



DECONSTRUCTING AFRICA’S NEGATIVE IMAGE THROUGH SARCASM ON TIKTOK

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ABSTRACT

The emergence of social media has facilitated the deconstruction of the negative image of Africa as portrayed by the Western media through an Afro-positive counter-narrative by Africans on various social media platforms. This article investigates the use of sarcasm on TikTok to address Africa's negative image. The qualitative study purposively samples 44 posts shared by @charityekezie on TikTok to identify the misconceived issues about Africa she addresses on her page and further explores the sarcasm expression practices that are present in the videos she shares. Document analysis and observation are employed to collect data for the study. The findings are discussed thematically through the lens of the echoic mention theory and the pretence theory of irony. The study's findings revealed that misconceptions about Africa concerning the continent lacking basic needs, infrastructure and transportation, English language proficiency, communication technologies, clothing and beauty products are addressed by @charityekezie on her TikTok page. The findings further indicated that allusion to previous comments by other TikTok users, use of non-verbal cues and verbal communication were the sarcasm expression practices adopted by @charityekezie on her TikTok page. The study recommends that African social media content creators use their TikTok accounts to address positive images about the continent to the rest of the world. The study further concludes that the TikTok application and its affordances enable individuals to contribute to the deconstruction of the negative image of the African continent.

Keywords: Africa, TikTok, Sarcasm, Images, Social Media

INTRODUCTION

Africa is continuously portrayed as a dark and needy continent identified with "primeval irrationality, tribal anarchy, civil war, political instability, flagrant corruption, incompetent leadership and managerial ineptitude, hunger, famine and starvation as well as rampant diseases" (Adum et al. 2015, p.3). What makes news in the Western media when reporting on Africa is the bizarre which paints a picture of a hopeless continent needing salvation from the West (Adum et

al., 2015). Even though there has been unrest in some African countries like Rwanda, Burkina Faso, Mali, Chad, Cameroun amongst others, the negative dominant representation of the continent as a whole by the Western media ignores all the economic, social and political successes that also take place in the continent and instead emphasizes the undesirable episodic stories (Adum et al., 2015). Nothias (2017) avouches that the Western media have been unsuccessful in adhering to the ethical requirements aimed at reducing harm to the global portrayal of Africa. This negative reportage of Africa can influence financial assistance, trading exchange and other economic benefits that may be tailored to the continent (Schorr, 2011). According to Bunce et al. (2016),

Since the publication of Hawk's Africa's *Media Image*, and Wainaina's important essay, there have been many important and profound changes in the media representation of Africa. Several scholars have concluded (Nothias 2014; Ojo 2014; Bunce, in this volume) that the mainstream international print coverage of Africa shows signs of becoming more positive in tone and varied in its subject matter. (p.3).

According to Gathara (2014), the question then is, "If Western journalists get Africa wrong, who gets it right?" (para. 1). The best people to tell the African story are Africans themselves. However, until the emergence of the internet, people could not communicate globally. The penetration of the internet across the African continent has led to the proliferation in the use of various social media platforms on the continent. The advent of social media has also paved the way for Africans to create their content and narratives "often focusing on stories that celebrate the normalcy of African lives and contributions, working towards an Africa-optimistic future" (Boakye, 2021, para. 2). The use of social media platforms such as blogs, websites, social networking sites (Facebook, Twitter, Whatsapp, Instagram, LinkedIn etc.) further enables Africans to counter certain negative stereotypes used in portraying the continent by the Western media (Nkono, 2018).

Some studies have been conducted globally on the portrayal of Africa. Some of these studies (e.g., Bunce, 2014; Bunce et al., 2016; Manya, 2016; Oguh, 2015; Tsikata, 2014; Zeph-Ojiako & Anakwuba, 2019) explored the portrayal of Africa by Western/International media; others (e.g., Adum et al., 2015; Serwornoo, 2021; Wahutu, 2018) looked at how African media report on the continent; others (e.g., Marmer et al., 2010) examined the portrayal of Africa in Western schools whereas a few (e.g., Manzo, 2018; McCone, 2019) also investigated how the African continent is portrayed in photography. Manya (2016) for example, explored how 67 Africans sampled online perceived the portrayal of Africa by the U.S. media. The study, analyzed through Walter Fisher's narrative paradigm, identified hunger, poverty, war, corruption, and misconceptions about Africans living on trees as the major issues addressed in the U.S. media concerning the continent. Serwornoo (2021) also investigated how Africa as a continent is portrayed in the Ghanaian media through the news value theory, intermedia agenda-setting theory and the postcolonial critique. The findings of the explanatory analysis revealed that the image of Africa is dominant with issues of war, killings, terrorism, crime and crises. Thus, even the African

media reported about the continent negatively and relied consistently on the Western media as news sources.

