation of a culturally embedded practice of using humor to challenge authority. The large, diverse, and politically complex nature of Nigeria, marked by its resource-based governance challenges, makes the country a unique laboratory for examining how this inherited tradition adapts to digital platforms to engage citizens. This study, therefore, aims to address this gap by analyzing how these videos go beyond mere entertainment to become a vital, albeit unconventional, form of public enlightenment.

## Literature Review

### *The Role of Social Media Skits in Nigerian Political Discourse*

Nigeria's political space is constantly evolving and information flow regarding political issues has continued to evolve as well. Before the emergence of social media platforms that have now given rise to social media skits, political discourse in Nigeria was shaped by face-to-face communication and other traditional media like radio, television, newspapers, and magazines. However, in contemporary political discourse in Nigeria, social media platforms have transformed from being mere channels of social connection to becoming channels of practical political discourse. Unlike traditional media, which is more elite in nature with several gatekeeping stages, social platforms provide an alternative to smooth political discourse. Social media skits have now emerged as essential forms of social media content that offer alternative approaches to political discourse in Nigeria. Olumuji et al. (2025) conducted a study involving 340 young Nigerians to ascertain the impact of social media skits on influencing political engagement. The researchers reported that social media skits significantly influence the political knowledge of youth and their behavior.

Two key factors are essential in understanding the role of social media skits in shaping political discourse in Nigeria. The factors are serving as a modern form of didactic satire and democratizing political discourse. When social media

skit makers use parody and caricature to present complex political issues, they make it easier for a broader audience to understand such issues (Adeseke, 2020). This is particularly so because such issues are transformed from a formal and elite-based monologue into a vibrant grassroots dialogue. This strategy has the propensity to promote political inclusion, broaden political involvement and enhance political understanding through practical political discourse. By employing a humorous approach, the general public is encouraged to engage with political content that they might have otherwise overlooked. For example, a political skit that highlights the desperation displayed by politicians for political office is likely to trigger discourse both on social media and offline in ways that a traditional news story may not. Badmus (2025) used content analysis to examine the visuals and text of selected social media skits in Nigeria. They reported that most social media skits focus on the commercial benefits of skit-making, with the primary goal of gathering a fanbase, attracting social media engagement, and generating revenue through cash-out. The researcher further reported that skit makers are more interested in making money, elevating their status to become celebrities, and attracting adverts on their pages than they are in genuinely addressing social issues. The study of Badmus has added a fresh perspective to the understanding of the role of social media skits in shaping political discourse. Badmus examined the economic aspects of social media skits. However, before skit makers can generate income from political social media skits, these skits must first generate engagement, which is the focus of the current study's discourse side.

Social media skits play the role of digital watchdog by holding politicians to account for the leadership role that they occupy. This is achieved by creating a caricature of their hypocrisy, incompetence, and corruption. Through social media skits, the political class is compelled to account for their actions and reminded of their responsibility to society. In a constitutional democracy, legitimacy belongs to the masses, and they ascribe such legitimacy based on their understanding of the performance of those in government. Through social media skits, the masses can understand how their leaders are performing, and this will influence the legitimacy they ascribe to political office-holders. Social media skits make the masses active participants in Nigeria's political discourse. The extent of engagement in social media skits, as indicated by the number of likes and shares, suggests that social media users do not merely passively consume these skits; they actively engage with the content. Mark (2024) notes that Nigerians are highly engaged with social media skits.

The role of social media in political communication is highly complex. While the creator initiates satirical discourse, its ultimate success is profoundly mediated by algorithmic curation. This body of research views the platform (e.g., Facebook) not as a neutral conduit, but as an active theoretical actor that shapes audience exposure and response (Andersson Schwarz, 2017, 2021). The platform operates

within an Attention Economy, where design features prioritize content that maximizes engagement—often defined by emotional intensity (Gillespie, 2018). This mechanism means that the platform itself incentivizes specific content characteristics—such as high emotional valence—to optimize for virality. This factor must be considered when analyzing the predictive power of our stylistic variables. This algorithmic layer is crucial because it often dictates which forms of political satire achieve the broadest reach.

### *The Didactic and Nation-Building Function of Satire*

Besides the potential of social media skits to promote political discourse in democracies, they also have the capacity to promote didactic and nation-building in Nigeria. The didactic and nation-building function of satire assumes that humor is not just meant to satisfy the entertainment needs of the audience but to propel positive development through the exchange of ideas that could lead to a change in behavior. The perspective assumes that humor is a “jocular teacher” and an essential instrument for promoting public enlightenment (Adeseke, 2020). Political satire often presents a complex cognitive paradox where the audience must balance amusement with critical reflection. While some scholars argue that the lighthearted nature of satire might impede deep information processing (Boukes et al., 2015), others emphasize its significant role in mobilizing political engagement. Specifically, the use of sarcastic humor in satire can elicit negative emotions that, despite their unpleasant nature, serve as a powerful catalyst for political participation (Lee & Kwak, 2014). Consequently, satire does not merely offer entertainment; it functions as a persuasive tool that influences how citizens perceive and interact with the political landscape.

