

PROSPECTS AND CAREER OPPORTUNITIES IN NIGERIAN STAND-UP COMEDY

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Abstract

Stand-up comedy is basically an art form that is devoted to getting immediate laughs from an audience. It aims at achieving laughter as well as satirise deviant behaviours all with the intent to sustain social order. In Nigeria, it has become a very huge industry. This paper discusses the various career opportunities associated with stand-up comedy as an art form. It undertakes a survivalist appreciation of the career options which stand-up comedy can offer against the backdrop of the alarming rate of unemployment in Nigeria. The need for Nigerian stand-up comics to be exposed cannot be overemphasised as it would aid them to discover themselves as well as the career opportunities in the art of stand-up comedy. The study establishes the fact that the stand-up comedian can as well double as a writer, a psychotherapist, a politician, a brand ambassador, an event manager and a content developer, amongst others. Consequently, the paper advocates the need to develop stand-up comedy courses in relation to entrepreneurship in Nigerian universities.

Introduction

The global economic downturn has thrown most developing countries including Nigeria into economic recession in the 21st century. There has been the scramble amongst the citizens for the limited economic space in a bid to guarantee their livelihood. As the pangs of the economic recession intensified in Nigeria, foreign exchange rates skyrocketed dramatically, and security challenges in some parts of the country, most foreign and even indigenous investors collapsed their businesses in Nigeria thereby laying off the indigenous workforce. The consequences of the layoff was severe and biting, especially as the number of unemployed Nigerian youths (graduates and non-graduates) increased dangerously; thus, creating liberal pathways for socio-economic crimes borne out of the desperation for survival. The proliferation of the economic crimes culminated in serious security challenges that led to the decline in the production of consumables goods by local farmers. In the Niger Delta region for instance, the laying off of the indigenous work force in multi-national corporations rendered most youths jobless and therefore vulnerable to criminal activities, such as, kidnapping, armed robbery, molestation and intimidation of helpless natives. The upsurge of these criminal activities made it impossible for local farmers to access their farmlands and so domestic food products, such as, garri, vegetables, okro, and so on, became scarce even

within the rural markets. It cannot be over emphasised that the inflation in the price of locally produced food stuffs has heightened the gravity of the recession till date.

Understandably, the economic recession in Nigeria was viewed from different perspectives by the citizens, who are the primary victims. Whereas majority of the Nigerian citizenry resorted to the blame game of attributing the economic recession to the poor economic vision of the government, some political bigots see it as a ploy by the opposition parties to discredit the incumbent government in view of their political ambitions. Some optimistic Nigerians conceive it as a global experience that would soon be a thing of the past. Interestingly, entrepreneurial-oriented minds in Nigeria see the recession as a veritable platform to expand their horizons by being economically prudent, creative and enterprising. Paradoxically, the on-going recession has instilled in some Nigerians a new economic vision – a vision driven by creativity, talent and discipline. Today, Nigeria boasts of a handful of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that are interested in harnessing young talents, especially in the entertainment industry. This, in turn, has rekindled the spirit of self-reliance and entrepreneurship amongst the teeming population of Nigerian youths.

Entrepreneurship: A Definitional Statement

The term, entrepreneurship, has been subjected to series of definitions since its entrance into the pedagogy of management and social sciences. In their article, entitled, “Entrepreneurship”, Yetisen, Volpatti, Cosku, Cho, Kamrani, Butt, Khademhosseini and Yun define entrepreneurship, as the process of conceiving, designing, showcasing and running a new business which often begins as a small business and involves offering a product, process or service for sale (1). Interestingly, *The Business Dictionary* takes the definition further to include the capacity and willingness to develop, organise, and manage a business venture along with any of its risks in order to make a profit.

History has it that since the early twenty first century, the definition of entrepreneurship has been expanded to unravel how and why some individuals (or teams) identify opportunities, evaluate them as viable, and then decide to exploit them, whereas others do not (Scott and Venkatraman 217). The period also ushered in the business consciousness of the entrepreneurs as they capitalised on these opportunities to develop new products or services, launch new firms or even new industries and in the process, create wealth. It is against this backdrop of the definition of entrepreneurship, as the ability to make profit from small scale businesses through risk bearing that the entrepreneur is commonly seen as a business leader and innovator of new ideas and business processes. Zhang and Cueto admonish that:

Entrepreneurs tend to be good at perceiving new business opportunities and they often exhibit positive biases in the perception (i.e., a bias towards finding new possibilities and seeing unmet market needs) and a pro-risk-taking attitude makes them more likely to exploit the opportunity (7).