Nkono (2018) argues that most studies, analyses and critiques on the representation of Africa often focus on the traditional media with a paucity of literature on the Afro-positive turn that takes place on social media. An enquiry into the social media portrayal of Africa is relevant because according to Ogunyemi (2011), the internet and its related affordances can potentially solve the journalistic issue of representing African cultures negatively. Based on Nkono's (2018) and Ogunyemi's (2011) contention, this paper explores the burgeoning phenomenon of addressing the negative image of Africa on social media. Specifically, the paper investigates the TikTok influencer, @charityekezie's use of sarcasm in deconstructing Africa's negative image to the rest of the world. The study was guided by the following research questions;

1. What negative images about Africa are addressed by @charityekezie on her TikTok page?
2. What are the sarcasm expression practices in the TikTok videos shared by @charityekezie in response to the misconceived images about Africa?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Portrayal of Africa by Western Nations

According to Zeph-Ojiako and Anakwuba (2019), media act as the eye of every society by enabling the society to perceive things beyond its immediate environment. However, this role played by the media is enormously abused by the Western media, which has continuously painted a derogatory image of Africa to the rest of the world. A number of studies conducted between the 1970s and the 1990s point to the Western portrayal of Africa as being crammed with negative stereotypical images (Bunce et al., 2016). The negativity in terms of portrayal has persisted over time. Most scholars have attributed this persistent negativity to the kinds of images and videos that reporters use in accompanying stories about Africa and the language and grammar employed in media reportage (Manya, 2016). Such portrayal of the continent manufactures a binary opposition where the West is identified as civilized and democratic whereas Africa is deemed savage, uncivilized and inferior (Mengara, 2001).

According to scholars such as Ezeru (2022), it was not until 2010 that most Western media began employing African journalists to cover stories on Africa. Thus, before this period, most Western media relied on non-African journalists who were often not knowledgeable enough to cover stories about Africans and the continent. Bunce (2014) submits that even when African journalists were employed, Westerners occupied top management and editorial positions hence still regulated the stories that eventually made the news. Researchers such as Harth (2012) identified ten myths that classified the kinds of stereotypical images of the African continent that are disseminated through the media. *The myth of lack of progress* portrays Africa as backwards with no contribution towards development, globalization and technological advancements. *The myth of timeless present* points to Africa as a continent that sees no progress even as other nations are evolving. *The myth of primitive continent* discusses how some African cultures are

continuously shown in the media to prove how inferior the continent is. *The myth of tradition* views Africa as a continent with static and non-dynamic rituals. *The myth of Africa continuity* illustrates a homogenous Africa and disregards the fact that the continent has 53 countries with different cultures. *The myth about the lack of history* considers Africa as a continent that was only given a history after its encounter with the West through colonization. *The myth about Africa's geography* reveals Africa as a jungle with no modern infrastructure or buildings. *The myths about Africa's population* is grouped into two parts. Thus, Africa is portrayed as overpopulated due to so many child-bearing or under-populated due to death from viruses such as HIV/AIDS. *The myth about poverty in Africa* promotes the idea that the people of the continent are poor and desperate with only a few rich politicians. *The myth about the hopelessness of Africa* is evident in the Western media's decision to ignore Africa because it is unworthy of their time (Harth, 2012). Michira (2002) also identifies hunger, famine and starvation as the most consistent images permeating Western media about Africa. Thus, according to the author, images and videos of malnourished and poorly starved individuals are often attached to such media reports about Africa. The continent is, therefore, portrayed as hopeless and needing salvation from the West.

Social Media and the Image of Africa

We live in a social media world and era (Sharma et al., 2022). The advent of the internet and its varied social media platforms has paved the way for people all over the globe to create and share content with others without any geographical barriers. In their abstract, Solo-Anaeto and Jacobs (2015) stated that;

Social media are becoming significant channels for information dissemination and communication worldwide. Internet and social media users run into hundred thousand daily; with young people constituting a large percentage. With the internet technology, social media, which consists of YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, blogs, Myspace, have made the communication process faster, interactive, user friendly and enabling user-generated contents. All these make the influence of social media far reaching; with good sides... (p. 1)

Ekpe (2017) states that the use of social media by Africans has presented an opportunity for the voices of Africans to be heard all over the world. Thus, through content creation on social media, Africans can tell their own story to the world. The media now is more personal and has a high tendency to reshape society. Through social media, some international artists who have had the opportunity to travel to specific African countries profess their love for the continent, bringing about some corrective waves about Africa. Artists such as Akon, Ciara, Harry Styles, Jay-Z and Rick Ross have all contributed to the positive narrative of Africa to the world through their social media posts.

