

## **ART REPORTING: CARTOONING IN THE PRINT MEDIA**

Buike Oparaugo

Former Lecturer, Mass Communication Department,

The Polytechnic of Sokoto State, Sokoto

buikeoparaugo@gmail.com

### **ABSTRACT:**

This paper examined cartooning in the print media as a form of reporting. Cartooning generally requires a measure of creativity and ability to depict issues and events in pictorial fashion. The use of cartoons has been a long standing feature of the print media, specifically newspapers and magazines. Caricature as a form of art had existed for a very long time in Nigeria before the belief that this form of satirisation in Nigeria is a colonial innovation. The Punch, The Guardian, This Day, The Sun, Vanguard, The Nation, Tell, Newswatch, etc., all publish cartoons and comic strips on social, political and economic affairs of the country or as illustrations of some editorial matter. Cartoons are funny drawings on newspapers and magazines making caricature of societal ills or maladministration. The primary function of the cartoon is communication. Cartoon was originally a sketch for a large canvas or fresco painting for architectural drawings, for tapestry design or for pictures in mosaic or glass. At present, cartoon has no doubt become an indispensable part of modern journalism. The article is however, anchored on two theories: social responsibility theory and agenda-setting theory. The researcher highlighted three major types of newspaper cartoons, which are: comic strips, political cartoons and gag cartoons. While considering the prominence and personality involved in drawing cartoon, the cartoonist also has to

consider the timeliness of the issue being presented to the readers. The researcher identified some of the functions/roles of newspaper cartoons, among which is that cartoon provides readers with the platform of the formation of public opinion. The researcher concluded that cartoons published in newspapers are the critiques of the issues, personalities and institutions of the current situation as it can be said that cartoons are the chronicle of the current history. The researcher therefore, recommend that Art Reporting should be stand as a separate course in the field of mass communication just as Photography and Photojournalism, Investigative and Interpretative Reporting, Editorial Writing, Feature and Article Writing, and News Writing and Reporting.

**Key words:** Cartoon, cartooning, print media.

### **INTRODUCTION:**

Cartoons have over the years become a major feature of newspaper and magazine content in Nigeria. A panoramic observation would reveal that most daily newspapers and weekly magazines publish various cartoons and comic strips (Onakpa, 2014). The Punch, The Guardian, This Day, The Sun, Vanguard, The Nation, Tell, Newswatch, etc., all publish cartoons and comic strips on social, political and economic affairs of the country or as illustrations of some editorial matter. Cartooning has been one of the most significant tools in propagating and promoting the cultural

heritage in Nigeria. Using imagery, metaphor, symbolism and other rhetorical devices cartoonist defines political situations and attempts to interpret them visually in a way that is both amusing and thought provoking.

The primary function of the cartoon is communication. And communication more specifically is defined as a process of sharing meaning the source of the message and the individual or group of individuals on the receiving end (Tyumbu, 2018, p.137). Udoakah (2003a) remarks that both editors and cartoonists consider cartoons as a very effective channel of communication. Udoakah (2003b) argues that the satirical representation in graphic form of the lives of political actors and actions as well as socio-economic, religious, or cultural issues with political undertones, reveal the narrative power of cartoons, thus he writes: "narrative communication is a process that does not take place exclusively through linguistic medium but that all media, whatever their primary sensory basis, can serve as vectors of narrative." The term also means giving and receiving signs which have meaning attached to them. The importance of communication in the society cannot be over emphasized. That is why Oyewo (2000) stated that communication is a central activity that human life revolves around, a sine qua non to human to human existence. Just as news writing and reporting is a universal feature of print and electronic media, cartoon is a major feature or aspect of the print media. Cartoons must meet certain criteria which among other things include prominence, proximity, personality involved and so on. Just as editorial relies on topical issues which have been in the news recently, so does cartoons rely on editorial and news to draw its meaning when drawn.

