

Humor in Cyberspace: Laughter as a Coping Mechanism in Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper investigates how Nigerians utilise online comedy as a coping mechanism in the midst of stress. It examines the hypothesis that the ever-growing online comedy in Nigeria has helped or can help to mitigate the affective impact of negative events in the country. 116 respondents participated in an online questionnaire requesting their opinion about online comedy in Nigeria. They also completed the Coping with Humour Scale and answered questions measuring depression and social anxiety. The results from the total sample revealed that Nigerians use humor as a coping mechanism in Nigeria. Overall, the results provided empirical support for the proposal that humor facilitates a more positive outlook on life. A series of correlation tests showed little evidence for any direct relationship between the respondents' Coping with Humour Scale scores and the background variables examined. Looking at the effects of gender, depression, the standard of living, and social anxiety, it was found that respondents had a similar response to online comedy in Nigeria, regardless of their social background.

Keywords: Humor, cyberspace, laughter, Nigeria, stress management

1. Introduction

1.1. Humor in Nigeria

Humor is an inherently complex phenomenon that plays a central role in social life. Although some scholars have argued against the use of laughter as the major determinant of humor because it is difficult to limit laughter to humor at all times and that laughter may have different meanings depending on the culture (Attardo 1994), the majority of scholars usually associate humor with laughter, happiness, cheerfulness, and feelings of happiness (Berger 1995; Filani 2016). This is the working definition adopted in the present study.

Nigerians love to laugh, no doubt. Nigeria has maintained a long history of being happy. Adegbite (2018) argues that Nigerians use humor as an antidote for stress, pain and suffering. During the festive seasons, especially in Lagos and other big cities, it is common to see

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numerous posters for upcoming comedy shows such as AY Live, Akpororo vs Akpororo, Night of a thousand laughs, Laffta Fest, and Crack Ya Ribs. These shows attract a huge crowd and bring in millions of Naira from tickets and sponsorship. A few decades ago, there was no comedy industry in Nigeria; however, today it is the third-largest entertainment industry in Nigeria (after Nollywood and music) with an estimated annual value of over 50 billion naira (Osae-Brown, 2015). The early phase of the evolution of comedy in Nigeria has been traced to the pre-colonial and colonial village spoke-persons (Gbinije 2013; Ayakoroma 2013; Taiwo 2017). This class of individuals received considerable admiration from the villagers for the comic spectacle that they often added to social events. Most of the time, the spoke-persons received gifts from the villagers as a form of appreciation. They increasingly received invitations from their patrons to perform at important occasions.

This continued until the 1950s, when the first generation of professional humorists became prominent in the country. This generation was championed by comedians like Moses Olaiya (Baba Sala), Usman Baba Pategi (Samanja), James Iroha (Gringory), Chika Okpala (Zebrudaya), Sunday Omobolanle (Aluwe), Afolabi Afolayan (Jagua), Kayode Olaiya (Aderupoko), Tajudeen Gbadamosi (Jacob), and Ayo Ogunshina (Papa Lolo) (Haynes 1994; Ijalana 2010; Olonilua 2011; Dede 2014). The theatre stage was the main outlet through which these pioneers delivered their humorous acts. Television shows came in much later around the late 1970s and early 1980s. Unfortunately for this pioneer generation, the income from their humorous performances generated insignificant financial returns. It was therefore not unusual that many of them had relatively modest lifestyles. Many of them had to support their comic vocation with other enterprises. Although this generation was applauded nationally, the general public considered it disparaging to follow their path. Not many young people openly aspired to be comedians (Taiwo 2017:27).

