

# “Kwatakwata by June diεε...”: Internet humour used during the first phase of the COVID-19 pandemic by social media users in Ghana

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## Abstract

*The first phase of the COVID-19 pandemic has been described as stressful. People make light of stressful situations in different ways. Ghanaians are known to be able to make humour out of any situation. During the first phase of the COVID-19 pandemic, Ghanaians shared memes and posters on social media, making light of the seriousness of the pandemic. "Kwatakwata by June diεε...", shortened from the phrase: [kwatakwata by June diεε na obiara ewu] to wit "Latest by June, we will all be dead", has become a catchphrase on social media and the streets of Ghana to make fun of the serious impact of the virus. This current study examines internet humour that became popular with Ghanaians during the first phase of the COVID-19 pandemic in Ghana. We examined videos, memes, and posters from various social media sites to learn about the Ghanaian use of humour during a public health crisis. Content analysis of the data showed that*

*Ghanaians created humorous content to express how they felt about the public health crisis and educate citizens about the pandemic. Recurring themes observed from the data include humour concerning death, isolation, and keeping children occupied. Our analysis showed that Ghanaian social media users largely used self-enhancing humour. We discuss these themes to show the types of internet humour Ghanaians shared during the first phase of the COVID-19 pandemic.*

*Keywords: Internet, humour, Ghana, COVID-19.*

## **1. Introduction**

In March 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared SARS Cov-2, also known as COVID-19, a pandemic. The world we knew changed, and fear gripped people all over the world, shelter-in-place restrictions were introduced by governments to protect its citizens from the highly infectious virus. Ghana declared a partial lockdown on March 30th (Garda World 2020). During the lockdown as schools were closed, people worked from home via the internet. As death rates soared across the globe, humorous videos, posters, skits, and memes began circulating on social media platforms. These videos, posters and memes seemed to make light of the pandemic that was wreaking havoc in the world.

Humour simply involves pointing out the funny or ironic aspects of a situation. It has been defined as the “attitude which allows an individual to modify concepts and beliefs, situations and objects, and to reorganize their meaning in more than one dimension” (Baumert et al., 2020, p. 112). Ciocca et al., (2020) point to Freudian perspectives which suggest that humour works by means of two main techniques, namely, condensation and displacement. They also discuss humour as the capacity to express or perceive what is funny, as a source of entertainment. Evidence of humour as a means of coping with situations or events that are awkward, stressful, or difficult including terminal illnesses, anxiety and depression are well documented (Demjen, 2016; Ersfjord, 2018; Mathew & Vijayalakshmi, 2017; Menendez-Aller et al. 2020; Tan & Schneider 2009). Eisend (2018) suggests that several factors, including culture, age, political orientation, influence what is considered humorous. The theory of benign violations has been used to explain humour (Warren & McGraw 2015). According to Lintott (2016), something becomes funny when it appears either wrong or threatening but harmless. Accounts of what is benign largely depends on the audience.

In the psychological literature, four styles of humour are identified: affiliative humour, self-enhancing humour, aggressive humour, and self-defeating humour (Evans & Steptoe 2018; Proyer, 2018; Martins et al., 2003). Affiliative humour uses aspects of everyday life to create humour with the purpose of enhancing one’s relationship with others in a positive and benevolent way. Proyer (2018) suggests that affiliative humour ends up relieving tension and improving relationships. Self-enhancing humour is meant to promote a good-natured attitude toward life with the ability to make humour out of present circumstances in a productive manner. A recent study suggests that self-enhancing humour is one of the best emotion-focused or coping strategies (Young et al., 2019). Evans and Steptoe (2018) further point out that aggressive humour often uses humour in ways that tease, ridicules or criticizes others. Sometimes, they generate prejudice, sexism, and racism. Self-defeating humour entails self-disparaging humour about oneself in ways that amuse or please others. Affiliative humour and aggressive humour have been the most used types of humour by internet users (Martin et al. 2003).

