

Political Cartoonists versus Readers: Role of political cartoonists in Building Public Opinion and Readers' Expectations towards Print Media Cartoons in Pakistan

Ayesha Ashfaq

PhD Fellow School of Communication, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang Malaysia
Lecturer, Institute of Communication Studies University of the Punjab Lahore Pakistan
Email: shfqysh@gmail.com

Prof. Dr. Adnan Bin Hussein

Professor, School of Communication, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang Malaysia
Deputy Vice Chancellor, Universiti Sains Malaysia Penang Malaysia
Email: adnan@usm.my

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Abstract

This study is an effort to explore the role of political cartoons in opinion building and the expectations of the readers towards the political print media cartoons in Pakistan. It further aims to know the perceptions of the cartoonists while portraying the issues and events by using artistic, satirical and unique medium of visual communication. It is a dual study that not only focuses upon the intentions of the cartoonists but also deals with the views of the readers and their expectations towards the medium. The researchers used in-depth interview method to conduct the interviews of the two famous cartoonists of Pakistan Javed Iqbal and Maxim, who make cartoons in the major newspapers Jang and Nawa-i-Waqt respectively, and survey method in order to examine the opinions of the readers, so the questionnaire is selected as a tool of data collection from readers. The researchers analyzed the data under the umbrella of social responsibility theory. This study concludes that political cartoonists are also influenced by ideology of the newspapers. Editors can block their publication if they want to. They are not as independent as they are considered to be as satirists. They do focus on the issues of the day and try to highlight those aspects which cannot be covered through other media content in order to shape the public opinion. On the other hand, the Pakistani public feels that cartoon communication is such a strong and powerful medium that it can be used for propaganda and publicity, the clear proof of which is the cartoon controversy regarding blasphemy in 2005, but in Pakistan, cartoonists use this medium rather unconstructively in order to make fun of the politicians.

Keywords: Cartoon communication, Print media political cartoons, Political cartoonists, Public opinion, Audience studies,

1. Introduction

"Cartoonists are not comedians. They are people who make a difference in the community" (Frank Swoboda¹, 2003).

Some scholars see the genre of political cartoons as an important medium of formation and building of public opinion on salient political and social issues (Everte, 1974, Vinson, 1967, Abraham, 2009). The old thoughts of media historians to deny the worthiness of cartoons has replaced with the concept that cartoon communication is used for government propaganda, public catharsis, publicity stunt, or instructional aid, so the media scholars have started to pay attention on cartoon research as a powerful medium of communication. According to Caswell (2004), political cartoons are considered as "both opinion-molding and opinion –reflecting" (p.14).

As Inge(1990) writes that

Cartoons introduced generations of readers to symbolic ways of addressing the continuing the problems of society and the philosophic questions of mankind.[They please] our visual sensibilities by bringing to life the kinds of dramatic conflicts that enable us to work out vicariously our internal frustration. (as cited in Lester, 2005, p. 222)

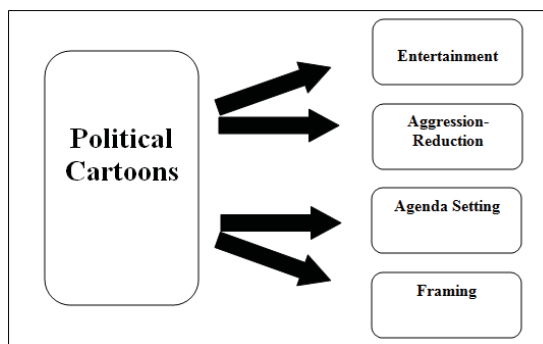
¹ Frank Swoboda, President of the Herblock Foundation, made this comment in panel session at the 2003 convention of the Association of American Editorial Cartoonist on June 20, 2003.

In other words, they provide certain frameworks under which the readers can examine the life and political system in a country (DeSousa & Medhurst, 1982). According to Coupe (1969), "like all the journalists, the cartoonist is concerned with the creation and manipulation of public opinion"(p.82) because cartoon provides the safe platform for social commentary to express opinions and raises the voices of public(Ashfaq, 2008).