This negative perception continued until the arrival of the second generation in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The second generation witnessed the rise of comedians like Yibo Koko, Babatunde Omidina (Baba Suwe), Tony St Iyke, Agoma, John Chukwu, Jude Edesiri Onakpoma (Away Away), Sam Loco, Mazi Mperempe, Gbenga Adeboye, Mohammed Danjuma, Alam Blow, Atunyota Alleluya Akporobomerere (Ali Baba), Francis Agoda (I Go Die), Bunmi Davies, Basorge Tariah Junior, Julius Agwu, Nkem Owoh, Bolaji Amusan (Mr Latin), Okechukwu Onyegbule (Okey Bakassi), Bright Okpocha (Basket Mouth), Ayo Makun (AY), and Godwin Komone (Gordons). This generation marked the entrenchment of stand-up comedy and ushered in an era in which patrons and consumers of live comic performances accepted that they had to pay well to watch the inducers of laughter (Taiwo 2017:28). It is

important to mention the contribution of Opa Williams, a film producer, who popularised the Nigerian stand-up comedy by producing and sponsoring “Night of a thousand laugh” (NTL). The year 1995 witnessed the first edition of NTL, a special live event strictly involving only stand-up performances of comedians. From that year on, this event has been taking place annually and thus offers many Nigerian comedians of the second generation an elaborate platform to perfect their enterprise (Ayakoroma 2013). This generation thus elevated Nigerian humor to a coveted profession, particularly in terms of the ability of the enterprise to adequately satisfy the needs and fantasies of comedians.

The intersection between the lifestyle of many of the second-generation comedians and the income from their comic enterprise is worth rumination. Their lifestyle is certainly in stark contrast to the very humble life of first-generation Nigerian comedians who are still alive. Reports have it that the highest-paid (second-generation) comedian in Nigeria charges \$20,000 as performance fee for an event, that typically does not last longer than an hour (Gabriel 2012). It is estimated that, as of 2016, the leading comedians perform in at least four shows per month (Dube 2016). These comedians are also reported to make impressive money from endorsement deals from corporate and multinational companies (See Taiwo 2017). In all of this, the remarkable observation is the paradoxical link between the apparently growing wealth of these comedians and the continuing plunge in the resources available to Nigerians and the Nigerian society. What utility humor presents to the corporate and individual patrons of these comedians is an inherent question of whether these comedians offer any value whatsoever to their consumers.

The third generation of comedians in Nigeria is rather a unique one. This group of contemporary comedians are responsible for the evolving evangelical aspect of Nigerian comedy (Idahosa 2016; Augoye 2016, Adejobi 2016, Taiwo 2017). Examples of these comedians include Seyi Law, Gbenga Adeyinka, Teju Oyelakin (Babyface), Omo Baba, Gondoki, I Go Save, Princess, Lolo, Lepacious, Bose, Helen Paul, Aboki4Christ, Akpororo and Real Warri pikin. Many of these comedians are invited by churches to crack jokes in their special services to attract more members. Despite the controversy that this novelty generates, more churches continue to invite these comedians to grace their services. Many of these prominent third-generation comedians emerged at the same period that the second-generation comedians were either still on the rise or consolidating their ascendancy to fame, and obviously match their successful second-generation mentors in terms of flamboyance and income.

Many continue to join the army of third-generation Nigerian comedians, using particularly the Internet to deliver their comic contents. The older generation comedians are

forced to consider extending their presence to the social media if they must sustain their prominence in the industry. One of the newest sensations in this third generation is Mark Angel, with his company of little children, especially Emmanuela and Success. Mark Angel is popular for his comic uploads (skits) on all social media platforms. He currently has close to 6 million subscribers on YouTube (the highest in Nigeria). Other comedians utilising these channels include Woli Arole, Woli Agba, Williams Uchemba, MC lively, Asiri, Maraji, Broda Shaggi and Mr Macaroni. As noted by Olatunbosun (2013), social media jokes, which have some features that are similar to those of stand-up comedians, are daily increasing and rapidly gaining popularity and threatening the business of stand-up comedians. Many of these comedians like Lasisi elenu, MC lively and Broda Shaggi largely address the socio-economic and political issues in the country and skillfully use emotions such as anger to humorise these situations. There are others like Akpororo, Woli agba and Dele, Woli Arole and Asiri, and Acapella who crack jokes with religious content. They use religious organisations as platforms for their comedy. It will be interesting to know what becomes of the present generation in the future.

