



Application of Political and Social Cartoons in Daily Used Products and Their Acceptance

Prasun Chakraborty



Abstract: In India, political cartoonists have a deep-rooted tradition of using their art to comment on politics and society; however, in recent years they have encountered increased restrictions on their freedom of expression. This decline in freedom of expression poses a significant concern within Indian democracy. Although newspapers once featured political cartoons, their prevalence has dwindled as readership has declined, while electronic media such as television and the internet have gained popularity. Cartoonists in India still aspire to use their art to convey their ideas. Still, the current landscape poses greater challenges: critical cartoons are not readily accepted, and those in positions of power often respond negatively. Unlike in the past, when cartoonists were celebrated, they now face criticism and online harassment. To sustain their livelihoods, cartoonists have resorted to selling products featuring their cartoons, adapting to digital media and online platforms to reach a broader audience. A survey conducted in Dehradun revealed that most people favour cartoons on products and view them positively when the cartoons carry socio-cultural messages. Social cartoons can effectively serve as promotional tools for products, whereas political cartooning is more target-specific. The feasibility of using consumer products as a display platform for cartoons warrants further investigation to support both cartoonists' livelihoods and their reach to a wider audience.

Keywords: Socio-Political Cartoon, Perception of Varied Usage, Application Possibility on Products, Application of Political and Social Cartoons in Daily Used Products and Their Acceptance

Nomenclature:

UPES: University of Petroleum and Energy Studies

I. INTRODUCTION

Political and social cartoons have long been a powerful medium for commentary and critique, supplying incisive insights into the ever-evolving political and social landscape (Bhattacharya, 2019) [4]. In recent years, India has seen a notable shift in how these cartoons are used, moving from traditional print media to everyday products as promotional advertisements, reflecting changing trends in communication and consumer culture. A decline in freedom of expression has also been noted, and this poses a significant concern. While newspapers and magazines previously showcased political cartoons, their prevalence has dwindled because readership has declined, and electronic media such as television and the internet have gained popularity.

This shift has raised questions about how political and social cartoons are received today. Diverse types of static cartoons used in newspaper journalism include editorial cartoons, pocket cartoons, comic strips, editorial illustrations, pictorial commentary, concept cartoons, symbolic cartoons, satirical cartoons, visual metaphors, collage cartoons, caricatures, meme cartoons, infographic cartoons, and visual puns. Each serves a distinct purpose, conveying commentary, satire, or humour on topics such as current events, politics, and societal issues. In terms of concept, content, and commentary, static cartoons used in newspaper journalism can largely be divided into two categories: political cartoons and social cartoons.

Political cartoons focus primarily on political themes, issues, and characters (Sarkar, 2024) [6]. The following points explain how political cartoons are used in editorial contexts and why they often portray political characters. First, political commentary: humour, satire, and caricature convey opinions or critiques on political matters, including the politics, policies, and decisions of the day. Second, political characters: cartoonists often feature, satirise, or exaggerate politicians, leaders, and other prominent political figures to make a point. Third, amplifying messages: cartoonists use political characters to amplify messages or critiques about a specific political group or ideology. Fourth, visual identification: audiences can easily recognise political characters by their appearance, which makes it easier to understand the cartoonist's message (Goswami, 2016) [10]. Fifth, personification: political characters are often personified to highlight specific traits, qualities, or actions—for example, a politician known for flip-flopping on issues might be portrayed with two faces. Sixth, symbolism: political cartoons often use symbolism to represent political parties, nations, or ideologies beyond individuals. Seventh, engagement and discussion: by featuring political characters, political cartoons aim to engage readers and provoke thought and discussion, and a humorous visual perspective can make complex political events more accessible to a wider audience. Eighth, freedom of expression: cartoonists play a crucial role in democratic societies by providing a platform to criticise political leaders and policies without fear of censorship (Din, 2025). All of this requires specific skill in conceptualising the message presented through illustration so that viewers are attracted to it and can decode it with ease (Kushwaha, 2025) [7].

