Analysis of Dominant Themes in Kipanya's Political Cartoons on Instagram and X: A Study from January to December 2023

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Abstract: This study aims to analyze the dominant themes depicted in Kipanya's political cartoons on Instagram and X from January to December 2023. Guided by Meaning Construction Theory and Symbolic Interactionism, the study employed content analysis of Kipanya's cartoons and contextual analysis of viewer comments. Findings reveal several recurring themes, including political opportunism, manipulation, superficial reforms, and corruption. Political opportunism is criticized through depictions of leaders prioritizing personal gain over public needs, while political manipulation is illustrated by politicians making unfulfilled promises. The cartoons also explore the superficiality of political reforms under President Samia Suluhu Hassan and criticize corruption and mismanagement. Reader interpretations reveal frustration with political inaction, dissatisfaction with unfulfilled promises, scepticism about the effectiveness of reforms, and concerns about mismanagement. Overall, Kipanya's cartoons effectively capture and critique public sentiments, reflecting widespread disillusionment with Tanzanian politics and highlighting the disconnect between political rhetoric and reality. The study recommends that political cartoonists like Kipanya deepen their thematic exploration, clarify political messages, and engage with audience feedback. Media platforms should promote diverse perspectives, facilitate informed discussions, and monitor and address misinterpretations. Political leaders and public figures should acknowledge public criticism, enhance transparency and accountability, and engage constructively with satire to improve governance.

Keywords: Political Cartoons, Political Opportunism, Political Manipulation, Corruption, Frustration, and Visual Communication.

1. INTRODUCTION

Political cartoons have long served as a unique medium of visual communication, offering a blend of satire, critique, and humour to comment on societal, political, and cultural issues. Cartoons are a form of visual rhetoric that utilize illustrations, often enhanced by captions or speech bubbles, to convey messages to the public, authority figures, or specific individuals. Through symbolic representations, they can evoke a range of emotional responses and encourage multiple interpretations depending on the context (Naghy, 2010). These characteristics make cartoons a potent tool for social commentary, as they not only highlight prevailing issues but also provoke reflection and discussion.

Kipanya, a renowned Tanzanian cartoonist, has gained prominence for using political cartoons to reflect and comment on sensitive socio-political matters. Particularly through his presence on social media platforms such as Instagram and X (formerly Twitter), Kipanya engages with the Tanzanian public, offering critiques on current events through his visual artistry. His work highlights the absurdities of political, economic, and social phenomena, serving as both a mirror and critic of the nation's developments. Political cartoons like Kipanya's can function as subtle, yet powerful, commentaries that challenge authority and critique the status quo, often eliciting a range of responses from readers, including strong emotional reactions or diverse interpretations (Naghy, 2010).

Across the globe, the role of political cartoons has been well documented. In the United States, for example, cartoons have historically shaped public opinion and influenced political discourse. McCloud (1993) notes that political cartoons are a succinct form of visual rhetoric capable of delivering complex messages concisely. Studies have shown that readers often interpret cartoons based on their political ideologies and affiliations. In the United Kingdom, cartoons are deeply rooted in the country's rich tradition of satire and are valued as tools for social commentary. Similarly, in Asia and Africa, cartoons

hold cultural significance, although the socio-political dynamics in these regions heavily influence both the creation and reception of such content (Mapuwei, 2014).

In the East African context, cartoons have emerged as critical tools for addressing governance and social justice issues. Kenya and Uganda, for instance, have a history of using political cartoons to critique corruption and other societal challenges (Musasia & Ndonye, 2014) reflecting on national issues, especially with the growing influence of social media platforms like Instagram and X. While these platforms provide cartoonists like Kipanya a broader audience, they also amplify the impact of political cartoons by allowing instant engagement from readers across diverse social, political, and economic backgrounds. Despite their growing significance, there remains a lack of comprehensive research on how Tanzanian audiences interpret and engage with political cartoons in digital spaces.

This study seeks at analyzing the dominant themes in Kipanya's political cartoons posted on Instagram and X from January to December 2023. It aims to explore how these cartoons reflect the socio-political landscape in Tanzania and how readers interpret these visual commentaries. The findings will offer valuable insights into the role of digital political cartoons in shaping public discourse in Tanzania, where cartoons often serve as a subtle form of social critique.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Stead and Liew (2020) conducted a comprehensive review of the literature on the indexing of political cartoons, focusing on the challenges associated with searching and retrieving such content online. Their work noted the scarcity of research on political cartoon collections and emphasized the difficulties in subject indexing, which remains a key concern for digital libraries and archives. The paper also highlighted the evolving role of political cartoons in the digital era, with more transnational and multicultural disputes attracting attention due to the rise of internet publications. This study underscores the importance of developing efficient indexing systems that consider both the visual and symbolic elements of political cartoons, an issue that is increasingly relevant in the digital age where cartoons are widely disseminated on social media platforms like Instagram and X (formerly Twitter).

