

HUMOUR AS A CATALYST FOR SOCIAL RESILIENCE IN LOKOJA, KOGI STATE: COPING MECHANISMS AND SOCIAL INTERACTION

Oluwakemi M. EMMANUEL-OLOWONUBI

Department of Theatre Arts

Federal University Lokoja

Lokoja, Kogi State, Nigeria

mercy.emmanuel@fulokoja.edu.ng

kemmee.30@gmail.com

Abstract

Humour is a powerful tool that can serve as a catalyst for social resilience, especially during times of adversity. It provides individuals and communities with the means to cope with stress, maintain a sense of normalcy, and foster a sense of connection and solidarity. Within the unique socio-cultural landscape of Lokoja, Kogi State, Nigeria, humour emerges as a distinctive coping mechanism, influencing how individuals navigate the intricate tapestry of social vices, vile, economic challenges, poverty, and political complexities. This localized exploration delves into profound relationship between humour and societal issues within the specific context of Lokoja metropolis. Grounded on the transformative ideas of Augusto Boal, the research was motivated by the recognition that humour plays a significant, yet understudied role in fostering social resilience. Through a combination of ethnographic studies, interviews and social media/comments, a deeper insight was gained into the ways in which humour operates as a tool for both individual and collective resilience in the State. Obtained data were analyzed using thematic analysis. Six major themes were identified as the contribution of humour to the resilience of the Kogi people. These were psychological relief and stress reduction, fostering social connections, maintaining optimism and hope, challenging authority and social norms, cultural preservation and identity and promoting adaptability and creativity. The study concluded that embracing humour as a tool for resilience can transform challenges into opportunities for growth, solidarity, and ultimately, survival. These findings have practical implications for informing social interventions and strategies aimed at enhancing resilience within indigenes facing adversity.

Key words: Adaptation, Humour, Norms, Resilience, and Society

Introduction

Humour plays a crucial role in fostering resilience and well-being, particularly during challenging times. Some studies indicate that humour can serve as an effective coping mechanism, promoting social support and resilience and Lokoja metropolis is not exempted. Lokoja the capital of Kogi State also known as the confluence city is situated in the North Central zone of Nigeria. Kogi State, situated in Nigeria's North-Central region, is often regarded as a “microcosm of Nigeria” due to its significant ethnic diversity, with groups such as the Igala, Ebira, and Okun constituting the majority while other tribes as Bassa Nge, Bassa Komu, Nupe and Ebira Koto constitute the minority reflecting the country's broader cultural and linguistic landscape (Falola and Heaton, 2008, p. 225).

Kogi State, centrally located in Nigeria, is endowed with an array of natural resources, including iron ore, limestone, and crude oil, making it a significant contributor to Nigeria's mining and industrial sectors. Ogah and Audu (2018, pp. 8-14) asserts that, iron ore deposits in Kogi are estimated at over 3 billion tons, while limestone reserves account for more than 50% of Nigeria's total, supporting major industries like the Dangote Cement plant in Obajana. Additionally, the Ajaokuta Steel Company, though currently underutilized, holds potential for the nation's steel production if fully operationalized. Bordering ten states; Ekiti, Ondo, Edo, Enugu, Anambra, Benue, Kwara, Niger, Nassarawa and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT, Abuja) (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kogi_State). Kogi's strategic location at the intersection of northern and southern Nigeria strengthens its trade connectivity. Its proximity to Abuja and central position enhance its accessibility along critical transport routes, notably

the Lokoja-Abuja axis, facilitating trade and economic activities across Nigeria.

Despite the riches deposited in Kogi State, Kogites experiences severe poverty and socio-economic challenges, reflecting Nigeria's broader struggle with governance and resource management issues (Egbejule, 2019, p. 2). This socio-economic paradox has led Kogi's inhabitants to adopt unique coping mechanisms, including the use of humour through the social media, and indigenous languages which foster resilience by reinforcing cultural identity and solidarity (Salawu and Mohammed, 2020, p. 58). Therefore, Kogi exemplifies both the complexities of Nigeria's socio-political landscape and the adaptive strategies communities use to navigate adversity.

