

Beyond Laughter: An Analytical Study of Selected Bukusu Stand-up TikTok Performances

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Abstract

Stand-up comedy has emerged as a distinct subgenre within the comedic landscape, captivating audiences worldwide with its unique blend of humour and performance artistry. This form of entertainment not only induces laughter but also provides a sense of relief and joy to its spectators. Through its therapeutic essence, stand-up comedy offers a nuanced perspective on life's intricacies in a light-hearted manner. While it is often categorized as mere amusement, this paper delves deeper into the theatrical dimensions of stand-up comedy, exploring its societal significance. The role of stand-up comedy in shaping societal discourse is multifaceted and profound. Beyond its surface entertainment value, it serves as a platform for dialogue and introspection. This examination delves into the conversational techniques employed by comedians, as well as the paralinguistic elements of their performances. Moreover, it scrutinizes the utilization of music, symbolism, caricature, subtle irony, and improvisation, along with the interactive dynamics between performers and audiences. Drawing upon the General Theory of Verbal Humour, stand-up comedy performances are analysed as oral texts, shedding light on their intricate linguistic and comedic structures. Additionally, the concept of entextualization, which involves transforming spoken dialogue into textual form, is employed to dissect the underlying layers of comedic expression. Namalwa Chesoli and Choffuri who are Kenyan comedians on tiktok are purposefully selected as exemplars of stand-up comedy, their live digital performances serving as primary sources for analysis. Through a combination of performance and literary scrutiny, this study seeks to unveil the profound societal role played by stand-up comedy, transcending its perception as mere entertainment to emerge as a significant cultural phenomenon.

Key Words: *Stand-Up Comedy, Entextualization, Culture, Phenomenon*

INTRODUCTION

Stand-up comedy is a vibrant form of entertainment that resonates deeply within social and political contexts, often serving as a conduit for societal introspection and discourse. Kreftling (2014) aptly observes that:

All humour locates itself in social and political contexts, but not all humour does so self-consciously or with specific intentions to promote unity and equality or to create a safe and accepting space for people from all walks of life (Kreftling 2014).

Performing art such as stand-up comedy is part of the social landscape of many Kenyan communities and has contributed greatly in fostering unity. History shows that in the traditional African setting, artists did not necessarily compete for audience attention or for patronage of their performances. Rather, long established cultural norms, nature of ceremonies and activities dictated performances well suited for each occasion and artists were an essential part of such ceremonies. The artists became regionally famous for their performance and leadership skills through their art since they not only entertained their audiences but also provided direction on the different issues taking place in the society. These roles are clearly depicted through Namalwa Chesoli and Choffuri's stand-up comedy performances.

Stand-up comedy exhibits a fascinating parallelism with folk tales, as Brodie (2014) elucidates. Within this dynamic, the comedian assumes the role of a modern-day storyteller, while the audience collectively embodies a shared cultural identity or set of common experiences. This collective worldview, whether affirmed or challenged by the comedian, becomes the linchpin of comedic narratives, intertwining with the fabric of societal norms and values to evoke laughter and reflection.

Central to the essence of stand-up comedy is the art of storytelling, often imbued with personal anecdotes, keen observations, and witty commentary on contemporary issues. While these narratives typically emanate from the comedian's perspective, they need not necessarily reflect their own experiences. Instead, comedians draw inspiration from their surroundings, engaging with current political and social landscapes to craft compelling tales that resonate with audiences (Bingham & Hernandez, 2009; Brodie, 2014). Lee (2018) offers an insightful perspective on humour, portraying it as both a lens through which individuals perceive the world and a coping mechanism for navigating anxieties and uncertainties. In this light, stand-up comedy emerges not merely as a source of entertainment but as a nuanced reflection of society's collective consciousness, offering both catharsis and commentary on the human condition.

The therapeutic potential of humour, particularly within the realm of stand-up comedy, is a subject of growing scholarly interest. Gladding and Drake Wallace (2016) highlight the profound physiological effects of laughter, noting its ability to trigger muscular activity, enhance cardiovascular function, and stimulate the release of endorphins in the brain. This physiological response underscores the therapeutic value of humour, prompting its integration into therapeutic interventions. Through the deliberate interplay of humour and vulnerability, comedians navigate the complexities of human experience, inviting audiences into a shared space of laughter and introspection. Thus, stand-up comedy transcends its role as mere entertainment, assuming a therapeutic dimension that fosters emotional well-being and communal solidarity through the gathering together of the people to listen to the stand-up comedians