Mulanda and Khasandi-Telewa's (2016) exploration of the motivations behind political cartoonists' work provides additional insight into the subjective nature of political cartoons, noting their capacity to shape public discourse and, at times, polarize society. Their study, grounded in the Social Action Theory, suggests that political cartoons are inherently opinionated and sectarian, often designed to evoke strong emotional reactions. The research demonstrates that cartoons can be critical tools for expressing societal dissent but also warns of the need for regulation due to their divisive potential. This finding is significant in understanding the themes presented in Kipanya's cartoons, where the balance between critique and public engagement is a central concern, especially in the Tanzanian political landscape.

Sufriyanto et al. (2018) investigated the role of visual language in political cartoons, particularly in their ability to offer socio-political criticism without inciting public unrest. The study's historical analysis of Indonesian political cartoons across different political regimes shows how cartoons can adapt their critique based on the prevailing political context. This adaptability resonates with Kipanya's work, where themes shift according to the political environment in Tanzania. Kipanya's cartoons, like those in Indonesia, often employ satire to criticize leadership and societal issues, and understanding how visual rhetoric can soften the impact of such criticism is crucial for interpreting his work on platforms like Instagram and X, where audiences are highly reactive.

In an African context, Omanga (2014) analyzed how Kenyan political cartoons constructed symbolic representations of global figures like Osama bin Laden during the "war on terror," illustrating how cartoons shape public perception of global events through a local lens. Similarly, Hakam's (2019) study of Arab newspapers demonstrated how political cartoons challenge dominant Eurocentric discourses by creating alternative narratives. These works provide a comparative framework for analyzing Kipanya's cartoons, which often employ local and global political commentary. By focusing on contemporary Tanzanian political issues and integrating global references, Kipanya's use of satire in his cartoons offers a unique perspective on both national and international political landscapes, making his work an important subject of study for understanding political expression in the digital age.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is guided by Meaning Construction Theory (MCT) and Symbolic Interactionism Theory, both of which offer valuable perspectives in analyzing Kipanya's political cartoons on Instagram and X. Meaning Construction Theory (MCT), grounded in the work of Stuart Hall (1973), posits that audiences actively engage in the interpretation of media, constructing meaning rather than passively absorbing messages. MCT emphasizes that political cartoons, as multimodal texts combining imagery and language, do not hold inherent meanings but instead rely on viewers to decode them through their cultural, social, and historical contexts (Baran & Davis, 2010). Hall's encoding/decoding model is key, as it recognizes that meaning is both encoded by the artist and shaped by the audience's background, beliefs, and experiences (Bruner, 1990). In the context of Kipanya's work, MCT highlights how readers negotiate meanings based on the socio-political climate, personal biases, and the multimodal nature of the cartoons (Wodak, 2009). This theory also addresses power dynamics, illustrating how dominant ideologies shape and influence the interpretation of political messages embedded in Kipanya's satire (Kress, 2010).

Symbolic Interactionism Theory, developed by George Herbert Mead and Charles Horton Cooley, focuses on how individuals derive meaning through social interactions and shared symbols (Griffin et al., 2015). Political cartoons, including Kipanya's, often use recognizable symbols, cultural references, and social interactions that resonate with the audience. The theory posits that social meanings are constructed through the interactions between the cartoonist's visual symbols and the audience's interpretive processes. Cartoons serve as reflective media that echo societal norms, allowing audiences to engage with characters and events that represent political and social realities (West & Turner, 2017). This theory also examines how the portrayal of political figures or events in Kipanya's cartoons influences audience perceptions, offering insights into the ongoing discourse in social media spaces like Instagram and X, where political cartoons act as a form of symbolic interaction that helps shape public opinion (Nungesser, 2021). Both theories offer comprehensive frameworks for analyzing how Kipanya's audience constructs and negotiates meanings in response to his political commentary.