In recent times, collecting and sharing humorous articles and memes on and through the internet has become commonplace and social media users have largely adapted internet humour in their online communications and a means of self-expression (Laineste & Voolaid, 2017;

Penney, 2020). Taecharungroj and Nueangjamnong (2015), suggest that memes are a means of online communications by social media users to carry different cultural ideas and contents which transform a single event into a shared phenomenon. Research suggests that there are seven types of internet humour used on social media: comparison, personification, exaggeration, pun, sarcasm, silliness, and surprise (Taecharungroj & Nueangjamnong, 2015). Taecharungroj and Nueangjamnong (2015), found that sarcasm and silliness are the most frequently used types of humour, particularly in Facebook memes. This finding is also consistent with other findings for print and broadcast media (Catanescu & Tom, 2001).

## **2. The use of humour in Ghana**

Ghanaians are known to have a good sense of humour (Coker & Dadugblor, 2016; Quayson, 2018). Coker and Dadugblor, (2016) suggest that Ghanaians are proud of their sense of humour. To Ghanaians, humour, is a balm for the soul to laugh about everything (Ofori, 2019). Even grievances in a society like political corruption tend to be laughed away (Asiedu-Appiah, Agyapong, & Liturchy, 2017). One of the anecdotal ways Ghanaians use humour is as a coping and courage mechanism during difficult situations. This is evidenced by common sayings in Akan, a local Ghanaian language, like [wansre a wobesu] meaning literally, “if you don’t laugh, you will cry” and [fa bi ye serew] to wit “laugh about some of the things”. These sayings suggest that some situations are so dire that one needs to laugh in the face of it to keep sane and move on in life.

Silliness and exaggeration appear to characterise the type of humour mostly found in Ghana. Quayson (2018) highlights that humour is used extensively in Ghana even in highlife songs which are widely enjoyed. A study that examined the use of humour in Ghanaian languages suggests that in Ghana there is even a humorous way of talking about toileting (Opoku 2016). Opoku suggests that the use of humour in Ghana is even seen in language learning such that there is now the Ghanaian English which could for example re-phrase “this boy has stepped on my feet” as [this boy has tia me nan so]. [tia] in the local Akan (Ghanaian) language means step, whereas [nan] means leg; and “so” means on. Addo (2013) also points to the fact that Ananse stories have been used as folklores to create humour and educate. To Addo, good humour in traditional style is one that amuses and educates or teaches moral stories. In a careful analysis of comic styles and motives in relation to leadership and influence in Africa, Asiedu-Appiah et al., (2017) suggest that several moral stories are channelled through humour to alter undesirable conducts and promote harmony and unity in an African community. The researchers subscribe to the view that the use of humour in Ghana has succeeded in breaking ethnic barriers.

### **2.1. Internet humour in Ghana**

A survey by a digital research organization in Ghana found that in January 2020, about 14.76 million Ghanaians used the internet (Kemp 2020). The population of Ghana was estimated by the UN to be about 31 million in 2020 (Worldometer, 2020). Internet penetration in Ghana stood at 48% in January 2020 (Kemp 2020). Content creators, especially humorous ones, benefit from the “eye traffic” on their sites and pages, especially when they include humour on them (Coker & Dadugblor 2016). Coker and Dadugblor (2016), indicate that several popular Ghanaian figures including musicians and football players have added humour to their style of gaining media attention. Examples of such people include Kwadwo Sheldon and Clemento Suarez (real name, Clement Ashiteye). Kwadwo Sheldon is a Ghanaian satirist, comedian, and content creator, who creates thought-provoking and humorous skits where he freely expresses his views on happenings in the country, whilst Clemento Suarez is a Ghanaian comedian and actor who appeared to become very popular during the early months of the COVID pandemic for his

humorous skits. For this, they keep trending on social media which also earns them followers and revenue. Given Ghanaians appreciation for humour, it is not strange that they turned to the internet to create and share humour when COVID 19 first hit.

Despite the rising number of internet users, the increasing number of social media users, and the humour loving nature of Ghanaians, little research attention has been paid to the interaction of these phases. Furthermore, there appears to be no research attention given to the types, content and frequency of internet humour Ghanaians engage in on the internet. This study is aimed to examine internet humour used during the first phase of the COVID-19 pandemic by social media users in Ghana.

