

Prank as social media comedy in Nigeria: Chibuike's *African Snake Man Prank* and *Iboji Grave Prank* as examples

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ABSTRACT: Prank videos have become the new-normal on social media. Pranks like smashing a stranger's phone, eating cow dung, and eating poisonous insects, have gone viral on social media sites like Facebook and Tiktok, and because social media offers content creators quick fame, stardom and wealth, content creators are ready to do anything including risking their lives just for the views, likes, shares, and the money, fame and notoriety that comes with creating contents on social media. While many have raised concerns over viral prank videos that are anti-social on social media, some Nigerian comics which we call 'social media comedians' have been able to create comedy from prank videos. This qualitative study examines prank as a form of social media comedy using Ubani Zion Chibuike's *African Snake Man Prank* and *Iboji Grave Prank*, and employs the digital qualitative research method and netnography as its methodology. The findings reveal that both acts had strong online audience engagement, according to comments by viewers on Chibuike's YouTube channel - Zfancy. However, 6,000 likes, 1,246,990 views, and 2,891 comments on the *African Snake Man Prank* outperformed 12,000 likes, 376,606 views, and 1,221 comments on the *Iboji Grave Prank* in terms of viewers' engagements. Also, their comments indicated they liked both pranks and identified with the situations they portrayed. Furthermore, Chibuike's prank rely heavily on natural situations than scripted scenarios. This kind of approach cuts down on production costs and time, eliminating the need for elaborate scripting, directing, and editing. The study recommends further investigation on the various forms of comic pieces on social media.

Keywords: Comedy, comedian, Nigeria, prank, social media.

INTRODUCTION

Humour remains a universal cord that binds humanity, irrespective of age, race, class, colour, sex or religious orientation. Bily (2005) argues that humour is an inherent phenomenon of human life that plays a central and necessary part in social life (Cited in Filani, 2016, p.1). Perhaps, this is the reason why unborn babies play and dance in their mothers' wombs when excited. The term, humour, according to Attardo (2011, p.135), "has emerged as a technical term intended as covering anything that is (or maybe) perceived as funny, amusing," comic "or laughable". In the same vein, there have been controversies surrounding the use of laughter as a determining factor for humour, as it is difficult to always pin down laughter to humour (Attardo, 1994).

The humorous may also depend on the society, social

context and culture. Similarly, Raskin (1985) believes that what is humorous is what the native speakers of a language take as humorous. Notwithstanding, humour also occurs in cross-cultural and multilingual societies. An example of this is seen in the fact that, we all find humour in the comic films of Charlie Chaplin, irrespective of our racial, cultural, age and religious orientations.

In Nigeria, comedians have long been in existence, especially as village spokesmen in traditional ceremonies and other occasions. These comedians attracted enough recognition that they were paid to perform at events. Owajaye (2019) records that by the 1950s, the first generation of vocational humour performers were already visible in Nigeria with names such as Moses Olaiya (Baba Sala), Usman Baba Pategi (Samanja), James Iroha

(Gringory), Chika Okpala (Zebrudaya), Adeyemi Afolayan, aka, Ade Love (Jagua), and others. Today, modern Nigerian stand-up comedy is associated with Opa Williams. His 1995 maiden edition of *Night of a Thousand Laughs* at the University of Lagos, created the platform and springboard for the development of modern Nigerian stand-up comedy. Stand-up comedians like Ayodeji Makun (AY), Julius Agwu, Basket Mouth, I Go Dye, Bovi, I Go Save, Klint de Drunk, Okey Bakassi, and many others, have made their names in the Nigerian entertainment industry.

However, since the advent of the internet, social media, and the coronavirus pandemic, there have been significant changes, as many Nigerian comedians now use the social media to engage with their audience. Such social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and YouTube are now avenues for Nigerian comedians to upload their comic skits for viewers to access, while they (the comedians) smile to the bank. Aside the advantage of a wider audience reach, Kunde (2022) argues that, "social media has made it easier for companies to distribute their content across several platforms... to leverage their existing audiences and reach new ones through the power of sharing". Also, the use of drones, 3D animation, artificial intelligence, machine learning, and other technologies, helps producers create videos more effectively. It is important to note that prank videos are rapidly gaining popularity on social media in Nigeria.

Krakowiak and Modlinski (2014) define a prank as a ridiculous event or act carried out to amuse or ridicule a victim who does not anticipate being the target of any mockery or comic circumstance. Pranks have been defined as a type of play that, by drawing on socio-cultural ideas, seeks to blur the line between imagination and reality and is unserious, make-believe, and involves a significant amount of surprise (p.32). A possible reason why prank videos are growing common on social media is the accessibility of technological devices like digital cameras, which have made video production simple. The short skits are captured by the camera, edited, and posted on social media for viewers. Again, it is necessary to state that stand-up comedy which involves the telling and performance of jokes by a comic before a live audience, is different from social media comedy which are already pre-recorded comic videos by comedians uploaded on social media.

Owajaiye (2019) observes that, currently, Instagram is regarded as the quickest channel for comedians to gain exposure. The easy access to celebrities and the sheer number of users of the platform, means that all it takes is for the right persons to see your comic skit, and a comedian is launched into social media stardom. Examples of comedians who have become celebrities via social media are Maraji, Emmanuella and Mark Angel, Craze Clown, Josh2funny, Ubani Zion Chibuike (Zfancy), and many others.