1.2. Comedy as a Coping Strategy

The rate at which Nigerians show interest in comedy, especially online comedy, in recent years is thought-provoking. One is then forced to question the reason for this development. Could it be as a result of the socio-political situation in the country? There's no denying that many people are going into comedy because of the superficial benefits that older comedians have enjoyed, but the increase in viewership and the quest for more comedy series is intriguing. It is also not news that the situation of things in Nigeria is mind-troubling. Unemployment is currently one of the fundamental challenges facing Nigeria. The rate of unemployment in Nigeria is alarming. The rate continues to rise without any significant effort to mitigate the effects. Available reports from various local and international bodies show there has been no time in Nigeria's history when the unemployment rate is as high as it is now (Kayode et al. 2014; ILO 2012). Recent statistics by the National Bureau Statistics has put the unemployment rate in Nigeria at 23 percent², while the youth unemployment rate is 36.5 per cent (NBS 2019).

The security crisis in Nigeria is also worrying. As Nigeria reels from one violent conflict to another, the country's leaders seem to be more clueless about what to do. Presently, the spotlight is on recurring violent conflicts between farmers and herders. Before now, it was Boko

² The projection by the Nigerian federal government is that it will hit 33.5 per cent in the current year (Premium Times 2020).

Haram.³ Even before that, it was the tensions in the Niger Delta, and so on. The most recent event is the pipeline explosion that occurred on March 15, 2020, in Abule-ado, Lagos State. The biggest problem, however, is that none of these challenges may ever change soon if the leaders remain clueless on what to do. This perhaps explains one of the main reasons for the increasing growth in the comedy industry. Many of the comedians realise how much money they can make from the industry by tapping into the need of the general public for things that will help them cope with the stress in the society.

Of particular interest in the present context are findings that indicate that an increased sense of humor can serve to moderate the affective impact of negative life events (Martin 1996; Martin & Lefcourt 1983). Consistent with such reports, the research on the relationship between laughter and coping with stress has found that people can and do use humor to cope with stress and adversity (Nezlek & Derks 2001). Such studies have typically employed self-report measures to assess various aspects of sense of humor, including both laughter responsiveness and amount of humor. For individuals with a low sense of humor, negative affect pertaining to depression, anxiety, anger, and fatigue increased as the number of their negative life events increased. In contrast, individuals with a higher sense of humor showed no increase in negative affect levels even as the number of their stressful life experiences increased. As such, this pattern provides empirical support for the widespread belief that people with a greater sense of humor are less adversely affected by stressful experiences (Martin 1989, 1996; Kuiper et al. 1992; Kuiper & Olinger 1998).

Overall, these studies have suggested that increased humor or laughter can serve to buffer the harmful effects of stress on an individual. Despite the frequency with which it has been suggested and tested that a good sense of humor helps to enhance quality of life, the empirical evidence associated with this claim has been relatively sparse. Most importantly, none of the available studies has been carried out in the Nigerian context. The present study aims to investigate Nigerians' use of humor as a coping mechanism. It also aims to examine the relationships between their use of humor as a coping mechanism and their daily social life and general psychological condition.

Although the study is guided by the general hypothesis that the use of humor as a means of coping would be positively related to the quality of people's social life, some important changes have been made to the methodology employed in this context. To begin, the present study used a reliable scale that was not employed in previous humor research to measure how

³ Various report sources have it that abductions, suicide bombings, and attacks on civilian targets by Boko Haram persist.

Nigerians use online comedy to cope with life difficulties. For instance, participants completed this scale once. In other words, the study relied extensively on a single retrospective report of events that might have occurred over a fairly substantial time period, such as the previous month, or even longer (e.g. Martin & Lefcourt 1983). A potential problem with this single assessment approach is the likely decrease in accurate reporting of life experiences and events as the time span increases (Martin 1989; Nezlek & Derks 2001). In order to minimise the effect of this challenge, the present study included additional personal questions that measured participants' cumulative social experience.

Also, the Coping with Humour Scale (CHS) employed in the present study was originally proposed as a seven-item scale; however, Martin (1996) has suggested that the seven items may not be equally valid measures of the underlying construct. Following Bentler's (1998) confirmatory factor analysis report that one of the items, "I must admit my life would probably be easier if I had more of a sense humor" was a relatively poor measure of coping humor, the item was excluded in the CHS used in this study. The item, "I usually look for something comical to say when I am in tense situations" (see Nezlek & Derks 2001) was also excluded particularly because the present study is more about the effect of comedians on respondents, rather than respondents' bent to crack jokes. Another item, "I watch online comedy only when I am in a bad mood," was added for the purposes of this study. The confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) conducted proved that the six CHS items included in this study were valid measures of coping with humor in the Nigerian context (see Section 3.1).