Some scholars see the genre of political cartoons as an important medium of formation

and building of public opinion on salient political and social issues (Abraham, 2009). The old thoughts of media historians to deny the worthiness of cartoons has replaced with the concept that cartoon communication is used for government propaganda, public catharsis, publicity stunt, or instructional aid, so the media scholars have started to pay attention on cartoon research as a powerful medium of communication (Ashfaq and Bin-Hussein, 2013). Cartoon certainly ranks among the oldest core content of mass media of communication. It is obvious; however, that this vital content of mass media has received minimal research attention and or critical analysis in professional journals, series, books, etc. this oversight is actually what has sparked off the desire for this study.

More specifically, media discourse harnesses language as an indispensable tool in media communication whereby journalists use both linguistic and nonlinguistic resources as devices, techniques or skills of manipulating language efficiently and persuasively to create effect and impression in a literary or dramatic work such as cartoons and to evoke a particular response from audience. These devices are employed purposely to communicate with the audience in order to persuade them towards perceiving a particular topic from a different point of view to make them more receptive and to provide rational argument for making public opinion that may bring positive changes in society (Sani, Abdullah, Abdullah and Ali, 2012).

#### **MEANING OF CARTOON:**

Cartoons are funny drawings on newspapers and magazines making caricature of societal ills or maladministration. Cartoon is a pictorial parody or imitation, which, by the devices of caricature, analogy as well as ludicrous juxtaposition, sharpens the public

view of a contemporary or topical issue, event, political or social trend. A cartoon carries with it the caricature as an almost indispensable element. Just as the caricature is for an audience that is familiar with the original, the cartoon is based on wide acquaintance with the subject. Cartoons come in various forms/genres: the editorial cartoons which are found in newspapers and magazines, and animations/animated cartoons for the electronic media, e.g. Tom and Jerry, Casper, Pokemon, Mickey Mouse, etc.

According to Salihu and Oparaugo (2017, p.149) cartoon can be defined as “funny line drawings in newspapers mocking the political events and policy.” They further added that cartoons usually employ humor or irony to point out shortcomings or hypocrisies within the political system. An editorial cartoon, also known as a political cartoon, is a drawing containing a commentary expressing the artist's opinion (Sterling, 2009). Shelton (2017) further posits that an artist who writes and draws such images is known as an editorial cartoonist. They typically combine artistic skill, hyperbole and satire in order to question authority and draw attention to corruption, political violence and other social ills.

Newspaper cartoons are drawings or series of art drawings that tell stories about human actions or inactions in the society. Cartoons amuse, yet they are veritable means of exposing social ills, (Ukonu, 2013, p.68). They as well communicate and convey messages of deep meaning and magnitude. A cartoon is a medium of expressing criticism without appearing harmful, (Ukonu, 2013, p.68). It educates, attacks, irritates, teases or satirizes societal ills and gross misconduct of people. They may tell stories in single panel format with single picture in a box. Here, the story may begin and end in box. Multiple panel cartoons involve more than one cartoon in the box or

sequence of boxes. Editorial cartoons are single panel graphics that comment on political events and policy, and serve to define the significant topics of political discourse and record them, thus creating a “snapshot” of the political climate in a given period (Conners, 2005)

Some scholars see cartoons as an important medium for the formation of public opinions on salient social issues (Agberia, 2003). They are seen as “both, opinion-moulding and opinion-reflecting”, and they provide subtle frameworks within which to examine the life and political process of a nation (Caswell, 2004). Cartoons are intended to transform otherwise complex and opaque social events and situation into quick and easily readable depictions that facilitates comprehension of the nature of social issues and events (Agberia, 2003).

Cartoon is defined as “a graphic presentation typically designed in one panel, non-counting format to make an independent statement or observation on political events or social policy,” (Edward and Ware, 2005). They often employ humor or irony to point out short-comings or hypocrisies within the political system. While many studies use the terms “political cartoon” and “editorial cartoon” interchangeably, others differentiate between comic strips and political contents, and single panel cartoons that make commentary on politics and policy. The latter could generally appear on the editorial page of a printed newspaper, and are the focus of this study.