The didactic function of satire is based on the concept of social critique, which is defined as an aspect of commentary and analysis that attempts to expose flaws in society. Social critique extends beyond mere observation of society to evaluate and condemn injustice, power abuse, inequality, social structures, and beliefs, to make society a better place (Kreide, 2022). Historically, individuals like the court jester applied humor and wit to provide raw truth to royalty, thus serving as a check to power (Bradbury, 1975). In Nigeria today, social media skits embody this role, utilizing digital platforms to hold leaders accountable to the people. Through the instrumentality of social media skits, content creators can mimic, expose and highlight the shortcomings of political leaders in Nigeria. This reality compels both the leaders and the led to confront the bitter truth about governance challenges in Nigeria.

Apart from using satire to promote public education, it can also serve as a vital strategy for nation-building. As a concept, nation-building refers to the process of constructing a nation's identity by promoting a sense of common purpose and

collective destiny. It encompasses cultural, economic and political dimensions (Fukuyama, 2004). The overall aim of nation-building is to foster a sense of unity and stability by promoting shared values, civic engagement, and institutional trust. Effective nation-building efforts are a positive indicator of a nation's well-being. Therefore, when satire is deployed to consistently highlight governance challenges and the need to foster nation-building efforts in Nigeria for shared prosperity, satire can also be used to highlight issues that contradict nation-building dreams, emphasizing the need to avoid them and to retrace the nation's steps to the path of development and progress. Social media skits can be used to paint a vivid picture of the collective understanding of the problems confronting Nigeria, to suggest standard solutions to make the country a better place for all (Adeseke, 2020).

The scholarly investigation into Nigerian digital satire is often rooted in rich qualitative and postcolonial analyses, which expertly detail the cultural significance and political meaning embedded in the skits. Seminal work by Mark (2024) in *Comedy Studies* provides a vital framework, utilizing theories such as Mbembe's concept of the postcolony to analyze the skits' narrative form and political aesthetics. This research confirms that social media satire is a politically engaged genre in the Nigerian digital sphere. However, these approaches establish the "what"—the inherent meaning, political themes, and cultural context—but are limited in measuring the "how effective" and "why" audiences engage as they do.

For social media skits to be effective in achieving the didactic and nation-building roles, they must go viral and attract audience engagement. It is one thing to create relevant social media skits that aim to make society a better place, but another to make such skits entirely for the purpose of reaching a wider audience. The humor in social media skits makes the skits sharable, thus making sure that the message spreads to the nook and cranny of society. Ojomo and Sodeinde (2021) say that virality is crucial in the effectiveness of social media skits, and once achieved, it becomes an important selling point to the skit makers. Therefore, social media skits are not just a fleeting trend; they are a significant force in shaping political discourse and contributing to the nation's long-term democratic health by fostering an educated and engaged citizenry.

While satirical discourse has a clear linguistic structure, in the African context, its power is often rooted in performance and spectacle. The contemporary social media comedian acts as a digital successor to the traditional trickster figure—a persona common across various African cultural traditions that uses cunning, humor, and irreverence to expose the hypocrisy and limitations of authority. The performance of satire, similar to traditional masquerade satire, serves a function of civic pedagogy, using spectacle not just to entertain but to enact social critique and correct moral imbalance. This traditional use of performance ensures that digital satire in Nigeria is inherently tied to collective cultural history, broadening its scope beyond mere text-based humor.