It affects on the image of politicians on readers' mind. The impact may be favorable or unfavorable to the politicians. It is a medium of satirical, light and enjoyable communication which may be considered as a source of opinion and image building. People not only enjoy this medium but also think over it that what it is addressing about (Ashfaq, 2008). "Cartoons being a highly artistic as well as an intelligent work become a thoughtful, innovative and inexpensive publication. It gains an extra mileage, where novelty with deviation leaves its impact on its readers. It may have a long lasting and effective impression on its readers and at the same time will not hurt the one portrayed" (Javed, 1998, p.5).

DeSousa Medhurst(1982) also added four main basic functions of political cartoons in social life (See Figure 1.).

Figure 1. Functions of Political Cartoons



Source. DeSousa & Medhurst, 1982

According to DeSousa Medhurst, political cartoons as an entertainment functions possess the ability to make readers laugh at difference scenarios and personalities. Secondly, political cartoons as aggression reduction functions provide readers a place of catharsis and avenue to reduce their frustration and annoyance regarding certain situations. Thirdly, political cartoons as agenda setting functions set a stance in amusing manner. Finally, political cartoons as framing functions provide specific frames about a certain issues in limited space and single configurations.

In addition to this, all the cartoons may not be considered as political cartoons. They can be focused on social commentaries as well. So, the editorial cartoons may be classified into two categories i.e. social comment cartoons and proper political cartoons (Treanor & Mateas, 2009) and both may have impact on their readers on specific issues.

In Pakistan, cartoon communication has not been a new phenomena but the scholar started to pay attention after the Blasphemy Cartoon Controversy in 2005 when a Danish newspaper publish 12 caricatures against Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).

The cartoon communication in Pakistan has been flourished during military regime of General Zia ul Haq (1977-1988) of Pakistan which was considered as the era of black laws. There was little press freedom. During that period, a famous political cartoonist, known as Nanha, started to criticize the government's black laws through his cartoons because cartoons were light in tone but conveyed that much required sarcasm for government actions. Later on, many cartoonists like Javed Iqbal, Maxim, Feica, Shahtoon, Nigar Niazi, and Zaidi etc, have been working as political cartoonists in the mainstream newspapers of Pakistan but unfortunately, Pakistani scholars and thinkers did not pay attention on this medium as in the whole world, the research on political cartoons is limited. But now it is considered that political cartoons can play a role as an important platform of propaganda as the Danish newspapers used this medium to criticize the Holy Figure of Muslims. Cartoonists set agendas according to the pressure groups, editors and their personal interests. But on the other hand, there is also assumption that people take this medium as only for fun and satire to make audience laugh without any agenda. So, this study aims at analyzing the expectations and views of Pakistani public towards this unique visual communication and also investigates the opinions of renowned political cartoonists of Pakistan.

Most of the studies on political cartoons aimed to highlight the functions and nature. For instance, Streicher (1967) conducted a research to investigate the role of political cartoons in formation of public opinions during impeachment trail

proceedings of American President Clinton regarding Clinton-Lewinsky-Starr affair. Similarly, Baldry and Thibault (2006) studied political cartoons as a platform for representation of the public voices. Morris (1992) also investigated political cartoons as a tool of visual rhetoric in the democratic process using structuralist approach. In addition to this, Delporte (1995) investigated cartoons ridiculing the Dreyfus affair of French President during the period 1894-1906. Likewise, Feldman (1995) analysed the content of political cartoons on the basis of symbolic themes regarding portrayal of six Japanese prime ministers.

In addition to this, most of the researchers also focused upon the political cartoon coverage of presidential election campaigns as Edwards (1997) analysed the images, narratives and metaphors in the political cartoons regarding 1988 presidential campaigns. Conners (2007) also examined political cartoons of US 2004 presidential campaign on the basis of popular culture.

Moreover, Seymour-Ure (2001) predicted that cartoons will be always influential medium in British society. On the use of visual rhetoric and metaphors in political cartoons, Refaie (2003) examined Australian political cartoons to study visual rhetoric and metaphors. Similarly, Medhurst and DeSousa(1981) also investigated the usage of rhetorical devices in political cartoons.

Significantly, the review of literature describes that there is limited research on the role of political cartoons in shaping and forming public opinion. There is also little research on the expectation of the readers towards the political cartoonists. So, this study will fill the gap of the literature.