Recently, there has been a global rise in the usage and popularity of the social media platform known as TikTok. Introduced in the social media market in 2016, TikTok is a platform reliant on user-generated content whereby users create and upload short videos up to 3 minutes on

dance routines (Ahise et al., 2020), lip-synced content made by other creators and self-created dramatic and/or humorous contents. According to Lu and Lu (2020), TikTok appears as the most downloaded application on the IOS app store with over 500 global active users. Wang (2021) attributes the popularity of the TikTok application to its "... use of the Uses and Gratification theory, advertisement and marketing promotion strategies, and their unique AI technology and algorithm" (p.588). Videos on the application often incorporate "music samples, filters, quick cuts, stickers, and other add-ons" (Dilon, 2020, p.1). Although TikTok has received a lot of criticism since its introduction, it has resisted and continued to grow in popularity globally (Dilon, 2020).

One TikTok user who has gained many following and support on the application is @charityekezie who creates content aimed at reconstructing the image of Africa by debunking certain stereotypes about the continent. In an interview with the Global Online News Agency, 'Insider', @charityekezie, a Cameroonian young lady who has lived in Nigeria since age 10 explained how she often received racist comments about her skin which she ignored most of the time when she joined the TikTok application in 2020. She further added that,

It was when I started getting comments about African culture that I got annoyed. People were asking me condescending questions about whether African countries have shoes or basic technology, so I decided to respond to them, and use my TikTok account to challenge their views about my culture. But I did it with a twist — using humor and sarcasm in the hope that it will lead people to educate themselves. And it seems to work. (Cheong, 2022, para. 4-5).

Though several people make posts on various social media platforms to educate and inform others about the African continent, what made @charityekezie stand out was her constant use of sarcasm to address misconceptions about Africa.

Sarcasm

Sarcasm forms a relevant aspect of human language and communication (Băroiu & Trăusan-Matu, 2022). It is a type of verbal irony which produces "negative and critical attitude towards people or events" (Cheang and Pell, 2008, p. 366). The authors observe that people use sarcastic comments in conversations because to some extent, listeners of such comments perceive it as less threatening and more respectful than an outright critical statement. Sarcasm, is therefore, a rhetorical manner of expressing a negative attitude towards someone or something (Akula & Garibay, 2021). Sharma et al. (2022) also define sarcasm as any form of statement that conveys the opposite meaning of what is said generally in a highly unpleasant manner which offends or mocks the listener. There is a constant use of wordplay fraught with aggression and humour in sarcasm (Haiman, 1998 as cited in Rao et al. 2022). Sarcasm, seen as hidden cruelty, is formed by exaggerating a specific language one intends to construct (Sharma et al., 2022). Experts of interpersonal communication and group communication advise against the use of sarcasm due to the harm it may cause. However, people continue to use this type of verbal irony because it is more memorable than the usual direct communication that takes place (Huang et al., 2015).

Sarcasm is often employed on social media platforms such as Facebook and X (formerly Twitter) and is usually targeted at politicians and celebrities who are primarily influencers in the online space (Sharma et al., 2022). In their study on constructing sarcasm on social media, Das and Clark (2019) realized that some social media users showed much excitement in their capacity to use sarcasm on social media. Such users believe that not everything on social media should be taken to heart and using sarcasm is one way of making light of situations on social media. To the authors, sarcasm is one good way of making content popular on various Social Networking Sites (SNSs). Unlike text-based user-generated content that is quite difficult to detect, sarcastic posts through verbal communication (videos) on social media which are often accompanied by visual and acoustic cues such as laughter, are easy to detect (Cheang & Pell, 2008). According to Das and Clark (2019), sarcasm aims to point out a flaw and entertain others.

Sarcasm within verbal communication is often identified through specific situational context and non-verbal cues (Caucci & Kreuz, 2012). By context, the authors refer to the physical geographical area of the sender and receiver of sarcastic statements, the relationship between them, and other qualities of both the sender and receiver. Where a sarcastic statement takes place determines whether it will be considered humorous. Caucci and Kreuz (2012) further aver that other cues such as a sender's tone of voice; lexical choices and facial expressions may provide vital information for a receiver to understand a statement as sarcastic.