The foregoing reveals that the same reasons that led to

the decline of live theatre and gave rise to the development of the Nigerian film industry (Nollywood), are the same issues challenging stand-up comedy in Nigeria. Although, comedy shows are very much in vogue, especially during periods such as Valentine, Easter, Independence Day, and New Year Day, issues bothering on insecurity, the get-famous-quick syndrome, the immediacy and wider coverage of social media, plus reduced time span, makes it more comfortable and safer for people to sit in the comfort of their homes and access comic skits on social media with their smartphones. Also, attention is a scarce commodity on social media, as every content is designed to catch the attention of viewers. Hence, most contents on social media are short and compressed to meet the constraints of the medium. This qualitative research examines prank as social media comedy in Nigeria using Ubani Zion Chibuike's *African Snake Man Prank* and *Iboji Grave Prank* as case studies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Comedy: Meaning and origins

Comedy is one of the major divisions of drama and describes a play that ends happily. Perhaps, the very essence of comedy is captured in the opinion of Carus (1898, p.251), who argues that "life is serious, and if we could see all the misery of life at once, it would so oppress us that we would long die". He observes further that:

Because life is serious, and because we need a buoyant spirit to fight the struggles of life bravely, we need as a temporary relief from time to time a hearty laugh. The man who always laughs lacks seriousness, he is silly. Constant laughing betrays a fool. But a man who cannot laugh had better consult his physician. He is sick. He is devoid of that elasticity of spirit which is so necessary for carrying the burden of life with ease and good grace (Carus, 1898, p.251).

The import of the above submission is that laughter is a necessity of life for every human being. Wright (1972, p.49) observes that the very heart of comedy lies in man's recognition of how far his fellow man has fallen from the idea. By implication, laughter is a sentimental outburst which is limited to the realm of rational mentality. For Bergson (1914, p.37), comic amusement arises when "something mechanical is encrusted on the living". This is seen when a person continues to behave mechanically by doing the same thing; in spite of changing conditions. This, for Bergson, is a laughable situation because of the repetitive and nonflexible behaviour. This explains his theory of automatism.

Berger (2012) outlined four fundamental categories of

humour techniques: identity (humour created through the player's identity, such as the character they are playing and their appearance), action (humour created through physical actions or non-verbal communication), language (humour created through puns, wordplay, sarcasm, and satire) and logic (humour created through the results of thought, for example making someone a target for ridicule or banter). Similarly, when humour is performed within the appropriate context, it creates cheerful mood on the part of the audience. In this regard, Prasetyo and Qomar (2020, p.404) argue that the use of humour must be tested and is the result of research that takes into account the condition of the listener, because humour that is not appropriate in context to the target can affect its reception and understanding on the part of the audience.

Modern and postmodern dramas have embraced comedy as a powerful and suitable means of commenting on and confronting the chaos, decadence, uncertainty, and irrationality that characterizes modern life. Olson (2001) argues that "postmodernism and comedy are aligned in that they function by overturning master narratives and ridding metaphysics of transcendence and closure" (p. 6). Comedy here serves as a means to critique, interrogate and expose the excesses of man for the good of society. A very good example is the South African comedian, Trevor Noah, who uses his comedy as a tool to fight against the racial discrimination of blacks and people of colour. In this sense, comedy, as Fakhrkonandeh (2020, p.111) suggests, can be characterized as a strained mode of social realism streaked with moments of grotesque and dark humour. It incorporates realism through *mise-en-scene*, socially recognizable and morally nuanced characters that represent diverse social and moral trends and forces.

Aristotle informs that comedy grew out of the improvisations of the leaders of the phallic songs in ancient Greece. In this regard, Brockett and Hildy (1999, p.20) record that:

Some of the pre-dramatic ceremonies were performed by a dancing chorus who at times masqueraded as animals, or carried an animal as a representative; there were also choruses of fat men, satyrs, and men of stilts. The rites often included a procession with a chorus who sang and danced as they carried large phallic symbols (representing male sexual organs) aloft a pole.

In spite of the foregoing, there seems to be contentions regarding the origin of comedy. Stewart (1994, p.33) hints that, "most acclaimed theatre historians can hardly account for when and what ancient Greek audiences laughed at". In his *Poetics*, Aristotle (1902, p.4) states that the Athenians, Dorians and the Megarians in Sicily all lay claim to the origins of comedy. Furthermore, he adds that, Homer, a renowned Greek poet, "was the greatest

composer of serious poetry... so too he was first to indicate the form of comedy, by dramatising not an invective, but the laughable" (p.5). Elliot (1962, p.149) observes that:

The phallic songs were, of course, ritual performances devoted to increasing the fertility of the land, the herds, and the people. The ritual seems to have had two general parts: the invocation of good through the magic influence of the phallus, and the expulsion of evil by means of the magic power of satire, invective, lampoon – this last improvised by the leaders of the songs.

The above submission reveals two key elements of Greek comedy – the tendency to criticise or poke fun at someone or something and the ceremonial significance of life and fertility placed on comedy.

Social media prank and comedy

Prank is a joke played on someone who is not aware that he or she is being played or tricked. According to Krakowiak and Modlinski (2014), "a practical joke (i.e. a prank) belongs to a category of disparagement humour, as it is a playful act held to amuse, tease or even mock the victim, and to entertain the audience" (p. 31). While pranks occur in seemingly natural situations with victims who play along unaware that they are being filmed and are objects of a joke, cloutlighting which is a word derived from the words 'clout' and 'gaslighting' aims to increase engagement on social media by luring people who are obviously uncomfortable and unwilling with pranks or jokes (Nagesh, 2018). Cloutlighting is an extreme form of prank. A common trend features men playing cruel pranks on their partners before posting videos of them crying or in pain online to earn more followers on social media.