4. METHODOLOGY

The study employed a qualitative approach to explore the dominant themes in Kipanya's political cartoons posted on Instagram and X between January and December 2023. Qualitative research allowed for an in-depth analysis of individuals' interpretations, attitudes, and perceptions, particularly through content analysis. This approach enabled the researcher to delve into the themes, symbols, and messages conveyed in the political cartoons, as well as analyze the comments to gauge sentiments and levels of engagement. By using qualitative content analysis, the researcher was able to systematically examine the nature of political discourse surrounding the cartoons, thereby gaining valuable insights into readers' reactions.

A descriptive case study design was used to provide a comprehensive portrayal of the readers' perceptions of Kipanya's political cartoons. This design is ideal for describing phenomena in a detailed and structured manner without influencing the subjects under study (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Through content analysis of Kipanya's 52 political cartoons on each platform, the researcher aimed to describe the patterns of perception and engagement among the cartoon's followers. The focus was on examining how these political cartoons shaped public discourse and reflected political themes prevalent throughout the year. This methodology established a clear foundation for exploring broader trends in Tanzanian political commentary via social media platforms.

The study's target population consisted of followers of Kipanya's Instagram and X accounts who actively engaged by commenting on his political cartoons. Using random sampling, 52 posts from each platform (Instagram and X) were selected from a total of 165 cartoons posted throughout the year. These 104 posts provided a representative sample for examining the political content in Kipanya's cartoons. The selection of posts focused on political themes to ensure a rich analysis of the interactions and sentiments expressed by users. By concentrating on political cartoons, the study was able to generate specific insights into the public's response to Kipanya's visual political commentary.

The data collection process involved qualitative content analysis of the comments on these selected cartoons. The researcher categorized and coded the

comments based on thematic elements such as agreement, disagreement, humour, or confusion, facilitating a nuanced understanding of audience engagement. Thematic analysis further helped to identify recurring patterns and underlying sentiments in the comments. Ethical considerations were upheld by ensuring that public posts were used responsibly, with proper attribution to content creators. Rigorous inter-coder reliability checks and member checking were conducted to ensure trustworthiness and reliability in the analysis process.

5. FINDINGS

Among findings, there is Disappointment and Disillusionment. The political cartoons by Masoud Kipanya on Instagram and X from January to December 2023 encapsulate a deep sense of disappointment among Tanzanian citizens toward their political leaders. This theme is prominently illustrated in the depiction of citizens grappling with the gap between the politicians' grand promises and the harsh reality of unfulfilled commitments. As one reader commented, expressing frustration, *"Aisle aibu sana ila watajuta tu,"* which translates to a sentiment of surprise and disappointment at the disingenuousness of politicians. Such remarks underscore the public's disillusionment with leaders who prioritize their political agendas over the needs of their constituents, highlighting a pervasive sense of betrayal in the political landscape.

Another significant theme in Kipanya's cartoons is the portrayal of political manipulation and the irony surrounding unfulfilled political promises. For instance, the depiction of a faulty vehicle symbolizing the Tanzanian government serves to illustrate how politicians mislead the populace with false narratives of progress while failing to deliver on electoral commitments. The imagery of a headless figure—representing politicians constrained by structural issues despite superficial political reforms—further reinforces the idea that the political landscape remains stagnant. This irony, coupled with the depiction of unachieved development goals, emphasizes the disconnection between political rhetoric and tangible outcomes, thereby eroding public trust in the electoral process.

Kipanya's political commentary also sheds light on the need for substantial constitutional reforms to ensure genuine political accountability and representation. The cartoons suggest that the political liberties afforded to citizens are precarious and dependent on the current administration's discretion. As depicted through the unfinished drawings and the headless figure, the narrative calls for reforms that establish robust protections for political freedoms rather than superficial changes that can be easily reversed. This analysis highlights a critical gap in Tanzania's political system, where the lack of institutional safeguards fosters a disconnect between elected officials and their constituents. Ultimately, Kipanya's work articulates a clarion call for meaningful reform, emphasizing the importance of enhancing democratic accountability to combat electoral apathy and disillusionment among Tanzanian voters.

Kipanya's political cartoons on Instagram and X from January to December 2023 vividly portray the paradox of political power in Tanzania, where elected officials often fear their constituents. This theme is highlighted by a cartoon depicting a politician with his hand covering his mouth, signifying a profound disconnect between leaders and the people they serve. The portrayal of the president struggling to power a tank, only to find it riddled with holes, symbolizes the inefficacy of leadership efforts undermined by systemic corruption and mismanagement. This representation critiques Tanzania's political culture, which often views power as an end rather than a means to serve the public good, prompting a reevaluation of what true leadership entails.