Newspaper cartoons are powerful medium of expressing opinion without looking harmful. According to him, cartoon communicates by humor and satire. It is used to discuss social affairs. It can imitate, educate or tease; cartoon informs and reforms, transmitting information graphically by humor. Cartoons give a

symposium reporting and aesthetic roles in newspaper and magazine production.

An editorial cartoon uses a picture instead of words to get a point across and expressing opinion of the newspaper but unlike editorials, it is signed, whereas many people won't read and readers will read an editorial cartoon, (Levin, 2000, p.112). It is important at this point to note or emphasize that this paper focuses on newspapers and magazine editorial cartoons. Unlike the newspaper editorial that is not signed, newspaper cartoons are signed, that is, they have by-lines just like news, opinions, features and article writing.

### **Historical Perspectives of Cartoon:**

Cartoon (Italian word, 'cartone' meaning paper) was originally a sketch for a large canvas or fresco painting for architectural drawings, for tapestry design or for pictures in mosaic or glass (Lynch, 1972). Cartoon acquired its present meaning in 1843 when a great exhibition was organized by Prince Albert (Queen Victoria's consort) to get designs for the walls of the new House of Parliament. Many of the entries, though lofty in intention, were ridiculous. The later reflected in John Leech drawings which were the first cartoon' in that sense of the word to be so called.

At present, cartoon has no doubt become an indispensable part of modern journalism. Cartoon is originally meant to be a drawing, a full size pattern for execution in painting and tapestry. It was the final stage in the series of drawn preparations for painting in traditional renaissance studio practice. By the 1840s when that studio practice was rapidly declining, cartoon rather acquired a new meaning (earlier given in the introduction).

In 1843 the British parliament ordered for designs in a competition for fresco. These designs were later parodied in *The Punch* by

John Leech. He used the cartoon to satirize and lampoon the socio-political abuses of that period. From that moment, the word cartoon acquired its present popular meaning of a humorous drawing or parody that satirizes. Over the years, cartoons have gained prominence in newspapers and magazines in different countries, not only as means of entertainment and education but also as tools for enhancing the sale of the papers. The relative peace that Europe enjoyed after the First World War (1914-1918) witnessed a great boom in the newspaper publishing business and in turn, this influenced the use of cartoons for sociopolitical commentary.

According to Nze (1989), the importance of cartoons as instrument of political and social commentary was not confined to Europe alone. During the American Civil War, the cartoon became a powerful tool on the side of the North and in the overthrow (in 1873) of the corrupt political group known as the Tweed Ring which controlled the government of New York from about 1870. By the 1800s, cartoons had become so important in the American newspaper industry that through it a type of journalism that lays emphasis on sensationalism, gossip, crime, sex, etc. got the name Yellow Journalism. It happened that an American newspaper publisher, Hearst, hired an illustrator, Richard F. Outcault from Joseph Pulitzer's *The World*. Outcault had drawn a child cartoon character who appeared in yellow dress and became known as the Yellow Kid.

Bittner (1989) says however, the kid stayed behind at Pulitzer's *The World* to be drawn by George B. Luks. This era became known as the yellow journalism era. Coupled with the popularity of the penny press (an era that flourished after that of yellow journalism), newspapers became very powerful and influential among the masses. Still in the US,

general interest in cartoon, their interpretation and relevance became heightened when an individual like Bill Mauldin of The Chicago Sun Times and nineteen (19) students of Yale University started a course in political cartoon. The interest this aroused gave those students the opportunity to know the extent of freedom of expression that cartoons guarantee. The 20th Century saw cartoons become a daily feature of newspapers and magazines.

