Research Article

A Study on The Portrayal of Gender and Body Shaming in Stand-Up Comedians Content on YouTube and Instagram

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Abstract: This study explores the portrayal of gender roles and body shaming in stand-up comedy content on YouTube and Instagram, focusing on its influence on audience perceptions and self-esteem. It examines how humor navigates the thin line between satire and the reinforcement of societal stereotypes, especially concerning gender dynamics and body image in the digital age. Adopting a mixed-method approach, the research includes quantitative surveys to gauge audience impact and content analysis of popular stand-up acts to identify recurring themes and stereotypes. The findings reveal that while humor can challenge societal norms, it often perpetuates harmful stereotypes, significantly impacting self-perception and body image among audiences. The study highlights the growing need for ethical considerations in comedy, urging creators to balance creative freedom with their responsibility toward social impact.

Keywords: Gender Body shaming, YouTube comedy content standup body image self-esteem

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, a digital revolution has taken place, and from it, stand-up comedy has emerged as an influential platform for public opinions and a place for social criticism. Particularly, YouTube and Instagram allow comedians to perform for large audiences anywhere in the world. Because of its easy availability, stand-up comedy has become a major cultural power. This has somewhat transformed stand-up comedians into thought leaders. Here, comedians frequently use humor to address important social issues, but there's growing worry about how sensitive topics like gender roles and body image are portrayed. It is important to analyze the influence that funny narratives have on societal attitudes. When comedians make jokes about gender roles or body image, they walk a fine line between satire and reaffirming harmful stereotypes.

The relevance of this topic in current times cannot be underestimated. Society is witnessing a catastrophic change in how gender and body image are perceived, driven by movements like #MeToo and body positivity. The media has the power to gradually transform audience perceptions. Though there has been progress, there is still a long way to go in the battle against established preconceptions. In this respect, stand-up comedians' content on websites like YouTube and Instagram is crucial in establishing or breaking these prejudices. Comedy is a powerful instrument for both positive and negative social change because of its ability to create cultural norms, push social boundaries, and influence opinions.

Most recently, stand-up comedian Samay Raina made offensive and derogatory comments about Kusha Kapila, a fellow comedian and influencer. The jokes brutally targeted her marriage, divorce, and even sex life, a few of which had to be censored by the show. The controversial episode rapidly became a trending topic on social media, with many questioning whether Samay Raina had crossed a line. (The Indian Express, Entertainment Desk, 2024)

Stand-up comedy, by its nature, is an ambiguous medium where comedians often make risky jokes under the guise of humor. Through this study, we hope to understand how such jokes impact and influence the minds of the viewers watching them, and whether it significantly alters their perception of stereotypes. The global nature of digital content, where a single video or post may quickly reach millions of viewers, further intensifies the impact of these acts.

Another major reason behind choosing this topic is the increasing impact of digital media on the development of social perceptions. These platforms enable a more direct relationship between comedians and their audiences than traditional media does. Their material frequently combines humor and criticism of society, which makes it an effective tool for influencing public opinion and conveying ideas. But with this power also comes the obligation to make sure that the material being created doesn't support negative stereotypes or worsen social problems like body shaming and gender inequality.

Comedy clubs and TV shows used to offer stand-up performers a more regulated setting where viewers' reactions were limited to those who were physically there. But now that these performances are available to a worldwide audience online, every joke is vulnerable to immediate criticism and even retaliation. This change has given rise to an expanding discussion concerning the limitations of comedy and the degree to which comedians

need to be responsible for the consequences of their remarks. While some claim that comedy should allow for unrestricted expression, others suggest that comedians should refrain from reinforcing negative stereotypes.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

To determine whether repeated exposure to the portrayal of gender stereotypes and body-shaming in stand-up comedy content on YouTube and Instagram affects viewers' self-perception of the topics.

Objectives:

1. To determine whether consuming such content impacts their own self-esteem and body image.
2. The impact of comedians on public opinions regarding gender portrayal, body image, body shaming.

Research Questions

1. How do stand-up comedians on YouTube and Instagram portray gender roles in their content, and what stereotypes, if any, are perpetuated?
2. To what extent do popular stand-up comedians use humor related to body shaming, and how is this received by their audiences?
3. How do the audience reactions and comments on YouTube and Instagram reflect societal attitudes toward gender and body shaming in stand-up comedy content?

HYPOTHESIS

- Ha Heavy viewers of Stand-Up comedians' content on YouTube and Instagram are negatively affected in relation to their self-perceptions of body image and body shaming when gender stereotypes are portrayed.
- Ho: Heavy viewers of Stand-Up comedians' content on YouTube and Instagram are not negatively affected in relation to their self-perceptions of body image and body shaming when gender stereotypes are portrayed

LITERATURE REVIEW
HUMOR AND ITS SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS
Psychology Today defines humor as "the capacity to express or perceive what's funny, is both a source of entertainment and a means of coping with difficult or awkward situations and stressful events. Although it provokes laughter, humor can be serious business.

(Tomsett, E. (2018): Research focuses on how humor in stand-up comedy intersects with gender body politics. Using body-related humor and self-deprecation, the study examines how female comedians in a field traditionally dominated by men negotiate and reclaim their identities. Employing a qualitative method, they examined performances and conducted interviews with female comedians. The findings suggest that while self-deprecating humor may serve to perpetuate negative stereotypes, it also facilitates the understanding and transcendence of these biases by female comedians.

Women have historically been placed second to men, facing stereotypes and specific roles.

Humor can be positive (affiliative) or negative (aggressive), with positive humor creating bonds and negative humor targeting others. Women often use humor that focuses on positive things or makes people feel good. Men tend to use humor that involves making fun of or criticizing others.

(Rodriguez, 2019)
The analytical study conducted by (Kumar et al.,2024) demonstrates how different people view humor. This research examines and evaluates the relationship between popular components and characteristics of stand-up and comedy shows. Findings show that comedians view personal insults or experiences as highly humorous material when performing stand-up shows, where double-meaning jokes and expressions, abusive language, body shaming, political satire, stereotypes and exaggerations, and sexual remarks are all excellent ways to achieve happiness or pleasure. It briefs us about the sarcastic ways humor is used in stand-up comedy.