Thus, this research explores dynamics of humour and theatre as powerful sociocultural tools that have long played integral roles in human expression and communication. Humour has proven to be a coping strategy in the face of social vices, economic realities, and political challenges among the people of Kogi State and Nigerians as whole. This phenomenon raises intriguing questions about how individuals employ levity and nonchalant attitudes to address profound societal issues, prompting an exploration into the multifaceted dynamics of humour within the Kogites context. Theatre, on the other hand, transcends mere entertainment; it serves as a reflective mirror that portrays and interprets the human experience. In this adapted form of *Theatre of the Oppressed (TO)*, humour doesn't downplay suffering; instead, it serves as a culturally attuned tool that respects how people choose to cope. By embracing humour within TO practices, researcher acknowledges the community's agency in navigating hardship and enhances TO be relevance in environments where direct confrontation may not feel culturally or politically viable.

Originating from the work of Augusto Boal, Theatre for Development emphasizes collective empowerment, social change, and the democratization of theatrical expression. Lokoja metropolis is a region rich in diverse tribes, cultures and traditions, Theatre for Development holds the potential to be a conduit for community-driven initiatives and a platform for exploring and addressing societal issues. For this research, the amalgamation of humour and the social media presents a unique lens through which to examine the intricate relationship between societal challenges and the coping mechanisms employed by Kogites. Employing the use of Questionnaires, this study aims to not only observe but actively engage with communities. The inclusion of theatrical reflections through the social media and people's observations and comments allows for a dynamic exploration of how humour is woven into the fabric of our daily life and becomes a potent vehicle for resilience amidst adversities.

This research seeks to unravel the layers of humour within the Kogites socio-cultural context, understanding its significance, forms, and impacts. Through the lens of *Theatre of the Oppressed* developed by Brazilian theatre director Augusto Boal in the early 1970s and inspired by the ideas of Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, which emphasized education as a tool for liberation and critical consciousness (Freire, 1970, p. 77). Boal adapted these principles into theatre, aiming to empower marginalized communities to recognize and challenge oppression in their lives. His goal was to transform spectators into "spect-actors" who could actively participate, rather than passively observe, thus using theatre as a rehearsal for real-life social action (Boal, 1979, p. 126). Freire's landmark work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, published in 1970, which emphasized the importance of dialogue and critical consciousness for empowering communities to address their own social conditions (Freire, 1970, p. 77). His concepts inspired a transformative shift in TfD, where communities, rather than passive audiences, become active participants in the theatre-making process. In other words, this process will endeavours to empower communities to articulate their experiences and challenges, fostering a deeper understanding of the coping strategies embedded in humour. In doing so, the study aspires to contribute not only to academic knowledge but also to the development of practical

interventions that resonate with the lived experiences of Kogites and Nigerians as a whole.

Literature Review:

Humour, Theatre of the Oppressed, Theatre for Development, and Resilience

Studies indicate that humour plays a critical role in fostering resilience and psychological well-being, especially in challenging or high-stress contexts. For instance, research has shown that self-enhancing humour, an adaptive style that allows individuals to maintain a positive outlook amidst adversity, is linked to higher levels of resilience among professionals facing stressful environments, such as healthcare workers (Banas, Dunbar, Rodriguez, and Liu, 2011, pp. 115-144). Similarly, Henman's (2001, pp. 142-153) study of prisoners of war during the Vietnam conflict found that humour served as a vital coping mechanism, helping detainees manage trauma and sustain their mental health in extreme conditions. Also, studies have found humour to play a significant role in enhancing children's engagement and communication (McCabe, 2023, Pp. 652-658). Such findings underscore humour's potential as a resource for resilience, making it a relevant focus for examining how communities cope with adversity, as seen in Lokoja, Kogi State.