Rodger (2018) recounts how YouTuber Brad Holmes played one of these pranks on his fiancé, Jenny and posted the video of her screaming in pain for his two million followers to see online. The 27-year-old has more than 250,00 subscribers on YouTube, and in one of his prank videos, he calls Jenny "thick," cuts off a section of her hair while she's asleep, and poses as if he wanted to propose to her before revealing that it was all a joke.

Jarrar *et al.* (2020) opine that extreme prank is a type of play where one love partner engages in an act that could place the other in an embarrassing situation that is typically unbeknownst to him or her. Unaware that they are being pranked, the unassuming companion responds to the scenario as though it were true. The joke or prank is then documented on video and put online for comments and likes (p.2). Sometimes the consequences of the act are much worse than anticipated and cause the victim great humiliation or suffering. As Redmond (2018) observed, her daughter's life was destroyed by pranks that were inspired

by YouTube. Pranks can be extremely deadly and could wreck the victim's life. This illustrates how something that one person may perceive as harmless fun may actually be bullying and harassment. Regrettably, observation has revealed that numerous individuals have fallen prey to various pranks.

While the intention of the prankster is to create ludicrous situations intended to increase traffic and social media following, some pranks can be extremely dangerous to both the prankster and the victim. In the same vein, pranks are dependent on the taboos, beliefs and traditions at work in a particular society. Hence, how a person perceives humour is informed by their gender, ethnicity, economic status, and nationality, and what may seem as a joke in Europe could be perceived negatively in Africa (Arnold, 2011). This therefore calls for caution amongst comics and pranksters when making prank videos. The foregoing suggests that not all prank videos are comic, as some may be offensive even if they attract a huge social media engagement. Extreme pranks thrive on fear and pain, which victims are subjected to and later freed when the joke is over.

Social media: A definition

Social media describes a computer-based interactive system of mediated technologies that facilitate information sharing through virtual communities made possible by the internet. For Thuraiatnam (2021), "social media is a vast network that includes various modes of communication with clients. It consists of email, instant messaging, social networking, telecommunications, blogs, videoconferencing, online business meetings and much more". Trottier and Fuchs (2013) state that the concept of "social media" can be clarified using the social theory method by identifying three social informational processes that constitute three different types of sociality, such as cognition, communication, and cooperation (cited in Chima, 2019, p.17). It follows that in order to communicate with others and create shared communication spaces, persons have specific cognitive qualities that they employ. These spaces are sometimes used for community building and the co-creation of new aspects of broader social systems, in addition to being used for interaction.

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010, p.61) describe social media as "a collection of internet-based applications that utilise the technological and ideological foundations of Web 2.0, and let the exchange and making of user generated content". The foregoing shows how technology influences social media. Kumar (2016, p.1) observes that "social media and technologies are a networking computer mediated technology that allows people and other organizations to share, create or exchange information, literature, researchers, videos/blogs, and ideas in virtual communities". Additionally, the availability of technological tools like smart phones, laptops, digital cameras,

televisions, etc. has made social media accessible to anybody with these tools. Global connectivity has been made feasible through social media platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram as well as video conferencing platforms like Zoom, Google Meet, Microsoft Teams, and others.

In an article published on the *Wall Street Journal*, Aeppel (2015) observed that Oxford University economists reported an eye-catching metric that it took telephone 75 years, radio 38 years, TV 13 years, Internet 4 years, and Facebook 3.5 years to reach 50 million users, whereas an online gaming app - Angry Birds, achieved that feat in just 35 days. This shows the enormous impact of technology on social media.

METHODOLOGY

Biography of Ubani Zion Chibuike

Zion Ubani Chibuike is a popular Nigerian prankster known as Zfancy. He is a comedian, social media influencer and a film maker known for his prank videos. He was born on 18th August 1995 to the family of Mr and Mrs Ubani, and hails from Abia State of Nigeria. He grew up in Lagos, where he had his secondary and higher education. His interest in comedy began during his childhood days when he engaged in playing pranks on his siblings. He started his career professionally in 2017, and created his YouTube channel, where he began posting videos centred on pranks. His YouTube page – Zfancy has 391, 000 subscribers, and his Facebook page – Zfancytv has 1 million followers.

Chibuike was arrested in October 2018 for pranking a man at a mall in Lekki, Lagos State. The man involved was angry as he felt embarrassed. He was made to take off his clothes, revealing his unclean inner-wears which made his friends laugh at him. The situation was reported to the police at the mall; and Chibuike was arrested alongside his camera man. However, Chibuike managed to get out of the situation by pranking the police officers, who were about making them pay some money. He and his camera man were later released and he made a video revealing his ordeal.

Chibuike has been known for many popular pranks online, some of which include: *Abusive African Prank*, *Soldier Uniform Prank*, *Scorpion Prank*, *Calling Sars with Stranger's Phone Prank*, *African Snake Man Prank* and many others. In addition to his YouTube Channel, he has a Facebook and an Instagram page, where he uploads his prank videos.