2. Methods

Participants were 116 Nigerians who were recruited to complete the questionnaire online within a space of two weeks. The description of the participants is summarised in Table 1. The participants were instructed to fill out the three-part questionnaire. The first part comprises a rating scale exercise. The role of online comedy in the social life of Nigerians was measured using the Coping with Humour Scale (Lefcourt & Martin 1986). The CHS is a self-report measure of items that measure how individuals make use of humor to deal with stress in their lives. It aids the evaluation of the relationships between humor and psychological adjustment as well as the social wellbeing of participants (Ruch 1998; Nezlek & Derks 2001). The scale was used to measure individual differences in the use of comedy on social media as a coping mechanism. Participants were instructed to rate each of the six items using a 5-point scale labelled 1 = not, 2 = slightly, 3 = somewhat, 4 = quite, and 5 = very. Examples of items on this scale are: "I often find it difficult to laugh when I'm having problems" and "I often find that

my problems have greatly reduced when I watch comedy online." The validity of the CHS has been proven by studies like Lefcourt and Martin (1986), Dillon et al. (1985), Trite and Price (1986), Martin and Dobbin (1988), Nezu et al. (1988) and Nezelek and Derks (2001).⁴

The second part contained direct questions measuring the psychological and social conditions of participants. In the third part, participants were questioned about their thoughts on comedians and online comedy in Nigeria.

Table 1: Composition of the Participants (N=116)

		Frequency	%
Gender	Male	55	47.4
	Female	61	52.6
Age	16-19	7	6
	20-29	79	68.1
	30-39	25	21.6
	40-49	2	1.7
	50+	3	2.6
First language	Hausa	7	6
	Igbo	15	12.9
	Yoruba	75	64.7
	Others	19	16.4
Occupation	Students	52	44.8
	Employed	60	51.7
	Unemployed	4	3.5
	Undergraduate	32	27.6
Educational level	OND/HND/NCE	14	12.1
	BA/BSc/BEd	48	41.4
	Masters and above	22	19

A series of statistical analyses were performed after the numerical data had been encoded, entered, and checked for errors. The relationships between the CHS summary measures and a

⁴ For a detailed explanation of the CHS, see Martin (1996) and Martin and Lefcourt (1983).
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number of background variables were examined using analysis of variance (ANOVA). The purpose of ANOVA is to determine the extent to which the effect of an independent variable is a major component (Girden 1992:1). It is often used to compare two or more means in order to estimate the significance of the differences between them. The results of the significant effect tests are reported accordingly.

3. Results

The section consists of four main parts. The first part deals with evaluation of the CHS scores, indicating the mean values and standard deviations. The second part presents the results of the respondents' responses about their social and psychological conditions, followed by their comments in the open questions. The third part deals with respondents' perceptions of comedians and online comedy in Nigeria. The relationship between the participants' CHS scores and their social variables was examined in the last part. The social factors examined are: gender, state of mind, standard of living and social anxiety.

3.1. Evaluation of the CHS Ratings

The CHS comprises a six-item scale. A descriptive statistical analysis was conducted to compare the overall average scores of the six items. The mean and standard deviations of the six rating scales are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Mean Ratings and Standard Deviations of the CHS (N=116)

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
I often find it difficult to laugh when I'm having problems	1	5	2.81	1.23
I often lose my sense of humour when I am bothered	1	5	2.66	1.36
I often find that my problems have greatly reduced when I watch comedy online	1	5	3.08	1.43
I watch comedy only when I am in a bad mood	1	5	1.85	1.3

I often feel that if I am in a situation where I have to either cry or laugh, it is better to laugh	1	5	3.50	1.41
I often feel that humour is a very effective way of coping with emotional problems	1	5	3.73	1.25