### **Cartooning in Nigeria:**

Caricature as a form of art had existed for a very long time in Nigeria before the belief that this form of satirisation in Nigeria is a colonial innovation (Onipede, 2005). It could be pertinent to note that the functional concept of cartoons has been embedded in Nigerian traditional societies which were used to satirise and correct the ills of the society. Satire in verbal and visual element which include abusive and mocking songs during the traditional festivals such as Ibadan, Gelede, Efe, and Bolojo, etc and sculptural mocking images on helmet and a facial masks worn by the masquerades during Egungun festivals (Onipede, 2005).

Since the return of civil rule in Nigeria in 1999, it is hard to find a single newspaper publication without a cartoon communicating humorously messages of national importance (Oparaugo, 2014). Newspapers in the missionary era, which was considered the first period in Nigerian print Journalism never gave regard to cartoon. The period of the nationalist press considered as the second era of print journalism in Nigeria marked the adaptation of the western tradition of featuring comic strips which were normally placed in the foreign news section of the papers. From 1960 to date, the trend in most Nigerian newspapers and magazines has been a combination of both comics and serious political cartoons.

Communication scholars are all agreed that, as it is with many subjects, visuals greatly assist in arousing readers' interests. In the print media, cartoons equally assist in providing a clear mental picture, speed understanding, help memory and provide a shared experience. Some cartoons are even featured without captions or written explanations, yet the messages inherent in them are still understood by readers. Memoirs in the Saturday Punch is a good example of such.

Newspaper cartoons throughout Nigerian history reveal that they have served as unique windows useful in understanding local and national politics (Olaniyan, 2002). Using imagery, metaphor, symbolism and others rhetorical devices, the cartoonist defines political situations and attempts to interpret them visually in a way that both amusing and thought provoking. The exploit of Akinola Lasekan with his editorial cartoons in the West African Pilot in the 1940 and 1950s reflect colonial life, and also depict the struggle for nationhood which later culminated in Nigeria's independence in 1960 (Olaniyan, 2002).

Additionally, and perhaps most importantly, newspaper cartoons serve as a unique record of the particular events, attitudes and narratives present during a moment in political history (DeSousa and Medhurst, 1982). Newspaper cartoons featured predominantly during military rule in Nigeria. The period (1983-1999) witnessed remarkable events in the democratization of the country. Characterized by abusive use of power by the military government beginning with General Muhammadu Buhari's coup d'état on 31 December 1983, followed closely was the tenure of General Ibrahim Babangida, who was described as the "Maradona" of Nigeria politics due to his methods of politics visible in the annulment of the presidential election in 1993, and the eventual transmission to

democratically-elected president in 1999 (Olaniyan, 2002).

The cartoonist acts as the conscience or the voice of the people. He speaks for and represents the opinion of the people. On this, Alimi and Shopeju (1999) give the following example: When the Uwaifo Judicial panel absolved Alhaji Shehu Shagari and Dr. Alex Ekweme for charges of corruption leveled against them, Kabiyesi' in the National Concord had this comment; why did the army take over? Many Nigerians would have asked this question if they had the opportunity. The two scholars cited above also regard cartoon as topical. Because of this, the cartoonist functions as a chronicler of events, which are graphically presented. Reading through the cartoons of a particular period will definitely assist in remembering the major events of that period. The common features of editorial cartoons are a good grasp of current affairs, clearly identified political issues and problems that are local and international and also deft craftsmanship and skill in snappy graphic language.

The cartoon serves as a capsule version of editorial opinion meant for the reading public to swallow and probably get some societal ills cured. In other words, the drawing or graphic illustration and the commentaries in cartoons on political and social issues are not only intended to create fun for the readers but they also seek to ginger their sense of reasoning into clamouring for positive change in the political structure.

The political cartoon is often satirical in nature and castigates the social misdeeds, sayings, views or events that have to do with highly placed personalities. The cartoon is therefore a vital tool employed by the press for its watchdog role in the society. By keeping public officials on their toes, the cartoon assists in correcting societal ills. Cartoons offer a

retreat from reality and that in many ways the world is not particularly comfortable. Many cartoons are entirely serious in their intentions; it is through humour that some of these difficult matters are exorcised.