### **3. Method**

The study employed a descriptive qualitative approach. We explored types of internet humour shared by Ghanaian social media users during the initial phase of the COVID-19 pandemic in March and June 2020. Data collection was done within six weeks, from the last week of April 2020 through to the first week of June 2020. This period was the peak of the first phase of the pandemic in Ghana.

We collected two types of data. First, we collected a set of humorous content created in Ghana between March and June 2020 which had been circulated on the internet. Second, we also collected humour created elsewhere but which was extensively circulated on the internet and Ghanaians responded to during the first phase of the pandemic. We gathered information from WhatsApp groups (which we asked friends and family to share with us), Facebook and Instagram pages of Ghanaian social media influencers, celebrities and bloggers who shared humorous posts and content during the first phase of the pandemic. Data consisted of pictures, cartoons, memes, GIFs and short videos related to COVID-19.

### **4. Data screening and analysis**

First, we screened all data we had collected between April and June 2020. Our research team met and reviewed all the material (N=162) we had received. Some of the material was not related to COVID-19 or were just pure information and therefore not humorous. These were discarded. After the screening, we retained 97 of the internet humorous material.

Next the team reviewed the content of the data that were retained to determine its scope, origin, and humour (if any) as they related to COVID-19. The team met about four times over a two-week period to discuss the data. Because the team had a WhatsApp group, most of the videos, memes and cartoons of humorous nature were stored in our media documents on the WhatsApp platform.

We conducted descriptive analysis by critically examining the data, describing the features (e.g., language, subject matter) of the data collected. We then conducted content analysis to systematically code humorous material gathered. This was necessary for the simple reporting of common themes found in the data (Sandelowski, 2010). This unobtrusive categorizing approach was used to determine trends of the humorous content, their frequency, and the structures/contents and discourses of the internet humour used by Ghanaians (Gbrich, 2007; Vaismoradi et al., 2013). Each material was assessed based on the humorous content. Where we did not agree on whether a particular video fitted a theme, we discussed and went over it till we agreed. We also shared our documents with two experienced PhD researchers and one post-doctoral fellow for feedback.

## 5. Findings and discussion

The internet humorous material we analysed originated in Ghana and outside of Ghana. There were sixty-five (65) of internet humour from Ghana (see Table 1); and thirty-two (32) from outside Ghana (See Table 2). As can be observed in both tables, self-enhancing humour was the most common type of humour that characterised the internet humour created and shared in Ghana. Self-enhancing humour involves maintaining a humorous disposition and perspective of life in the face of challenging circumstances or stress (Martin et al., 2003). Martin et al., posit that some self-enhancing humour has “intrapyschic functions” (p. 52) and are used as a way of gaining control or victory in the face of a threat. Olah & Ford (2021), in agreement with Martin et al. (2003), found in their research in the U.S. that self-enhancing humour protects against stress from COVID-19 and removes feelings of hopelessness. Our findings which are consistent with the research may suggest that Ghanaians used self-enhancing humour to increase their sense of control in the challenging phase of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 1 and 2 below shows the distribution of humorous material of both Ghanaian and non-Ghanaian origin which were circulated in Ghana during the first phase of the pandemic.

Table 1: Internet humour originating from Ghana

Type of humour	Frequency (N=65)	Example
Dark humour	16 (24.62%)	Ghanaian president being satirized declares that by June... followed by pallbearers seen dancing after his speech (Asomaning, 2020).
Boredom relief	22 (33.85%)	Counting rice from different bags of the same brand and weight.
Diet humour	5 (7.69%)	A man who had heaped his plate full of food praying that calories be isolated from his body; cholesterol be quarantined from his blood and fat maintain a permanent social distance from his tummy.
Fashion humour	2 (3.08%)	Having face masks sewn to compliment the colour of ladies’ dresses, gem encrusted with big flamboyant bows on the side. An old-style Ghanaian hairstyle for women used to wear their hair been tagged “coronavirus ambassador.”
Humour on naming children	1 (1.54%)	The Coronials, children conceived during the pandemic and named with one of the “key” terms associated with the pandemic, such as being named “Covid Coomson”; “Sanitizer Fiifi Grant”.
Humour on safety protocols	19 (29.22%)	A popular boxer named Bukom Banku in an interview saying that instead of observing social distance from others, people in his community are rather observing social long; this he explained to be 2 acres (GHOne TV, 2020)

Note. Because of the potential for copyright infringements, we have not reproduced some of the internet humorous material we received. We found it difficult to find and cite the creators of some of the internet humorous material we used in the study.