A social cartoon is a form of visual art that uses humour, satire, or caricature to comment on various aspects of society, often focusing on social, soft-political, and cultural issues. These cartoons are typically placed in the editorial sections of newspapers, magazines, and online publications, allowing artists to comment on current events and societal trends. Social cartoons are typically single-panel illustrations with a

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*Correspondence Author(s)

Dr. Prasun Chakraborty*, UPES, Bidholi, Dehradun (Uttarakhand), India. Email ID: prasunnid@gmail.com, ORCID ID: [0000-0003-1110-7324](https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1110-7324)

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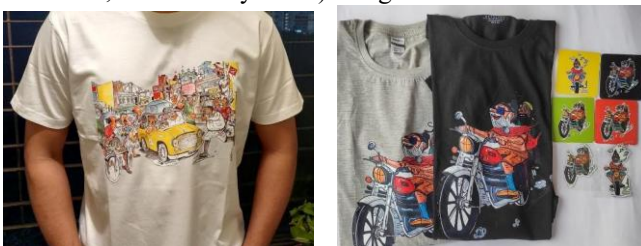
caption or dialogue that conveys a message or perspective on the chosen subject. The primary purpose of a social cartoon is to provoke thought, discussion, or laughter while shedding light on issues such as inequality, politics, human behaviour, and other aspects of modern life (Din, 2025) [8]. These cartoons often employ exaggeration, irony, or absurdity to make their point or highlight the absurdities in a situation.

Although cartooning is a powerful medium of expression discussed across different forums (Balakrishnan & Venkat, 2023 [3]; Chakraborty & Chowdhury, 2021a, 2021b; Lacity & Rudramuniyaiah, 2009) [11], its use in print is gradually declining. Despite these obstacles, cartoonists have adapted by using digital media and online platforms to reach a broader audience. The present study is a qualitative attempt to survey a select group of respondents to assess the situation regarding the retention and upscaling of cartoon-related products (Saha & Beniwal, 2019 [1]; Shifana & Jacob, 2023) [5] and to investigate what common people feel (Bakhtiar et al., 2024) [2] and what artists aspire to as they reach for a wider audience. It also examines the potential for promoting Indian political cartoons by exploring other media and products as display platforms.

II. METHODOLOGY

The survey, conducted in Dehradun in and around the University of Petroleum and Energy Studies (UPES) premises, was structured to capture two primary aspects: (a) the public's reception and acceptance of political cartoons, and (b) their perspectives on cartoons when integrated into various products. The survey was administered to 47 respondents using purposive random sampling to (a) represent the public with varied demographic and educational backgrounds, and (b) include young design students and others, ensuring a comprehensive range of perspectives.

Experimental cartoon samples (see Figure 1) were created and printed on T-shirts, umbrellas, and other daily-use products. Participants' acceptance preferences were solicited to understand their viewpoints better. The exercise aimed to assess the feasibility of blending cartoons (print and electronic, static and dynamic) using a fresh outlook.



[Fig.1: Sample Socio-Political Cartoon on a Daily-Use Product]

Note. T-shirt prints used for experimentation, exhibiting sample socio-political cartoons.

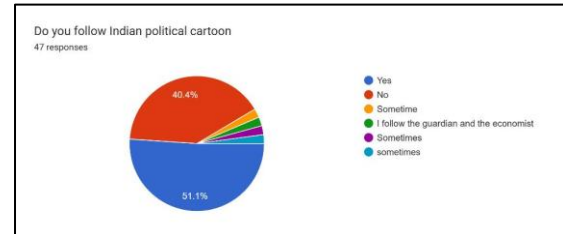
III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

During the survey, 47 respondents from different age groups and socio-economic statuses participated; 48.9% were male, and 46.8% were female. Respondents ranged in age from 18 to 65 years. Respondents held different occupations and came from various parts of India; 68.1% were students aged 18 to 30 years, and 76.6% of respondents were from

North India, with the remainder from the south, east, west, and central parts of the country.