Dews et al. (1995) as cited in Attardo (2002) indicate that the differences between what a speaker says and what he or she means may trigger humour. Attardo (2002) proceeds to identify sophistication (ability to play with words), evaluation (ability to express negative sentiments), tool of politeness (considered less rude and face-saving than a direct aggressive and hostile speech), persuasive aspect (used to convince someone to do the bidding of another), retractability (used to express something in a manner that the speaker avoids being held responsible for a wrong statement made) and group affiliation (used to include or exclude members of a particular group) as the purposes for sarcasm. According to Creusere (1999),

People who use this speech act do not intend listeners to accept their assertions as fact. Yet, they also do not intend their remarks to be deceptive; ironic speakers usually want their intended meaning to be transparent to at least some members of their audience. (p.215).

Although sarcasm has been identified as a subset of irony, scholars often use them interchangeably (Bali & Singh, 2016).

Echoic Mention Theory

Deirdre Wilson and Dan Sperber in 1981 propounded the echoic mention theory. The theory indicates that a listener can identify an ironic or sarcastic statement when he/she realizes that the statement made by the speaker refers to the ideas and opinions of another person other than the speaker. Often the speaker's attitude towards these external opinions is that of disapproval and contempt (Keenan & Quigley, 1999). When a speaker is in doubt about whether a sarcastic statement is well understood by his/her listeners based on the context within which the statement

is made, he or she offers other background clues such as using ironic tone of voice, a wry facial expression or an exaggeration (Wilson, 2006). Speakers make echoic use of sarcastic statement to provide their listeners with their own reaction towards the content of an opinion that has earlier been attributed (Wilson, 2006). Echoes can therefore be explicit or implicit. Thus, a speaker can repeat the exact words of an earlier speaker (explicit) or can only allude to an earlier statement made (implicit). The constant use of explicit echoic sarcastic statements enables the listener to easily grasp the meaning of the sarcastic statement the speaker intends to communicate (Keenan & Quigley, 1999).

Pretence Theory of Irony

The pretence theory of irony was developed by Herbert Clark and Richard Gerrig in 1984, however, Grice (1978) was the first to liken irony to a kind of pretence. An ironic speaker is identified as pretending when they perform a specific speech act outside their authentic self (Popa-Wyatt, 2014). Currie (2006, p.116) also introduced the “pretence of doing” and the “pretence of being”. Thus, an individual can pretend to be something he or she is not or do something he or she is not doing under normal circumstances just to ridicule a belief or a contrary way of doing things. In producing ironic/sarcastic statements, speakers pretend to address audiences they do not know and the listeners are expected to comprehend that the speaker is pretending by making fun of an earlier speaker, an audience who may accept what the speaker pretends to say or the specific utterance itself (Garmendia, 2018).

The echoic mention theory and the pretence theory of irony are useful for this study because they will assist in explicating the sarcasm expression practices that accompany the sarcastic videos made by @charityekezie on her TikTok page. According to Garmendia (2018), although the two are separate theories, they are often considered indistinguishable from each other because a speaker identified as echoing an utterance made by another can be seen to be pretending to be someone he or she is not, just to ridicule the other.

METHODOLOGY

This paper employs a qualitative e- research method involves examining patterns of activities that are exhibited in the online world (Salmons, 2017). Data for the study were purposively selected because they were information-rich and could help explore the phenomenon of in details (Lindloff and Taylor, 2017). The TikTok platform was sampled for the study because it is one of the popular social media platforms at present (Guo, 2021) and has not received so much research attention especially in the Ghanaian context. Mayr and Weller (2017) assert that data for social media research can be collected based on user account and for this reason, the TikTok account of @charityekezie, was also purposively sampled for the study. Aside her consistency in posting videos aimed at deconstructing the bizzare image people have about Africa, @charityekezie’s account was selected because it has received a lot of media attention (e.g., The Insider (theins.ru), The Observer (theguardian.com), Independent Online (iol.co.za), france24.com, theparents.com, buzzfeed.com and Aljazeera.com) as one that is helping to retell the story of Africa in a positive

light through the use of sarcasm. Three months period posts were purposively selected as data for the study. Thus, from 4th January 2022 (the first day she made a sarcastic post that went viral on TikTok) to 31st March, 2022. This period was selected because it provided me with all the necessary data needed to explore the burgeoning phenomenon under study. Forty-four (44) posts shared by @charityekezie which are in the forms of videos with captions were collected for this study. Document analysis and observations were used as the data collection methods. For this study, even though I had a TikTok account, I created a new account, searched for @charityekezie's account page and followed her. This was done to prevent intrusion from other pages should I use my personal account. Since her account was public, following her gave me access to her posts. According to Beninger et al. (2014), seeking consent is at the center of discussions of ethical considerations regarding social media research as not all users are comfortable with their data being used for research. Based on the author's contention, I sought the permission of @charityekezie through e-mail before collecting the data from her page. I downloaded all the posts shared by @charityekezie from January 14, 2022 to March 31, 2022. The captions for each posts were also copied and pasted in a word document to correlate with each post within the same folder. I observed the comments under each post. The background of each video which served as non-verbal cues in backing the sarcastic utterances made in the videos were also observed. The statements made in the videos were transcribed and read continuously to identify patterns in relations to the formulated research questions. The collected data were thematically analysed following Braun and Clark's (2006) six step to thematic analysis.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

