

The Effect of Chinese Stand-up Comedy Shows on the Formation of Z Generation's Own Narration of Reality

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Abstract: The stand-up comedy shows recently thrived in China both out of the development of the internet and the following accessibility brought to it and also the risen interest of the youth population in this genre's ability of providing comments on things. The generation Z, often described as being abandoned, is especially in favor of this kind of entertainment and shows strong resonance with it. Recently, more and more Z generation comedians are speaking from the perspective of the Z generation in the show. This research investigates the relationship between Chinese stand-up comedy shows and the formation of the social narrative of the Z generation. The methods that this paper mainly uses are literature review in the process of finding a theoretical base for the problem and case analysis on the shows of a stand-up comedian when comes to the analysis part. The findings of this research indicate that Chinese stand-up comedy contributes to the shaping of Generation Z's social narratives by providing a narrative structure that addresses the challenges faced by young people, by constructing storylines and causal relationships between the dissonance of labor and employment, and by affirming a value system that prioritizes secure employment and the enhancement of living standards.

Keywords: Stand-up comedy, social narrative, Z generation.

1. Introduction

Stand-up comedy is a genre of show that features a comedian talking with humor entertaining the audience. It was originally from the west, and has afterward been introduced to China [1]. Thanks to the powerful internet which can increase the audience basis and the spreading rate significantly, this genre of popular culture is now widely accessible to the public and is creating a big impact by discussing complex social issues. Many researchers have focused on how the rising stand-up comedy in China has showcased the perspective of feminism, including how women are striving for equality and rights as comedians and also how female comedians break social taboos and start confrontational discussion [2-3]. Additional research has investigated the specific diction and linguistic codes employed by Chinese comedians in discussing identity conflicts [4]. However, there are comparatively fewer researchers doing studies regarding the intersection between Z generation and the Chinese stand-up comedy show, and also to see this intersection from a social narration perspective. The comedy stage serves as a critical forum for Generation Z to articulate their perspectives, enabling them to construct narratives that contribute to their subjectivity as social observers. They can construct their own narratives, contributing to their subjectivity as observers.

This is also the reason this paper conducted research on this topic because this voice that stand-up comedy provides for the Z generation was relatively lacking before. This research investigates the impact that the stand-up comedy show has on the construction of the narratives of Z generation. This paper mainly reviews other academic journals and uses a case study as the research method. The findings may enhance comedians' awareness of the narrative-building potential in their scriptwriting, prompting a more active and responsible contribution to this narrative.

2. The background of stand-up comedy show

2.1. The rise of stand-up comedy shows in China

Stand-up comedy is a performance art wherein a comedian delivers verbal routines to a seated audience. Through carefully crafted script, the comedians deliver humorous monologues. It usually contains two parts as its basic structure which are the setup and the punchline, the former serves for the unfunny part of a joke that serves as the building up of the plot, and the latter stands for the funny part of the joke [5]. It was originally from the west, and has afterward been introduced to and thrived in China. Because of the powerful internet which can increase the audience basis and the spreading rate significantly, platforms like "ROCK & ROAST" increase the accessibility of comedy shows to the audience a lot, with the number of shows and clubs rising significantly [6]. Especially the youth population has seen a huge rise in popularity for this medium, who view them as a way of giving commentaries on social issues. The increasingly sedentary lifestyle brought by the rise of the internet and more online classes for students specifically promoted the popularity of stand-up comedy, because streaming comedies have gained a lot of popularity out of the decreasing attractiveness of other offline entertainment.

2.2. The background of the stand-up comedy show used in the case study and the comedian

The case study selected for this paper pertains to the works of a renowned Chinese Generation Z comedian, Xiangyu Yu, who holds a philosophy degree and has performed on "The King of Stand-up Comedy". The topics that he often talks about revolve around experiences that youth would face in social media and family life, which are all highly related to Z generation. The case that this paper will pick is in a show in which he specially discusses the experiences that Z generation faced when applying for jobs or dealing with problems related to work experiences.

3. Generation Z

3.1. The definition of and the situation faced by Z generation

Generation Z (often shortened to Gen Z), also known as Zoomers, is the demographic after Millennials and before Generation Alpha, with the generation most frequently being defined as people born from 1997 to 2012. Contrary to societal prejudices, research suggests that members of Gen Z are adept at deferred gratification and exhibit greater concern for academic performance and future employment prospects than their elders. Also, they are the first generation to grow up with the access to internet and portable digital technology from a young age. The access to the internet made them both encounter with and connect to the rise of stand-up comedy shows better because the internet contributes to the rise of the stand-up comedy show for the large user base and the easy accessibility [6]. Platforms such as YouTube have been instrumental in both the proliferation of stand-up comedy and in enabling young people to access this content.

3.2. The relationship of Z generation with their humor

Besides, Z generation generally has a strong and powerful usage of their unique humor as a way to laugh at their pain and desperation, and to regain hope [7]. This is evident in memes that Z generation is using, and also in the lines of stand-up comedians. The humor, although serves a different role rather than laughing off pain in this specific research, also contributes to the Z generation for its ability to build up narratives.

4. The main building parts of social narratives

In the realm of scholarly discourse, the transparency of facts is not intrinsic. People use different narratives to interpret and understand the facts and provide it with significance in forming perceptions of the world. Also, the narratives are really important because people can give facts different kinds of interpretations, indicating and showcasing the different perspectives of people.