The result for the six-item scale rating shows high mean scores for most of the items but one "I watch comedy only when I am in a bad mood." In order to confirm whether these six items were good measures of the latent construct⁵, a Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted. The goal of CFA is to examine whether a given measurement model is valid for a particular context. The factor coefficients from this analysis are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Coping with Humour Scale: Factor Coefficients for the Six Items

Item	Coefficient
I often find it difficult to laugh when I'm having problems	.78
I often lose my sense of humour when I am bothered	.77
I often find that my problems have greatly reduced when I watch comedy online	.83
I watch comedy only when I am in a bad mood	.82
I often feel that if I am in a situation where I have to either cry or laugh, it is better to laugh	.86
I often feel that humour is a very effective way of coping with emotional problems	.62

The results of the confirmatory analysis of all the six items showed that the coefficient for each item was reliably different from 0 (all z s > 5.0). The CFA produced an absolute fit index of 0.93. Cronbach's alpha for the six-item scale was .77. The mean score for the six-item scale was 2.94. The results suggested that the six items were good measures of the latent construct. Thus,

⁵ A latent construct is used in CFA to denote a variable that cannot be measured directly but can be estimated by related variables (Ullman 1996). The latent construct in this study is how Nigerians cope with humour.

there is a tendency for the items to be reliably used as measures to examine how Nigerians use humor to cope with stress.

3.2. Social and Psychological Conditions of Respondents

Respondents were asked questions in order to elicit information about their psychological conditions. Participants were first asked whether they were generally happy people. The majority of the respondents (86%) claimed to be happy people, 6% said they were not happy, and the remaining 8% were unsure whether they were happy or not. The second question was asked to investigate whether respondents often felt depressed. While 69% of those surveyed said they hardly felt depressed, 25% admitted that they often felt depressed; the remaining 6% were unsure. To further examine respondents' exposure to depression, they were asked if they had people around them who often got depressed, 44% admitted they had depressed people around them, 36% said they did not have depressed people around them and the remaining 20% were not sure.

Respondents were also questioned about their self-esteem, the majority of them (81.9%) said they had positive self-esteem, 8.6% said they did not have positive self-esteem, and 9.5% were unsure whether they had positive self-esteem or not. Since the research was also concerned about the social condition of Nigerians, the respondents were asked whether they were satisfied with their standard of living. The greater percentage of the respondents (68%) were not satisfied with their standard of living, only 28% claimed that they were satisfied with their standard of living, the rest were not sure. To further elicit information about the socio-political situation in Nigeria, the respondents were asked whether they often get worried about the situation of things in Nigeria. The majority of the respondents (79%) admitted that they were often bothered about the way things were going in Nigeria, 17% claimed to be less bothered about the situation in Nigeria, and the remaining 4% were unsure whether the happenings in Nigeria ever worried them.

3.3. Respondents' Perception of Online Comedy in Nigeria

This part investigates the perceptions and attitudes of Nigerians towards online comedy and comedians in Nigeria. The first question asked the respondents about their disposition to online comedy in Nigeria. Most of the respondents (86.2%) had a positive attitude towards it, only 3.4% had a negative attitude and the remaining 10.3% were not sure. The next question was whether the number of online comedians in Nigeria had multiplied in the last years. 61% of the

respondents thought the number had multiplied, 34% did not agree to that, and the remaining 5.2% were unsure.

An open question was asked regarding what the respondents believed was responsible for the increase in the number of online comedy series. Overall, respondents' views on why Nigerians make more online comedy series are largely positive. However, the comments of the respondents can be divided into five categories. The first category reflects comedians' attempts to find solutions to the shortcomings of the government, either for themselves or the larger Nigerian population. Some of these comments are:

P12: No good job opportunities so people literally look for a way to survive and the online comedy is somewhat helpful in actualizing that

P31: To create a personal job

The second category reflects the commercial aspect of online comedy and the intention of online comedians to showcase their talents:

P8: Perhaps to showcase their talent and also for profit making

P43: For some, it might be for fame. While some because they have talent in it and has people around them that encourage them. Other is purely passion, they find joy in making people laugh.

P53: It's a new industry that builds quick fame and could get you through some important doors in Nigeria, at the end of the day it's for survival

P78: To make a living, majority of online comedians are not really meant to be in the comedy industry but they are just all about the fact that others are making it big in the comedy industry so they just go into it afterwards make junks.