Research Questions

1. Do Pakistani cartoons fulfill the expectations of the readers regarding different issues highlighting in the cartoons?
2. What are the expectations of the readers towards the genre of political cartoons?
3. What do the cartoonists think about their medium of communication as a platform of shaping public opinion?

Political Cartoons & Social Responsibility Theory

The researchers selected social responsibility theory as a theoretical framework of the study. Social responsibility theory is an outgrowth of the libertarian theory which is the phenomena of mid 20th century. According to it, the freedom to every citizen including media practitioners and organizations is ensured but they are obliged to work and perform their duties with responsibility. They have to realize the real essence of the functions of mass media. They are responsible to raise the voices of the public and to disseminate the unbiased and objective facts and realities prior to their personal and organizational interests. It is a matter of self regulation. "The theory has major premise: freedom carries concomitant obligations; and the press which enjoys a privileged position..., is obliged to be responsible to society for carrying out certain essential functions of mass communication in contemporary society"(Gunaratne & Hasim, 1996, p.103). According to Siebert, Peterson & Schramm (1956), media practitioners have five basic functions to perform that are:

1. Inform, discuss, debate and suggest solutions on public affairs in the right direction.
2. Aware common citizens about current situations and make them able for self government.
3. Act as a watchdog of the society against the government in order to safe guard the rights of the individuals.
4. Provide a healthy platform of entertainment.
5. Maintain and develop their own economic and financial sources in order to make themselves free from the pressure groups.

One of the intent of this research is to determine the role of political cartoonists in formation of public opinion and the pre-existing images of the issues. Whether cartoonists play constructive role in raising voices of the public or not in the eyes of public? It is also to evaluate that political cartoonists are satisfying the expectations of the readers or not. So the researchers will analyze all responses under the main postulates of the social responsibility theory.

Research Methodology

To address the research questions, the researchers conducted a survey of Pakistani public. A questionnaire comprising of both open ended and closed ended questions was constructed as a tool of data collection from readers. The researchers selected 100 young readers from the age of 20 to 30 years old, those who read political cartoons and were willing to participate in the research voluntarily on the basis of snow ball sampling technique.

The researchers also conducted interviews of two renowned political cartoonists of Pakistan (Javed Iqbal and Maxim) who have been making cartoons from more than 20 years for widest circulated newspapers(the Jang group and Nawa-i-waqt group of publications respectively). In addition to this, the researchers also conducted interviews of Pakistani intellectuals² belong to different expertise in order to get the expectation of the most educated class of Pakistan regarding political cartoons published in mainstream newspapers of Pakistan.

Findings and Discussion

It was observed that 75% of selected Pakistani respondents believe that cartoons have become an integral part of the newspapers (see table 1). The importance of political cartoon communication throughout the world cannot be denied as 69% respondents think that political cartooning is an effective way of communication (see table 1). It is a light way of communication through which the harshest message can be conveyed in a very mild tone that people don't get frustrated. As Koetzle and Brunell(1996) stated that "editorial cartoons are oriented towards extreme interpretations of campaign events, they are free to discuss, investigate and lampoon topics that are... generally left untouched by the media at large" (p. 96).Cartoon communication is considered as the 'bomb throwers'(Javed, 1998) and portrait of anti portrait'(Saeed, 2003).Political cartoons also influence the pre-existing image on the readers' mind as 67% people feel that cartoons can play an important role in building their opinions and pre-existing images of any issue or personality(see table 1).

Table 1. Effectiveness of Cartoon Communication

	Statements	Some times	Most of the times	All the times	Not at all
1.	Cartoon is an important part of the newspaper.	7%	75%	16%	2%
2.	Political cartoon is an effective way of communication.	6%	69%	21%	4%
3.	Political cartoons play any role as a source of opinion building and influence on pre existing images	9%	67%	19%	5%

The experts that were interviewed by the researchers also added about the cartoon communication as a platform of influencing the pre-existing images and opinion formation.