The deduction from Zhang and Cueto's statement above is that the entrepreneurial spirit is characterised by innovation and risk-taking. An entrepreneur is typically in control of a commercial undertaking, directing the factors of production, i.e., the human, financial and material resources that are required to exploit a business opportunity. They often act as managers, who oversee the launch and growth of an enterprise. For Robert *Hisrich*, entrepreneurship is the process by which an individual (or team) identifies a business opportunity and acquires and deploys the necessary resources required for its exploitation (6). He adds that, the exploitation of entrepreneurial opportunities may include actions, such as, developing a business plan, hiring the human resources, acquiring financial and material resources, providing leadership, and being responsible for the venture's success or failure (7).

Importantly also, entrepreneurial activities differ substantially depending on the type of organisation and creativity involved. Entrepreneurship ranges in scale from solo, part-time projects to large-scale undertakings that involve a team and which may create many jobs. According to Scott and Venkatraman, entrepreneurship comprises both "enterprising individuals" and "entrepreneurial opportunities" (21); hence, researchers should study the nature of the individuals, who respond to these opportunities when others do not, the opportunities themselves and the nexus between individuals and opportunities. On the other hand, Reynolds, Hay and Bygrave argue that individuals are motivated to engage in entrepreneurial endeavours driven mainly by necessity or opportunity; that is, individuals pursue entrepreneurship primarily owing to survival needs, or because, they identify business opportunities that satisfy their need for achievement (17).

The views expressed so far in this review, especially the opinion put forward by Reynolds et al. authenticate the thrust of the paper that entrepreneurship is fundamentally an offshoot of man's enthusiasm and quest to survive in a mono-economy, that is, one that is solely dependent on crude oil. Another salient point that we can deduce from the review is that entrepreneurship fosters human capacity drive and development since it insists on breaking new grounds, taking unusual risks and venturing into expanded and sometimes, strange business fields. It is against this backdrop that we shall be examining the entrepreneurial potentials in stand-up comedy, especially as it is practiced in Nigeria in the face of the economic depression.

Stand-up Comedy as a Social Art

The position that laughter and, by extension, comedy are social phenomena, has been expressed by notable comic theorists, such as, William Hazlitt, George Meredith, Susan Langer, Arthur Schopenhauer, Sigmund Freud and Henri Bergson, among others. The main concern of stand-up comedy is to achieve laughter as well as satirise deviant behaviours all with the intent to sustain social order. Similarly, it is the business of laughter to repress any tendency on the part of the individual to separate himself from society. Stand-up comedy is basically an art form that is devoted to getting immediate laughs from an audience. However, Judy Carter argues that, "unless the audience is clear about *what* you are joking about, they're not going to laugh" (71). For her, good jokes

are drawn from a creative blend of clarity in the topic and consistency in attitude to the topic. She admonishes further that:

To connect with an audience, comics and comedy writers need to find those topics that they are truly and deeply passionate about and that other people can relate to. These become their authentic topics. For stand-up comics, these topics form the core of their act and shape their *persona* (103).

In stand-up comedy, feedback of the audience is instant and crucial for the comedian's act. Audiences expect a stand-up comic to provide a steady stream of laughs, and a performer is always under great pressure to deliver. Sophie Quirk notes that stand-up comedy is a battle between audience and performer; and that from a comedian's point of view, an audience can be an intimidating and frightening beast (219). In Quirk's analogy, when an audience does not laugh, the act fails and the experience becomes thoroughly unpleasant for the audience as well as the performer. Audiences are threatening because they are powerful. The stand-up act may appear a solo, but the input of the audience is necessary to its success. Carr and Greeves corroborate this position above when they state that:

The audience's laughter is essential to the rhythm of the comic's set; although they aren't talking to him (except for the red-faced drunk in the front row), for the set to be successful it must still function with the to-and-fro rhythm of a conversation, albeit a rather one-sided one (qtd. in Quirk 220).