I begin by providing a description of the profile page of @charityekezie. **Figure 1** below shows @charityekezi with her picture as her display image; 1.8 million followers; 38.1 million overall likes and 479 followings (people she follows) as at December 7, 2022. Currently, she has 3.3 million followers and 84.1 million likes as at December 1, 2024.

As seen in **Figure 1** below, @charityekezie states on her profile page that she is a Leo (someone born between 23 July and August 22); on TikTok to make people happy; gives directions to interested persons to send a direct message to her through her Instagram page rather than on TikTok. She also provides the URL to her website for interested persons who want to know more about her. Another peculiar feature on the page which is often not present on most TikTok accounts is the existence of three sub-categories labelled 'what I ordered', 'Africa' and 'Savage talk' which describe the kind of content she shares on her page. The first three posts have been *pinned* to the page, which means that even though content shared on TikTok appear in a reverse chronological order where the most recent comes first, the pinned posts irrespective of the dates they were posted do not move but continue to remain at the top whilst the reverse chronology continues after them.

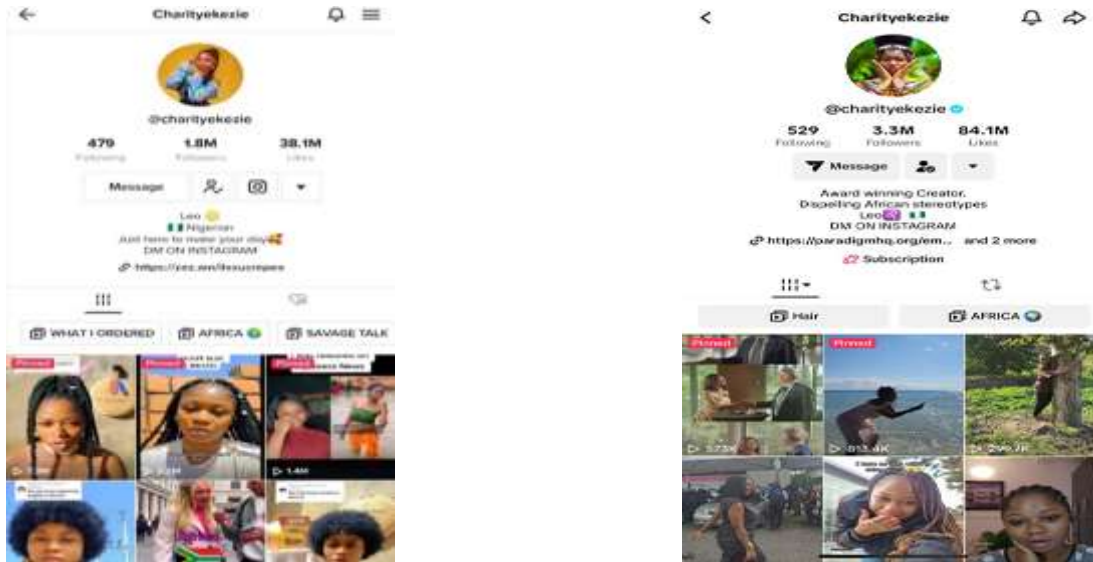


Figure 1: Profile page of @charityekezie on TikTok on December 7, 2022 and December 1, 2024 respectively

The second image in Figure 1 shows @charityekezie identifying her page as one that dispels stereotypes about the African continent. Thus, she made changes to her profile description in 2024.

Table 1: Frequency table of posts shared by @charityekezie on TikTok from 4 January 2022 -31 March, 2022

Month	Sarcastic Posts about Africa	Posts unrelated to Africa	Total
January	9 (30%)	3 (21.4%)	12 (27.3%)
February	9 (30%)	6 (42.9%)	15 (34.1%)
March	12 (40%)	5 (35.7%)	17 (38.6%)
Total	30 (100%)	14 (100%)	44 (100%)

From Table 1, it is evident that @charityekezie shared more posts about Africa within the three months period under study. Thus, 30 posts (68.2%) were about Africa whereas 14 (31.8%) were unrelated to Africa. These 14 posts were often personal videos of herself and her family, and what she has labelled 'what I ordered verses what I got' which often encapsulates videos about people who compare their fashion inspiration images to what their fashion designers created to ascertain whether a good job was done or otherwise. It is also noteworthy that she had posts in which she celebrated and thanked her followers for their increase in number and unflinching support. Table 1 further showed that as the months progressed the total number of posts shared by @charityekezie also increased. More posts about Africa were shared in the March than the other two months.