Interviewee A: Cartoons have great influence on readers' mind. Because a picture and a sketch of any issue or problem is more powerful as compared to the narration. About 30 years back, I saw a cartoon in a newspaper. In those days, there were many accidents occurred because the main holes in the streets, were not covered. So a cartoon was published to ridicule this issue in this way that there is a horse which has fallen in the main hole of the street and the caption was "Bahr –e Zulimat main Dhura diye ghourey Hum ney"(horses are running in the ocean of injustice). It was so interesting that I still remember it. It was a mixture of satire, literature and social problem which had an impact on the people and raised the voices of the public. But now a days, cartoonists make the cartoons which are usually personality oriented just to fake or defame any politician, They should make the cartoons on the different issues that open a new horizon for the public and concerned authorities to think about it.

Similarly,

Interviewee B: cartoon influences on readers' mind but it just supports or negates pre-existing image of any issue or personality. Because cartoons are considered as the humorous way of communication and any intellectual and opinion oriented person can take it so serious. But it can be said that it adds fuel to fire.

Moreover,

Interviewee C: It has definitely influence on the readers as they react on the cartoons as well. As a British newspaper of perpetuating the blood libel against Jews after it ran a cartoon that depicted Prime Minister Ariel Sharon eating a

² 1. Interviewee A. Dr. Muhammad Hafeez, Professor, Department of Sociology, University of the Punjab Lahore Pakistan
2. Interviewee B. Dr. Ahsan Akhtar Naz, Director Institute of Communication Studies, University of the Punjab Lahore Pakistan.
3. Interviewee C. Mr. Rana Ejaz, Assistant Professor, Department of Political Sciences, University of the Punjab Lahore Pakistan.
4. Interviewee D. Dr. Ashraf Khan Kayani, HEC Professor, Department of Sociology, University of the Punjab Lahore Pakistan.
5. Interviewee E. Dr. Naeem Ahmed, HEC Professor, Department of Sociology, Ex-Chairman, Department of Philosophy, University of the Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan.

baby. The cartoon in the independent newspaper showed Sharon crouched in the ruins of a village, biting the head off a baby as helicopters circle overhead broadcasting the message "Vote Sharon." "What's wrong... You never have seen a politician kissing babies before?" Sharon asks in the drawing. People reacted on it. Similarly when the cartoons published against Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), Muslims all over the world reacted and protested against it.

On the other side, some people are of the view that cartoons do not play any significant role in the society because it is a phenomenon of educated people and of those people who have awareness and knowledge of the situations and issues that are portrayed in the cartoons. Caption and inner dialogues make the cartoons a medium for educated people. As 48% selected respondents feel that caption is sometimes important to understand the cartoons whereas 39% people believe that caption is most of the times important for effectiveness of cartoon(see table 2). Javed Iqbal(cartoonist) himself also added that "caption is must for any cartoon, daily cartoon cannot be published without caption because it will be the illustration that can never be as interpreted by readers as you want readers to interpret but it does not mean that captions are too long because these captions also loss the interesting matter" (Personal communication, April, 2012) So, that is why, few experts negated the influence of cartoons on majority of Pakistani public. As it was stated:

Interviewee D: *I don't think cartoon plays any important role in opinion making because in my perception there is very less number of people who read the cartoons deliberately and regularly. Though there was a time when cartoons were used to aware or guide the illiterate masses but now there is a caption which explains the whole crux of the subject of the cartoon. 65% people are still illiterate in Pakistan which cannot read the captions and cannot understand what a cartoonist wants to convey. So, it is a phenomenon of educated people. Only 51% students are enrolled in the schools and almost 49% children don't go to school. Then how they can make opinion through cartoons when they cannot read? To understand the cartoon, one thing is to have awareness about current affairs as if I know the current situation of politics or any problem and the very next day I see the cartoon then I will smile or will consider it to make my opinion.*

In addition to this, cartoons are mainly addressing political issues with reference to Pakistani newspapers. The criticism and satire are mainly focused on politicians and their activities. So, it is true that politics is mainly responsible in the making of cartoons in Pakistan. Political climate of Pakistan is so fertile that it gives a number of ideas to portray a situation. Pakistani political instability is the major issue for mass media which is interrelated with the rest of the issues of Pakistan. It was observed that Pakistani public think that political cartoons are more about political personalities than that of issues. Table 2 shows that 57% people believe that political cartoons are most of the times focused on political characters in funny and satirical manner. In other word, political cartooning is used in order to make fun of the politicians in all the situations.