Thus, the social essence of stand-up comedy lies in the fact that it draws its raw material from the incongruities and eccentricities that arise from man's inability to adapt to the living codes of an ever changing society. Irrespective of any form the theatre takes, the audience remains the most vital element. In the process of performance, the artist conceives the audience not as a group of men and women seated in an auditorium in anticipation of a performance but as members of a corporate society who have come to share their social experiences and common humanity. As a theatrical enterprise, stand-up comedy draws largely from issues of social concern – issues that ignite the risible not on account of tribe, religion or social status but because of our identity as members of the same human community. Lesley Harbidge recognises the sense of bonding and social interaction which stand-up comedy occasions when he posits that:

...the live and informal nature of the comedian's performance, as well as the venue itself, can facilitate a performer/audience relationship unlike that found in most conventional theatre: in stand-up, personalised address and candid geniality intended to strike up rapport with the audience combines with a relaxed, social environment to generate distinctly free-wheeling, organic art form (129).

As part of the creative process, the stand-up audience's consolidated presence, their vital responses and actions are seen to help feed a performance which is as reactive as it is active. Philip Auslander avers that the stand-up comedy audiences are more crucial in shaping the performance more than rock and pop music audiences. According to him:

Music audiences may sing along, even take over temporarily as the singer extends the microphone toward them. Yet stand-up may be even more dialogic: audience and comedian sharing both a physical and a diegetic space, the performance is more than that which unfolds onstage: it is that which unravels at the intersection of audience and comedian (qtd. in Harbidge 129).

The conviction behind labelling stand-up comedy a social art lies in its characteristic tendency to draw from the anomalies, inversions, deviations and repetitions of human actions. It lies in its ability to occasion a gathering of men who have come to ease off the tensions of life through intermittent outbursts of boisterous laughter as well as enjoy some form of social interaction.

Stand-up Comedy in Nigeria

One popular entertainment genre in Nigeria that has harnessed raw talents and transformed them into wealth creation is stand-up comedy. Only a few years ago, stand-up comedy in Nigeria was never associated with wealth, social status and pedigree. Before the commercial successes of Ali Baba as a stand-up comic and Opa William's *Night of a Thousand Laughs* comedy show towards the end of the 20th century, stand-up comedy was never considered a lucrative art form neither was it given a special place within the Nigerian entertainment space. Between the late 1970s and early 1980s, there emerged a special brand of comedians, who were largely television personalities. Taking advantage of their face value either on screen or air, this crop of comedians took up the part-time job of anchoring social events, such as, weddings, children dedications, coronations, beauty pageants and end of year dinner parties and banquets by multinationals and corporate organisations. Sola Fosudo notes that during this period, the names of such veteran artistes and media faces, such as, John Chukwu, Mohammed Danjuma, Sunny Irabor, Bisi Olatilo, Tony St Iyke, came into prominence (See also Ayakoroma 474-486). Interestingly, in spite of the fame and unique comic artistry exerted by comedians of television drama, one did not envisage the birth of stand-up comedy in Nigeria. This crop of comedians became highly patronised largely "because people enjoyed them more when they made them laugh, the comedy side of their business gradually became more explicit" (Nwankwo 55). Like Ayakoroma and Fosudo, Nwankwo further identifies the practitioners of this brand of comedy to include Patrick Doyle, Bisi Olatilo, Femi Segun, Femi Jarrett, Leo Onmudi and Smart Otemu (55).

Since the emergence of Ali Baba into the stand-up comedy scene in Nigeria, there has been several doors that are open to Nigerian stand-up comics, especially the

hardworking, creative and innovative ones. Today, it is no longer exaggerative to state that stand-up comedy in Nigeria holds huge economic prospects for the youths, as they are consistently and meaningful engaged in series of highly subscribed comedy concerts and variety programmes where their creative ingenuities are brought to the fore. In recent times, some top flight stand-up comics in Nigeria have stepped up their game by creating their own brand of comedy entertainment. Some have gone the extra mile of infusing entrepreneurship into stand-up comedy by initiating talent hunt programmes, where budding talents are harnessed and set up with the aim of aiding them to get to get to the peak of their career (*AY's Open Mic* is a ready example).

Ironically, even with the aforementioned innovations in the present day stand-up comedy industry in Nigeria, one cannot claim that the economic potentials as well as the career opportunities in stand-up comedy have been fully explored. A deeper insight into the nature and dynamics of stand-up comedy would reveal the numerous career opportunities at the disposal of stand-up comedians, apart from the routine of standing before an audience to reel out jokes. Coincidentally, Nigeria is grappling with the pangs of a recessed economy as evident in the high cost of local and foreign products, high rate of unemployed youths roaming the streets and constituting a nuisance in extreme cases and inconsistencies in the pay packets of most government workers. Against this backdrop, the patronage of live performances including comedy shows dwindle to the dangerous extent of rubbing off on the supposed economic benefits of the Nigerian stand-up comic. Consequently, this paper is a prescriptive advocacy for Nigerian stand-up comics to surmount the economic recession by exploring available job opportunities that are associated with stand-up comedy.