### **Theoretical Underpinning:**

The article is supported with two theories: social responsibility theory and agenda-setting theory.

### **Social Responsibility Theory:**

Social responsibility theory appealed to the idealism of individual media practitioners and tried to unite them in service of cultural pluralism (Okoye and Oparaugo, 2019). It encouraged them to see themselves as front-line participants in the battle to preserve democracy in a world drifting inexorably towards totalitarianism. Dennis McQuail (1987) summarized the basic principles of the theory as follows:

- Media should accept and fulfill certain obligations to society
- These obligations are mainly to be met by setting high or professional standards of informativeness, truth, accuracy, objectivity and balance.
- In accepting and applying these obligations, media should be self-regulating within the framework of law and established institutions.
- The media as a whole should be pluralist and reflect the diversity of their society, giving access to various points of view and to rights of reply.
- Society and the public have a right to expect high standards of performance and intervention.
- The media should avoid whatever might lead to crime, violence, or civil disorder or give offence to minority groups.

This theory was chosen as the cartoonists see themselves as front-line

participants in the battle to preserve democracy in a world drifting inexorably towards totalitarianism.

### **Agenda-Setting Theory:**

First introduced in 1972 by college professors, Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw, they found in surveying North Carolina voters during the 1968 U.S. presidential election that what people thought were the most important issues were what the mass media reported as the most critical. Thus, agenda-setting theory was born, built on the notion that the mass media sets the agenda for what people should care about. According to Okoye and Oparaugo (2019), the agenda-setting theory does not give the media the exclusive power or authority to determine what the public actually thinks, but it does give them the power to determine what the public should be thinking.

There are however, two core assumptions of the theory. The first is that the media filters and shapes what we see rather than just reflecting stories to the audience. An example of this is seeing a sensational or scandalous story at the top of a broadcast as opposed to a story that happened more recently or one that affects more people, such as an approaching storm or legislative tax reform.

The second assumption is that the more attention the media gives to an issue, the more likely the public will consider that issue to be important. Another way to look at it: Mass media organizations aren't telling us what to think or how we should feel about a story or issue, but are giving us certain stories or issues that people should think more about.

There is psychological and scientific merit to the agenda-setting theory. The more a story is publicized in the mass media, the more it becomes prominently stored in individuals'

memories when they're asked to recall it, even if it doesn't specifically affect them or register as a prominent issue in their minds. According to McCombs and Shaw (1976) media emphasis on an issues influences the audience to view the issue as important. Thus, newspaper readers view any issue drawn on the cartoon box as important to have merited such interest from the cartoonist and the editor.

### **Types of Newspaper Cartoons:**

There are three major types of newspaper cartoons: comic strips, political cartoons and gag cartoons.

#### **Comic Strip Cartoons:**

Comic Strip Cartoons have more than one panel. They usually are a series of humorous drawings put together to make a funny plot. The last panel usually has the punch line. Animation is kind of like a Comic Strip Cartoon, because Animation is basically defined as a series of pictures put together one after the other to make it seem as if the characters are in motion.

#### **Political Cartoons:**

Political Cartoons usually serve as a visual commentary on current events. Usually satirical rather than just funny, they may say the political viewpoint of the cartoonist or an addition to an editorial opinion article in a newspaper or magazine. In other words, they show the Cartoonists view of the Politics that they are drawing about. But, sometimes Political Cartoons may express an idea that the Government is trying to stop.

#### **Gag Cartoons:**

Gag Cartoons usually consist of just one panel. This one panel shows the humor in, or makes fun of a certain group of people, rather

than just a single person. Gag cartoons are usually found on greeting cards or magazines.