Table 2. Readers' views about the trends of Political Cartooning in Pakistan

Statements	Some times	Most of the times	All the times	Not at all
4. Political cartoon in Pakistan only used to make fun of politicians.	12%	57%	29%	2%
5. The trend criticizing in political cartoons of Pakistan is healthy and constructive.	28%	17%	2%	53%
6. Political cartoons in Pakistan are biased.	41%	42%	10%	4%
7. Political Cartoons are used to promote any individual or issue.	56%	34%	7%	3%
8. Caption is important to help in understanding the message of cartoon in Pakistani newspapers.	48%	39%	10%	3%

But on the other side, cartoonists argue that they usually pick up the subject of the cartoons through the situation which is presented in the newspapers. Pakistani newspapers are full of the politics in Pakistan. In addition to this, they argue that as in Pakistan, the whole journalism has switched to "he said" journalism. Similarly, cartoons are also focused upon the politicians and their statements. As Javed Iqbal added that

Politics is the focal area of cartoons therefore mostly the ideas are conceived arising out of the politics Now a days, politics can be considered as a game and every body has curiosity to know who is with whom? Almost 6 billion people are suffering injustice, inflation, food crisis, electricity load shedding, poverty and judiciary problems. These all problems are the result of faulty and corrupt political system. So it is the demand and interest of public to see politicians and politics in the ridiculous manner. They feel themselves satisfied when their voices in the form of ridiculing the politicians are highlighted through cartoons. (Javed Iqbal, Personal Communication, April, 2012)

It was also found that 41% respondents think that political cartoonists are sometimes biased in their drawings whereas 42 % people believe that they are most of the times biased (see table 2). They set agendas and promote specific political parties and politicians as 56% respondents feel that political cartoons are, some times and 34% respondents think most of the times, meant to support or defame any specific individual (see table 2). But on the other side, cartoonists argue that “cartooning is also not an independent art. Cartoonists are depended. Suppose, I have idea and make a cartoon but it is the editor or the newspaper’s owner who is supposed to make decisions that it should be either published or not. Cartoonists are not free” (Maxim, Personal communication, April, 2012)

Maxim further stated that there is a cartoon which I made but Nawa-i-waqt did not publish it. It was coalition between PPP and Muslim league N. pleasure or displeasure is expressed (see figure 2). As I told, I want to criticize the coalition but I couldn’t, because it was against the ideology of Nawa-i-waqt group (Nawa-i-waqt & The Daily Nation). The Nawa-i-waqt group is considered as a conservative newspaper, supports the ideology of Pakistan and Right wing party. Whenever my cartoons is offensive to any political party or policy of the newspaper then the editor obviously stops my cartoon and usually it happens due to any political party. Cartoonists are dependent. They are not free.

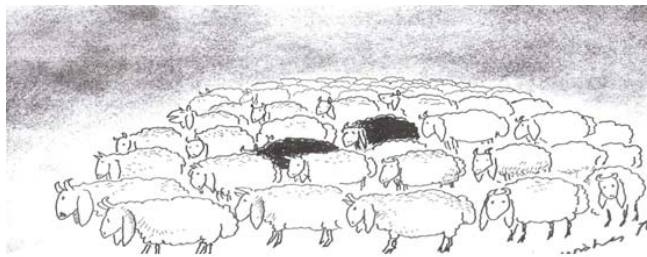


Figure2. Banned cartoon of Maxim regarding present government of Asif Ali Zardari

The cartoonists also face difficulties from pressure groups. Suppose, if the cartoon is made against ‘Maulvi’(Religious group) then they get frustrated. Actually the level of tolerance is very little among people. The policy of Nawa-i-Waqt does not allow its staff to make any harsh comment He further justified that it also happens with me so many times that some politicians victimized me due to making their cartoons. When late Benazir Bhutto became Prime Minister of Pakistan in her first tenure of government (1988-1992), she appreciated my cartoons but when cartoon made against her, she started to victimize me. He further added that as I was supposed to be appointed somewhere on merit but I was dismissed due to her victimization. Freedom of expression is the foremost right of any journalist either he is cartoonist, a reporter or an editor because they are the people who raise the voices of the common public and if they are not free then how the public is free.