Issues about Africa Addressed by @charityekezie on her TikTok page

From the thematic analysis conducted, it became evident that the sarcastic posts made by @charityekezie tackled misconceptions in relation to basic needs, infrastructure and transportation, communication technology, clothing, beauty products and others.

Table 2: Frequency table of issues addressed by @charityekezie on her TikTok page

Issues	Frequency	Percentage
Basic needs	9	30%
Infrastructure and Transportation	4	13.3%
Language and communication technology	6	20%
Clothing and Beauty products	4	13.3%
Others	7	27.4%
Total	30	100%

Table 2 shows that most of the issues addressed by @charityekezie on her TikTok page addressed misconceptions concerning basic needs (30%), communication technology and language (20%), infrastructure and transportation (13.3%), clothing and beauty products (13.3%) and others (27.4%). The themes generated affirm Manzo’s (2018) contention that Africa has a perverted image rooted in deadly narratives projected by the media. Issues about basic needs ranked first which reaffirms Michira’s (2002) statement that the image of hunger, famine and starvation persist most in all the images that surround the portrayal of Africa in the media.

A Continent Without Basic Needs

Under this theme, most followers of @charityekezie inquired about whether Africa had good drinking water and food to eat and whether fast food joints were available on the continent. Others also made enquiries about the climate in the continent as to whether it ever rained. For example on 4 January 2022, @charityekezie made a sarcastic response to a follower who enquired about how he/she was going to get water should they travel to Africa. Thus, comments such as the ones below necessitated some videos made by @charityekezie addressing the image of Africa as a continent without basic needs.

How will I get water? – 4 January 2022

What do Africans eat? Still are they eating human? – 18th March 2022

Africa just don't have clean water – 23 January 2022

My mom says Africa has no food – 13 February, 2022

Ok I feel stupid for asking do gou [you] guys have like fast food places like macdonalds? – 19 February 2022.

The aforementioned questions and statements reinforce the assertion by Michira (2002) and Mogaji (2021) that Africa is often portrayed as a barbaric continent full of starvation and hunger needing support from the West and other international bodies. This image, therefore lurks in the minds of people who have not travelled to the continent and hence, rely solely on what the media feed them. Charity Ekezie used most of her posts (30%) to address his issue, which shows its importance to her.

A continent lacking English Language Proficiency, Communication and Other Technologies

This theme ranked third with 20% and it discusses how people question whether Africans have access to the internet, mobile phones, electricity, televisions and refrigerators. Questions and statements such as;

Africans know English? (surprised emoji) – 25 February, 2022

Africans have electricity (worried emoji) -7 March 2022

Wait african's have phones not to be rude I just didn't know -31 January 2022

Africa has iphones too (Surprised emoji)? - 29 January 2022

Africa has internet and TikTok? -21 January 2022

This theme buttresses Harth's (2012) and Michira's (2002) position that the image of lack of progress in Africa appears often in the portrayal of Africa in the media. Thus, people assume Africa is a backward continent that lacks the zeal for progression and hence has no access to certain technological advancements concerning communication, electricity and many others. These kinds of questions motivated @charityekezie to make videos addressing the issue of Africa lacking technological and communication tools and English language proficiency etc.

A Continent Lacking Infrastructure and Means of Transportation

This theme which garnered 13.3% of the total number of sarcastic posts about Africa discusses how some TikTok users questioned @charityekezie on whether the African continent has access to good roads, buildings and cars. Thus, questions such as the ones below are often addressed by @charityekezie.

Wait africa has buildings I've been lied to my whole life – 27 March 2022

Whatttt I didn't know there were cars in Africa schools taught me wrong – 9 February 2022

This theme further reinforces the misrepresentation that Africa lacks development even as the world evolves (Harth, 2012). Although Bunce et al. (2016) aver that there have been some positive change in the images used in describing Africa by way of tone and subjects discussed, the

questions posed by @charityekezie’s followers indicate that there are still more people who continue to perceive the African continent as a dark, uncivilized and barbaric continent (Michira, 2002). Thereby, influencing the content creator to address this issue in four of her posts.