Stand-up comedy has evolved from mere entertainment to become a powerful medium for social and political commentary, particularly in the Indian context. It highlights the distinctive qualities of Indian English and Hindi harsh stand-up comedy. The paper offers insights into the ways in which humor can be manipulated and utilized to analyze society. Humor is tested and categorized in this study, which applies to stand-ups as a tool for comedy. This research makes an important contribution to our understanding of how comedy may be used to question current narratives and promote democratic values in society by critically studying the works of Indian stand-up comedians. (Ahmad et al., 2022)

(Wawrzyniuk, 2021) reports on a qualitative investigation examining how stand-up comedy viewers approach humor analysis. In accordance with this research, stand-up comedy is frequently connected to profanity and vulgarity when it comes to language. This research addresses a preliminary study that was conducted. This investigation used seven different narratives from four different comedy programs. The research done here showed that the general theory of verbal comedy may be expanded upon and its focus shifted from the production of humor to the interpretation of humor.

STAND UP COMEDY AS A MEDIUM OF EXPRESSION
Stand-up comedy is an artistic expression in which the artist shares their observations and personal experiences on simple, daily life topics and simultaneously makes jokes about certain topics that might be considered offensive or controversial to the audience members. The risque element in such comedy is what keeps the entirety of the comic sphere alive.

Laughter is the metric used for determining the success of these humorous acts. It is conducted in an intimate fashion

in a comedy club with a small audience and a stage with a mic on it. (Sahoo, 2018, p. 13)

(O'keefe, 2019) suggests that stand-up comedy may be a fantastic medium for provoking thought and shifting perceptions of gender roles in society in addition to being a great way to make people laugh. What Western cultures ideas about gender and sexuality are influenced by and reflected in stand-up comedy. It may surprise you to learn that the way a joke is delivered can affect how the audience takes it. Jokes with shock value or sarcasm are more likely to question the status quo but narratives or jokes that make fun of gender stereotypes might purposefully reinforce them.

While there are vast amounts of studies being conducted regarding the stand-up comedy sphere, none of them pay heed to the scenario in the South- Asian context-specifically the Indian subcontinent.

Stand-up comedy is an aggressive form of humor, traditionally dominated by men. Women in comedy face challenges in getting booked and being perceived equally. (Rodriguez, 2019)

BODY IMAGE
Body image is one's perception of their body, their level of attractiveness, or the acceptance they desire from society for their body shape, size, and other features.

Cultivation Theory suggests that consistent representation of certain body types, attributes, personality traits and omission of specific attributes can influence viewers to accept them as de facto truths. These effects are not immediate or imposing but are subtle, psychological changes.

Negative body image has been a topic of discussion since the sixth century BC (Eco, 2004). It refers to how people see, think, and feel about their own appearance (Ferrari et al., 2016).

With the rise of social media, its use has become widespread. This constant media exposure brings body image concerns to the forefront. People strive to be accepted by peers, which involves conforming to socially acceptable standards of appearance (Collins, 2003). Rejection and daily teasing can lead victims to change their behavior patterns, isolate themselves, and adopt unhealthy weight control practices (Ribeiro-Silva et al., 2017). (Teeters, 2018)

Participants displayed negative body image influenced by the type and number of media consumed. Males generally showed more body satisfaction compared to females. Age and gender were not significant factors in body image. Negative body image can lead to eating disorders, emotional distress, and psychological impairment (Goss & Gilbert, 2011). Understanding adult body image is crucial for preventing such disorders. (Teeters, 2018)

BODY SHAMING

A recurring feature of female standup comics content is the description of the bodies of women which aren't as per widely accepted social and cultural norms. The use of literary devices is prominent in such acts. Palta in another video of hers has perpetuated stereotypes regarding what is considered attractive in terms of femininity and masculinity. (Sahoo, 2018)

In the Kapil Sharma Show, performer Rochelle Rao's portrayal of a female called "Lottery Akela" commodifies her body for the purpose of eliciting laughter. Often in such comedies, the female anatomy becomes a means to an end to provide a punchline or a closing joke. Further, women with a traditionally attractive countenance are frequently used to promote the ideal of the married man flirting with the "attractive other woman" while subtly insulting their wives. (Sharma, 2021). Other tags like "gorgeous, beautiful, sexy" are derogatory in nature as they are being described as the primary feature/ attribute of a woman. Such stereotypes reduce women to as sexually attractive beings and relay their sole reason of existence as childbirth. (Sharma, 2021)

In today's culture, viewers are increasingly exposed to fat-shaming and body-shaming on television and in movies. This exposure normalizes body shaming, encouraging bullying and negative behaviors in daily life. Some popular shows mock overweight people, associate them with negative traits, or use them as the butt of jokes. Body shaming means saying mean things about how someone looks, whether it's their size, shape, or appearance. This can be about other people or even about yourself. (Fernandes, 2023)

Body shaming leads to mental health issues like depression This negativity can contribute to serious issues where individuals might develop unhealthy behaviors or struggle with their self-image and confidence. Therefore, how we talk about and perceive bodies can have significant impacts on mental health. Television significantly impacts society by setting norms and influencing attitudes. Prolonged exposure to body shaming content can lead viewers to accept these behaviors as normal. (Fernandes, 2023)

(Fasoli et al.) stated, the usage of self-deprecating jokes was done to not only connect with the audience but also to get their approval. The paper concluded by stating that self-enhancing humor led to women having a positive body image while self-defeating humor led to women having a negative body image.

IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL NORMS AND BEHAVIOUR
Three factors that impact viewer influence include comparison with peers, internal perception of the thin body and related ideas, and a situation where evaluation of the self becomes the locus of one's identity. (Cash & Labarge, 1996; Thompston & Stice, 2001; Jones, D. C., 2001)

Consumption of soap operas led to an internalized perception of body image and an innate desire to be thin amongst both girls and boys. The tests suggest that even if

the media personnel were to change the narrative on body image its effect would be extremely slow. (Tiggemann, 2005)

Commercialized Stage Plays survive on dark, misogynistic content revolving around sexism, racism, body shaming and casteism. Women with masculine physiques were bullied and called offensive names such as Sand (Bull), Undertaker (a popular wrestler). (Hira Siddique & Muhammad Rizwan Safdar, 2024)

In the modern era, where content often appears repetitive, stand-up comedians employ various techniques to remain relevant. They utilize their personal experiences and cultural insights to craft material that is both humorous and genuine.