Humour is recognized as a key concept in theatre/drama education, alongside other elements like aesthetics, curricula, and pedagogy (Schonmann, 2011, Pp. 390-401). Humour is increasingly viewed as a tool for fostering social awareness and critical consciousness in contemporary times (Mora, Weaver and Lindo, 2015, Pp. 1-8). Theatre, with its ability to reflect the human experience, often explores the profound connection between humour and resilience (McCabe, 2023, Pp. 684). In the face of adversity, both on and off the stage, humour becomes a powerful tool for resilience, allowing individual to navigate challenges with grace and perspective. The theatre, as a mirror to society, celebrates the resilience inherent in the human spirit through comedic storytelling, providing that laughter can be a resilient response to life's trial (Luminato, 2023). Live theatre helps to promote social discourse, dialogue and potential social change; cooing together as a community to listen to opposing points of view is necessary (Acting Studio Chicago, 2023).

One form of comic performance that effectively captures attention and provokes awareness is *satirical comedy*, particularly in stand-up and sketch formats. Satire uses humour to critique and draw attention to social, political, and economic issues, making it an influential tool for raising awareness. Satirical comedians use irony, exaggeration, and ridicule to shed light on societal contradictions and injustices, which help audiences, view familiar issues from fresh perspectives. According to Ruch (1993, 129-131), satire leverages humour's ability to disarm audiences, making difficult topics more accessible and reducing resistance, while inviting critical reflection on these issues.

Research has shown that viewers of satirical comedy, especially formats like satirical news, are often better informed and more engaged with social issues than traditional news viewers. For instance, Baumgartner and Morris (2008, p. 627) found that satirical news consumers, like viewers of *The Colbert Report*, demonstrated increased critical thinking and political engagement compared to audiences of conventional news programs. Similarly, Mizejewski (2014, p. 56) notes that satire can contribute to social change by encouraging open discussions around sensitive topics, helping audiences confront and reflect on issues that might otherwise remain unspoken. Thus, satirical comedy goes beyond entertainment, encouraging audiences to think deeply about societal problems and fostering dialogue that can inspire social progress.

Comedy's ability to capture attention, amuse audiences, reduce resistance to persuasion, dissolve social barriers, and pique interests may all help to contribute to social change. Resilience is a vital component of mental health. Researchers have focused their emphasis on resilience, particularly when it comes to assisting people in overcoming hardships such as poverty, religious intolerance, health pandemics, and

economic difficulties. This interest stems from the finding that greater resilience is typically linked to improved overall health outcomes over the long term, which promotes increased adaptation (Windle, 2011, Pp. 161-163). The degree of an individual's resilience depends on several elements, including their capacity for flexible adaptation in the face of upsetting circumstances and their capacity for emotional regulation.

While resilience is frequently seen as a fundamental and consistent personality quality (Skodol, 2010, Pp. 112-125), on a conceptional continuum, some personality traits have been found to be strongly associated with resilience (Silk, Vanderbilt, Shaw, Forbes, Whalen, Ryan and Dahl, 2007, Pp. 841-865). Additionally, according to Southwick, Sippel, Krstal, Charney, Mayes, and Poetzak (2016, Pp. 77-79), resilience is a dynamic process that results from an individual's ability to regulate their emotions in conjunction with external factors like family, society, and environment. The process however is unique to each person.

Although, resilience is a complex idea, it can be mainly understood as a response mechanism that is triggered to shield people from stressors in harsh or dangerous situations, eventually, assisting them in adjusting to difficult situations, particularly when answers might not be readily apparent. Success in many facets of both personal and professional life, including overcoming setbacks, depends on resilience. We laugh because it's a deep-rooted biological emotion that comes out of us which serves as a coping mechanism in stressful situations (Provine, 2000). An effective joke tends to take our attention from challenges that an individual might be facing. Due to their exceptional social skills and capacity for empathy, humans are a highly emotional species (Baumeister and Leary, 1995, Pp. 497-529). The ability to laugh, converse, sing, and dance is another characteristic that sets humans apart (Dunbar, 2004, Pp. 100-110). There is a connection between these social skills. The scope and depth of human collaboration necessitate mechanisms that support interpersonal affective attachment and communication that can break barriers and resistance.