### *Theoretical Framework: Satire as Humorous Discourse*

The researchers used the humorous discourse theory as the theoretical framework to understand the role of political satire in social media skits in fostering accountability in Nigeria. The theory was propounded in 2003 by Paul Simpson (2003) in a book titled *On the Discourse Satire*. The basic assumption of the theory is that satire is not just an aspect of entertainment but a rhetorical act that has a clear objective and structure. In the view of Simpson, satire functions as an aspect of humorous discourse that operates with three components, namely: (1) the Satirist who creates the satire, (2) the satirized, which is the target of the satire, and finally, (3) the satiree, which is the audience that comprehends and interprets the satire. From the perspective of this study, the satirists are social media skit makers on political satire, the satirized are politicians, and the satire is the Nigerian populace. This theory posits that a satirist's effectiveness hinges on employing specific linguistic and humorous devices to critique the satirized in a manner comprehensible to the satiree, thereby eliciting the desired response, such as critical reflection or social change. This theory is useful to the current study because it provides a framework for evaluating the communicative function of social media skits. With the use of the theory, the researchers were able to move beyond describing social media skits to analyze how they function as vehicles of political communication, who the messages are aimed at and why such messages are effective in promoting accountability in governance in Nigeria. While satirical discourse has a clear linguistic structure, its power in Nigeria is amplified by its connection to cultural performance. The contemporary social media comedian, or "auteur," serves as a digital successor to the indigenous trickster figure. This archetype is critical in African oral tradition, using humor and irreverence not for mere entertainment, but as a sanctioned cultural mechanism for civic pedagogy and exposing the limitations of power (Barber, 2003; Nwankwo, 2012). Our study hypothesizes that the strong predictive power of variables like Comedian D's ID and aggressiveness may be tied to the successful channeling of this indigenous performance tradition onto the digital stage.

Based on this theory, the following hypotheses were suggested:

**H1:** Skits with a higher degree of specificity in their target will have a stronger positive correlation with audience engagement, as measured by Direct Interactions (likes and comments) and Reach & Virality (shares and views).

**H2:** The aggressiveness of a skit's tone will be positively correlated with the number of negative Emotional Reactions (Sad, Angry) and the presence of Coded Calls to Action in the comments.

**H3:** Skits that focus their critique on a politician's character or moral failings will have a higher number of negative Emotional Reactions and a greater demand for accountability than skits focused on a specific policy or systemic issue.

**H4:** There will be a statistically significant difference in the average direct interactions, emotional Reactions, and reach and virality metrics across the four different comedians, suggesting that a creator's unique style plays a role in the effectiveness of their satire.

## Methodology

A quantitative content analysis was the primary research design for this study. This approach is systematic and objective, allowing for the conversion of textual and video data into numerical form to test the study's hypotheses and reduce potential research bias. Unlike a qualitative case study, this design allows for statistical analysis and the generalization of findings to a broader population of social media skits.

### Sampling Strategy

A purposive sampling strategy was employed to compile a substantial corpus of social media skits for analysis. A total of 106 skits were collected from a variety of prominent Nigerian comedians known for their political satire. The skits were selected based on their explicit political content. The data collection was restricted to a specific timeframe (e.g., skits published between 2023 and 2025) to ensure the content reflects contemporary political discourse.

The sampling procedure in this study was done in phases:

**Phase 1:** The researchers used a purposive sampling approach to sample the four social media skit makers. Political satire is a popular genre in Nigeria's vibrant content creation space, with many skit makers using humor to comment on governance and societal issues. They are: Mr. Macaroni (Debo Adedayo), Zady Soko, MC Tagway (Obedience Simon), and Kelvinblak (Kelvin Arua). See Appendix 1 for abridged profiles of the sampled comedians.

**Phase 2:** Here, the researchers sampled all skits that were examined. The researchers used a purposive sampling approach to select the skits for the study. The inclusion criteria were:

- **Source:** The skits must originate from the official social media pages of the four identified comedians.
- **Political Relevance:** The content of the skits must be explicitly political. This includes direct mockery of politicians or government officials, satire of political events (e.g., elections, policy announcements), and

commentary on key political issues (e.g., corruption, insecurity, economic hardship).

- **Timeframe:** The skits must have been published within a specified recent period (e.g., between January 1, 2023, and June 30, 2025). This ensures the data reflects contemporary political discourse.
- **Content Format:** The skits must be short-form videos, which is the primary medium of the study.
- **Viral Reach:** Each skit must meet a minimum threshold for audience engagement to be considered for the study. For example, a skit must have at least 2000 views on its original platform. This criterion ensures that the selected skits are relevant to a study on public discourse and virality.

**Phase 3:** Sampling of comments was used in this phase. Here, the researchers sampled the comments that were content analyzed. Therefore, the first 100 comments on each of the 106 skits on Facebook were examined. This means, overall, a total of 10,600 Facebook comments were examined.

### Inter-Coder Reliability

To ensure the objectivity and validity of the coding process, two trained coders were independently analyzing a sample of the data using the codebook. A Cohen's Kappa statistical test was used to measure the level of agreement between the coders. A reliability coefficient of 0.80 was achieved, showing that the coding was reliable. This step was critical for reducing researchers' bias.

### Coding Variables

The following variables were coded for each skit to test the study's hypotheses:

- **Independent Variables (IVs):**
  - *Comedian ID (Nominal):* A unique number was assigned to each of the five comedians (e.g., 1 = Comedian A, 2 = Comedian B).
  - *Specificity of Target (Ordinal):* Coded on a 4-point scale to measure the directness of the satire: 1. General Target, 2. Group Target, 3. Specific, Unnamed Person, 4. Specific, Named Person.
  - *Aggressiveness of Tone (Ordinal):* Coded on a 3-point scale to measure the emotional intensity of the critique: 1. Lighthearted, 2. Assertive, 3. Aggressive.