Another dominant theme is inefficacy of development projects, as exemplified by a cartoon featuring Minister of Finance Mwigulu Nchemba holding a plate behind his back while seeking foreign aid. This imagery highlights the government's failure to manage economic needs independently and underscores Tanzania's reliance on external financing, reflecting a broader critique of how dependency stifles sustainable development. Additionally, the juxtaposition of emaciated citizens with a satiated bureaucrat starkly illustrates public disillusionment with political leadership. The cartoon encapsulates the frustration of citizens who perceive their leaders as indifferent to the escalating food prices and economic injustices they face, portraying a government that frequently fails to fulfil its promises.

Kipanya's cartoons also address issues of accountability and transparency in governance. Potrays Accountability and Transparency Issues in a

particularly striking image, the president, oblivious to masked individuals plotting behind her, illustrates the pervasive corruption that compromises public funds intended for development projects. This representation not only underscores the lack of transparency in resource management but also raises critical questions about the accountability mechanisms within Tanzania's political system. By emphasizing the disconnect between leadership and the realities faced by citizens, Kipanya invites viewers to reflect on the urgent need for reform and enhanced scrutiny of public officials, ultimately advocating for a government that is more responsive and accountable to its people.

The political cartoons posted by Kipanya on Instagram and X from January to December 2023 vividly reflect public perceptions of leadership, particularly regarding corruption and the efficacy of governance. In one cartoon, dated October 19, 2023, a well-fed politician kneels before a malnourished voter, embodying a façade of humility while secretly revelling in his manipulative tactics. This depiction illustrates the widespread mistrust citizens harbour towards their leaders, who often appear disingenuous in their attempts to connect with the electorate. The theme of deception is prevalent, as the cartoon reveals the politician's ulterior motives, suggesting a broader scepticism about leadership's ability to foster genuine development initiatives.

The stark contrast between the politician and the voter not only highlights a significant power imbalance in the political landscape but also suggests a growing voter awareness of manipulation tactics. The voter's shocked expression signifies an awakening to the realities of political dishonesty, reflecting a shift in public sentiment. As citizens become increasingly discerning of superficial gestures, they recognize the underlying self-serving motives of their leaders. This evolving voter scepticism underscores the importance of understanding the complex dynamics between politicians and the electorate, ultimately suggesting that the public is less likely to be swayed by transient displays of humility.

Another significant theme emerging from Kipanya's cartoons is the critique of institutional practices, particularly regarding the Tanzania Revenue Authority (TRA). In a cartoon from October 16, 2023, TRA is portrayed as an unruly child whose oppressive actions trouble a businessman, mirroring the government's passive approach to managing bureaucratic inefficiencies. This imagery emphasizes the negative impact of TRA's practices on taxpayers and businesses, calling into question the government's reluctance to enforce accountability and oversight. The overall narrative illustrates a deep-seated public discontent with institutional shortcomings, advocating for a need for reform and improved governance to alleviate the burdens placed on citizens by inefficient systems.

6. DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

Kipanya's cartoons poignantly capture the disappointment and disillusionment of Tanzanian citizens towards their political leaders. The sentiment expressed by viewers, encapsulated in the comment "Aisle aibu sana ila watajuta tu," reflects a growing discontent rooted in a perception of political betrayal. This aligns with findings from Mulanda and Khasandi-Telewa (2016), who emphasize the polarizing effects of political cartoons on public discourse. Kipanya's work operates within this framework, as it evokes strong emotional reactions while highlighting the gap between political promises and the realities citizens face. The disappointment portrayed in Kipanya's cartoons mirrors the sentiments captured in Stead and Liew's (2020) exploration of political cartoons as a reflection of societal discontent, underscoring their role as a barometer for public sentiment in the digital age.

The theme of political manipulation and irony is vividly illustrated in Kipanya's depictions of the Tanzanian government. The portrayal of politicians as misrepresentative figures resonates with Sufriyanto et al. (2018), who argue that political cartoons can adapt their critique based on prevailing political contexts. Kipanya's imagery, such as the headless figure symbolizing politicians constrained by systemic issues, not only emphasizes the stagnation in Tanzanian politics but also critiques the superficial reforms that fail to address deeper structural problems. This approach highlights the critical role of visual rhetoric in political cartoons, where irony serves as a powerful tool to challenge political narratives and provoke public reflection.