A Continent Lacking Clothing and Beauty Products

This theme also had 13.3% as shown in Table 2. Under this theme, TikTok users questioned whether Africans had clothing to wear and whether African women had access to wigs and make-up products. Examples of questions and statements that led to @charityekezie addressing these issues include;

Are there make up product in Africa? – 26 March 2022

I have not [no] idea in [if] Africa people wear clothes - 29 March 2022

In a post shared on 15 March 2022, @charityekezie is seen transitioning from wearing traditional Nigerian clothing made with sacks to modern clothes. On the video, she writes “*When they say Africans don’t wear clothes*”. She further captions it “*Please send us money to buy clothes (sad emoji) thank you. P.S instead of making assumptions about Africa. Do a proper research*”. Though @charityekezie often leaves her audience to assume her actual meanings out of her sarcastic performances on TikTok, she sometimes uses her captions to somewhat state categorically what her audience should do to know more about the African continent. This theme is compelling, as scholars have not identified the lack of clothing and beauty products as an image used to represent the African continent.

Others

Other misconceived images about Africa which centered on the continent being regarded as one nation with all Africans knowing each other and Africans depending on international aid for survival were also grouped under the theme ‘others’. This theme ranked second with 27.4%. For example in a post on 22 March 2022, @charityekezie shared a video with the sarcastic on-video text “*Proof that we all know each other in Africa*” and a general caption “*Joshua if you’re seeing this better return those mangoes please. The gods don’t play (crying emoji)*”. In the specific video, @charityekezie employs sarcasm to narrate how she walked to Ghana from Nigeria to buy fish and chanced on Joshua from Kenya stealing mangoes from a wicked witch in Nigeria. Though funny, the video consummates the fact that Africa is not a homogenous continent but rather made up of many countries with different languages, cultures and social structures (Tsikata, 2014). Michira (2002) and Mogaji (2021) indicate that the media portrays Africa as a single country, which is internalized by audiences oblivious of the fact that the continent has various autonomous nations.

Sarcasm Expression Practices Present in the Tiktok Videos Shared by @Charityekezie

From the thematic analysis conducted, it became evident that the videos shared on the TikTok page of @charityekezie addressing the stereotypical comments and questions posed about Africa consisted of *the allusion to previous comments and questions from other users*, use of *non-verbal*

cues and *verbal communication*. Caucci and Kreuz (2012) state that sarcastic users often add non-verbal cues through their wry tone, weird facial expressions etc. to provide relevant information needed for a listener to understand a sarcastic statement. This implies that since sarcasm is viewed as an utterance that communicates the opposite of what is said (Sharma et al., 2022), @charityekezie uses the non-verbal cues in her videos to convey the actual meaning she intends to send out to her listeners (followers).

Allusion to Previous Comments Made or Questions Posed by Followers

Figure 2 is a screenshot from a video post shared by @charityekezie on 23 January 2022. The TikTok application affords its users the chance to reply to comments on previous posts through videos. For example, on the upper left part of Figure 2, there is a white background with the inscription, “reply to abbyjoy007’s comment –You have fridges in Africa (surprised emoji)”. Any user who comes across the post automatically knows that the video is a response to the previous comment made by the account holder ‘@abbyjoy007’.



Figure 2: A post by @charityekezie shared on 23 January, 2022 on TikTok

The recurring feature on all the sarcastic videos shared by @charityekezie was the presence of such captions at the upper left part of the videos indicating that the present post is in response to the previous statements. Referring to an earlier question or statement is in tandem with the echoic mention theory which indicates that oftentimes sarcastic statements refer back to a previous statement made by someone outside the speaker him/herself (Wilson, 2006). In this context, @charityekezie shows the statement or question she is responding to in any video she makes to give her followers an idea that she was not just making a video but was triggered by an earlier statement by other users. Thus, @charityekezie makes her sarcastic posts by alluding to earlier comments made by other users under her posts. This is the ‘implicit reference’ to sarcasm as identified by Keenan and Quigley (1999), which reveals a sarcastic speaker alluding to comments they are responding to in their posts stating the exact words.

Use of Non-Verbal Cues

The study further revealed that the creator of the sarcastic posts (@charityekezie) often used her contorted facial expressions and the background of her videos to communicate the actual information that she intended to convey to her followers. Even though @charityekezie verbally agrees with the negative image of Africa that is evident in the comments and questions she receives from her followers, she uses her facial expressions and the background props in her videos to bring out the flaws in the statements and questions. This buttresses Das and Clark's (2019) assertion that well-structured sarcasm is aimed at ridiculing and pointing out the flaws in the statement which was made by someone who is not the sarcasm speaker. For example, when asked whether there are refrigerators in Africa (as seen in Figure 2), @charityekezie responds with a video where she is seen washing her hands in a sink and walking to a refrigerator to pick a bottle of water which she drinks. Even though she is heard affirming that indeed Africans do not have access to refrigerators, the presence of the refrigerator in the video, her constant laughter and contorted facial expressions give a clear indication that she is mocking the follower who asked the question. As Sharma (2022) avers, sarcastic speakers habitually mock the supposed absurd opinions or views of others.