Table 2: Internet humour originating from outside Ghanaian sources

Type of humour	Frequency (N=32)	Example
Dark humour	6 (18.75%)	In response to President Trump’s tweet that he and his wife had contracted COVID-19, a white twitter user responded by posting the picture of the Ghanaian pallbearers and asked them to stand down but stand-by.
Boredom relief	5 (15.63%)	A Facebook user posting that his cleaning lady called and told them that she would be working from home, that she would send them instructions on what to do.
Diet humour	6 (18.75%)	A drawing of a big-bellied man lying on his back saying he needs to socially distance himself from his refrigerator to flatten his curve.
Fashion humour	5 (15.63%)	A picture of a lady who has tied the disposable face masks together to make a bikini.
Humour on naming	5 (15.63%)	A Kenyan teacher marking the class register on March 23rd, 2029, and mentioning names like “Corona Bebe”, “COVID Nube”, “Wuhan Xakuza”, “Mask Mugabe” among others.
Humour on safety protocols	5 (15.63%)	Barbers maintaining social distancing by attaching their clippers to long sticks whilst giving a shave.

Note. Because of the potential for copyright infringements, we have not reproduced some of the internet humorous material we received. We found it difficult to find and cite the creators of some of the internet humorous material we used in the study.

From the content analysis, six main recurring themes emerged: (1) Laughing in the face of death; (2) Humour as a relief from boredom; (3) Diet humour; (4) Fashion humour; (5) Humour on naming; and (6) Humour on safety protocols. The themes were not mutually exclusive. Some of the videos and memes seemed to be connected to two themes such as the use of masks as a new normal and humouring safety protocols. Some themes had sub-themes. Humour as relief from boredom had five sub-themes: (a) counting the rice, (b) humouring the "new normal"; (c) expelling home-schooled children (d) and humouring social disruption.

Table 3: Themes emerged from analysis

Internet humorous material	Thematic allocation
"kwatakataa by June dieε... na oibara awu" ("by June everyone will be dead"); The dancing pallbearers	Laughing in the face of death
Counting Rice, humour in the new normal, expelling home-schooled children, humouring social disruption.	Humour as relief from boredom
Panic and eat	Diet humour
Hilarious COVID-19 fashion	Fashion humour

The “Coronials”	Humour on naming children.
Socially distanced corn cobs, big six wearing masks on currency notes.	Humour on safety

### 5.1. Laughing in the face of death

COVID-19 with its infections and death to thousands, coupled with the fear that has gripped the world because of it, is a topic one would hardly ever consider humorous. Just thinking about the devastating effect of this illness causes some distress and anxiety. However, during this time, there have been several memes, posts, and videos that have created humour surrounding the usually solemn and sacred attitude towards death. Gallows humour or dark humour, also known as "dark comedy", is humour that makes fun of a subject matter considered serious, taboo, too painful to discuss, life-threatening, disastrous, or terrifying (Moran & Massam, 1997). Initially gallows humour specifically concerned death or situations suggestive of death; but the term black or gallows humour has come to be used for humour in traumatic or stressful situations. Gallows humour is seen as a "defiance and emotional escape from grim realities" (Thorson, 1993: 19). Dark humour is used a lot by people who engage in traumatic work to reduce vicarious trauma. However, some researchers have debated that the psychological use of gallows humour is yet to be studied empirically. For example, Moran (2002) suggested that excessive use of dark /gallows humour is indicative of psychological stress and reduction of psychological wellness.