Monetary incentives drive these performers to generate new content. The paper also explores the dual nature of social media, which can either support or hinder an artist's work. By sharing their jokes online, comedians can pinpoint their target demographic and attract fresh followers.

Social media also acts as a platform for experimentation, enabling comedians to gauge the reaction of their material. Nevertheless, the swift spread of content online can result in issues related to joke ownership and plagiarism by fellow comedians. Regardless of the obstacles, online platforms continue to be a valuable tool when it comes to comedians in order to assess audience feedback and enhance their performances. (Sturges)

In a careful close reading of the work of Finnish comedians, Keisalo demonstrates that comedians indeed guide their audiences towards particular interpretations. (Zijp, 2024)

GENDER BIASES IN COMEDY

Gender-based discrimination against women is examined through the lens of Nigerian internet comedies. The findings suggest that humorous depictions of women could contribute to the spread of myths and have a detrimental effect on women's mental health and sense of social dignity. Given the comedian's notoriety the study emphasizes the significance of laws and regulations pertaining to media literacy in reducing the harmful effects of such content on audiences particularly women and girls. (Akalonu & Ha, 2024)

Biases against women in comedy and the industry's male-dominated culture present significant obstacles for female comics. These problems come in many forms such as uneven compensation, little time on stage and a dearth of representation in important positions where decisions are made. Though their perseverance in these struggles highlights the importance of helpful procedures, female comedians typically employ innovative strategies that draw attention to their presence and challenge gender norms and regulations (Cook et al., 2022)

The impact of rape jokes with a gender bias on viewers feelings of shame. According to the study feminist jokes lessen shame by promoting empowerment and critical thinking but sexist jokes increase guilt and promote negative stereotypes. The study highlights comedy's dual power to heal and harm offering an intriguing look at how humor affects society's perceptions of touchy subjects like rape. The study highlights comedy's potential as a social weapon by taking a balanced approach to analysing the advantages and disadvantages of various rape joke genres. (Proulx, 2018)

The stand-up comedy industry remains male-dominated, with women often belittled and undermined through various means, from the types of jokes they can tell to their treatment onstage. (Rodriguez, 2019)

Women, who make up 49.6% of the world's population, continue to face inequality and underrepresentation. Despite efforts to promote gender equality, the television and film industry has seen limited success. Accurate and authentic representation of women requires more women creating content. (Luke, 2018)

Women are underrepresented in comedy films and television. Having more women writing, directing, and producing movies and shows can show women more realistically. (luke, 2018)

Out of 48 cases analyzed, 93.8% featured female characters, with 79.5% containing sexual language. Common instances included protagonists or cameras focusing on women's bodies. This portrayal contributes to mental health issues and perpetuates violence against women. (Akalonu & Ha, 2024)

The study highlights the prevalence of sexual objectification in online comedy, impacting how women are viewed and treated in society. (Akalonu & Ha, 2024)

METHODOLOGY USED IN REVIEWED PAPERS

Teeter's research aims to investigate the factors affecting adult body image and to what extent these factors influence adults. The research used surveys to explore how friends, TV, magazines, and social media affect how people view their own bodies and judge others' appearances. It aimed to understand how these influences impact feelings about body image and criticism of others' physical appearance. The researchers focused on understanding the connections between these factors and people's body image, body shaming behaviors, and feelings of shame directed towards others. (Teeters, 2018)

Fernandes used a mixed methodology. A qualitative case study focused on Bharti Singh, a comedian ridiculed for her weight on national TV, limiting her talent to jokes about her body. (fernandes, 2023)

Luke's study used qualitative interviews, critical reflections, and detailed content analysis to explore women's representation in comedy. (luke, 2018)

A mixed-method approach provided comprehensive

insights into the sexualization of women in online comedy skits. (Akalonu & Ha, 2024)

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive research design to analyze viewer perceptions of stand-up comedy content on YouTube and Instagram. Participants were shown visual stimuli in the form of relatively obscene images extracted from stand-up comedy content, as well as questions about the impact of stand-up comedy content and its influence on their perceptions.

DATA COLLECTION METHOD

Data was collected through a Google Form survey, which consisted of the following:

1. **Demographic Questions –** Basic details such as name and frequency of stand-up comedy content consumption.
2. **Visual Stimuli Presentation –** Respondents were shown selected relatively obscene images taken from stand-up comedy performances.
3. **Perception Measurement –** Likert Scale was used to measure participant responses. After

viewing the images, participants answered binary (Yes/No) statements such as "I like this ad", "This content is appropriate", and "I find this humorous."

SAMPLING

Sampling Technique:

Non-Probability Purposive sampling by selecting easily accessible young adults (18-45) in India who watch stand-up comedy, primarily through platforms like social media and online surveys.
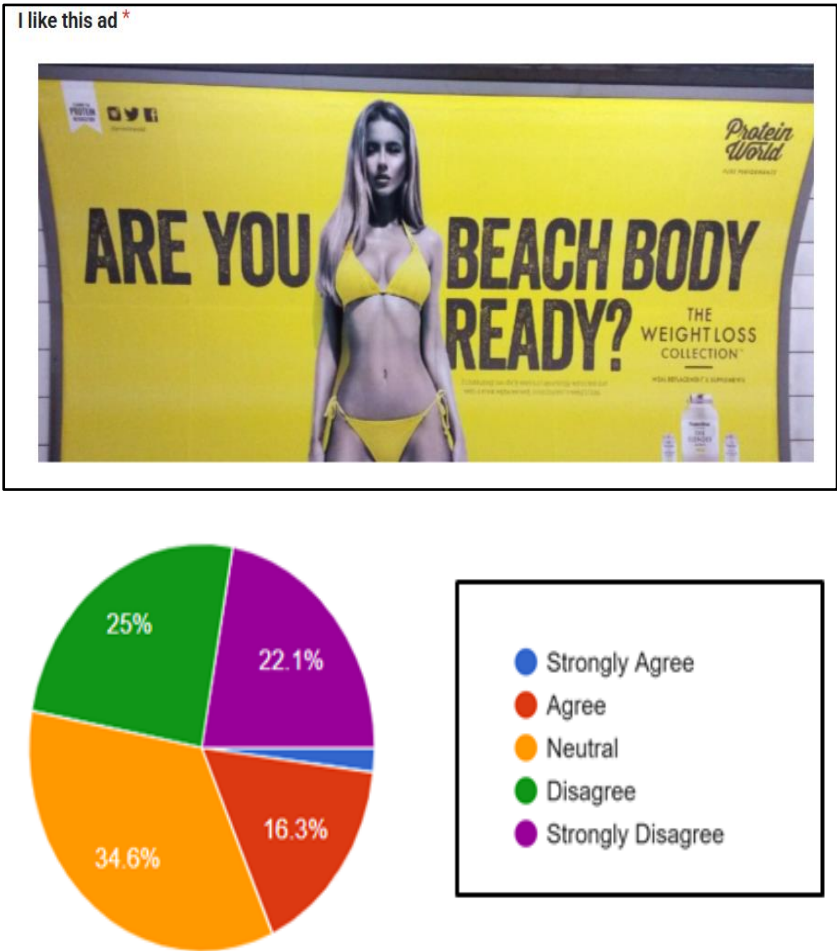
Universe:

All young adults and adults (18-45) across India who regularly watch stand-up comedy on platforms like Netflix, YouTube, and live performances, ensuring a diverse representation of genders and cultures.
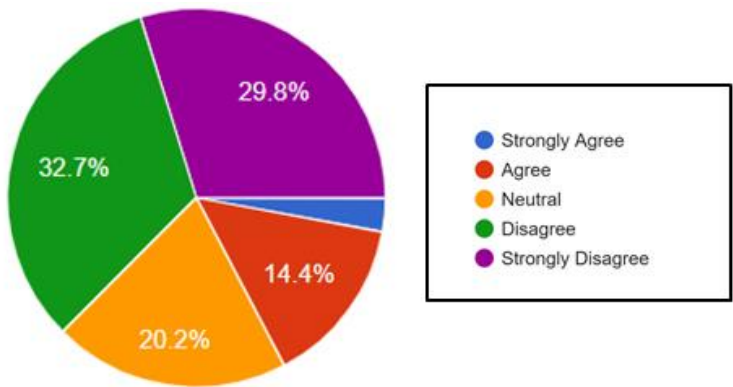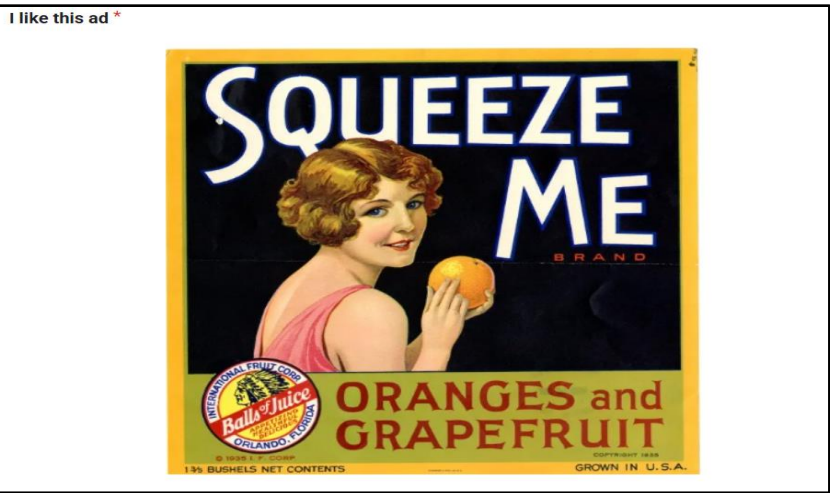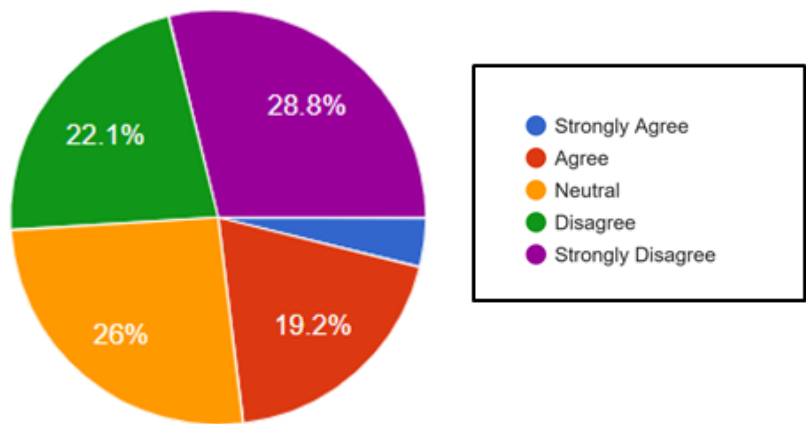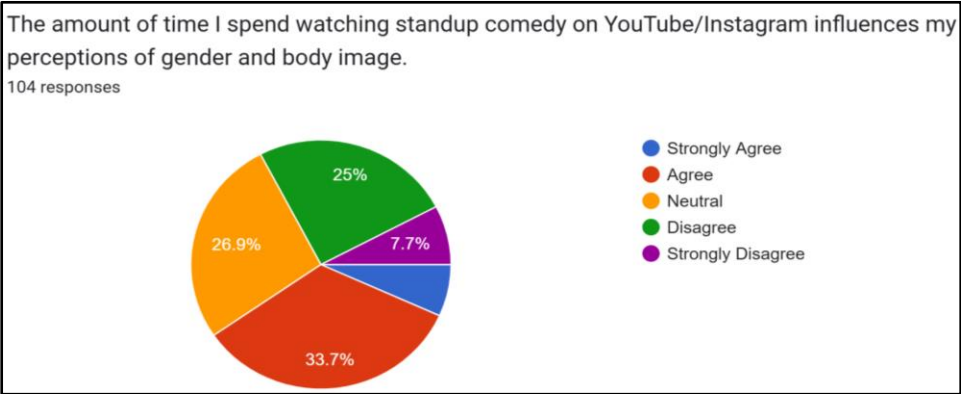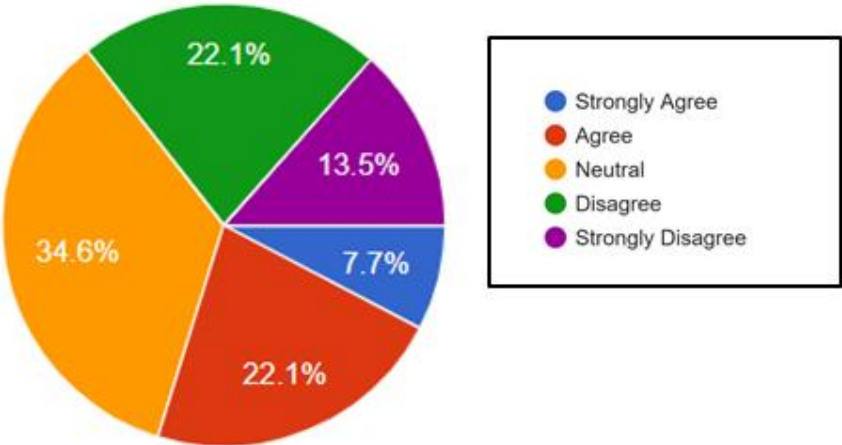
SAMPLING METHOD