Methods

The digital qualitative research method and netnography are used in this study. Digital qualitative method involves conducting research online or using the internet as a

source of data e.g., by analyzing social media posts or online articles/blogs on a specific issue. Netnography entails studying and analyzing users' written remarks, communication style, involvement frequency, and dwell time while engaging with contents on social media. In this case, netnography will be used to examine online audience engagements with *African Snake Man Prank* and *Iboji Grave Prank*.

The study's sample comprises of 40 Nigerian social media comedians who frequently publish amusing skits on social media. However, only Zfancy was discovered to produce pranks as a form of social media comedy, while the others focused on pure comedy skits. Out of the 40 comedians, Zfancy was selected using the convenience sampling technique, which entails choosing data subjects based on their accessibility to the researcher. The population also includes 128 videos on Zfancy's YouTube channel, 391,000 subscribers, 6,000 likes, 1,246,990 views and 2,891 comments from *African Snake Man Prank*, and 12, 000 likes, 376,606 views, and 1,221 comments from *Iboji Grave Prank*. From the 128 prank videos, two were selected: *African Snake Man Prank* and *Iboji Grave Prank*. Eight comments were also sampled for analysis – Four from comments on *African Snake Man Prank* and four from comments on *Iboji Grave Prank*.

The above sample only reflects a small section of the whole population. Passive YouTube users/subscribers on Zfancy's YouTube channel were excluded from the selection process. Through observation, analysis, and examination of the prank videos, as well as through online users' views and comments, the validity of the data instruments was established.

THE SCENES

Synopsis of *African Snake Man Prank*

The story opens with a short clip of a snake prank to whet the appetite of viewers, then a short introduction by Chibuiké and his Assistant. The next scene shows Chibuiké standing in front of a provision shop. He is dressed in a black polo shirt and jean trouser, a black cowboy-like face cap, a brown bag and brown shoes. He asks the owner of the shop for directions to a residential area known as Bode Thomas in Surulere-Lagos. He tells the shop owner that he has a show. Another lady gives him directions to the place; telling him to use a motorcycle. Two other women are seated in front of the shop.

Chibuiké is about leaving when he asks the women if they saw something leave his bag. He tells the ladies that it is his snake, and that he is a snake man. The ladies are thrown into panic as Chibuiké begins to make hissing sounds in an attempt to call back his snake. The shop owner begins to plead 'the Blood of Jesus' and 'Holy Ghost fire' as she asks him to leave with his snake. Chibuiké tells the woman that it is a python snake, and that he would

come back for the snake. The shop owner says he is going nowhere, as she keeps rebuking him 'In the Name of Jesus'. Some neighbours are attracted to the scene. Chibuiké continues with his hissing sounds as he hopes to attract the snake out. Everyone leaves the shop in fear and stand out waiting for the snake man to call the snake out. Chibuiké tells the lady that he would come back. Other residents insist he must leave with the snake.

The next scene shows Chibuiké in front of a salon. Four ladies casually dressed in tops and jean trousers are seated, as Chibuiké, dressed as in the previous scene, asks them if they saw anything that entered the shop. He informs them that he is a snake man and that he has a snake show. He bends down and begins to hiss in an attempt to call the snake out. The ladies quickly leave their seats and stand some distance away from the shop. Chibuiké tells them that it is his python snake. The shop owner tries to close the shop as the ladies inside run out.

The next scene shows Chibuiké standing at a roadside, as he asks two Yoruba ladies, seated in front of a shop, how he can get to Lawanson in Lagos. They give him directions, after which he looks at his bag and asks the ladies if they saw anything leave his bag. He tells them that it is his snake. The ladies move away from their seats as Chibuiké begins to hiss, in a bid to call the snake out. Neighbours in close-by shops leave their shops out of fear. He tells the people that he has a snake show and that he is looking for his cobra snake. He tells them that the snake is black and tall. Few minutes later, he says he wants to leave and that he would come back for his snake. One of the ladies tells him that they have small children there; that he should leave with his snake. He informs them that the cobra does not bite. They all say it is a lie; that it bites. A man dressed in a sky-blue caftan arrives the scene. Chibuiké tells the people that the snake spits acid. He attempts to leave. The man accosts him and says he cannot leave; that he must leave with his snake.

Chibuiké tells the man that he has a show in Lagos. The man tells him to leave with his snake; that they do not know how to train cobras. Chibuiké informs them that he has a second snake inside his bag. The man discourages him from bringing it out as he points to a sleeping child. One of the neighbours tells him to bring out the second snake; so that it would look for the missing one. He attempts to open his bag. The people shift from him quickly. He leaves them as he rushes off quickly.

The next scene shows Chibuiké in front of another shop. He asks for directions and a man attempts to describe the directions to him. Then he asks the man and three ladies inside the shop if they saw his snake. He informs them that he has a show. He begins to make hissing sounds and bends to open his bag. One of the ladies catches the trick and discovers that it is fake. The next scene shows clips of Chibuiké as he brings out his bag with papers bearing various inscriptions: 'Python Snake', 'Cobra Snake', and 'Anaconda Snake'. The people laugh realising that he succeeded in fooling them.

Synopsis of *Iboji Grave Prank*

The twelve minutes and thirteen-second-long video begins with Chibuike approaching two Yoruba women dressed in traditional Yoruba attire. Chibuike welcomes them and introduces himself before telling the women in Yoruba that he is looking for the cemetery and that he intends to go and spend the night there. Upon hearing this, one of the women pulls away from him, while the other woman urges him to ask around before also backing away. He then starts to follow her while pleading with her to show him the way to the cemetery. He chases after her, and she takes to her heels. There is a scene with Chibuike and two young men right after that in which he tells the audience that they are in Abeokuta to try some pranks.