During this pandemic, however, many memes, videos, and posts have appeared on social media concerning death. This includes one meme, which has become the title of this paper [kwatakwataa by June diεε... na oibara awu] ("by June everyone will be dead"). This meme was adopted in a video by Ghanaian comedian Clemento Suarez titled, Corona ABCD (Serr Major 2020). This video depicts the comedian as a young boy enroute to primary school, who is stopped by an adult and told to recite the ABCD of the Coronavirus. As he recites this in Twi, a language widely spoken in Ghana by the Akan people, who are the largest ethnic group in Ghana, the comedian on more than one letters, insists that “by June everyone will be dead”. The unseen character in the video rebukes him and asks him never to repeat that phrase in order not to wish death on themselves or the nation. Despite this warning, Clemento Suarez is unfazed as he gets to the letter “O” and says, [Ohhh.. by June diεε na oibara awu]. Despite being warned and chastised to speak positive words, he gets to the letter "S" and repeats- [Still aa by June diεε ...]. The humour in this video skit is expressed by how the comedian gets into character in his portrayal of a schoolboy, complete with uniform and school bag, childish innocence, and childish voice. The innovative way every letter of the alphabet expresses a thought about the Coronavirus, safety protocols and currents affairs is hilarious. For example, "C" stands for "Coronavirus, God will punish you"; "Q" for "Quarantine's sister is not Valentine so let the girl (any girlfriend with anyone during this pandemic) go home" and "V" for "Verily! Verily, I say unto you "stay at home"". In another video the President of Ghana is seen winking and telling the citizens that by June everyone will be dead (Asomaning, 2020).

#### 5.1.1. Dark humour as warning

The dancing pallbearers have also been invited to several local TV stations to tell their story and most Television anchors end up dancing to their catchy tune. Ghana's dancing pallbearers hired, under normal circumstances, to give the dead a befitting funeral through the ushering of the deceased into the grave have now become the "coronavirus grim reapers" (Paquette 2020). In amusing ways, these dancing pallbearers have been edited into different footages worldwide to

warn people to stay at home or risk being "taken out" by them. With their signature tune and comic dancing, they have brought the reality of death to persons who refuse to take the safety protocols seriously. In one meme, the ailing president of North Korea, tells his nurse he thinks he hears music. A picture shot of the hospital door shows the dancing pallbearers waiting to come for him. Their video has been shared in many countries to encourage people to "stay home or dance with us". Another meme showing the icons of death evolution from ancient times to classic and finally 2020, depicts the dancing pallbearers as the death evolution icon for 2020. According to a Washington Post article (Paquette 2020), the pallbearers lighten the mood, especially in cultures where it is taboo to talk directly about death. This morbid humour lifts the spirit and helps people to cope with a disease without a cure.

## **5.2. Humour as relief from boredom**

A picture shows a 2020 daily planner as the most useless purchase of the year. This portrays a disruption in plans and daily routines which has made it difficult to follow through with a planner. A picture captioned read "I have slept so much that my dreams now have advertisements", and another image showing how lying-in bed doing nothing which was associated with laziness a few months ago is now an act to save lives.

### *5.2.1. Counting the rice*

In the earliest stages of the pandemic, a three-week partial lockdown was put in place in the two major cities in Ghana, (Greater Accra & Greater Kumasi) to curb the spread of the virus. This led to changes in lifestyle by its citizens. Results show that as boredom resulting from changes in lifestyle affected Ghanaians, there were jokes, such as passport stamps in 2020 depicting boarding passes and arrival stamps indicating departures from the bedroom, transits in the bathroom, and arrival in the living rooms, zoom meetings, and Facebook. This picture though humorous shows how life in quarantine and lockdown brought boredom since one was bound solely to their homes. Another image indicated the number of grains in a sachet of rice. The poster showed that boredom warranted counting all the grains of rice in the bag, to determine that though two bags of rice weighed the same, one had more grains of rice than the other with an ironically humorous caption of "it's not so boring staying at home".

### *5.2.2. Humouring the new normal*

Another significant change in lifestyle aside from boredom is the use of facemasks, sanitisers, and regular hand washing. Funny pictures such as people in masks being now welcomed in banks and high-security zones, compared to people without masks, which would have been unheard of before Coronavirus. The picture was captioned: the corona lesson M7: "In the past men in masks were banned from banks. Now "maskless" men are banned from banks". These depict the changing narratives and how old lifestyles are being replaced by "new normal". Another picture captured showed how masks have helped in disguise; one can freely walk past a debtor, who may not be able to recognise you. Individuals generated humour in this lifestyle change, to help cope with the use of masks as a new normal. Another picture likened the use of masks to the use of underwear, even though sometimes not very comfortable it is necessary. It indicated that without facemasks, one is naked and could contract the virus. Due to this, older people were shown using Bibles, sachets of gin, and handkerchiefs as facemasks. Such metaphors helped to make light of the situation, at the same time educating and giving people the courage to cope with the new lifestyle.