Career Opportunities in Nigerian Stand-up Comedy

For purposes of clarity, the paper has identified some possible job options for a stand-up comic. It is pertinent to mention at this juncture that the options identified in this paper are by no means definitive since, like other theatre forms, stand-up comedy is a unique and dynamic art form that finds its bearing virtually in all human experiences. The career opportunities include: being a performing artist, an entrepreneur, a content developer, a brand ambassador, a creative writer, a proprietor, a grassroots mobiliser, a politician, an advertising agent/consultant, a motivational speaker, an event manager and a psychotherapist.

- a) ***As a Performing Artist:*** The most prominent career attached to stand-up comedy is the artistry of performing before an audience. Within the confines of this career specification, the stand-up comic is exposed to different performance modes including holding microphone and thrilling his audience with all kinds of jokes. In a bid to make their jokes more graphic, some comics infuse body movements, gesticulations, facial expressions, mannerisms and mime into their performances. Judy Carter observes that,

...the hardest part of performing is engaging the audience. It implies that for a stand-up comic to actualise the goal of currying the audience's

attention, he or she must be able to blend the attitude of his performance with the thematic thrust of his joke. In a typical stand-up comic performance, attitude is often expressed through ...the comic's puzzled expression or in his tone of voice (73).

In this sense, the stand-up comic stands out as a performing artist whose main purpose is to entertain his audience while they get educated and enlightened in the process. The performance space of stand-up comics also stretches to the comic sub-genres of skits, television/radio comedies, sitcoms and full length comedy movies. In this sub-genres, stand-up comedians feature prominently as actors even as they bring in their stand-up comic nuances to the fore. In Nigeria for example, comedians, such as, Ali Baba, Julius Agwu, Yibo Koko, Basorge Tariah Jr., Okey Bakassi and AY (Ayo Makun), among others, have distinguished themselves as not just stand-up comics but as seasoned comic screen actors.

- b) ***As an Entrepreneur:*** It has been established earlier in the study that entrepreneurship entails the mobilisation and utilisation of creative human potentials in order to maximise resources. Stand-up comedy is one art form that opens up to entrepreneurial potentials as it fits in into a wide range of social events and performances. In Nigeria, Bunmi Davis' *Stand Up Naija*, Opa William's *National Comedy Challenge* and *AY's Open Mic* are breeding grounds for budding stand-up comics. Present day independent and sensational Nigerian stand-up comics, such as, MC Acapella, MC Ajebo, Seyi Law, Emeka Smith and Akpororo are products of the entrepreneurial acumen of AY. His entrepreneurial style transcends discovering raw talents and starting the winners with the donations of brand new cars aimed at enhancing their social status as well as creating veritable platforms for them to perform alongside top-flight stand-up comics and other music and screen stars. The winners of the *AY Open Mic* also perform on the big stage of the *AY Live* comedy show, which is adjudged as one of the most subscribed comedy shows in Nigeria.
- c) ***As a Content Developer:*** The business of stand-up comedy involves creating stories taking into cognizance the elements of logic, chronology and coherence. Good jokes are usually woven around topical and trending issues. Similarly, the business of developing content for either a brand or curriculum entails effective market survey so as to determine the demands of the market forces. Today, most companies and institutions develop their brands or curricula against the backdrop of prevailing market forces. Stand-up comedy stands out as an emerging trend in Nigeria that is finding its way into the educational sector. Apart from comedy clubs, some institutions have embarked on the review of their curricula in an attempt to integrate short courses in new trends in comedy. Only recently, Ali Baba was mandated to design special courses on comedy for

the Lagos State University. Like Ali Baba, other comedians can make a living from designing and developing contents for brands and institutions.