In the following scene, Chibuike asks four women—two seated and the other two standing by the expressway—for the location of the cemetery that he wants to spend the night there. One of the women tells him they have no idea what he is talking about, another starts to back away from him. He implores her to take him there. The lady replies him that she cannot be the one and takes off with the two others. They keep looking back to ensure they are safe.

The next scene shows Chibuike participating in a celebration. He approaches a man and three women and says he needs directions to the cemetery because he wants to go there and spend the night. They enquire about the type of grave he has in mind. He repeats that he wants to go and sleep in the grave. He tells them he is taking them along with him. The women move away from him before taking off. Chibuike points at the man and says he is going with him. Chibuike chases after the man as he starts to run. He abruptly comes to a stop and charges violently at Chibuike. Chibuike instantly lets him know that it is a prank. He sees a group of Yoruba drummers and asks them to play while he and his team dance to ease the tension as they laugh with the prank victims.

The next act takes place at Olumo rock, in Abeokuta. Chibuike informs viewers that 'Iboji' means grave in Yoruba language and that they would be doing some pranks there. A tour guide educates them on the historical significance of Olumo rock. This is followed by another scene where Chibuike and his team tell viewers that Abeokuta is a good city with beautiful people. Chibuike tells viewers that there is less traffic in Abeokuta and encourages them to visit the place.

The next scene takes place in front of an automobile shop. Chibuike is standing before seven men dressed in casual attires and seated. Chibuike greets and introduces himself to them. He informs them that he is from Lagos and that he is tired of life. He tells them that he wants to take his life and begs them for directions to the grave, for him to go and sleep there. The men begin to stand up one after the other. Soon they begin to run as Chibuike runs after them shouting that he wants to go to the grave.

The succeeding act features Chibuike in front of ten young men. He introduces himself and tells them that he

does not understand life anymore. He tells them that he came from Lagos and is looking for the burial ground. He begs them to show him the way but they begin to leave one after another. One of the men is courageous enough as he asks Chibuike what he wants to go and do there. Chibuike tells him that he wants to go and sleep there. He then tells the man that he is going with him. The man tells Chibuike that he cannot take him; and that Chibuike cannot be dead. Chibuike raises his hands as though he is conjuring and points to one of the men, then says he is taking the man with him. They all take off.

In this scene, Chibuike converses with three men who are sitting in front of a store. He introduces himself and states that he is from Lagos. He tells them that he does not understand this life anymore and that everything is hard. He then asks for directions to the burial ground, that he wants to go back. The men ask him what reasons are making him take that decision. Chibuike tells them that he is taking them with him. They stand up and move away from him. Chibuike points to one of the men and says he is taking him. The man quickly pleads the blood of Jesus and says he is not going anywhere.

This scene shows Chibuike and four other men in front of another automobile shop. One is standing and three are seated. Chibuike greets them and introduces himself. He informs them that he is from Lagos and that life is hard; that he wants to go back to the grave. Chibuike points to one of the men and says he is taking him along with him. The man begins to run away while the others move away from the scene. Chibuike begins to pursue after the man for a few minutes and later stops, as he informs the man that it is a joke. They all laugh over it. This is followed by a last scene that shows Chibuike laughing with all the people he pranked in the video.

AFRICAN SNAKE MAN PRANK AND IBOJI GRAVE PRANK AS SOCIAL MEDIA COMEDY

African Snake Man Prank is a 13-minute comic skit that features Chibuike pranking some residents in Lagos city of Nigeria. The comic skit is hosted on his YouTube channel – Zfancy which has 391, 000 subscribers and 128 videos. The description on the channel reads "I make Pranks, Social Experiments, Challenge & vlog videos all to draw smile on your face and make the world a happier place". This statement shows his commitment to creating comic prank videos as well as other forms of experiments.

Figure 1 shows that the *African Snake Man Prank* video was posted on YouTube on 6th November, 2019, and as of 30th March, 2023, the video had 26,000 likes, 1,246,990 views and 2,891 comments. The following comments are presented to provide insights on the reception of the video by subscribers on Zfancy's YouTube channel. Chibuike first thanks users for watching the video, then he invites them to comment and subscribe to his YouTube channel thus, "Thanks for watching guys... We really appreciate