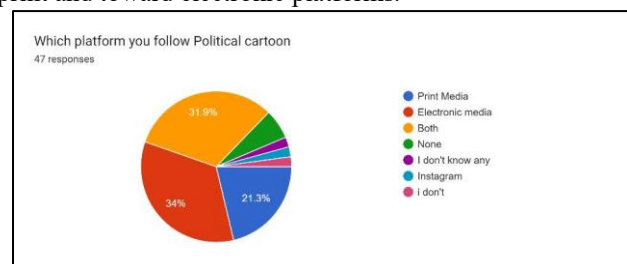
A. Awareness and Consumption of Political Cartoons

In response to the question “Do you follow Indian political cartoons?” (see Figure 2), 51.1% of respondents reported following Indian political cartoons on an irregular basis. In comparison, 40.4% did not follow them, and the remainder held different viewpoints.



[Fig.2: Proportion of Respondents Who Follow Indian Political Cartoons]

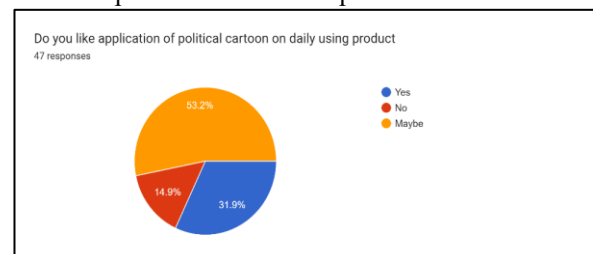
In response to the question “Which platform do you follow political cartoons on?” (see Figure 3), preferences for accessing cartoon-related content were more inclined toward electronic platforms than print. Specifically, 34.0% of respondents preferred electronic media, 21.3% preferred print media, and 31.9% preferred both print and electronic sources. This pattern reflects a broader trend in news media away from print and toward electronic platforms.



[Fig.3: Preferred Platform for Following Political Cartoons]

B. Acceptability of Political and Social Cartoons on Daily-Use Products

The next stage of the survey examined the acceptability of cartoons on daily-use products to understand which theme—political or social—was more acceptable (see Figure 4). Overall, 31.9% of respondents expressed interest in applying political cartoons to a daily-use product, 53.2% were unsure whether it would be workable, and 14.9% expressed strong disinterest in political cartoons on products.

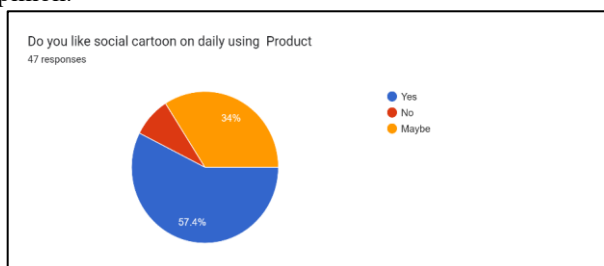


[Fig.4: Acceptability of Political Cartoons on Daily-Use Products]

Compared with political cartoons, social cartoons showed significantly higher acceptability (see Figure 5).



Specifically, 57.4% of respondents expressed a strong liking for social cartoons on products, 34.0% were unsure about the concept, and 8.6% opposed it or expressed a negative opinion.