### **Cartooning in the Print Media:**

Political cartoons adorn a small part of a newspaper, often in a corner. Cartooning generally requires a measure of creativity and ability to depict issues and events in pictorial fashion (Ofor and Obiorah, 2014, p.188). The print medium often uses cartoons in their daily and weekly publications. Just like the photojournalist uses pictures to tell stories, the artiste uses cartoons to tell stories. Like news, articles and pictures appearing on the pages of newspapers and magazines are signed under their by-lines, the cartoon is also signed. As noted by Nkana (2006), cartoons tell stories or express message, entertain, teach or comment on a person, event or state of affairs with or without words and encourage the reader to develop an opinion about someone or something prominent in the news.

Cartoons are editorials in pictures. Like an editorial, cartoon is somebody's opinion. Only instead of expressing it through words, the cartoonist presented his ideas in picture form (Ogbuoshi, 2011). In conveying his message to the readers, the cartoonist/artist employs humour and caricature. In newspapers, some newspapers' house style means that the cartoon will be on the editorial page, hence the name editorial cartoon; while some others place it on any other page as the editor deems fit or as dictated by the house style. Thus, Ojobor (2017, p.193) posited that an editorial cartoon is an illustration, picture, caricature or comic strip containing a political or social message usually relating to current events or personalities. Because it is often connected with political institutions, some authorities refer to it as "political cartoon". However, Orhewere (2016) feels cartoons should be placed on the editorial page,

although he is convinced that no matter where the cartoon is placed, it will still get attention. Ogbuoshi (2011, p.106) added that a cartoon is placed on the editorial page to reinforce editorial comment. An editorial cartoon also helps in informing and educating readers (Oparaugo, 2014; Ojobor, 2017; Ogbuoshi, 2011 and Ukonu, 2013).

The cartoonist may decide to use a comic strip, political cartoon or a gag cartoon according to the message of the day. However, sometimes, the cartoon and the newspaper editorial of the day have the same message albeit using different medium. While the editorial uses only words, the cartoons use drawn images and sometimes accompanied by few words. While not all readers may have the patience to read the editorial completely, the readers have the patience to read a complete cartoon.

### **Determinants of Cartoon:**

There are two major issues that determine what the cartoonist considers before drawing cartoons. They are: timeliness and the prominence and personality involved.

#### **Timeliness:**

This refers to the time an event occurs. An idea, event, experience, observation or problem prevalent in the society is cartoon worthy when it is new or recent. Its relevance lies in the fact that it should be hot and juicy. Thus, the cartoonist must endeavour to get the drawing done before others or at least not later than others.

#### **Prominence and Personality Involved:**

Popularity or eminence is a determining factor for issues that are cartoon worthy. Thus, the decision of an editor regarding which cartoon appears on his national daily can be influenced to a very large extent by the

personality or personalities involved. For example, the proposed Presidential debate between President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan of the PDP and presidential candidate General Muhammadu Buhari of the APC in 2015 was cartooned by Sun newspaper.

**Roles of Newspaper Cartoons:**

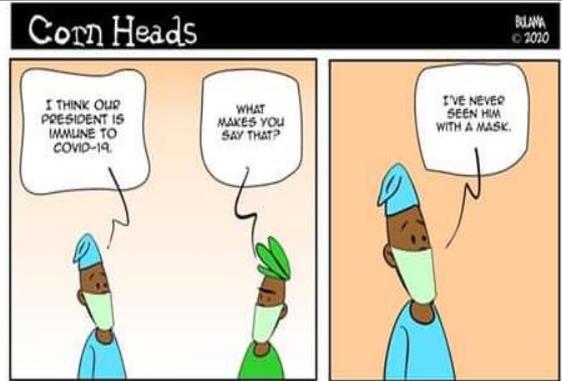
The importance of cartoons and illustrations are to use line drawings and pictorial representations to tell news (Nnamani, 2016). According to Salihu and Oparaugo (2017, p.153) the following are the roles of cartoons in newspapers:

1. Cartoon serves as a form of entertainment to newspaper readers.
2. Cartoon provides comic relief to readers who are stressed up.
3. Cartoons inform readers of the social ills going on within their environment.
4. Cartoon complements the editorial for easier and better understanding especially to impatient readers who don't like reading lengthy write-ups.
5. Cartoonists use cartoons to express what cannot otherwise be expressed in news/features/editorials.
6. Cartoon provides readers with the platform of the formation of public opinion.
7. Newspapers use cartoons to attack or criticize corrupt public office holders in an unharmed manner.