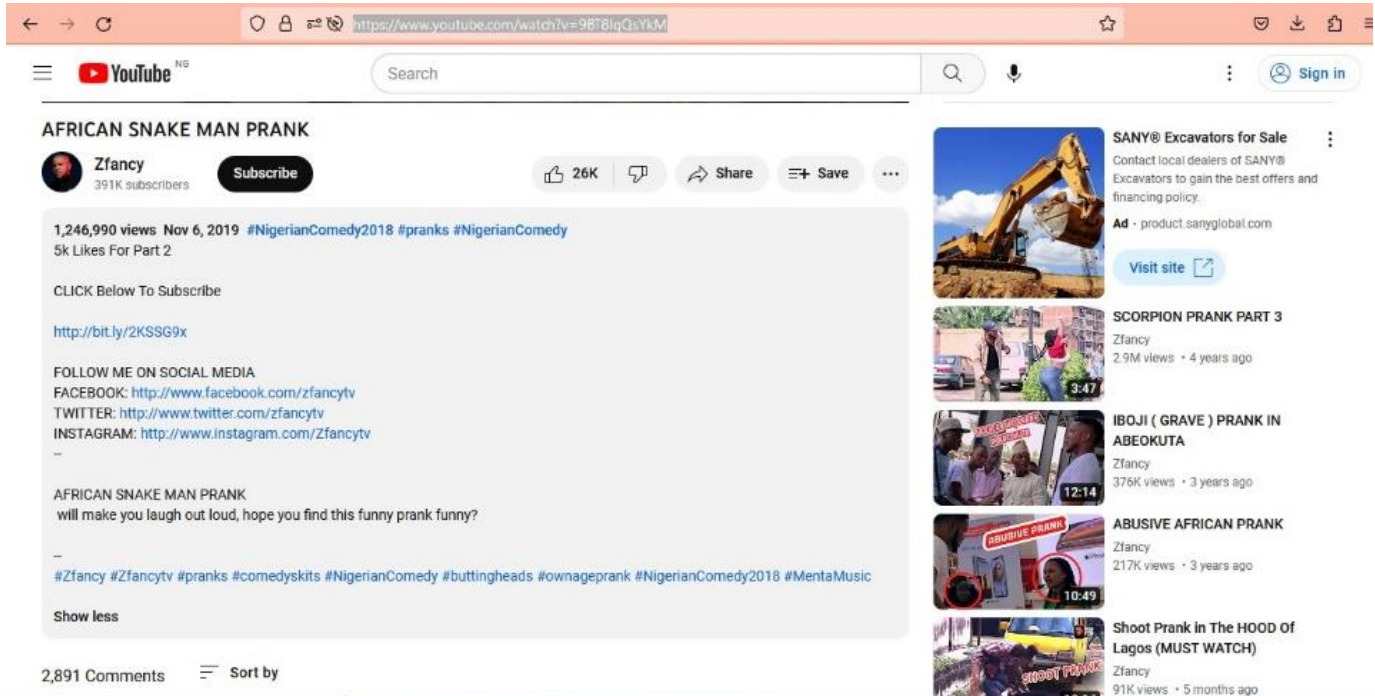


Figure 1. *African Snake Man Prank* on YouTube (Source: Chibuike's *African Snake Man Prank*, 2019).

...The boys will be heading to different states this season so comment your city...And don't forget to subscribe to the happiest and fanciest family on YouTube" (Chibuike's *African Snake Man Prank*, 2019). This comment had 573 likes and 114 replies.

Following the above, User 1 comments, "That first woman will still go and testify in church even after knowing its a prank. She's just like my mom...". This user compares one of the characters in the prank to her mother, thus personalizing the act. User 2 comments "I love how Nigerians always turn to prayers. The trust they have in prayer is amazing ..." (Chibuike's *African Snake Man Prank*, 2019). This user is impressed by the religious sense of Nigerians because the video depicts them as people who love to pray. User 3 comments "I love how happy Nigerians are...even though everything is not fine...we still have a reason to be happy" (Chibuike's *African Snake Man Prank*, 2019). This user is also impressed by how Nigerians try to be happy in spite of the many challenges they face. As seen in the end of the prank, the various victims are seen laughing with the prankster after knowing that it was all a joke. User 4 comments "This guy is crazy, I can't stop laughing! From Tanzania" (Chibuike's *African Snake Man Prank*, 2019). This user who is from Tanzania, believes Chibuike is crazy for choosing to prank people and film them without their notice. User 4 is impressed by the acts and cannot stop laughing.

Chibuike's style of comedy arouses laughter from natural situations or scenarios, where people are expected to react as they would do naturally when faced with that

particular circumstance. Fear is a natural quality and instinct in every human; and all humans are capable of being afraid. Also, prank itself is a joke or a mischievous act intended to deceive the victim into believing that whatever is happening at the time is true and real.

Nigeria is a multi-ethnic nation facing a lot of socio-economic and religious challenges. Hence, any act woven around religious and socio-economic themes will definitely get the attention of Nigerians. Fear is a major phenomenon which every Nigerian lives with, owing to the insecurity challenges facing the country such as kidnapping, pipeline vandalism, Boko-Haram insurgency, Fulani herdsman and farmers conflict, as well as religious hypocrisy/charlatanism, etc. Also, humans dread snakes, irrespective of race, ethnicity, sex or religious bias. Perhaps, this is the reason the Afro beat King, Fela Anikulapo Kuti, said Nigerians do not want to die, but want to go to heaven. The fear of death (or suffering) is a major tool which politicians and religious leaders use to control the lives of Nigerians. Fortunately, it is this same phenomenon of fear that Chibuike exploits in his *African Snake Man Prank* to elicit laughter from the audience.

Chibuike begins his comic prank adventure with an introductory scene, preparing the minds of the audience on what they should expect. The next scene opens at the front of a shop as Chibuike asks for directions to a residential area in Lagos known as Bode Thomas, from four ladies. The owner of the shop explains how he would get there (Figure 2).

Chibuike complains that his python snake is missing. This puts the shop owner and her colleagues in panic as



Figure 2. Chibuiké asks for directions from four ladies (Source: Chibuiké's *African Snake Man Prank*, 2019).



Figure 3. Chibuiké complains that his snake is missing as he looks into his bag (Source: Chibuiké's *African Snake Man Prank*, 2019).