Resilience, a complex construct influenced by various factors, has been recognized as a critical factor in navigating and overcoming difficult circumstances (Valladares-Garrido, Huamani-Colquichagua, Anchay-Zuloeta, Picón-Reátegui and Valladares-Garrido, 2022, p. 11052). Scholars have highlighted the importance of understanding the multifaceted nature of resilience, including its biological, neurological, environmental, and cultural dimensions (Falaschi, 2021). Resilience is a vital component of mental health. Researchers have focused their emphasis on resilience, particularly when it comes to assisting people in overcoming hardships such as poverty, religious intolerance, health pandemic, and economic difficulties. This interest stems from the finding that greater resilience is typically linked to improved overall health outcomes over the long term, which promotes increased adaptation (Windle, 2011, Pp. 152-169).

Lokoja, the capital of Kogi State, also known as the Confluence City is situated in North-Central Nigeria. The city is enriched with diverse tribes, religion, cultures, traditions and values; a characteristics that qualifies it a small 'Nigeria' because of its diverse tribes and languages of the indigenes. The state at large is blessed with over twenty mineral resources including crude oil, yet the citizens live in abject poverty, unemployment, political and economic challenges, arising mainly due to bad governance. In spite of these encounters, Kogites have never stood up to challenge the perpetrators; instead, they go on to create humour out of their predicaments. Amidst these adversities, there exists a noticeable and often perplexing phenomenon, the pervasive use of humour as a coping mechanism. This research stems from the recognition that while humour plays a significant role in the daily lives of the

inhabitants of Lokoja, there is a dearth of comprehensive studies addressing its profound implications for social resilience.

Methodology

The research was conducted in diverse locations across Lokoja, representing various socio-economic backgrounds and contexts. The selection criteria ensured a mix of urban and rural settings, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of how humour functions within different environments. The subjects of the study were individuals from various age groups, genders, educational background, and occupations, ensuring a diverse sample that reflects the multifaceted nature of Kogi State. Immersive field observations were conducted to capture the spontaneous and organic expressions of humour within everyday life. The study engaged participant observation, recording behaviours, language nuances, social media and contextual factors that influence the use of humour in coping with challenges.

Also, semi-structured interviews were conducted with individuals selected from the study sites. The interviews explored personal narratives, experiences, and perceptions regarding the use of humour in navigating social vices, economic hardships, and political challenges. The qualitative data from ethnographic studies and interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis.

Results and Discussion

The summary of the responses from the respondents who participated in the study through physical

Table 1: Percentage agreement of respondents on the impacts of humour on the identified major themes

Major themes	Physical Interviews	Administered Questionnaires	Social Media Comments
Psychological relief and stress reduction	90	83	87
Fostering social connections	70	87	68
Maintaining optimism and hope	82	88	90
Challenging authority and social norms	73	71	89
Cultural preservation and identity	80	75	82
Promoting adaptability and creativity	90	82	95