Narratives are made up of four main parts. They first give their own frame of the events and set of facts that they are going to mainly focus on, rendering analyzing the issues in their own particular way; they identify specific characters corresponding to either classes or groups of people as winners and losers, or villains and victims; then, they provide a chronology of events and the causal mechanisms that precipitate a particular outcome; and they suggest moral of their constructed story, including what has happened, whether these things are good or bad and what should be done about that. Through this process, narratives afford a window into the proponents' experiential insights, concerns, and value orientations, as well as potential policy and legal inclinations. The cases of stand-up comedy in China contribute to the forming of these four building blocks to a very high degree for Z generation's narration, including both their frame of social events and their unique value standard. The genre of stand-up comedy has played a pivotal role in shaping the narrative discourse of Generation Z to a considerable extent. The stand-up comedy show that is picked specifically here today, is related very deeply to the job experiences of young people and starts the building of narration from there [8].

5. Case study of the relationship between the stand-up comedy show of Yu and the formation of social narration of Z generation

5.1. The creation of frame brought by discussing the experiences of Z generation

The content of the comedy show, by drawing the focus of discussion to the experiences of Z generation, creates a frame of events for narration that is special and authentic to the youth. In his show, he mocks the idea of being a "fresh graduate" by saying that "even if I am starving to death, I am still a fresh graduate".

As a background, fresh graduates are supported in the job application process for the society wants a higher employment rate of college graduates. This is the reason why being a fresh graduate is deemed prestigious and desirable. The joke made by this comedian here is that he is still proud of himself for being a fresh graduate when he is not able to use that identity to gain a job. The "starving to death" is a hyperbole but it indicates some existing problems with the quality of living of fresh graduates brought on by the absence of a job. The disparity between the expected good living identity of "fresh graduates" and the reality highlight even more the economic difficulties faced by the himself on the life quality induced by the absence of jobs.

Also, the comedian presents a conversation between himself and one of the rich students that he teaches when he wants to persuade that student to study. He recalls saying, "Please study for your teacher so he can earn some money" and "He would not spend the money but would accumulate that for you so that he can rent your houses in the future". The joke here lies in that the comedian considers

the money that he earned from the student as something that he would eventually return to the student rather than something that he can keep and make his life more desirable. This definition of earned money points to the expense of rent prices faced by him. If he is rich enough to buy a house, then he would not have to struggle to pay the intolerable high rent every month.

The permutation of this challenge arises due to the individual's occupational deficit or the engagement in a vocation characterized by under-compensation. The experiences described by the comedian share huge similarities with other members of Z generation for they both have constrained budgets when comes to life quality and also high rent when comes to residue places. Thus, the experience shown in the lines forms a unique frame for the narration of Z generation that stresses events showcasing the difficulties they brought by their lack of work.

5.2. The account giving and story construction provided by the comedian

The comedian provides an account of the happening events featuring the perspective of Z generation, including the causal mechanisms underlying the events and also a constructed story plot with identified characters. Initially, the orator establishes a metaphorical parallel between newly minted college graduates and a particular variety of mooncakes that proliferate on store shelves. He mocks that college graduates like him are like those mooncakes that have fresh ingredients, and a close production date, but just with nobody touching and buying. Despite nobody touching it, every year a new group of them is being produced and given away to employers who already have a large supply of these "mooncakes". By using the large amounts of mooncakes to parallel that of the employees who are being sent into the labor market, the mismatch of the amounts of workers and the amount of jobs opening is shown vividly.

Noting that the comedian is talking about his experiences of not being employed in the labor market before he makes this parody, it can be concluded that he is trying to provide an account for the low employment rate of college graduates including himself, which is what the last paragraph focus on as the events being framed by the narrative of Z generation, that the mismatch of labor supply and labor demand is causing the difficulties faced by the college graduates induced by the absence of jobs. There are too many people applying for jobs, so there would definitely be somebody not being employed.

Furthermore, the orator constructs a narrative with defined characters—those of fortune and misfortune—within this causal sequence. The mismatch of the labor force and the opening job positions has made the employees, mainly corresponding to the Z generation as the narrator, into the unlucky figure, fitting the roles of the narrators themselves into the story, and also the boss of the companies as the lucky ones for the huge amount of the supply of workers can lower the wage down and also increase the quality of labor.

5.3. The confirmation of value standard that belongs to Z generation

The comedian helped discover and celebrate a value standard that belongs to Z generation as the source of judgment of their narratives. After discussing some instances when the companies break the offer with Z generation, the comedian claims that the thing that nearly everybody wants is the sense of assurance, the assurance that one's life is progressively aligning with a predetermined trajectory, free from disruption. As an add up to the background, the desire for a stable job that the employees would not be mentioned in the narratives of the company which the employees would normally listen to, for the company would want the employees to accept the arrangement of companies, rather than bringing up with possible disagreement.

As a result, the comedian here is helping the Z generations to recognize one of their important desires and the accompanied value that they give to the stability of jobs. This value standard being

regained by the Z generation here is really important for it has strong potential underlying for them to use it on commenting on social events they are encountering but also on guiding their path when they need to be clear about what is meaningful to them.

6. Conclusion

This paper discusses the effect that the Chinese stand-up comedy show has on the building up of the narratives of Z generation. The findings of this study suggest that Chinese stand-up comedy is instrumental in shaping the narrative framework of Generation Z, as it facilitates the structuring of events, the provision of accounts, the development of narrative arcs, and the establishment of value standards. This paper also has some weaknesses in the type and scope of materials that it used for analysis. It only includes a single case study of the comedian Yu Xiang Yu without picking the comedy show held by other comedians, this narrow focus may limit the generalizability of the findings to a broader spectrum of stand-up comedy. Also, the materials that this paper picked are mainly that of the lines spoken by the comedian, but not with the reaction of that of the audience. As a result, the realm of analysis is only limited to that of the comedians and might not be able to figure out whether or not the intention of the comedian is being successfully realized by inducing the effect on the audience. Future analysis might focus on the reception analysis of the comedy show, which might focus more on the reaction of the audience.

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