Figure 4. Chibuiké laughs as he holds a paper with the inscription 'Python Snake' for his prank victims (Source: Chibuiké's *African Snake Man Prank*, 2019).

Chibuiké makes hissing sounds in an attempt to call the snake out. The owner of the shop pleads the blood of Jesus; an indication that she is a Christian, while she and

others move out and stand at the front of the shop. This attracts other residents. Chibuiké then tells the shop owner that he is leaving and would come back for the snake. The shop owner insists that he must leave with his snake.

The laughter that arises from this scene comes from the reactions of the shop owner and other residents over the snake news. The shop owner pleads the blood of Jesus and tells Chibuiké: "I rebuke you!" Insinuating that Chibuiké is the devil; Nigerian Christians, especially Pentecostals are known to rebuke evil a lot. Everyone panics, whereas the audience knows that it is a joke. This dramatic irony is what elicits laughter on the part of the spectators.

The next scene takes place in a salon (Figure 3). Chibuiké is standing in front of five ladies, as he asks for directions. One of the ladies gives him directions, then Chibuiké complains that his snake is missing as he looks into his bag. The ladies run out of the shop because of fear, while Chibuiké begins to make hissing sounds, as he bends down to call out the snake.

The comedy in this scene, just like the previous, comes from the behaviours of the ladies on hearing that Chibuiké's snake is missing. The ladies run out of the shop, believing that the snake must have sneaked out of Chibuiké's bag into the shop. The audience laughs at the ladies because they are reacting naturally to a situation that is unreal.

Chibuiké arrives a third shop and asks for directions to Lawanson in Lagos. Two Yoruba ladies explain how he would get there, then he complains that his Cobra snake is missing. The ladies and other residents are in panic and fear. He begins to hiss as usual in an attempt to call back the snake. He tells the residents that he wants to leave, but they insist that he must leave with his snake.

The next scene features Chibuiké repeating the act of the previous scene; but the shop owner catches the trick. After this, Chibuiké brings out papers with the inscriptions: 'Python Snake', 'Cobra Snake', and 'Anaconda Snake', which he shows to everyone he tricked from the first scene to the last and they laugh over it (Figure 4).

It is important to note that the entire prank video was recorded with a hidden camera, held by Chibuiké's camera man but hidden from the view of the prank victims.

On the other hand, Chibuiké's *Iboji Grave Prank* is a humorous skit that lasts for 12 minutes and 13 seconds. It was published on his YouTube channel - Zfancy on 18th November, 2019, and as of 30th March, 2023, the video had 12,000 likes, 376,606 views, and 1,221 comments (Figure 5). The following comments are sampled to provide insights on YouTube users interaction with the video. Chibuiké sets the stage with the following comments "IBOJI (GRAVE) PRANK IN ABEOKUTA will make you laugh out loud, hope you find this funny prank funny" (Chibuiké's *Iboji Grave Prank*, 2019). This comment introduces the skit to YouTube users and prepares their minds on what to expect.