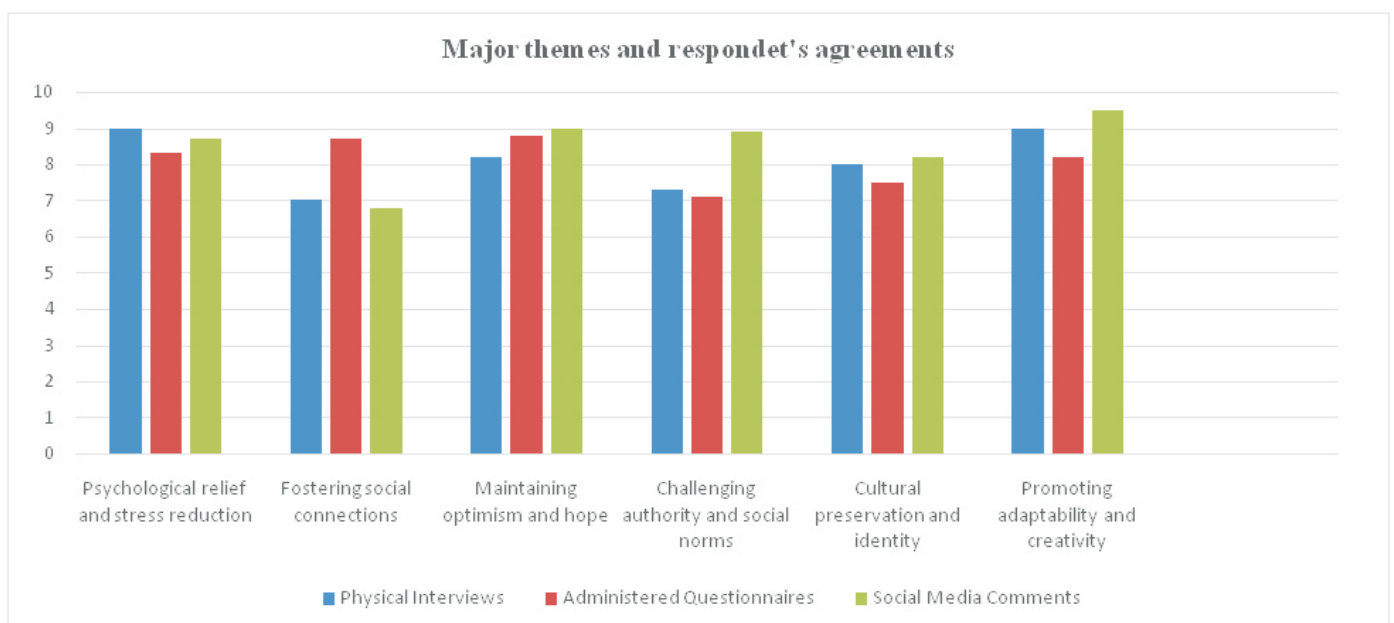


Figure 1: Representation of respondents views on the impacts of humour on the identified major themes

Theme 1: Psychological Relief and Stress Reduction

On the first theme, results showed that 90% of those who were interviewed physically agreed that humour can serve as a means for psychological relief and stress reduction. Also, 83% of those who responded to the questionnaires and 87% of those who participated through social media comments shared a similar perspective. This implies that humour can allow people to distance themselves from the intensity of their emotions, providing psychological relief in difficult situations. Also, laughter can reduce stress by lowering cortisol levels and releasing endorphins, which are natural mood enhancers. This helps individuals manage anxiety, fear, and sadness more effectively. This finding is in line with that of Norris, Stevens, Pfefferbaum, Wyche and Pfefferbaum (2007, Pp. 125-150) who stated that humour can significantly reduce stress and enhance a healthy living. Again, through humour, individuals can reframe their challenges, viewing them from a less threatening perspective. This cognitive shift can make problems seem more manageable and less overwhelming, promoting mental resilience.

Theme 2. Fostering Social Connections

On fostering social connections, 70% of those who participated in the physical interviews were of the view that humour can be used to achieve this. 87% and 68% of those that filled the physical questionnaires and those that participated through social media comments also subscribe to the fact that humour can foster social connections. Shared humour strengthens social bonds. During adversity, collective laughter can create a sense of solidarity, reminding individuals that they are not alone in their struggles. This communal aspect of humour could be vital in building a resilient community where people support one another. This finding is in line with that of Abramson, Grattan, Myer, Cotton, Arosemena, Rung and Lichtreld (2024, Pp. 42-57), who opined that shared humour can help in cementing social bonds. Humour can also help in breaking down social and cultural barriers, thus facilitating communication and understanding among diverse groups. By laughing together, people from different backgrounds can find common ground, fostering a sense of unity that is crucial during times of crisis.