The third category reflects the prominence of the internet in the Nigerian society and peoples' addiction to the social media:

P1: The world has gone digital

P27: Most people are often online than offline. People are emotionally attached to social media. Through online comedy, depressed people can be cheered.

P74: Technology availability and creativity

P76: And mostly people now days go online for everything

P93: It's easily accessible

P115: Because the world is fast becoming a global village

The fourth category reflects the attempt by comedians to use comedy as a tool for social transformation and to address the ill situations in the country:

P14: To inform the public about what is going on around them in very humourous way

P96: Because there are a lot of things happening in the country that people need to correct through the use of sarcasm.

P108: Often time, online comedy is made to depict the situation in our country. Nearly is there any development that comedian will not demonstrate in Nigeria.

More importantly, the last category reflects the attempt by both comedians and Nigerians to use humor to cope with stress:

P2: Watching comedy is a great way to relieve stress.

P3: Comedy is our way of coping with the hardships in Nigeria. That's why a lot of people subscribe to comedy & entertainment for distraction sake

P4: Online comedy has been a great help to people in the past years, a lot of people are depressed and since online comedy is the cheapest comedy to see, it has helped a lot of people from being depressed

P24: In order to reduce the rate of depression people are going through today in d society

P86: Because that is one of the most important things people need in Nigeria presently at least to shift focus from many problems that becloud the nation.

P88: Just to make Nigerians happy and get over the problem we have here in the country

P96: Nigerians are too tensed due to personal problems and myriads of problems there are in this country. Hence, comedy helps to get people relieved.

P107: Coping strategy to ward off depression

In order to examine how Nigerians use humor as a tool for social interaction, respondents were asked about the category of people they would rather watch an online comedy with. The percentage scores were relatively distributed. 49% would not mind watching online comedy with anybody, 34% only with their friends and the remaining 17% would rather watch it alone.

Finally, the respondents were asked whether more online comedy series should be produced daily. The majority of the respondents (72.4%) indicated that they would like to see more online comedy series, only 10.3% did not want it and the remaining 17.2% were indifferent.

3.4. Main Effects of Background Variables on the CHS Ratings

This section examines the effect of respondents' background information regarding their gender, psychological state (depression), social well-being (standard of living), and social anxiety. As previously mentioned, the personal information of the respondents was requested in order to investigate to what extent the differences in individuals' background influence their choice of humor as a coping mechanism.

The results of the series of ANOVA tests showed no significant correlation between any of the variables examined:

Gender: $F(6, 356) = 0.61, p > 0.05 (p = 0.35)$.

Standard of living of the respondents: $F(6, 210) = 0.07, p > 0.05 (p = 0.15)$.

Depression: $F(6, 150) = 0.87, p > 0.05 (p = 0.12)$.

Social anxiety: $F(6, 82) = 0.36, p > 0.05 (p = 0.8)$.

None of the variables had a significant effect on the CHS scores. It shows Nigerian have a uniform concept of coping with humor. The following section provides a more in-depth discussion of the results.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The results of the CHS ratings, as well as the comments from the respondents, have revealed that Nigerians use humor as a coping mechanism for stress in Nigeria. Respondents' opinions suggest the various ways that Nigerians have been using humor to deal with stress. Many of them, through online comedy, have created a means of sustenance for themselves and their families. As mentioned earlier, many of the comedians use their comedy skits to address the unwanted issues in the country. Comedians like MC Lively and Elenu use most of their skits as a tool for social transformation. The observation of the respondents on how comedians use their skits to correct the negative things happening in the country, sometimes through the use of sarcasm; and how they sometimes use their comedy skits to inform the public about what is going on in the country is consistent with what the likes of Olatubosun (2013) and Taiwo (2017) have noted.