### *5.2.3. Expelling home-schooled children*

When people are overwhelmed by dynamic work demands, combining work and home demands can lead to frustration. Frustration is seen in this period as parents took to social media to laugh at their situation. Pictures had humorous captions, where a mother of three children had tied them up and is seen behind her laptop working. Another post stated that "if the scientist did not rapidly find the virus, parents would find it". This post espouses how parents are frustrated and find it challenging to have a smooth integration between their work, children stuck at home needing to be home-schooled, and other family pressures of their lives. One meme showed how after two days of home-schooling, a parent was ready to expel her child, whilst another said the children had been suspended from school whilst the teacher (parent) was drinking (out of tiredness and frustration) on the job.

### *5.2.4. Humouring social disruption*

Social gatherings and events are one part of life which is not the same as it used to be, for example, a picture which had a caption "this is a restaurant in 2019 BC (Before Corona)" and showed people seated at a restaurant eating without facemasks and physical distancing. This picture speaks to how life has evolved since the invisible enemy hit. The virus had suspended social events such as marriage ceremonies, funerals, football activities, and political rallies which until recently, were mostly held in churches, parks, gardens, or stadia in the presence of a large congregation of friends and loved ones. Such social events are no more the same since restrictions put in place by the government allows only up to only one hundred people at such gatherings. A cartoon showed how football players ready to take a freekick, were using physical distancing protocol in an empty stadium scored a goal. Another picture showed how a couple getting married were asked to wink at each other in place of a hug or kiss, which is typical of most marriage ceremonies. A cartoon also showed how animals were grazing on the biggest sports stadium park, showing how social events have come to a halt, and animals could fully enjoy themselves without any disruptions. Fun is made from these changes and circulated on the various platforms to help one go through a day and know that they are not the only ones affected by the pandemic.

## **5.3. "Panic and eat"**

Panicking and stress, in some cases, are characterised by eating. Memes captured humour resulting from panic eating, related to stress, because of the sudden change in the daily routine. Children were involved in this. Most memes and pictures showed how food stored in refrigerators were being devoured. Excess weight gain associated with panic eating and less physical activity because of staying indoors was also captured. For example, a picture hilariously depicted how to be socially distant from your refrigerator, so that the curve (pot belly) can flatten. Another post showed prayer to isolate calories from the body of the eater, quarantine the cholesterol away from the blood and make all fats maintain a permanent social distance from the tummy. A picture showed a post saying, "parents are panic buying, children are panic eating". As humorous as these posts are, they show how people are using enlivening and humorous posts about eating, to make light of the stressful situation associated with the pandemic. The virus's impact on love and romance have also not been left out of these amusements. There were jokes about desiring to be the sanitiser of a loved one in a world full of Coronavirus. The lifestyle change has affected almost all aspects of life and making light of these changes using memes, pictures, posts, and videos give relief and assurance.

#### **5.4. Hilarious COVID-19 fashion**

Other memes and posts during this pandemic have been the new COVID fashions. These are posts depicting the change in fashion sense brought about by the new virus. In some images, old hairstyles that were common a generation ago to African, especially Ghanaian, mothers are being likened to the look of the Coronavirus under a microscope, and captioned, "International Coronavirus Ambassador". The picture and caption are funny to natives of Ghana or West Africa with memories of that hairstyle by mothers and grandmothers, mainly because it is such an apt description. Another meme concerning changes in fashion includes fashionable face masks that will emerge for "fashionistas". Pictures have very fancy, stylish, and amusing face masks with lace, pearls, and big bows, ready to be out doored in church once public gathering restrictions are lifted. Bikinis which once covered women's private areas at the beach or poolside have now, according to a meme, been relocated to cover the mouth and nose as face masks with the caption "2019, 2020" representing the different years and the fashion that characterises each year, especially 2020. Maintaining a decent look this coronavirus period saw videos and pictures depicting people trying to get a haircut, whilst barbers had tied clippers to poles about one to two meters long to observe physical distancing protocols.