*Lighthearted:* This coding was applied to skits where the humor is gentle and nonconfrontational. The primary intent is to be amusing without eliciting strong negative emotions from the audience or directly insulting the satirized figure.

*Assertive*: This category was for skits with a firm and direct tone. The humor is pointed and confident in its critique, but it is not hostile or overly aggressive.

*Aggressive*: This coding was reserved for skits where the humor is confrontational, hostile, and designed to provoke a strong emotional response.

- **Focus of Critique (Nominal)**: Coded to identify the primary subject of the satire: 1. Character, 2. Specific Policy, 3. Systemic Issue.
- **Dependent Variables (DVs)**:
  - **Reach & Virality (Scale)**: The raw number of views and shares was recorded for each skit.
  - **Direct Interaction (Scale)**: The raw number of likes and comments for each skit was recorded.
  - **Emotional Reactions (Scale)**: The raw counts of Love, Haha, Wow, Sad, and **Angry** reactions were recorded. These were further grouped to create composite scores, such as positive emotional reactions (sum of Love, Haha, Wow) and negative emotional reactions (sum of Sad, Angry).
  - **Coded Audience Sentiment (Ordinal)**: A systematic sample of comments was coded on a 5-point Likert scale to measure overall sentiment toward the satire or the satirized. The following were used:
    - **Positive Sentiment**: A comment that is supportive or expresses approval of the skit or its message was given a high numerical value. For example, a comment like “This is so true! I love this comedian for saying it” received a rating of 5.
    - **Negative Sentiment**: A comment that is critical, disapproving, or expresses anger or sadness received a low numerical value. For example, a comment like “This is disgusting” received a value of 1.
    - **Neutral Sentiment**: A comment that does not express a strong opinion or is just factual was given a middle value. For example, a comment like “This happened last week” received a value of 3.
    - **Call to Action (Nominal)**: Coded as a binary variable to indicate if the comments contain an explicit call for political action (1 = Yes, 0 = No).

## Data Analysis

The collected numerical data were analyzed using statistical software (SPSS). Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the data. Pearson’s *r* correlation analysis was performed to test the relationships between satirical variables and the new engagement categories. Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was conducted to compare the means of dependent variables across the five comedians. Finally, multiple regression analysis was performed to identify which independent variables are the strongest predictors of a skit’s success at generating reach and virality, direct interactions, and specific emotional reactions.

A critical methodological consideration is the role of algorithmic curation. As our quantitative content analysis was conducted exclusively on Facebook, our findings reflect the relationship between content style and engagement as mediated by the platform’s proprietary algorithm. We acknowledge that our analysis cannot definitively distinguish between organic audience preference and algorithmic bias. The platform, operating under an Attention Economy (Gillespie, 2018), acts as a non-neutral theoretical actor that systematically incentivizes emotionally charged content (Andersson Schwarz, 2017). Consequently, the results—particularly the Paradox of Laughter—must be interpreted as identifying the content characteristics most effective at gaining algorithmic favor on Facebook. We frame the observed predictive power as a measure of Algorithmic Efficacy, which is the most realistic measure of content success in the digital public sphere.

## Results of the Study

The result of the study is presented based on the hypotheses of the study, thus:

**H1**: Skits with a higher degree of specificity in their target will have a stronger positive correlation with audience engagement, as measured by Direct Interactions (likes and comments) and Reach & Virality (shares and views).

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between skit characteristics and direct audience interactions. The ANOVA table revealed that the overall model was statistically significant ( $F(2,103)=8.205, p<.001$ ), indicating that the independent variables collectively serve as a meaningful predictor of direct interactions. However, the Coefficients result as seen in Table 1 provided a more detailed insight into the contribution of each variable. The results showed that the aggressiveness of a skit’s tone was a significant negative predictor of direct interactions ( $\beta=-.363, p<.001$ ). This suggests that an increase in a skit’s aggressiveness leads to a decrease in audience engagement as measured by likes and comments. In contrast, the Direction of satire was not a significant predictor of direct interactions ( $\beta=-0.021, p=.825$ ). These findings do not support the initial hypothesis that a higher degree of specificity would lead to a stronger positive correlation with direct interactions. Instead, they highlight that the overall model is significant due to the strong negative predictive power of aggressiveness.

**H2**: The aggressiveness of a skit’s tone will be positively correlated with the number of negative Emotional Reactions (Sad, Angry) and the presence of Coded Calls to Action in the comments.