Universal Sampling: All young adults and adults (18-45) who regularly watch stand-up comedy on platforms like Netflix, YouTube, and live performances, ensuring a diverse representation of genders and cultures.

SAMPLE SIZE IS 104 RESPONSES.
DATA ANALYSIS

I like this ad *

The amount of time I spend watching standup comedy on YouTube/Instagram influences my perceptions of gender and body image.

104 responses

The data shows mixed opinions on whether stand-up comedy affects views on gender and body image. While 40.4% think it has an influence, 32.7% disagree, and 26.9% are undecided. This suggests that comedy can shape social perspectives, but its impact depends on personal beliefs and how people engage with media. Some may absorb the messages in comedy, while others remain unchanged.
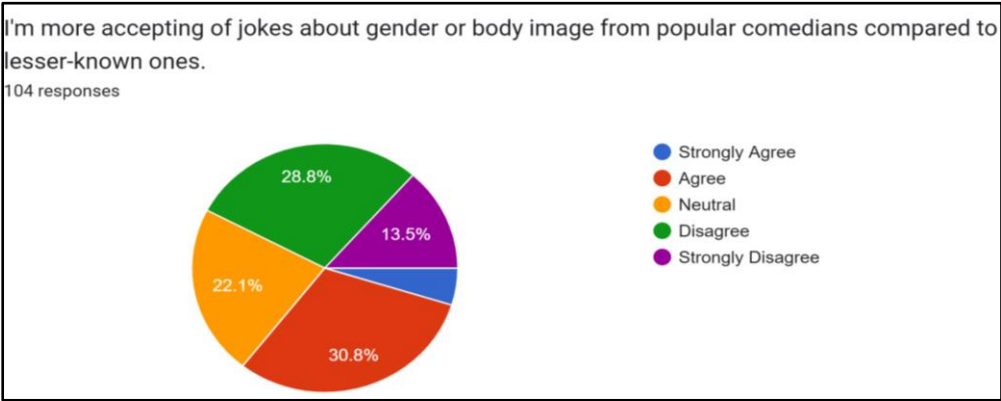
People have different views on whether a comedian's popularity influences their acceptance of jokes about gender and body image. 42.3% believe it doesn't matter, while 35.6% say they are more open to jokes from famous comedians, and 22.1% are unsure. This indicates that well-known comedians might be given more leeway because audiences are familiar with them, while newer comedians may be judged more harshly.
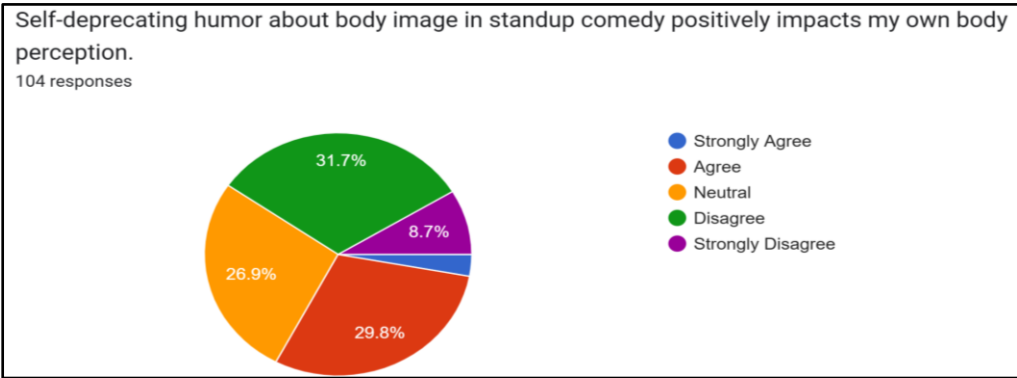

People have mixed views on whether self-deprecating humor about body image makes them feel better about their own appearance. While 40.4% say it does not help, 32.7% think it has a positive effect, and 26.9% are unsure. This means that while some find this type of humor relatable and uplifting, others feel it reinforces negative body perceptions. The impact depends on the comedian's style and the audience's perspective.
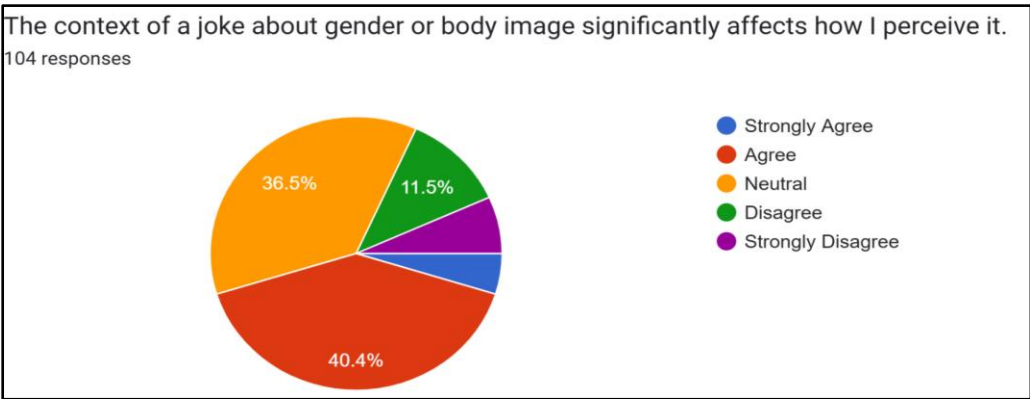