Also, from the responses and comments of the respondents, it is expected that the number of online comedians will continue to grow, especially that their audience and fans appreciate what they are doing and even yearn for more comedy series. Many of the respondents commented on the ever-increasing rate at which Nigerians subscribe to comedy channels online and follow comedians on their social media pages in order to distract themselves from the challenges facing the society and on how they use comedy as a coping strategy to fight depression. The current number of subscribers that many of these comedians have on their various social media outlets is evidence. For example, as already mentioned, the YouTube channel in Nigeria with the largest number of subscribers is Mark Angel comedy, which has close to 6 million subscribers and over 1.23 billion views. Also, at the time of writing this paper, the comedian AY is one of the most followed Nigerian celebrities on Instagram with over 7 million followers. These findings are consistent with the report from previous research that

humor can be used to cushion the affective impact of stress on an individual (Martins 1996; Martin & Lefcourt 1983). In addition, many of the respondents claimed to be generally happy persons, despite the fact that a very high percentage of them admitted to being anxious about the situation of things in the country. It is possible that humor has been helping them stay happy and remain optimistic in the face of challenges (Adewunmi 2011; Scott 2016; BBC 2016). The comments from the respondents obviously support this proposal. This also explains why the majority of the respondents claimed to have a positive attitude towards online comedy. Not only did they believe that the number of comedians increased over the years, they also craved for more comedy series to be produced daily.

Although the results confirmed the hypothesis that Nigerians use humor as a coping mechanism, none of the background variables tested was significant. There did not seem to be a relationship between coping with humor and the gender of the respondents. There was also no significant relationship between the use of humour as a means of coping with stress and the standard of living of the respondents. Depression and coping with humor were also not significantly related. In other words, depressed people used humor as a coping mechanism almost as often as those who were not depressed. The rating score of the CHS item 'I watch comedy when I am in a bad mood' complements this finding. The relatively low rating indicates that Nigerians do not have to wait to be in a bad mood before they decide to watch online comedy. This result is consistent with previous research suggesting that the relationship between coping with humor and general optimism or perception about life is at best weak (Kuiper & Martin 1998:166; Nezelek & Derks 2001:407; Kuiper et al. 1992). The fact that anxiety did not significantly correlate with the CHS scores is also consistent with previous research. For example, Nezu et al. (1988) reported that anxiety did not significantly influence the responses of his respondents on how they used humor to cope. There may also be a weak relationship between coping with humor and social interaction. The fact that people use humor as a coping mechanism is relatively easy to understand. Compared to those who do not, people who use humor to deal with their own problems can reduce the burden on others. Such ease can lead to greater satisfaction and a greater sense of effectiveness in daily activities. It may be important for future research to take these factors into consideration in order to either validate or debunk these results.

This study was intended to be a preliminary study on how Nigerians use humor to handle stress; I, therefore, admit that the present study was somewhat limited. First, it is not clear how generalisable the results are. The social and psychological conditions of the respondents were only examined at a certain point in time, not in different periods. It is to be expected that the

responses from the participants will be influenced by this factor, especially that it is very possible that their conditions, consequently their responses will vary from one period to another. Also, even though the participants reported on whether they were depressed or not, it is not clear whether the outcome found in the present study would be found in a study in which severely or clinically depressed people were examined (Nezlek & Derks 2001:408; also see Flett et al. 1997).

In addition to the generalisability concerns of the present results, the tests for significant connections between the CHS ratings and a number of variables showed weak relationships among the variables. Assuming such estimates are accurate, it may be concluded that Nigerians have a uniform concept of coping with humor, regardless of their backgrounds, psychological states and social conditions. It is important to keep in mind that such a conclusion must leave open the possibility that the CHS scores could have been influenced by other factors not tested in this study. Future research will need to examine more background variables that can influence the CHS ratings.

Another general concern requires clarification in future research issues on the multidimensional nature of comedy, humor and laughter (Kuiper & Martin 1998:151). The present study, for instance, focused on laughter as a component of humor and being able to be triggered by watching online comedy. It should be noted, however, that laughter is different in many ways and that coping with humor may involve perceptual, cognitive and emotional processes, or a combination of two or three of them (Kuiper & Olinger 1998; Kuiper & Martin 1998). These distinctions may then have implications for the mechanisms and methodology to adopt in the study. Thus, future research may have to clearly outline the distinctions between laughter and other components of humor, both in terms of what triggers them and the likely response(s) to them.

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