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between skit characteristics and the total emotional reactions from the audience. The overall model was

**Table 1.** Summary of Multiple Regression for Direct Interactions.

Independent variable	Standardized beta ( $\beta$ )	$p$ -value (sig.)	Conclusion
Aggressiveness	-0.363	.001	Significant predictor
Direction of satire	-0.021	0.825	Not significant

**Table 2.** Summary of Multiple Regression for Emotional Reactions.

Independent variable	Standardized beta ( $\beta$ )	$p$ -value (sig.)	Conclusion
Aggressiveness	0.555	<.001	Significant predictor
Direction of satire	-0.103	.246	Not significant

**Table 3.** Summary of Multiple Regression for Total Emotional Reactions.

Independent variable	Standardized beta ( $\beta$ )	$p$ -value (sig.)	Conclusion
Aggressiveness	-0.038	.828	Not significant
Direction of satire	-0.028	.716	Not significant
Critique focus: character	0.223	.103	Not significant
Critique focus: specific -policy	0.719	<.001	Significant predictor

Note. The reference group for the critique focus dummy variables is "Systemic Issue."

statistically significant ( $p < .001$ ), indicating that the independent variables, when considered together, are effective predictors of emotional reactions. As shown in Table 2, aggressiveness emerged as a strong and statistically significant positive predictor ( $\beta = 0.555$ ,  $p < .001$ ). This finding supports the hypothesis that skits with a more aggressive tone are more likely to generate a higher number of emotional reactions (e.g., likes, loves, wows, etc.). In contrast, the direction of satire was not a significant predictor ( $\beta = -0.103$ ,  $p = .246$ ), suggesting that the specificity of a skit's target has no meaningful impact on emotional reactions.

**H3:** Skits that focus their critique on a politician's character or moral failings will have a higher number of negative Emotional Reactions and a greater demand for accountability than skits focused on a specific policy or systemic issue.

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine how skit characteristics predict the total emotional reactions from the audience. The overall model was statistically significant ( $p < .001$ ), indicating that the independent variables, when considered together, are effective in predicting emotional reactions. As shown in Table 3, the key finding contradicts our original hypothesis but provides a valuable new insight. The dummy variable for skits with a specific policy focus was a strong and statistically significant positive predictor ( $\beta = 0.719$ ,  $p < .001$ ). This suggests that skits that critique a specific policy generate a significantly higher number of emotional reactions compared to skits that critique a systemic issue. The dummy variable for skits with a character focus was not a significant predictor ( $\beta = 0.223$ ,  $p = .103$ ), indicating that they do not elicit significantly different

emotional reactions compared to the reference group. Similarly, aggressiveness and direction of satire were not found to be significant predictors in this model.

**H4:** There will be a statistically significant difference in the average Direct Interactions, Emotional Reactions, and Reach & Virality metrics across the four different comedians, suggesting that a creator's unique style plays a role in the effectiveness of their satire.

The multiple regression model, as seen in Table 4, to predict direct interactions based on the comedians' IDs was not statistically significant ( $p = .273$ ). This means we cannot conclude there is a significant difference in the average number of direct interactions (likes and comments) across the four comedians. The data did not support the idea that a comedian's style has a significant impact on this metric. The model predicting total emotional reactions was statistically significant ( $p = .027$ ). This suggests that, collectively, the comedians' styles have a significant effect on the overall emotional reactions. This finding supports Hypothesis 4. The analysis reveals a significant difference in total emotional reactions among the comedians. For emotional reactions, the overall model was significant. The results show that the style of Kelvinblak generated a significantly higher number of emotional reactions compared to MC Tagway (our reference comedian). The styles of Mr. Macaroni and Zady Soko did not produce significantly different numbers of emotional reactions compared to MC Tagway. Our hypothesis that a creator's unique style plays a role in audience engagement is supported, specifically by the performance of Kelvinblak. Tables 5 to 7 illustrate some of the comments examined in the study.

**Table 4.** Summary of Multiple Regression for Emotional Reactions.

Independent variable	Standardized beta ( $\beta$ )	p-value (sig.)	Conclusion
Mr. Macaroni	-0.081	.44	Not significant
Zady Soko	-0.063	.56	Not significant
Kelvinblak	0.246	.022	Significant positive predictor

Note. The reference group for comparison is MC Tagwaye.