Most respondents believe that the context of a joke affects how they perceive it, with 45.2% agreeing and 18.2% disagreeing, while 36.5% remain neutral. This suggests that factors like delivery, intent, and setting influence audience reactions, though some people judge jokes independently of context.
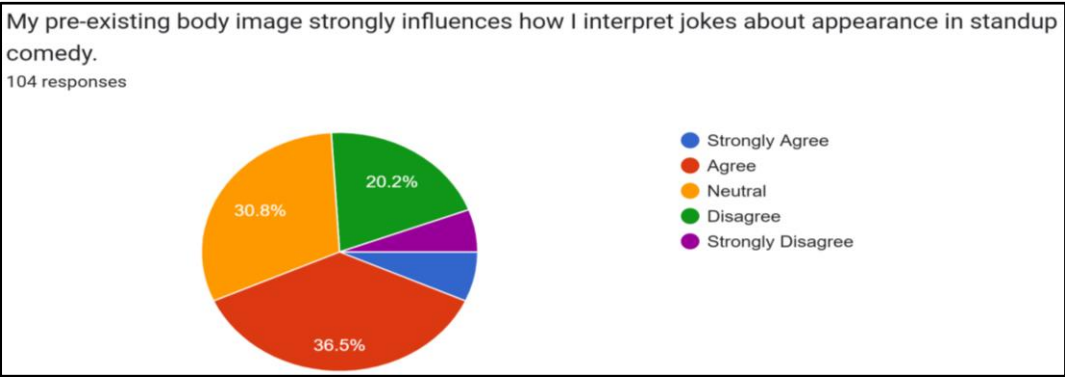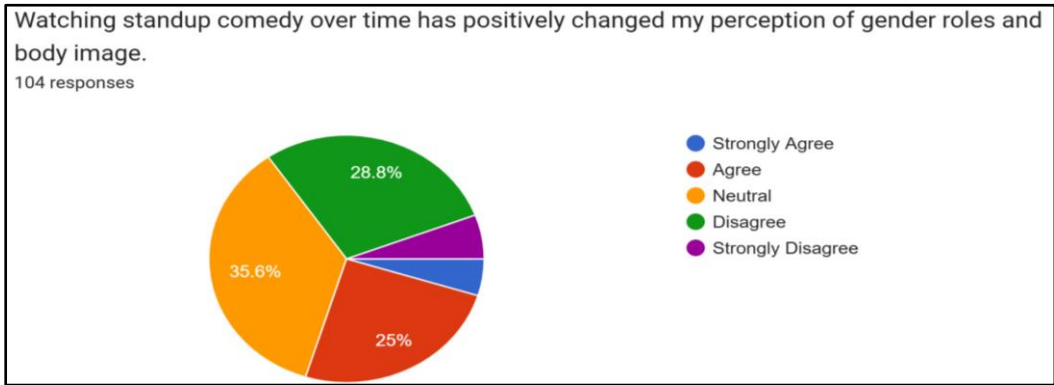
Some people feel their opinion on jokes about appearance is shaped by their own body image, with 43.2% agreeing and 26% disagreeing, while 30.8% are unsure. This means body perception can impact how people react to humor, but not everyone sees a strong connection.
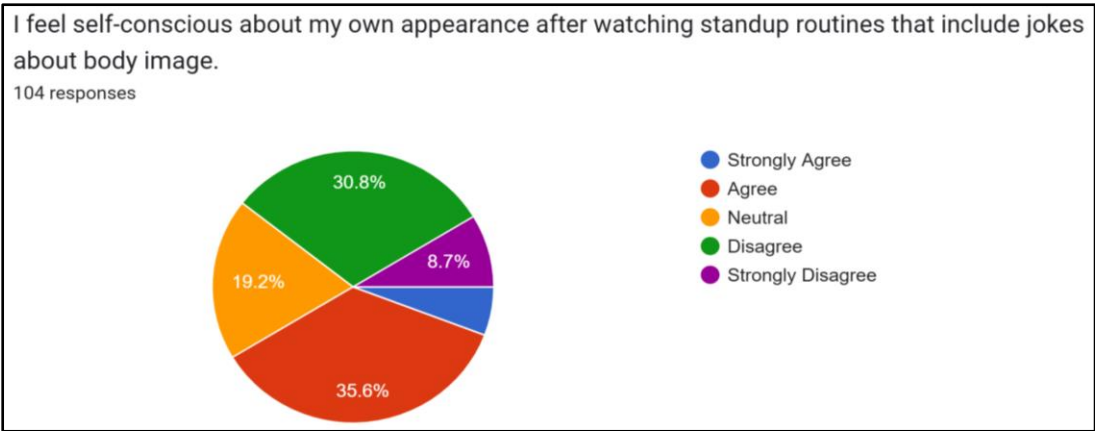
Stand-up routines that joke about body image make 41.4% of people feel self-conscious, while 39.5% remain unaffected, and 19.2% are unsure. This indicates that the influence of such humor varies among individuals based on personal perception and comedic style.
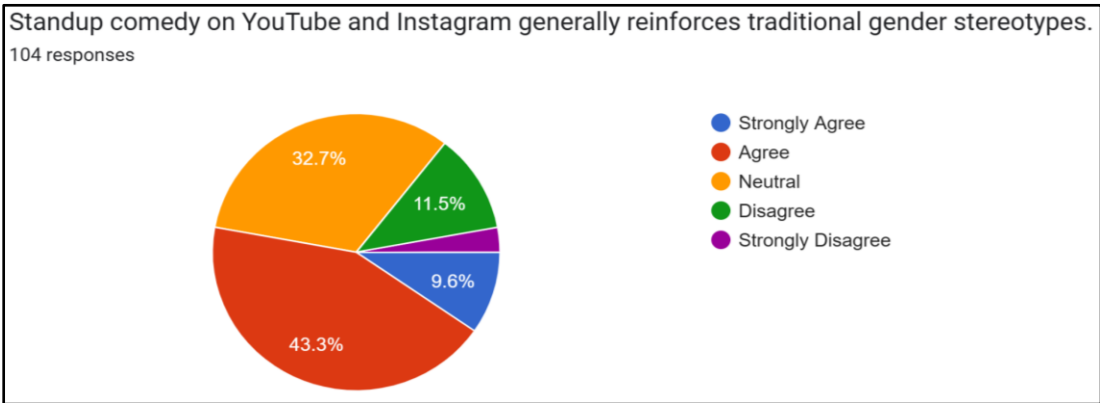
Over half of the respondents (52.9%) think stand-up comedy on social media reinforces traditional gender stereotypes, while 14.4% disagree, and 32.7% remain neutral. This suggests that many perceive comedy as maintaining outdated gender norms, though opinions vary.