**Samples of some Newspaper Cartoons:**



Daily Trust newspaper cartoon, May, 24, 2020



Daily Trust newspaper cartoon, May 17, 2020



Daily Trust newspaper cartoon, April 27, 2020



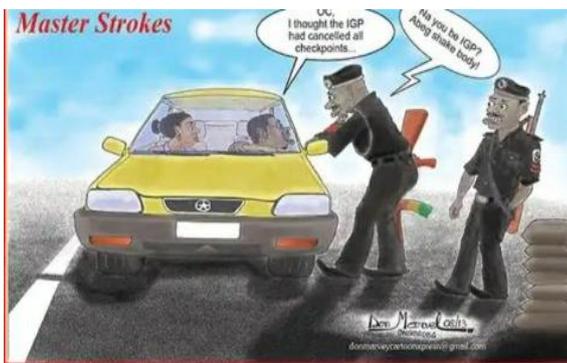
The Punch newspaper cartoon, April 29, 2019



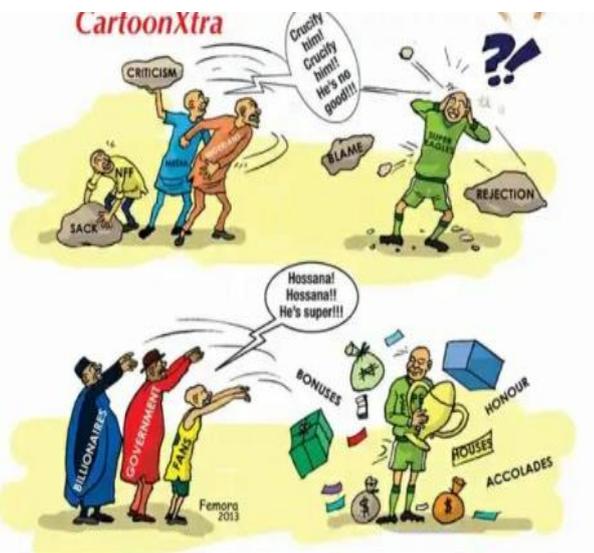
The Guardian newspaper cartoon, September 15, 2018



The Punch newspaper cartoon, December 5, 2018



Tell Magazine cartoon



Tell Magazine cartoon, 2013

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

Predicated on the Agenda setting theory of the press, this paper maintains that cartoons help to set the tone of public discussions over issues of national concern. Cartoons published in newspapers are the critiques of the issues, personalities and institutions of the current situation as it can be said that cartoons are the

chronicle of the current history. It is a unique form of communication which edges on the verge of fine art. Cartoonists that must promote democratic ideals must not allow any crisis to lure them away from true patriotism towards "the so-called, nationalism."

Newspaper cartoons have a lot of influence on politics like political elites and decision makers as well as large number of audience shaped by information from the mass media.

We therefore, recommend that Art Reporting should be stand as a separate course in the field of mass communication just as Photography and Photojournalism, Investigative and Interpretative Reporting, Editorial Writing, Feature and Article Writing, and News Writing and Reporting.

We also recommend that cartoonists that have served long and mature enough can occupy seats on the editorial board of media organizations.

Cartoonists should be allowed to express the public voices in the form of their creative and unbiased drawings. The impartial and objective attitude is required for ensuring the freedom of expression in Pakistan not only in the field of cartoon communication but also in the whole mass media.

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