Theme 3: Maintaining Optimism and Hope

Humour can help maintain a positive outlook even in bleak circumstances. Findings of the study showed that 82% of those interviewed 88% of those who filled the questionnaires and 90% of those who participated through social media comments agreed that humour can help in maintaining optimism and hope even in the face of adversity. This shows that humour can encourage a focus on the lighter side of life, promoting hope and optimism. This positivity is essential for resilience, as it motivates individuals to keep moving forward despite difficulties. This is in line with the findings of Rajabi, Assareh, Shiri, Keshvari and Hoor (2024, Pp. 2-24) who stated that humour can empower people by allowing them to take control of their narrative. By making light of a situation, individuals can assert a sense of agency over their circumstances, reinforcing their capacity to endure and overcome adversity.

Theme 4: Challenging Authority and Social Norms

Humour has the capacity to serve as a subversive tool. Findings of this study showed that 73% of those interviewed also share a similar view. 71% of those who filled out the questionnaires and 89% of participants through social media comments agreed that humour can be a tool in challenging authority and social norms. During adversity, when direct confrontation may be dangerous or impossible, humour allows people to express dissent and critique power structures in a way that is less likely to provoke retaliation. Findings of this study is in line with that of Augusto, Araújo, Rodrigues, and Barbieri Figueiredo, (2024, Pp. 1001-8) who stated that humour, especially satire, can be a subversive

tool to challenge authority and social norms. By highlighting the absurdities or injustices in society, humour can inspire social change. It raises awareness and prompts reflection, encouraging people to question the status quo and consider alternatives. This can lead to collective action, fostering social resilience on a broader scale.

Theme 5: Cultural Preservation and Identity

Humour is a key aspect of cultural expression. In the face of adversity, maintaining cultural practices, including humour, helps preserve a community's identity. 80% of the interviewed respondents; 75% of those who filled the questionnaires and 82% of those who participated through social media comments all agreed to this fact. Cultural continuity is crucial for resilience, as it provides a sense of stability and continuity amid change. This is in line with Norris, Stevens, Pfefferbaum, Wyche and Pfefferbaum (2007, pp. 127-150), who stated that through humour, communities can transcend trauma, using it as a means to process and make sense of their experiences. This collective processing can lead to healing and recovery, thus strengthening the community's ability to withstand future challenges.

Theme 6. Promoting Adaptability and Creativity

Humour facilitates creative problem solving. It encourages creative thinking, allowing individuals to approach problems from unconventional angles. A greater percentage of the respondents agreed with this theme. 90% of those interviewed; 82% of those who filled the questionnaires and 95% of social media comments buttressed the above observation. This adaptability can be a core component of resilience (Augusto et al., 2024, Pp. 1001-1008), enabling people to find innovative solutions in the face of adversity. It also enhances flexibility, helping people adapt to changing circumstances. By finding humour in the unpredictability of life, individuals can become more resilient to change, viewing it as an opportunity for growth rather than a threat.

Findings, Summary and Conclusion

In Lokoja, Nigeria, humour has become more than just a means of entertainment; it serves as a critical tool for resilience in the face of social, economic, and political challenges. Residents facing economic hardships, such as rising living costs, unemployment, and political mal-administration often employ humour to cope with their daily struggles. Jokes about high prices or witty exchanges in marketplaces offer a temporary escape from financial stress. This shared humour provides psychological relief by helping individuals distance themselves from intense emotions, a phenomenon supported by research showing that humour can lower cortisol levels and promote mood enhancement (Norris et. al, 2007, pp. 125-150). In Lokoja, such humour reduces the emotional toll of economic strain, transforming challenges into lighter topics that can be laughed about collectively.