Kipanya's emphasis on the need for constitutional reforms is particularly significant in the context of Tanzanian politics. By illustrating the precariousness of political liberties, Kipanya aligns with Omanga's (2014) analysis of how political cartoons can construct symbolic representations that call for accountability. The unfinished drawings and

depictions of a headless figure underscore the urgency for reform in a political system marked by inefficacy. This thematic focus mirrors the critiques in the empirical literature regarding the necessity for robust institutional safeguards to enhance democratic accountability and combat voter apathy.

The theme of political paradox and corruption is vividly illustrated through Kipanya's portrayals of leaders disconnect from their constituents. This echoes Hakam's (2019) findings on how political cartoons challenge dominant narratives and offer alternative perspectives. Kipanya's imagery—such as the politician covering their mouth—highlights the fear and detachment that characterize the relationship between leaders and citizens. Such representations compel viewers to reassess their understanding of leadership, reflecting a broader critique of political culture in Tanzania, where power is often perceived as self-serving rather than a means to serve the public good.

The theme of development inefficiency is prominent in Kipanya's cartoons, revealing citizens' frustrations with unfulfilled promises and governmental reliance on foreign aid. This theme is consistent with Stead and Liew's (2020) findings about the challenges in indexing political cartoons that address societal issues. Kipanya's depiction of a well-fed bureaucrat juxtaposed with malnourished citizens poignantly illustrates the disconnect between government actions and public welfare. Such imagery not only captures public disillusionment but also highlights the need for sustainable development strategies that prioritize local needs over external dependencies.

Kipanya's commentary on accountability and transparency resonates with the existing literature on the role of political cartoons in scrutinizing governance. The depiction of the president oblivious to corruption behind the scenes parallels findings in Mulanda and Khasandi-Telewa (2016) regarding the divisive potential of political satire. By bringing attention to the opaque nature of political processes, Kipanya encourages critical reflection on governance practices and the mechanisms that facilitate accountability in Tanzania.

Kipanya's cartoons reflect a nuanced understanding of the public perception of leadership and the power imbalance between politicians and citizens. As depicted in the cartoon where a politician kneels before a malnourished voter, the imagery encapsulates the facade of humility contrasted with the underlying manipulative motives of leaders. This portrayal aligns with Sufriyanto et al. (2018), who note how political cartoons can navigate sensitive critiques without inciting unrest. Kipanya's work thus not only critiques leadership but also highlights the growing awareness among voters, illustrating a significant shift in public sentiment towards political accountability.

Kipanya's critique of institutional practices, particularly the portrayal of the Tanzania Revenue Authority, reflects a deep-seated public discontent with bureaucratic inefficiencies. This theme resonates with the findings from Stead and Liew (2020), which underscore the importance of addressing institutional shortcomings in governance. Kipanya's cartoons advocate for reform and enhanced accountability within governmental systems, calling for a more responsive approach to citizen needs.

7. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Kipanya's political cartoons on Instagram and X throughout 2023 serve as a powerful lens through which to examine the sentiments of disappointment, disillusionment, and frustration among Tanzanian citizens regarding their political leadership. The dominant themes articulated in his work—ranging from the disconnection between political promises and reality, to the pressing need for constitutional reforms and accountability—highlight the pervasive challenges within Tanzania's political landscape. The imagery of manipulation, irony, and systemic inefficiencies underscores a growing public awareness of the disconnect between elected officials and their constituents, as citizens increasingly recognize the superficiality of political gestures. Kipanya's poignant critiques not only reflect public discontent but also advocate for meaningful change, urging a re-evaluation of leadership and institutional practices to foster genuine democratic accountability. Ultimately, his work resonates as a clarion call for reform in Tanzania, underscoring the urgent need for a political system that prioritizes the needs and aspirations of its citizens over self-serving agendas.

The study recommends the following: First, the Tanzanian government must prioritize constitutional reforms to establish robust safeguards for political freedoms and enhance democratic accountability. The current administration's discretionary control over political liberties undermines the principle of the rule of law and fosters a disconnect between elected

officials and their constituents. By implementing meaningful reforms, the government can foster a more inclusive and responsive political environment, thereby combating electoral apathy and disillusionment among Tanzanian voters.

Second, the government should address the pervasive issue of corruption and mismanagement within its institutions. The findings reveal a deep-seated public discontent with the government's failure to enforce accountability and transparency. By implementing stricter measures to combat corruption and improve oversight mechanisms, the government can restore public trust in its leadership and enhance the efficacy of its development initiatives.

Third, the government must prioritize the needs of its citizens and address the growing economic inequalities and development challenges. The findings highlight the public's frustration with the government's failure to fulfil its promises and address the escalating food prices and economic injustices.

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