In essence, stand-up comedy represents a multifaceted intersection of humour, storytelling, and societal commentary. Rooted in the intricacies of human experience, comedians wield their craft to illuminate and interrogate the collective consciousness, offering poignant reflections on the joys, sorrows, and absurdities of life. As audiences engage with these narratives, they partake in a shared journey of laughter, empathy, and self-discovery. By harnessing the therapeutic power of humour, stand-up comedy not only entertains but also uplifts, fostering a sense of connection and resilience in an ever-evolving world. Through ongoing scholarly inquiry and creative exploration, the profound impact of stand-up comedy on society continues to unfold, inviting us to embrace laughter as both a source of solace and a catalyst for change.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Namalwa Chesoli's and Choffuri's comic performances was guided by The General Theory of Verbal Humour (GTVH), a seminal work in the field (Attardo & Raskin, 1991; Attardo, 2001, 2017), which offers a comprehensive framework for understanding humour in verbal communication. Additionally, the concept of entextualization, which involves transforming spoken dialogue into textual form, was employed as a complementary analytical tool (Smith, 2020; Garcia, 2019). Applying the GTVH, this paper aims at elucidating the linguistic and comedic structures employed by the comedians, focusing on elements such as incongruity, semantic scripts, and lexical ambiguity (Johnson, 2016). Through the concept of entextualization, the translation of spoken comedic dialogue is used as a nuanced analysis of the comedians' performances.

By examining the linguistic, semantic, and contextual dimensions of their comedy, the paper sheds light on the broader cultural and societal implications of stand-up comedy as a form of oral literature (Brown, 2017). Empirical studies have underscored the applicability of the GTVH in analysing various forms of humour, highlighting its utility in understanding the mechanisms underlying comedic discourse (Attardo, 2001, 2017; Roberts, 2015). Through this interdisciplinary approach, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of the complexities of humour and its role in shaping discourse and cultural identity.

EMPIRICAL LITERATURE REVIEW

Analyzing the social significance of Namalwa Chesoli's and Choffuri's comic performances requires an exploration of the broader cultural and societal contexts within which their humour operates. Research by Johnson (2016) underscores the importance of understanding stand-up comedy as a form of cultural expression that reflects and critiques social norms, values, and power dynamics. By examining the themes and narratives presented in Chesoli's and Choffuri's performances, researchers can gain insights into how these comedians engage with and comment on contemporary issues such as politics, gender, race, and identity. Furthermore, studies by Garcia (2019) highlight the role of stand-up comedy in fostering social cohesion and challenging prevailing ideologies, thus contributing to broader discussions on social justice and equity.

Delving into the dialoguing conversational techniques used by Namalwa Chesoli and Choffuri provides a deeper understanding of how their performances resonate with audiences. Attardo and Raskin (1991) emphasize the importance of linguistic elements such as incongruity and ambiguity in generating humour. This implies that comedians employ various conversational strategies to elicit laughter and engage their audience. By analysing the comedic timing, delivery, and interaction with the audience, researchers can discern the underlying mechanisms through which Chesoli and Choffuri establish rapport and create comedic tension. Moreover, studies by Roberts (2015) highlight the role of improvisation and interactivity in enhancing the comedic experience, signifying that comedians often adapt their performances based on audience responses and feedback, thereby shaping the direction and tone of the conversation.

In addition to their comedic prowess, the social significance of Namalwa Chesoli's and Choffuri's performances lies in their ability to challenge societal norms and provoke critical reflection. Attardo (2001, 2017) argues that stand-up comedy serves as a platform for subverting dominant discourses and interrogating power structures, offering alternative perspectives that disrupt conventional ways of thinking. Through their humorous observations and satirical commentary, Chesoli and Choffuri confront taboo subjects and challenge prevailing ideologies, prompting audiences to reconsider their preconceptions and assumptions. Furthermore, research by Brown

(2017) highlights the therapeutic value of stand-up comedy in providing catharsis and relief from everyday stressors, suggesting that the laughter elicited by Chesoli's and Choffuri's performances serves as a form of emotional release and brings the people of the community together through listening to the comedians.

METHODOLOGY

Stand-up comedy, a dynamic blend of humour and performance, is a rich field for exploration through research. Utilizing a descriptive survey research design, this paper delves into the intricacies of stand-up comedy performances, drawing data from carefully selected samples of recorded performances. Following a meticulous process of transcription and analysis of performances transcribed, a coding system is employed to systematically organize the data (Johnson, 2016). This approach allows for a comprehensive examination of the comedic narratives and techniques employed by the comedians, shedding light on the nuanced interplay between humour and societal themes (Smith, 2020). Through content analysis, the study contextualizes the observed performances within the framework of contemporary oral literature, elucidating their broader cultural significance and thematic underpinnings (Brown, 2017).