Humour also fosters social connections, strengthening bonds within the community during challenging times. For instance, during periods of communal or personal hardship, group laughter creates a sense of solidarity, reinforcing that individuals are not alone in their struggles. Many respondents from Lokoja noted that humour strengthens social bonds by allowing people to express shared frustrations in a light-hearted manner. This echoes the findings of Abramson et al. (2024, pp. 42-57), who observed that shared humour cements social bonds and breaks down social and cultural barriers. In a diverse community like Lokoja, where ethnic and cultural differences are prevalent, humour allows people from various backgrounds to find common ground, facilitating understanding and unity during crises.

Humour in Lokoja also plays a crucial role in maintaining optimism and hope in the face of adversity. During bleak times, residents use humour to shift focus toward the lighter side of life, cultivating a sense of hope and resilience. Whether in public gatherings, family settings, or social media interactions, people draw on humour to sustain positivity. In this way, humour functions as a coping mechanism, keeping spirits high even when facing difficult realities. This finding aligns with research by Rajabi, Assareh, Shiri, Keshvari, and Hoor (2024, pp. 2-24), which indicates that humour empowers

individuals by allowing them to reframe situations and maintain agency over their circumstances, thereby strengthening their capacity to endure and overcome adversity.

A more subversive use of humour in Lokoja involves challenging authority and social norms. Given the potential risks associated with direct confrontation, humour provides a safer outlet for residents to critique leadership and address societal issues indirectly. Through satire on social media, witty remarks in local gatherings, or even subtle references in everyday conversation, people use humour to express dissent and question power structures without risking serious repercussions. The study's findings resonate with those of Augusto et al. (2024, pp. 1001-1008), who argues that satire can serve as a powerful subversive tool to question and critique authority. In Lokoja, humour that highlights societal injustices encourages people to reflect on entrenched norms and, potentially, to consider avenues for social change.

Additionally, humour in Lokoja serves as a form of cultural preservation and identity reinforcement. In the face of adversity, humour rooted in local customs, dialects, and traditions helps maintain a sense of continuity and cultural pride. Many respondents expressed that sharing jokes and humorous stories rooted in Lokoja's cultural fabric helps individuals reconnect with their heritage. This aligns with the findings of Norris et al. (2007, pp. 127-150), who note that communities often use humour as a means of processing and making sense of traumatic experiences. By preserving cultural identity, humour in Lokoja provides stability amid changing circumstances, offering a sense of belonging that is essential for resilience.

Furthermore, humour promotes adaptability and creativity, which are crucial for resilience in a rapidly changing environment. People in Lokoja often use humour to think creatively, finding unconventional solutions to everyday problems. This adaptability is reinforced by humour's ability to lower fear of failure and encourage experimentation. By embracing humour, individuals in Lokoja foster cognitive flexibility, allowing them to approach challenges from new perspectives and innovate even in the face of hardship. This adaptability, as noted by Augusto et al. (2024, pp. 1001-1008), is a core component of resilience, as it enhances people's ability to navigate uncertainties with confidence and optimism.

In conclusion, the study demonstrates that humour is a multifaceted tool for resilience in Lokoja, Nigeria. By reducing stress, fostering connections, maintaining hope, challenging authority, preserving cultural identity, and promoting adaptability, humour enables individuals and communities to face adversity with strength. Embracing humour as a resilience tool transforms challenges into opportunities for solidarity, growth, and survival, proving that even in the most trying circumstances, humour can be a powerful force for social and personal resilience. Humour. The study has shown that embracing humour as a tool for resilience can transform challenges into opportunities for growth, solidarity, and ultimately, survival. By enhancing cognitive flexibility, reducing fear of failure, fostering collaboration, and supporting a positive mind-set, humour encourages individuals and communities to approach challenges with a fresh perspective and to innovate continuously. Embracing humour in the midst of adverse situations can help in producing adaptive and innovative solutions.

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