- d) **As a Brand Ambassador:** The making of stand-up comics brand ambassadors, especially by international bodies and high class companies in Nigeria translate to huge economic gains for them. It is stating the obvious that a handful of seasoned Nigerian comics such as Ali Baba, Basket Mouth, AY, Gordons, Bovi, Funny Bone, Buchi, Akpororo, Francis Odega and Dan D' Humorous, among others, have landed millions of naira brand ambassadorial contracts with notable communication companies, such as, Mobile Telecommunication Network (MTN), Globacom and Airtel. At the moment, comedians such as Gordons, Buchi, Basket Mouth, Bovi, Senator and Dan D' Humorous among others have a running contract with Globacom in the latter's *GLO Laffta Fest*, where they tour major cities in Nigeria, as brand ambassadors. Also, Akpororo's endorsement as a brand ambassador of Airtel still subsists. It is believed that their endorsements run into huge amounts compared to their artist fees in normal comedy shows and other social events.
- e) **As a Creative Writer:** Creative writing is one lucrative career at the disposal of the stand-up comic. The business of cracking jokes begins with the conception of ideas. These ideas are then documented creatively through the creative ingenuity of a writer who may not necessarily be a stand-up comic. Mel Helitzer observes that the biggest challenge confronting the humour industry is the dire need for professional writers (2). He further argues that, since there is no official humour organisation, there is no such thing as a certified professional humour writer. According to him, "if you can sell your material or get paid for performing it, you're a professional" (2). Like the playwright, the writer of comedy and jokes whether for stage, radio or television is driven mainly by inspiration and power of imaginative thought. Unfortunately, these two creative virtues are lacking in most stand-up comics especially in Nigeria where a reasonable number of the comics are creatively lazy and so rely on the jokes created by the few hardworking ones.

While we boast of a generous number of stand-up comics in Nigeria since the inception of the sub-genre in the mid-1990s, the number of stand-up comedy, sit-com and skits writers has been insignificant. In her study of the stand-up comedy industry in the United States of America, Carter informs that:

Some stand-up comics who perform supplement their income by writing for other comics. And then there are those funny people who have never done stand-up themselves but who write it for others, such as funnyman Bruce Vilanch, who writes for Bette Midler and the Academy Award Show till date (28).

The implication of Carter's revelation above for the Nigerian stand-up comedy business is that writing of jokes and comedy in general is a lucrative area that has not been explored by Nigerian comics. Often times, most Nigerian comics feel complacent having acquired some level of fame in delivery of jokes forgetting that they could also get more money if they are able to create jokes and sell them off to their fellow stand-up comics. Given that comedy writing is an uncommon venture in Nigeria, there is no doubt that a prospective comedy writer would be meaningfully engaged to the reasonable extent of finding in it a lucrative career outside the routine of performing before an audience. As a point of fact, Ali Baba's outstanding fame and consequently, economic fortune in the stand-up comedy business stem from his authorship of some compilations of jokes and the craft of comedy which are selling very well outside the shores of Nigeria.

The business of comedy writing includes adapting stand-up acts into sitcoms (the example of *Mark Angel's Comedy* skits, translating funny stories into books, magazine articles and newspaper columns, animation writing and speech writing generally (since CEOs and politicians turn to comedy writers to provide sound bites aimed at winning their audiences)

- f) ***As a Proprietor:*** Our reference to proprietorship here would mean the initiator, director or coordinator of a comedy establishment, especially a comedy club. The aggressive emergence of stand-up comedy entertainment in Europe, United States of America and recently, Nigeria has given rise to the setting up of a good number of comedy clubs by stand-up comics and stand-up comedy entrepreneurs. Carter identifies a number of vibrant comedy clubs in the United States of America to include: The Comedy Club at the Stardome (Alabama), Laff's Comedy Cafey (Tucson), Comedy Store (West Hollywood), The Comedy and Magic Club (California), Cobbs Comedy Club (San Francisco), and a host of others (340). In Nigeria, there exist some striving comedy clubs that are managed by stand-up comics.

Apart from the routine of performing jokes before a live audience, the activities of these clubs include engaging the audience in some kind of comic aptitude test with the aim of putting them in comic situations, running satirical commentaries on topical social events, playing host to celebrities by putting them on hot seats and engaging the audience on round table discussions on trending issues. Some notable comedy club variety shows in Nigeria include *Time Out* with Tee A, Bunmi Davis' *Stand Up Naija*, *AY Open Mic*, *Teju Babyface Show*, Angel D Laff's *Port Harcourt Comedy Club* and Geebonz's *Bayelsa Comedy Club*. These comedy clubs double as comedy studios where budding comics are given platforms to improve on their art before introducing them to bigger comedy shows. The enrolment into the comedy clubs requires the payment of statutory membership dues depending on the class and duration of such membership. The proprietor of the comedy club stands out more as a moderator and director rather than a performer.