The methodology employed in this paper involves a thorough exploration of stand-up comedy performances as sources of primary data. Utilizing transcribed recordings of sampled performances, the researchers engage in a meticulous process of data collection and analysis (Garcia, 2019). By carefully watching and transcribing these performances, insights are leaned into the multifaceted nature of stand-up comedy, from the delivery of jokes to the exploration of social and political themes. The interpretive analysis of the data provides a deeper understanding of the comedic narratives, illuminating the ways in which comedians navigate and comment on contemporary issues through their craft (Roberts, 2015). Through this methodological approach, the study contributes to a nuanced understanding of stand-up comedy as both a form of entertainment and a reflection of societal discourse (Jones, 2018).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Chattoo (2023) and Chattoo and Feldman (2020) focus on comedy and satire as tools for social change, in terms of influencing public attitudes and behaviour. This is clearly seen through Chesoli and Choffuri. In one of the episodes 'Morning Glory Vs the Glory is here', Chesoli, through satire, talks about women who listen to the pastors more than their own husbands. No matter how the husband pleads for morning glory (love making in the morning) the woman does not listen since she is in a hurry to go to church. The woman doesn't even prepare breakfast for the family nor sweep the house. She tells the husband that if the pastor does not see her, the service will not be orderly. Yet in church she is the most famous. She is even the one charged with the responsibility of sweeping the altar, but none of her family members attends church. The artist thus uses satire to advise women to put their families first and also advises other people to stop blaming the church for their own transgressions. In Choffuri's episode 'Poverty Creates Enmity', Choffuri uses satire to show how some relatives especially mothers tend to favour children who are doing well financially. The episode brings out the fact that sometimes poverty creates unhappiness and promotes sibling rivalry and disagreements in society. The artists use this episode to advise parents to treat their children equally regardless of their standing in society. In 'Village Idlers', Chesoli satirizes idle men in society. Men who leave their houses very early in the morning and go to the market places to gossip. They have nothing to show because they are lazy. As a result, the wife and the children are disadvantaged and the home is disorganized because of lack of leadership.

The wife is very hardworking and the one who does everything at home to fend for the family, only for the man to come back empty handed in the evening to demand for food he never participated in finding.

The comedians have also used Symbolism to warn members of the society against being opportunistic. In 'Mangalobis' Chesoli uses Nairobians who visit the villages to show how opportunistic members of the society have become. The comedian explains how people from the city who go visiting the villages, gluttonously enjoy the good food prepared in the village, and keep complaining how food in the city is not fresh. When they are about to go back to the city, they request for almost everything including charcoal to be packed for them in their cars yet they can't even leave a shilling for the host in the village.

When using stand-up comedy for the purpose of social change, representation is an important concept for it to be empowering. The comedians have used representation, identity, and intersectionality. These concepts are important in order to understand that the stand-up performer's identity matter in relation to how the joke is interpreted. Kreftling (2014) states that any research on stand-up comedy should highlight the social dimension of humour and the role of the comedian as a social agent representing a particular group or community. Marginalized or oppressed people use humour as a psychological escape from reality; the jokes can be self-critical and serve to strengthen the bond within the group or population. The same or similar jokes can be interpreted as hostile and stressful for the marginalized group if told by the ruling, dominant, or arrogant group (Hart, p6, 2007). Both Chesoli and Choffuri have used humour in their jokes to express certain issues in society. In 'Waluhya na Mahari' Choffuri brings out this aspect of using humour as an escape from reality. In the episode 'Bukusu Darling' he also shows how oppression of women is propagated.

CONCLUSION

This paper underscores the transformative potential of stand-up comedy as a catalyst for empowerment and social awareness. However, it emphasizes the importance of a delicate balance between serving a purpose and maintaining its entertainment value. Essential elements such as clarity of purpose, authentic representation, and an intersectional perspective are identified as crucial for performances that effectively engage audiences and foster empowerment. Stand-up comedy emerges as a vehicle for bridging divides and initiating meaningful dialogue on sensitive and challenging topics, thereby lowering the threshold for important discussions within and between social groups. Moreover, the findings highlight the multifaceted benefits of stand-up comedy beyond its entertainment value. Beyond simply eliciting laughter, stand-up comedy serves as a conduit for communication on societal issues, facilitating socialization, offering comfort, and providing avenues for coping with stress and depression within society. By addressing taboo subjects with humour and wit, comedians create spaces for collective catharsis and reflection, contributing to the overall well-being and resilience of communities. Ultimately, this paper underscores the nuanced role of stand-up comedy in contemporary society, emphasizing its potential to spark positive social change while simultaneously providing moments of levity and relief. By harnessing the power of humour and storytelling, comedians have the opportunity to not only entertain but also educate, inspire, and empower audiences, thereby enriching the cultural landscape and fostering greater understanding and empathy among diverse communities.

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