Following Chibuiké's comment, User 5 comments "We

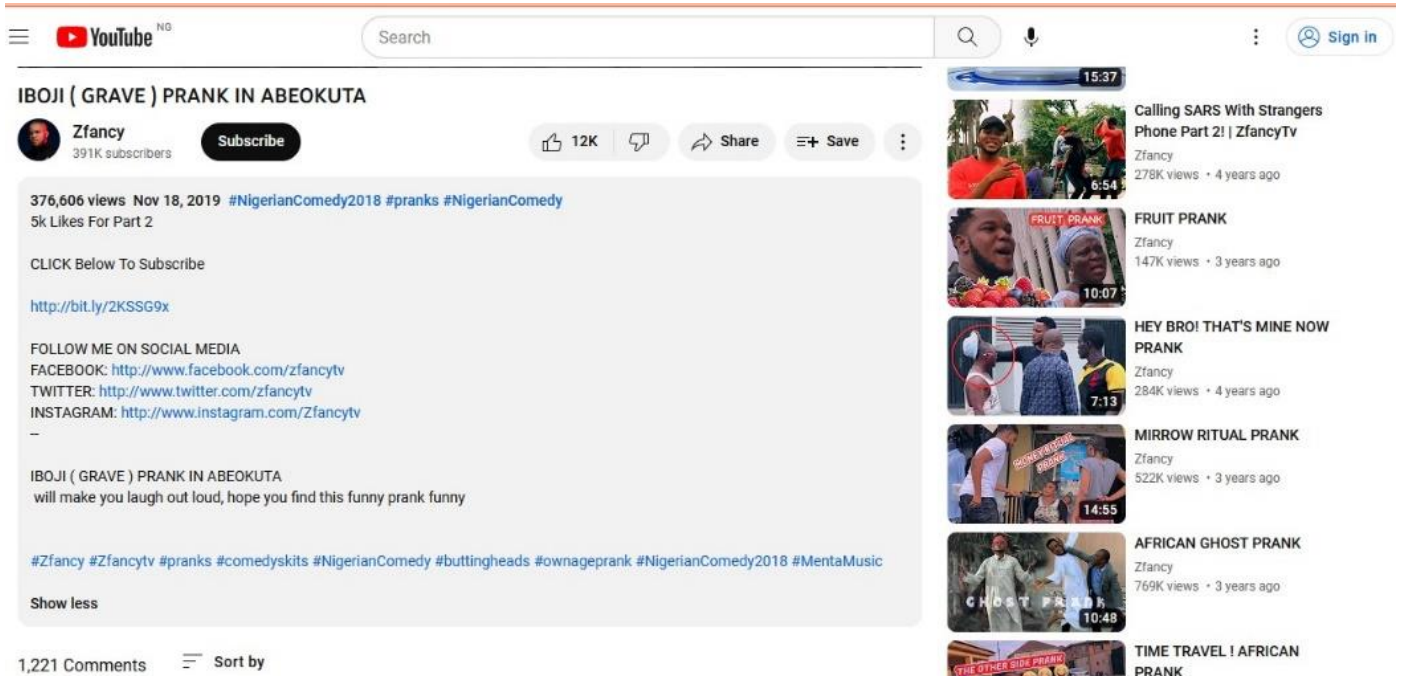


Figure 5. *Iboji Grave Prank* on YouTube (Source: Chibuike's *Iboji Grave Prank*, 2019).

really gotta appreciate this man guys, literally risks his health just to give us good content..." (Chibuike's *Iboji Grave Prank*, 2019). User 5 calls on other users to appreciate what Chibuike goes through such as the risks and dangers involved, in order to produce contents that meet their tastes. There are a lot of risks involved in producing skits such as these, and one may fall into the hands of victims, who out of fear and defence could get physical with the prankster. Such actions could result to assault and injury on part of the prankster. User 6 reacts thus, "The moment he says "I'm taking you with me", the message sinks in" (Chibuike's *Iboji Grave Prank*, 2019). This user relates how Chibuike's prank victims look helpless and are overtaken by fear when he declares that he is taking them with him to the graveyard. All they have left is to run for their safety. The same way everyone would react when faced with life-threatening situations.

User 7 reacts with the words "That man that was asking him why he was tired and for his plans is so compassionate" (Chibuike's *Iboji Grave Prank*, 2019). User 7 identifies with one of the prank victims who wanted to know Chibuike's plans, why he was tired of life and wanted to die. Unlike other victims, this one was looking for a way to help Chibuike do away with his suicidal thoughts which is commendable. User 8 comments "Lmao... I like the fact that Zfancy has improved over time and his pranks are more relatable than ever. Kudos bruh" (Chibuike's *Iboji Grave Prank*, 2019). User 8, who seems to be a long-time follower, observes the improvement in Chibuike's prank videos, and commends him for that.

Iboji Grave Prank features Chibuike asking residents of



Figure 6. Seven men take to their heels when Chibuike tells them he is going to the graveyard (Source: Chibuike's *Iboji Grave Prank*, 2019).

Abeokuta city to show him the direction to the graveyard. He tells them that he is tired of life and needs rest in the graveyard (*Iboji* - the Yoruba word for cemetery), having come all the way from Lagos because of frustration. On hearing this, the residents panic and are scared. They immediately shift from him and run away while he pursues after them (Figure 6). Broken into nine segments, the plot presents six different situations where Chibuike pranks the residents of Abeokuta.

The laughter arises from the reactions of the residents who are not aware that they are being pranked. They react as they would do naturally and this creates amusement on



Figure 7. Chibuike Laughing with some of his prank victims after telling them it was a joke (Source: Chibuike's *Iboji Grave Prank*, 2019).

the part of the audience. This use of dramatic irony; where the audience knows important facts ahead of the characters is what Chibuike exploits in this comic skit. Unlike other comic skits, the production style involves little scripting with less planning. Chibuike relies on improvisation or sketchy storylines and a repetitive use of the same narrative on different prank victims. The screen actors play their roles naturally without any pre-rehearsal. Hence, the nature of the acting is simple and naturalistic. It happens on the spur of the moment. Like documentary films, the production requires little editing because it involves the use of long takes in terms of camera shots which reduces production time and costs.

The last scene (Figure 7) shows various clips of Chibuike laughing with all his prank victims after revealing to them that they were pranked. This scene is also comic because the prank victims laugh at themselves for being so gullible.

Conclusion

Comedy as a genre of drama has enjoyed tremendous developments as a form of entertainment in Nigeria. While stand-up comedy continues to thrive, the coming of social media and the coronavirus pandemic ushered in a new brand of comics which we call 'social media comedians'. This group of comedians, with the aid of the camera, produce comic pieces which range from pure comedy skits to prank videos that are comic in nature. Aside the fame that social media gives them, many have become millionaires overnight by producing contents that generate traffic and engagements on their social media pages.

This study has examined prank as a form of social media comedy using Ubani Zion Chibuike's *African Snake Man Prank* and *Iboji Grave Prank*. Drawing from comments by Users on Chibuike's YouTube channel - Zfancy, who watched the two prank videos, both skits had a good user-engagement. However, *African Snake Man Prank* got

more audience engagement of 6,000 likes, 1,246,990 views and 2,891 comments than *Iboji Grave Prank* which had 12,000 likes, 376,606 views, and 1,221 comments as of 30th March, 2023. Also, their comments suggests that they found both pranks to be comic and entertaining and could relate with the situations they explored. Furthermore, Chibuike's prank skits rely heavily on natural situations than on well scripted scenarios. This kind of approach erases the problem of elaborate scripting, directing and editing, as the producer relies on sketchy and improvised scenarios to drive the narrative, which reduces the cost and time of production. The study calls for more research on other forms of comedy on social media.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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