Use of Verbal Communication

Aside from the non-verbal cues used in the videos, one other observable feature is the use of verbal communication; thus, @charityekezie, in all her videos, is heard verbally responding to the various questions posed. Though the aim is to deconstruct the stereotypical perceptions people have about the African continent, the interesting thing about her videos is that her words reaffirm the stereotypes, whilst her use of non-verbal cues communicates the actual information she wants to send across. In one of her videos where she is asked whether there are makeup products in Africa, she is heard responding that;

African women don't wear makeup. Like there are no makeup products in Africa really. To beautify ourselves, there are four basic steps we take plus one additional step. First we get a special peanut butter made by the oldest woman in our community and apply it as base. Then we layer it with a very rare clay soil that can only be found at the center of the Sahara desert. And then we cut off some feathers from our chicken and use it as our lashes to extend our lashes. And then we get charcoal to make our eyebrows pop. And then we put a mixture of Shea butter and hibiscus on our lips to stain the lip. And that is how we beautify ourselves in Africa ... (@charityekezie, 26 March, 2022).

Creusere (1999) avouches that sarcastic speakers do not intend their listeners to take their words literally as fact but to identify the situational context and other non-verbal cues to ascertain the actual meaning they intend to convey. This is evident from the transcribed data stated above.

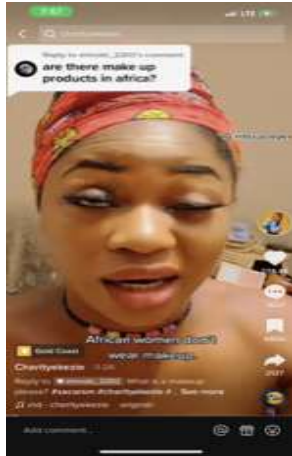


Figure 3: @charityekezie responding to a follower regarding the presence of makeup products in Africa

In Figure 3, an automatic transcription feature is enabled by @charityekezie whereby what she says is transcribed on the video. In the video, she sarcastically says, “*African women don’t wear makeup*” even though several makeup products are seen behind her. According to Popa-Wyatt (2014), sarcastic speakers can efficiently criticise other people’s foolishness by pretending to be foolish and behaving foolishly. Similarly, @charityekezie pretends to be foolish and ridiculously affirms the stereotypical images about Africa through her words. These words are, however, the opposite of what she means (Sharma, 2022). Thus, she uses verbal communication to indirectly mock the people who ask her absurd questions about Africa’s image. In all, as the verbal communication ridicules and mocks her followers, her use of non-verbal cues gives more information about Africa and thus, aids in reconstructing the image of the continent to the rest of the world through the TikTok video-sharing platform.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of the study revealed that even though there is global technological advancement with the proliferation of social media platforms, the misconceived perception of the African continent persists. Based on the findings of research question one, this study, recommends that more Africans including the media use their various social media account to portray the positive images of Africa to the rest of the world, which can bring opportunities to the continent. Moreover, based on the findings from research question two, it is recommended that sarcasm is used by African social media users to counter negative portrayals of the continent as the humour, verbal and non-verbal cues of sarcasm make it easy for information to be assimilated by other social media users.

CONCLUSION

The current study investigated the use of sarcasm by @charityekezie to reconstruct the stereotypical image of Africa as perceived by some users on TikTok. The study refuted Caucci and Kreuz's (2012) statement that the closer a speaker is to a recipient, the more likely he/she is to make sarcastic statement because even though @charityekezie does not know any of her followers who asked her questions about Africa, she went ahead to communicate using sarcasm. The findings revealed that the issues addressed by @charityekezie centered predominantly on the lack of basic needs, infrastructure and means of transportation, Africans' inability to speak English language and the lack of communication technologies (internet, mobile phones) in the continent. The absence of clothing and beauty products in Africa was also tackled as an issue in the videos. The findings further showed that @charityekezie addressed the aforementioned issues following several questions and statements from her TikTok followers. The sarcastic expression practices which included the allusion to previous opinions or questions by her followers, use of non-verbal cues and verbal communication conform to the assumptions of the echoic mention theory and the pretence theory of irony thereby reinforcing Garmendia's (2018) stance that the two theories go together in sarcastic expressions. The study recommends that Africans should take advantage of social media to contribute to the Afro-positive turn regarding the representation of the continent to the rest of the world.

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