#### **5.5. The "Coronials"**

Videos and voice messages predicting a baby boom during the period of the virus because of lockdowns and shelter-in-place directives have also been shared on social media. These children have been nicknamed the "Coronials". In Ghana, some of the funny names which depict the times yet with their distinct ethnic group connections of these children have emerged: Covid Coomson, Sanitizer Fiifi Grant, Handwash Aba Dadzie, Isolate Nutifafa, and Nosemask Agbenuvor are some of the hilarious names suggested of the children to be born in this era. In another meme a five-year-old "coronial" in 2025 is seen asking her mother who her father is. Her mum replies that she does not know because "he was wearing a mask".

#### **5.6. Humouring safety protocols**

Even in educating citizens to observe safety protocols, hilarious memes and videos have emerged to carry home the messages of safety and health. One photo depicts an undeveloped corn cob with sparse corn seeds on the cob with the amusing caption "social distancing". This photo without a doubt explicitly illustrates to all, since corn on the cob is a regular snack of Ghanaians, an authentic portrayal of social distancing. Another funny meme that seeks to rebel at the constant admonishing on handwashing, portrays a pair of bare, skinny fleshless chicken feet with the caption, "If I wash my hands one more time!". The effects of wearing a mask depict a man with broad and erect ears after a month of wearing the face mask. A picture of the Big Six on the twenty Ghana cedi notes wearing facemasks, tells citizens that even the historical Big Six who fought for Ghana's independence are protecting themselves. In a video by Ghanaian comedian Clemento Suarez, he educates viewers on the importance of wearing nose masks; however, he hilariously points to the fact that it is also for those with bad breath, who do not seem to be aware. With everyone wearing nose masks, those who have bad breath will breathe it themselves and experience what they have been putting others through (Serr Major 2020). Other videos showed journalists trying to educate people on the safety protocols, yet these people mainly market women struggled to pronounce "corona virus" and "hand sanitizers". Many hilariously kept saying "colonial virus", and "satilizers", "hanitizers" and "han sa tigers" (Aboagye 2020) etc. Another meme depicts social distancing shoes that are two feet long. These videos and memes though they seek to educate, act as a means for people to laugh and cope better with the present circumstances.

## 6. Study limitations and future studies

The present study does have some limitations. Firstly, the decision to focus only on social media at the neglect of traditional media content may be of some concern to some, as the traditional media platforms such as radio and television, are deemed to reflect the views of most Ghanaians. Thus, it may appear this study cannot be generalised to the entire Ghanaian population. Relatedly, the study may not reflect the entire population, due to language limitations. Many memes and videos selected for the study were in English and excluded those who have not been educated formally in English although a few were in the local dialect Twi. Additionally, we could not provide an objective criterion in the selection process of which (meme, picture, video, or poster) qualified to be used in our study. So long as the memes, images or videos were perceived as humorous to us or others who were forwarding it many times over social media, we included them in the study. Also, because of copyright issues we are unable to reproduce the posters, memes etc. in an appendix. However, we have tried to describe the memes as much as possible and cited content creators where such information is available.

Future studies can build on the foundation we have provided to study how Ghanaians have felt using internet humour. They can also examine if there is a link between the types of internet humour -self-enhancing humour and coping strategies within the Ghanaian context.

Ghanaians have always used humour in different circumstances. For a long time, the use of humour has been present in Ghanaian newspapers and other entertainment platforms. However, during this global pandemic, Ghanaians generated and circulated jokes, comics, videos, and memes on social media. Innovative videos and skits created in Ghana, especially during the period of lockdown, were in response to the need for Ghanaians to relieve themselves from the anxiety produced from the virus and perhaps fears of possible impending death. Humour helps people cope better. The types of internet humour we observed were largely self-enhancing in nature. Our study shows that during the initial phase of the COVID-19 pandemic, Ghanaian social media users employed self-enhancing humour to navigate through stress.

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