He further added that suggestions are also given by the politicians with this demand that make good cartoons for them. Cartoon is not meant for appreciation so I do not make good cartoons. Good cartoon means to admire a person just for the sake of having good relations with that person or to get some favors. Now a day cartoonists and newspapers have started to please the politicians so I think exaggeration element has decreased the importance of the cartoon.

Similarly, Javed Iqbal, another renowned cartoonist of Pakistan added that “in my opinion, cartoonist somehow, is dependent on policy of newspaper and political pressure that limit the ideas, themes, creativity and thoughts of the cartoonists” (Personal communication, April, 2012).

In addition to this, it was also observed that 55% respondents also feel that their expectations are not fulfilled by Pakistani political cartoonists (table 3).

Table 3. Political Cartoonists, Public Expectations and Jousnalistic ethics.

	Statements	Some times	Most of the times	All the times	Not at all
9	Pakistani political cartoonists are following journalistic ethics.	48%	22%	2%	28%
10.	Political cartoons in Pakistani newspapers are fulfilling the reader’s expectations	23%	12%	10%	55%

On the other side, the experts argue in the following way.

Interviewee E: cartoonist should give the balanced coverage to all issues that are facing by Pakistanis.

Interviewee D: cartoons should be purpose oriented, logical and thought oriented.

Interview B: social issues should be the mostly highlighted in the political cartoons because it is a light medium and people voices can be highlighted more easily as compared in the columns or any other newspaper item

Interview A: Cartoonist should follow the ethics and they should know about their limits. Sometimes they make the cartoons which are so much distorted that violate the ethics of the morality. As in the Bhutto's era, Nazir Naji made a cartoon against the "Maulana Mdoodi". In this cartoon the face of the Maulana Mdoodi was shown but the lower part of the body was of a female dancer in the dancing posture. Though it was the reactive cartoon but it should not against the ethics of moralities. Now a days, the medium of cartoon is used to ridicule the politicians rather it should be used as a constructive medium which helps to strengthen the identity of the nation.

On the other side, Javed Iqbal (cartoonist) argued that cartoon can be considered as a pressure cooker in which we have to cook and cook whatever public wants. No doubt, cartoon are the source of forming the public opinion and we should educate the people through cartoons but unfortunately the attitude of public is not to be educated rather they just raise the slogans "judge bahal kero"(restore the judges) so we have to make cartoons according to their "slogans" that is why cartoons are usually on the politics and personality oriented. Of course, social issues should be highlighted even it should be the main purpose of cartoon but unfortunately politics has become the hot issue of Pakistani society even more than that of American and Indian. He added that personally, I can easily make political cartoon now, it has become my habit, as I made the caricature of politicians very interesting and add just a spice to criticize them but on the other hand for social issues, I have to think a lot to give a new and amusing idea but I make social cartoons twice or thrice a month like on inflation or law and order. There are two main problems that should be highlighted; one is political instability & over population and limited resources. The main thing is awareness of the people. But we are just running behind politics. No doubt there are many other problems like how people waste the food on marriages? etc.

Conclusion

Cartoons published in newspapers are the critiques of the issues, personalities and institutions of the current situation as it can be said that cartoons are the chronicle of the current history. It is a unique form of communication which edges on the verge of fine art.

The cartoonists should be independent and they should not be pressurized by the pressure groups including editors, advertisers or political parties etc. Infact, they should be allowed to express the public voices in the form of their creative and unbiased drawings. The impartial and objective attitude is required for ensuring the freedom of expression in Pakistan not only in the field of cartoon communication but also in the whole mass media. Freedom of expression is the foremost right of any journalist either he is cartoonist or reporter because journalists are the people who raise the voices of common public. As far as the cartoonists are concerned, it is very important for them to feel free because it enhances the confidence and creativity of the cartoonist.

On the other side, Pakistani public wants that cartoonists should concentrate on constructive messages than political personalities. They should be unbiased as well and should promote a balanced view of personalities and issues. Besides politics, social issues should also be highlighted because it is a light medium and people voices can be highlighted more easily as compared in the columns or any other newspaper item.

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