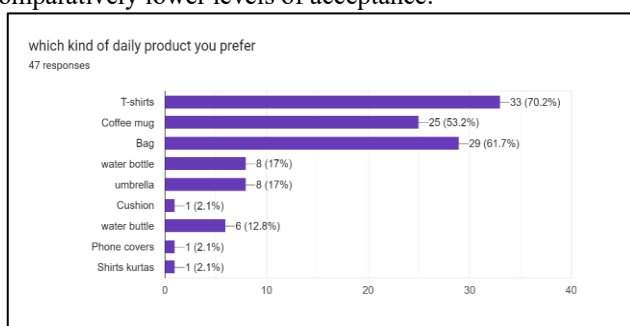


[Fig.5: Acceptability of Social Cartoons on Daily-Use Products]

The social cartoons used in the study were printed on everyday items such as T-shirts, coasters, and fridge magnets using digital printing methods; as shown in Figure 1, the process involved transfer printing, a technique within the broader category of digital printing. Incorporating socially themed cartoons added a fresh dimension of value to these products. This infusion of socially relevant cartoons may not only raise item prices but also help them stand out in the market. This distinctiveness may increase consumers' perceived value, creating a pathway toward higher profitability, attracting a consumer base that is socially conscious or interested in theme-specific items, and thereby contributing to increased sales and profits.

C. Product Preferences for Cartoon Application

The survey also explored preferences for products featuring political or social cartoons (see Figure 6), revealing divergent opinions among participants about the kinds of daily items they favoured. A range of products—T-shirts, coffee mugs, bags, water bottles, umbrellas, cushion covers, and phone covers—was printed and displayed for participants to indicate their preferences. T-shirts emerged as the most preferred choice (70.2% of respondents), followed by bags (61.7%) and coffee mugs (53.2%). Other printed products received comparatively lower levels of acceptance.



[Fig.6: Product Preferences for Cartoon Application]

IV. DISCUSSION

The preference for T-shirts, bags, and coffee mugs may reflect how individuals view cartoons in their daily lives. T-shirts, perhaps seen as a walking canvas for self-expression, held significant appeal; bags, considered practical yet personal accessories, and coffee mugs, objects of intimate daily use, also drew substantial interest. Other printed products, despite their variety, showed notably lower levels of acceptance than these three leading choices, which may

suggest a particular resonance with items of high visibility or functional significance in daily life.

These findings suggest a significant opportunity for cartoonists to tailor their content more toward social commentary. Creating cartoons that address social issues can broaden audience reach and increase popularity; by aligning their work with socially relevant themes, cartoonists can add value to various products and potentially create new markets for their creations. By focusing on social themes and integrating them into a variety of products, cartoonists may expand their audience and market considerably, capitalising on the resonance of socially conscious content in today's consumer landscape.

Through these partnerships, businesses may leverage the inventiveness and narrative skills of cartoonists and animators, giving their products unique looks based on compelling stories that appeal to consumers. These components can build a strong emotional bond with viewers that goes beyond conventional advertising: an engaging plot or a humorous character can enthrall customers and increase brand recall and loyalty. These mutually beneficial alliances not only encourage innovation but also improve a business's competitive position by providing a novel, appealing way to engage customers in an increasingly crowded retail environment.

The goal of the current study was to determine whether political cartoons, which seem to be losing popularity, can be revived in contemporary communication practices. From the influence of British cartoons to the formation of a contemporary Indian identity, political cartoons in India have undergone a dynamic, transformative process (Lacity & Rudramuniyaiah, 2009 [9]; Saha & Beniwal, 2019). Many cartoons have influenced public opinion, sparked debate, and artistically conveyed the core of sociopolitical topics.

Informal follow-up discussions with participants revealed that although political cartoons are appreciated and loved, when it comes to utilitarian products, consumers choose amusing social subjects and events over blatantly political content. When a cartoon's message is easy to understand and situationally relevant to the viewer, appreciation is higher, and product application is more readily accepted. Respondents appeared to want to remain connected to their surroundings, and cartoon representations evoked memories of previous experiences. Overall, respondents said language and illustrations should be polite, respect social norms, and look nice.