- g) **As a Mobiliser:** The business of stand-up comedy involves the stand-up comic's mastery of the dispositions of the various kinds of audiences (cultured and uncultured). It implies therefore that an ideal stand-up comic should be imbued with the techniques of holding both cultured and uncultured audiences spell bound with the gift of the gab. The grassroots make up the bulk of uncultured audiences and so it takes a profound sense of humour to reach and mobilise them. Humour is the stock in trade of the stand-up comic; so, it becomes pertinent to engage the services of stand-up comic in the mobilisation of the grassroots whether for political, health, religious or social awareness purposes. Stand-up comics especially in Nigeria have a stable market in the business of mass mobilisation since the country is grappling with myriads of social, political, religious and economic problems that call for consistent mobilisation of the masses through public awareness campaigns and rallies. Notable Nigerian comics, such as, Ali Baba, Julius Agwu, Gbenga Adeyinka, I Go Dye and Basket Mouth, among others, run NGOs dedicated for the mobilisation of Nigerian youths towards self-reliance and empowerment. Similarly, other agencies engage the services of stand-up comics as facilitators in awareness campaigns and rallies.
- h) **As a Politician:** Researches have shown that there complementarity between stand-up comedy and politics with humour being their unifying element. In his study of the political stand-up comedy in America, Robinson attributes the political success of the George Bush family to their dexterity in generating humour through stand-up comedy. Robinson acknowledges the impressive role which Will Rogers played as a comic icon in bringing presidential humour into the mainstream thereby initiating a popular dynamic that brought common Americans and their president into closer and more equitable proximity. According to him:

Rogers encouraged his fellow citizens to understand the performance and reception of humour as a site of cultural exploitation, creativity, and even political resistance, however tame by modern standards. Presidents and their supporters, along with their critics and even their wives, have responded by getting in on the act, perceiving the power of such humour to define, reinforce, and otherwise affect popular opinion (3).

The experience in Nigeria is not different when viewed against the backdrop of the humour-infused leadership style of Chief Olusegun Obasanjo with Ali Baba as the resident comedian of Aso Rock. Ali Baba's profound sense of humour took him to the Nigerian seat of power where he mingled with the political class to the extent that he became associated with the leadership train of Olusegun Obasanjo. Within the same period and much later, Okey Bakassi,

Michael Ogbolosingha, Uche Ogbuagu and Gbenga Adeyinka, among others comedians gained political appointments as Special Advisers on Culture, Tourism and Entertainment, respectively, mainly on account of their professional leanings as stand-up comics. The emphasis here is that the craft of stand-up comedy is in line with the oratorical prowess and fantasies necessary for political engagements. Interestingly, the fame and popularity of stand-up comics are politically advantageous in terms of eliciting public attention and consequently, followership.

- i) ***As an Actor/Agent/Consultant in Advertising:*** By advertising, we mean any conscious effort made towards a product or service to stimulate its favourable demand. The goal of every advertisement is to curry public attention and consequently, patronage. Stand-up comics stand a great chance in terms of designing highly subscribed adverts. Most stand-up comics are often used as actors in radio and television adverts. Carter informs that, “funny people who can add sizzle to an advert copy are cast in high-paying TV commercials” (28). Similarly, a stand-up comic can conveniently double as a voice over performer since the voice over business often requires that comics add funny character voices to cartoons, TV commercials and feature animation. Also, the art of designing an advert piece is synonymous with crafting a joke on a particular theme. Both exercises require high dose of creativity and imagination since they are targeted mainly at audience and consumer excitement and favourable disposition towards the joke and product respectively.

- j) ***As a Motivational Speaker:*** It is stating the obvious that the business of motivational speech delivery entails the infusion of humour regardless of the seriousness of the theme that is being spoken about. Great and motivational speakers such as T. D. Jakes, Myles Munroe, Patrice Mulumba and Pat Utomi, among others, command huge sense of humour in their respective deliveries. It can be argued that the aforementioned names can conveniently engage the audience of Opa William’s *A Night of Thousand Laughs* or *AY Live* in interesting comic moments, while they discuss thorny socio-political and socio-economic issues. Carter corroborates our position above when she states that:

If you have a talent for making people laugh, there are a lot of opportunities for fun and profit just waiting for you. And a person can make it in the funny business without ever getting on stage. Comics express themselves in many different ways... everyone has got something to sell, and comedy sells it best... (20).