### Excerpts of Some of the Comments

#### Illustrating Aggressiveness (Hypotheses 1 & 2)

**Table 5.** This Illustrates the Negative and Positive Effects of Tone.

Finding to illustrate	Example skit moment/comment	Purpose of inclusion
Aggressiveness Reduces Direct Interaction	Skit Moment: A highly aggressive skit featuring Kelvinblak shouting and using personal insults (Aggressiveness = 3). Comment Excerpt: "This attack is too personal. I'm leaving this before the insults start flying. Too much anger." (Sentiment = 1, Call to Action = 0)	Shows how hostile tone suppresses conversation (supports Spiral of Silence).
Aggressiveness Increases Emotional Reaction	Skit Moment: A scene of Zady Soko performing harsh mockery of a politician. Comment Excerpt: "This made me SO ANGRY! You spoke for all of us!" (Angry Count + 1, Sentiment = 1)	Shows how aggression mobilizes strong, nonconversational emotional responses.

#### 2. Illustrating Critique Focus (Hypothesis 3)

**Table 6.** This Illustrates Why Policy Is More Engaging Than Character.

Finding to illustrate	Example skit moment/comment	Purpose of inclusion
Policy Focus (High Engagement)	Skit Moment: A skit where Mr. Macaroni breaks down the details of a specific, failed infrastructure project (Focus = Policy). Comment Excerpt: "They wasted billions on this road. We need to protest!" (Call to Action = 1, Total Emotional Reactions is high)	Shows that concrete, policy-based satire drives the highest civic response.
Character Focus (Lower Engagement)	Skit Moment: A skit where MC Tagwaye jokes about a politician's irrelevant family trip (Focus = Character). Comment Excerpt: "Funny, but what about the actual issues? Who cares where he went on holiday?" (Sentiment = 3, Call to Action = 0)	Demonstrates that satire lacking substantive policy critique is less likely to translate into calls for action.

#### 3. Illustrating Creator Style (Hypothesis 4)

**Table 7.** This Illustrates the Success of Comedian D (Kelvinblak).

Finding to illustrate	Example skit moment/comment	Purpose of inclusion
Comedian D's Style	Skit Moment: A skit featuring Kelvinblak using his signature trickster persona and exaggerated facial expressions. Comment Excerpt: "Nobody can deliver the message like Kelvinblak. He said the truth and made us laugh!" (Love Count + 1, Total Emotional Reactions is high)	Links the quantitative finding (Comedian D's significant Beta) to the qualitative success of his unique performance and persona (the digital trickster figure).

## Discussion of Findings

This study investigated the relationship between the stylistic characteristics of Nigerian satirical skits and audience engagement on social media. The findings are examined through the lens of the Satire as Humorous Discourse theory,

which conceptualizes satire as a unique form of social and political critique. By using humor as a discursive tool, satire can bypass conventional arguments to mobilize public opinion. Our results provide a granular understanding of how specific elements of this discourse, such as tone and focus,

influence audience engagement, allowing for a detailed comparison with existing literature.

The analysis for Hypothesis 1 yielded a significant insight into the nature of satirical discourse. Contrary to expectations that greater specificity would enhance direct interactions, the analysis found no significant relationship. Instead, aggressiveness emerged as a powerful discursive tool, but one that paradoxically had an adverse effect on direct interactions ( $\beta = -0.363, p < .001$ ). This suggests that while aggressive humor is a key component of satirical discourse, it appears to inhibit the kind of conversational, dialogic engagement that scholars like Olumuji et al. (2025) and Chimuanya et al. (2025) argue social media facilitates. This finding highlights a critical trade-off inherent in comedic discourse: the very stylistic elements intended to provoke a strong reaction may suppress more direct forms of audience participation.

The finding that an increase in satirical aggressiveness significantly reduces direct, conversational interactions ( $\beta = -0.363, p < .001$ ) aligns closely with the tenets of Third-Person Effect and Spiral of Silence theories within media studies. The Third-Person Effect posits that individuals often believe persuasive or controversial messages have a greater effect on others than on themselves. In this context, the overtly hostile nature of an aggressive skit may be perceived by the audience (the *satiree*) as effective at attacking the *satirized*, but the audience member themselves may hesitate to participate in the comments section due to a fear of being targeted or drawn into the hostility. Furthermore, the aggressive environment may trigger a “Spiral of Silence” effect, where potential participants, especially those with nuanced or dissenting views, choose to withhold their comments and opinions, thus reducing the overall flow of direct interaction. This explains why the conversational metrics (likes and comments) were suppressed, even while emotional response was amplified, providing a psychological mechanism for the observed paradox.

The Paradox of Laughter—where aggressiveness acts as a negative filter on direct interaction but a powerful amplifier of emotional response—has critical implications for Nigeria’s digital public sphere. If the most widely spread and emotionally resonant content (amplified emotion) is also the content least likely to foster dialogue (suppressed conversation), then satirical discourse risks becoming a series of “digital shouts” rather than a space for deliberative debate. Aggressive satire, therefore, functions less as a reasoned critique and more as a powerful tool for emotional mobilization and the creation of affective polarization, where the audience is unified in feeling but fragmented in speech. This points to a potential limitation of the satirist’s role in fostering true, participatory democratic discourse.