Watching standup comedy over time has positively changed my perception of gender roles and body image.
104 responses

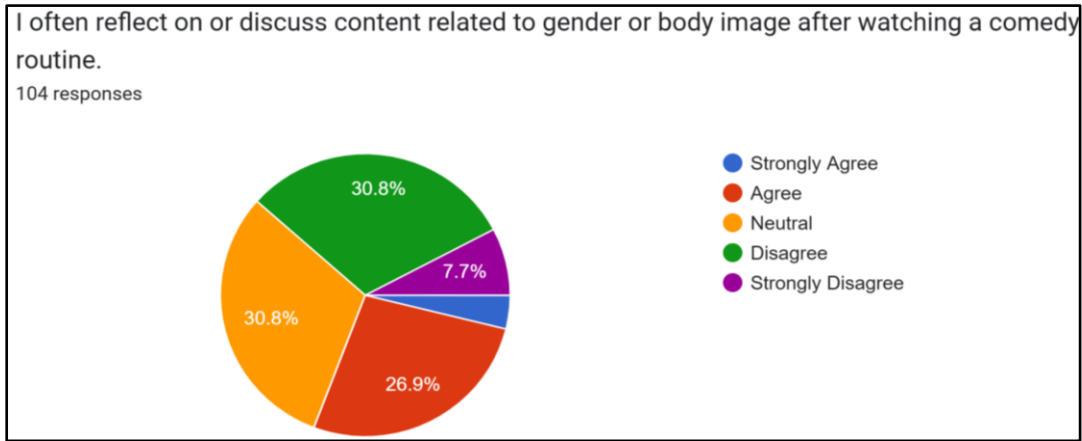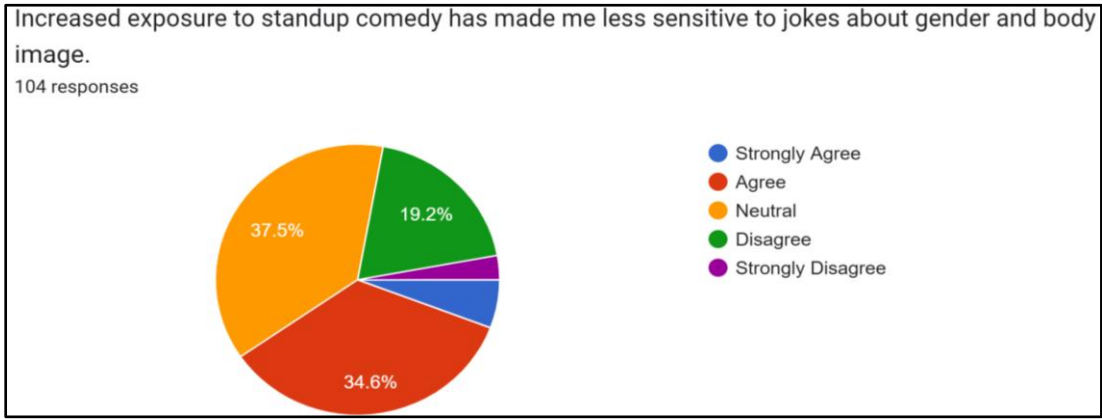Fewer than one-third (29.8%) of respondents feel that stand-up comedy has positively changed their views on gender roles and body image. 35.6% remain neutral, while 34.6% disagree, indicating that comedy's influence on these perceptions is not widely recognized.

I consider comedians to be credible commentators on gender and body image issues.
104 responses
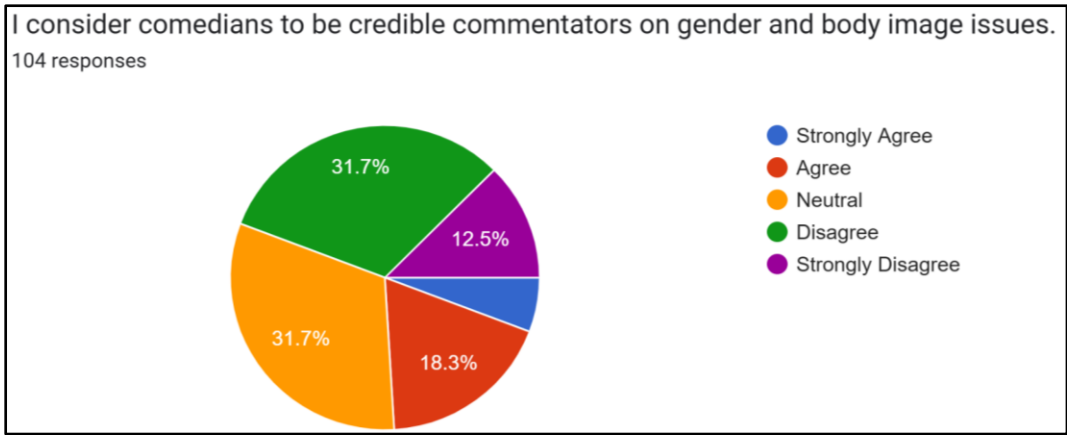
A minority (24.1%) believe comedians are reliable voices on gender and body image, while 31.7% remain undecided. Nearly half (44.2%) disagree, suggesting that many do not trust comedians to provide serious or accurate commentary on these issues.