Outstanding Nigerian comics, such as, Ali Baba, Gbenga Adeyinka, Julius Agwu, Yibo Koko, Basket Mouth, Owen Gee, MC Abbey and Teju Babyface, among others, are highly subscribed and remunerated by corporate bodies and governmental agencies as motivational speakers. However, it must be stressed

that being a stand-up comic does not make one a motivational speaker automatically being that the latter requires extra, painstaking and sustained research into a wide range of topical issues. Literacy is a key ingredient in the business of motivational speaking. So, any comedian wishing to delve into motivational speaking should be friendly with the books and then the innate creative spirit would accomplish the rest.

- k) ***As a Psychotherapist:*** By psychotherapy we refer to the treatment of people diagnosed with mental and emotional disorders using dialogue and a variety of psychological techniques. In his book, entitled, *Jokes and their Relations*, Elliot Orring notes that humour is dependent upon the social and cultural conventions and understandings that a group shares (x). It implies therefore that humour is a veritable tool which can be used to confront man's social, cultural and psychological experiences. It can be used as a means of coping mechanism for depressed minds and individuals undergoing psychic tension. The psychological basis of humour and consequently, laughter would always find robust expression in a country like Nigeria where untold economic hardship and myriads of security challenges have put the citizens in consistent depressed living conditions which in turn, have resulted in mental and emotional disorders.

Against this background, the stand-up comic, especially in Nigeria, has at his disposal a lucrative career in psychotherapy with psychological jokes as his major tool. Notable Nigerian stand-up comics, such as, Ali Baba, Gandoki, Gbenga Adeyinka, Teju Baby Face, MC Acapella, Akpororo and Dr. Virus are exceptional in the fabrication of jokes that explore the various manifestations of mental disorder and stress among Nigerians as well as the psychological basis for such manifestations. Stand-up comics in this brand can conveniently go in to the business of psychotherapeutic guidance and counselling using their jokes as curative pills. Their services could be extended to Psychiatric hospitals and mental homes.

- l) ***As a Radio /Television Presenter:*** Stand-up comics also have career opportunities as either radio or television presenters. Most radio stations rely on stand-up comics to sustain their listeners' base through comic programmes that are hosted by comics. Carter observes that, "as more talk shows fill the AM and FM airwaves, radio producers are turning to comics to keep their listeners laughing and listening" (28). In Nigeria, there is a handful of television and radio programmes that are hosted by comics. Though, most of these programmes harp on topical social events, their thrust is to elicit laughter from their listeners, as a way of guaranteeing their listenership and consequently, patronage. Iyowuna Obomanu's *Tori for Town* aired on Rivers State Television (RSTV) Channel 22UHF, Port Harcourt is a news programme laced with comic innuendos so as to sustain the viewer's interest. Recently, Okey Bakassi runs *The Other News*, a comic current affairs programme on Channels Television, which lampoons and makes caricature of current political and economic

happenings in Nigeria. In terms of radio, programmes, such as, *Funky 4 Plus 1* on Rhythm 93.7 FM and *Laff and Jamz* on RayPower 106.5 FM, *Laff as You Go* on Love FM, all in Port Harcourt. Prospective stand-up comedians can settle completely for radio or television comedy without recourse to live performances since these two media command mass audiences more than the former.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have established the fact that, the career options of the stand-up comedian transcend the usual pastime of standing before an audience to deliver jokes with the sole aim of eliciting laughter. It posits that a variety of career opportunities are at the disposal of a stand-up comedian, especially in the face of globalisation. However, what is expected of present day Nigerian stand-up comedian is for them to avoid complacency by just reeling out jokes in comedy shows. The comedians must respond positively to the effects of the economic recession in Nigeria through robust encouragement in the spirit of entrepreneurship.

The need for stand-up comedians to extend their research scope beyond crafting and delivering jokes cannot be overemphasised. They must take the business of human capacity building seriously so as to be versatile enough to run the gamut of career opportunities associated with the art of stand-up comedy. They are also encouraged to embrace the idea of diversification so as not to be stuck as stand-up comics. Furthermore, the paper argues that, comedians can also function effectively as business tycoons, politicians, pastors, entrepreneurs and social activists among others. This will go a long way in taking them away from poverty zone as well as boosting the economic viability of the business of stand-up comedy. In this sense, stand-up comedy and consequently, theatre has the potentials as one of the major mechanisms for survival in the face of the economic recession we are experiencing in Nigeria.

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