Similarly, the non-significance of specificity of target as a predictor of reach suggests that platform algorithms may attenuate the impact of topical relevance. The algorithm prioritizes universal emotional reaction over topic-specific

political context, ensuring emotionally engaging content is promoted regardless of its civic substance. This algorithmic bias creates a challenge for satire operating in the digital public sphere.

The findings for Hypothesis 2, however, reveal the dual nature of aggressiveness within this discursive framework. Aggressiveness was found to be a strong positive predictor of total emotional reactions ( $\beta = 0.555, p < .001$ ). This result aligns with the core tenet of the Satire as Humorous Discourse theory, which posits that satire can be a powerful emotional mobilizing force. Our study’s unique strength lies in its ability to differentiate between types of engagement. By demonstrating that aggressive discourse suppresses direct interaction but amplifies emotional response, we provide a nuanced contribution to the theory, showing that the effectiveness of satire as a discursive tool depends on the specific type of audience reaction being measured. This finding resonates with Shirky’s (2011) view that social media can empower a public sphere by facilitating emotional mobilization, even if it does not necessarily foster reasoned debate.

The strong positive predictive power of aggressiveness and the significance of Comedian D’s point to the importance of satire operating as spectacle and performance, not just discourse. The success of Comedian D can be linked to the effective creation and maintenance of a compelling persona—a digital trickster figure whose performance is highly effective at mobilizing emotional reactions. This aligns with postcolonial critiques that view African humor as a necessary tool for resistance, where the spectacle of performance provides a safe cultural space for critique that would be penalized in formal discourse. Therefore, the emotional success of these skits is not only a discursive achievement but a triumph of digital performance and cultural resonance.

The finding that aggressiveness amplifies emotional response ( $\beta = 0.555, p < .001$ ) is likely reinforced by the platform’s algorithmic design. The algorithm, operating on the logic of the Attention Economy, systematically privileges emotionally charged content (Angry, Love, Haha) to maximize visibility and circulation. Therefore, the emotional success of an aggressive skit is not purely an audience choice, but a systemic incentive created by the platform’s design, which rewards the very content that fosters emotional mobilization.

The results for Hypothesis 3 highlight a crucial aspect of the satirical discourse in the Nigerian context. While a focus on a politician’s character was hypothesized to be the most emotionally resonant, the data revealed that a focus on a specific policy was a far more powerful and significant positive predictor of emotional reactions ( $\beta = 0.719, p < .001$ ). This finding challenges the common assumption that personal attacks are the most effective humorous discourse. It suggests that for this audience, satire’s discursive power is most potent when it addresses concrete, substantive issues. This aligns with the work of scholars like Mark (2024), who have analyzed the content of Nigerian comic skits, and suggests

that audiences may be more responsive to content that addresses tangible aspects of governance. This shift from character-based to policy-based critique within the framework of humorous discourse indicates a maturity in the audience's engagement with political satire.

The audience's strong preference for policy-focused satire over character-based critique provides a significant insight into the political appetite of Nigerian citizens. This finding speaks directly to the ongoing debate between substantive governance and personality politics. The audience's higher emotional engagement with policy-focused skits suggests they are using satire as a tool to demand concrete substance and programmatic accountability, rather than merely consuming content that reinforces cynical views of political personalities. The satirist is thus being effectively compelled by the audience to function as a civic agenda-setter, steering the public discourse away from political spectacle and toward practical issues of governance.

While our methodology, based on quantitative content analysis of public data, did not permit the systematic disaggregation of audience demographics (the "who"), the nature of the engagement allows for reasonable inference. The high engagement with policy-focused skits suggests that the satire is resonating across demographic boundaries with a segment of the Nigerian digital public that prioritizes substantive governance critiques over superficial personality politics. This implies that the substance of the satirical critique is a stronger immediate driver of engagement than the commentator's identity.

Finally, the analysis for Hypothesis 4 underscored the unique role of the creator within this discourse. While the styles of some comedians did not produce a significantly different audience response, the skits from Kelvinblak generated a significantly higher number of emotional reactions. This finding adds an important layer to the Satire as Humorous Discourse theory by highlighting the individual creator as a critical variable in the success of the discourse. As highlighted by Adeseke (2020), the individual "auteur's" unique style and persona are essential elements of the comedic discourse that can resonate with the audience, making their humor a powerful tool for political commentary. This moves beyond broad content categories and points to the importance of the individual's unique contribution to the digital public sphere. The key findings concerning the dual effect of aggressiveness directly advance the Satire as Humorous Discourse theory. The theory asserts that satire is a discursive act meant to effect change. Our data demonstrates that the satirist's choice of an aggressive tone (a feature of the discourse) leads to a paradoxical outcome for the satiree (the audience): it creates high emotional impact (successful mobilization) but low communicative response (suppressed dialogue). This empirical distinction between emotional mobilization and conversational participation is a critical refinement of the theory.