I often reflect on or discuss content related to gender or body image after watching a comedy routine.
104 responses

About 30.7% of people think about or discuss gender and body image after watching comedy, while 38.5% do not, and 30.8% are undecided, indicating that stand-up comedy does not consistently spark deeper conversations on these topics.

Increased exposure to standup comedy has made me less sensitive to jokes about gender and body image.
104 responses

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

37.5% Neutral
19.2% Disagree
34.6% Agree

About 40.4% of respondents feel less sensitive to gender and body image jokes with more exposure to stand-up, while 22.1% do not, and 37.5% are neutral, suggesting that while comedy can normalize certain humor, its effect varies among individuals.

The standup comedy I watch on YouTube or Instagram significantly influences societal perceptions of gender and body image.
104 responses

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

26.9% Neutral
15.4% Disagree
8.7% Strongly Agree
45.2% Agree
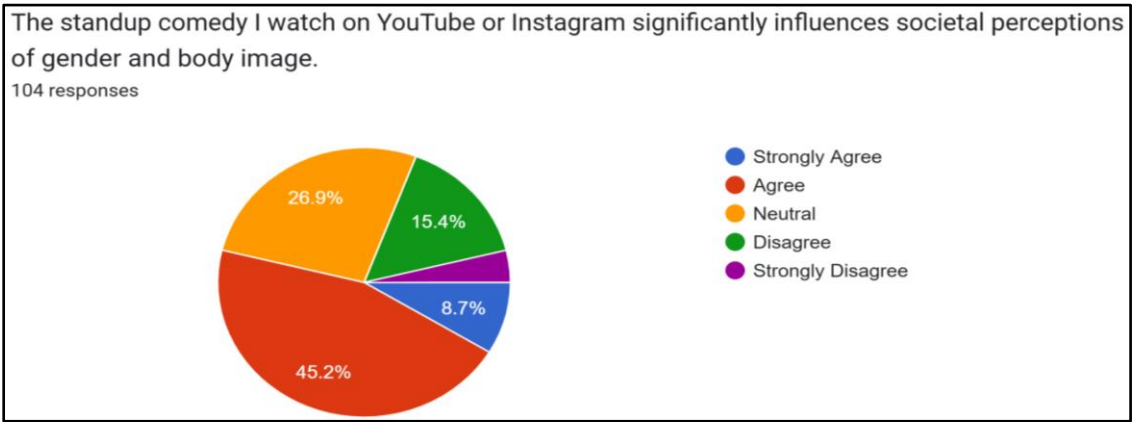
Over half of the respondents (53.9%) believe that stand-up comedy on platforms like YouTube and Instagram influences societal views on gender and body image. Comedy serves as both entertainment and social commentary, shaping public opinions by reinforcing or challenging stereotypes.

As comedians frequently discuss these topics in their routines, audiences may internalize the messages over time. This exposure can normalize discussions, shift perspectives, and impact societal attitudes. With its broad reach on social media, stand-up comedy plays a significant role in shaping conversations around gender and body image.

FINDINGS

The findings suggest that audience opinions on the impact of stand-up comedy on gender and body image are highly diverse, with no clear agreement. While some acknowledge its influence, others reject the idea or remain uncertain. This highlights the significant yet varied role of comedy in shaping societal attitudes, which largely depends on personal experiences, media exposure, and individual interpretation.

There is a noticeable divide in how people perceive jokes about gender and body image. Some believe comedy reinforces stereotypes, while others view it as a tool for social commentary and awareness. A considerable portion of respondents feel that stand-up comedy on digital platforms tends to uphold traditional gender roles rather than challenge them. However, many remain neutral, suggesting that the influence of comedy is subjective and shaped by personal perspectives.

The data also indicates mixed reactions to self-deprecating humor. While some find it relatable and uplifting, others believe it contributes to negative body image.

This suggests that the impact of such humor depends on the comedian's delivery, style, and audience perception. Similarly, the context in which a joke is presented plays a crucial role in how it is received. While many agree that tone and intent affect their reaction, others are indifferent to these factors.

Regarding comedians as credible voices on gender and body image, most respondents express doubt. While a smaller group considers comedians as reliable commentators on these issues, a significant number do not, with many remaining undecided. This suggests that while comedy can initiate discussions, it is not widely regarded as a serious or authoritative source of information on social issues.

Additionally, the findings show that stand-up comedy does not always lead to deeper reflection or discussions about gender and body image. While some people engage in conversations after watching comedy, others do not, and a

large portion remain neutral. Similarly, repeated exposure to jokes about gender and body image has desensitized some, while others have not noticed any change in their sensitivity to such humor.

Despite these variations in individual responses, many believe that stand-up comedy on social media platforms like YouTube and Instagram plays a role in shaping public perceptions of gender and body image. This suggests that whether consciously or unconsciously, comedy influences societal views on these topics. However, the extent of its influence varies from person to person, depending on their engagement with media content.

Overall, the audience falls into three key groups: those who see stand-up comedy as a powerful tool that shapes attitudes toward gender and body image, those who believe it has little to no effect, and those who remain undecided. This division highlights the complex role of comedy in society—it can challenge norms, reinforce stereotypes, or simply entertain without leaving a lasting impact. The research suggests that while stand-up comedy has the potential to shape opinions, its actual effect depends on how individuals interpret and respond to the content.

CONCLUSION

Our study examines the layers of stand-up video on YouTube and Instagram to determine its actual influence on gender stereotypes and body image perceptions in a time when comedy has evolved into a digital battlefield of social criticism.

The results show an unexpectedly neutral environment. Audiences stated that these platforms do not substantially change their opinions on gender and body image, even if comedy has the power to either support or contradict social standards. The striking range of comedic material accounts for this neutrality; certain routines may unintentionally reinforce preconceptions, while others purposefully subvert them.

The research sheds light on the intricate media consumption habits of contemporary audiences. It seems that comedy is a complex form of expression that captures the complexity of social perception rather than being a single, all-encompassing force. The total impact is balanced even though each humorous element may have varied degrees of influence.

This study provides a critical perspective of the intersection of comedy and social consciousness as digital platforms continue to transform entertainment. We discovered that our shared laughter is more complex than it first appears.

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