The cartoon-imprinted products created for this study were displayed in a public area for viewing and feedback from students, faculty, and other university personnel. Participants were also asked to indicate which products they would be willing to buy and keep. Participants chose products like T-shirts, umbrellas, and tea coasters with less obviously political cartoons for purchase, and several guests said they would be ready to reserve such goods in advance. However, prints with political figures were still welcomed. This observation implies that to develop a cohort of political cartoonists who can assess sociopolitical situations, formulate appropriate ideas, and communicate effectively with both politically engaged individuals and the general

public, design and communication curricula could benefit from specialised input.

V. CONCLUSION

The survey findings suggest a promising avenue for cartoonists to extend their work through diverse product applications. Converting existing cartoons into printed formats on a range of items offers a new sales platform. However, the study also highlighted a crucial disparity in acceptance: while socially based content was highly favoured, politically centred content faced comparatively lower acceptance.

The study further explored whether cartoons carrying political and socio-ethical messages could be applied to other consumer products as decorative elements—items that move with their users so the message is also transmitted to others who come into contact with them. On-the-spot observation of, and discussion around, the displayed prototypes made clear that people are open to exploring cartoon imprints on varied display media beyond print and digital presentation.

These findings point toward the value of a more detailed feasibility study involving larger and more varied target groups, addressing the following issues. First, political cartoons, once a regular feature in print newspapers and magazines, are gradually declining—probably because electronic media has become the dominant news platform—whereas comic strips persist. Second, adapting cartoons to a dynamic form is promising, but a series of illustrations intended to create a dynamic appearance risk losing the cartoon's inner essence and instead resembling an animation. Third, respondents generally preferred illustrations with a clean appearance that intelligently convey the event, message, or situation with humour and overall pleasantness, allowing viewers to form their own interpretations.

Fourth, when cartoons with political themes were displayed on T-shirts, tea coasters, and other products for students and other individuals in public spaces, two broad groups of responses emerged: politically engaged individuals and members of the public without strong political interest. Fifth, individuals who were not politically motivated or interested in political discussion tended to find overtly political cartoons uncomfortable and reported feeling alienated or disinterested; this group instead appreciated cartoons that addressed social issues rather than directly targeting political themes, particularly when humour and humanistic topics were involved, which allowed the cartoons to reach a wider audience.

Sixth, for cartoons with political themes to reach a politically engaged audience effectively, they should be presented in a refined manner that ensures the political message is clear and appeals specifically to individuals interested in politics; a broader audience is more likely to enjoy cartoons that focus on mass issues or broader humanistic themes combined with humour. Seventh, political cartoons should be displayed in public spaces in ways suited to the tastes and interests of their intended viewers, whereas cartoons addressing general social issues with humour tend to have broader public appeal and acceptance. Eighth, political cartoons should embody novelty in both context and timing; nurturing specialised artistic capability—through targeted

input in relevant courses—alongside attention to appropriate publication platforms and legal and ethical considerations, is important to the sustainability of cartooning as a creative art form.

DECLARATION STATEMENT

Some of the cited references are older and are noted explicitly as [9]. However, these works remain significant for the current study, as they are pioneering in their fields.

After aggregating input from all authors, I must verify the accuracy of the following information as the article's author.

- **Conflicts of Interest/ Competing Interests:** Based on my understanding, this article has no conflicts of interest.
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- **Data Access Statement and Material Availability:** The resources of this article are publicly accessible.
- **Author's Contributions:** The authorship of this article is contributed solely by the authors.

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AUTHOR'S PROFILE



Dr. Prasun Chakraborty is a designer, educator, and researcher with over two decades of experience in both the textile industry and design academia. He holds a postgraduate degree from the National Institute of Design (NID) and recently completed his PhD, focusing on contemporary Indian political cartoons and their application in new media for social impact. His professional journey includes leading roles at Portico, Bombay Dyeing, Raymond, and UPES. His expertise includes textile design, illustration, visual communication, design research, and foundation education. He is passionate about nurturing young designers through innovation, interdisciplinary learning, and industry-oriented education.

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