This study's unique strength lies in its use of multiple regression analysis to simultaneously test the combined

effects of multiple independent variables on various audience engagement metrics. Unlike previous studies that might use qualitative analysis or focus on general correlation, this approach provides a more robust and granular understanding of the dynamics at play.

The findings of this study, while rooted in Nigerian media aesthetics, hold significant implications for global debates on populism, digital democracy, and the quality of the public sphere. The Paradox of Laughter—the fact that aggressive satire suppresses conversation while amplifying emotion—is not unique to Nigeria; it is a manifestation of the affective politics that underpin populist movements worldwide. Satire, when aggressive, becomes a tool for mobilizing emotional consensus rather than facilitating reasoned deliberation, a process critical to understanding political communication in the age of viral content.

Furthermore, the audience's clear preference for policy-focused critique provides a strong counter-narrative to global pessimism regarding digital democracy. Across many Western democracies, satire is often criticized for reinforcing cynicism or focusing solely on personality. Our data from Nigeria demonstrates that a discerning audience actively rewards—with higher engagement and emotion—the content that delves into substantive policy issues. This finding suggests that social media audiences worldwide may possess a stronger appetite for genuine, substantive political discourse than often credited, utilizing satire as a sophisticated mechanism to demand accountability on tangible governance issues rather than merely consuming political spectacle."

We recognize the critical distinction that mere numerical engagement does not equate to the *quality* of democratic discourse. However, in the absence of large-scale survey or experimental data, the engagement metrics in this study are utilized as essential proxy variables to quantify the civic impact of satire. Specifically, Reach and Virality and Total Calls to Action serve as direct proxies for the satire's mobilization potential and agenda-setting power within the digital public sphere. The finding that Aggressiveness significantly predicts Emotional Reactions is therefore a crucial insight into the mechanisms of resonance that the platform's algorithm prioritizes. Thus, these metrics are not treated as ends, but as the most observable means of measuring the immediate efficacy of humorous discourse in prompting political attention and action.

## Conclusion

This study provides valuable insight into the effectiveness of political satire on social media. The findings show that specific skit characteristics, such as aggressiveness and critique focus, are significant predictors of audience engagement, but not always in the manner that was initially hypothesized. The data points to a trade-off in audience response, where a more aggressive style may generate strong emotional reactions while simultaneously discouraging direct interactions. Most

notably, the study reveals that satire focused on a specific policy is a more effective catalyst for emotional engagement than satire that targets a politician's character.

### Recommendations

The researchers make the following recommendations to content creators and future researchers:

- To maximize emotional engagement and virality, comedians should consider a style that is more aggressive and focused on specific policies, as these were found to be the most potent predictors of emotional reactions.
- If the goal is to foster a community of direct interaction and conversation, comedians should consider a less aggressive tone, as high aggressiveness was found to discourage likes and comments.
- Future studies could use a larger sample size of comedians and skits from different platforms to validate these findings.
- Qualitative methods, such as interviews or focus groups, could be used to better understand *why* audiences react differently to varying satirical styles.
- Future research could explore the long-term effects of each satirical style on audience behavior.
- Future studies should employ a mixed-methods approach combining content analysis with survey or experimental design to capture the missing demographic data (age, education, partisan leanings) of the audience. This would allow researchers to test whether the observed effects (the Paradox of Laughter and the Policy Preference) are moderated by audience identity, providing a more complete understanding of who is engaging and why.

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**Appendix I.** Abridged Profiles of the Sampled Comedians.

Comedian	Primary persona/style	Cultural context
Comedian A	The Grassroots Everyman: Focuses on the struggles of the “common man.”	Uses Pidgin English to bridge the gap between elite politics and street-level reality.
Comedian B	The Moralist Critic: Employs high-production value skits with a focus on ethical lapses.	Often utilizes Christian or traditional moral frameworks to critique state corruption.
Comedian C	The Parodist: Specializes in direct mimicry of specific political figures.	Known for high “Specificity of Target,” directly naming and imitating Nigerian governors and ministers.
Comedian D	The Aggressive Trickster: Uses high-intensity, confrontational humor and loud delivery.	Embodies the indigenous “trickster” archetype, using irreverence to challenge authority figures directly.