
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

A Study of Emotional Resonance in Workplace-Based Mocking Humor in Stand-up Comedy

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| ABSTRACT

This study examines how mocking humor elicits emotional resonance among audiences in Chinese workplace-themed stand-up comedy. Through meticulous analysis of 21 carefully selected performances from the renowned stand-up competition *King of Comedy*, the research uncovers two fundamental strategies—self-deprecation and satire—each skillfully executed through three distinct sub-techniques: direct statement, imagination, and comparison. Employing discourse analysis methods, the study demonstrates how comedians artfully transform ubiquitous workplace pressures, such as working overtime and excessive competition, into universally relatable daily narratives. The research further elucidates that self-deprecation effectively bridges social gaps by revealing personal vulnerabilities and imperfections, while satire serves as a powerful tool to externalize blame and validate collective criticism of workplace injustices. These strategies collaboratively evoke audience empathy toward common workplace dilemmas. The study significantly expands the scope of humor research beyond traditional Western perspectives. Moreover, it provides practical, actionable techniques for comedians to enhance audience engagement and emotional connection, offering valuable insights for both academic researchers and comedy practitioners alike.

| KEYWORDS

Stand-up comedy; Workplace; Mocking humor; Emotional resonance; Discourse analysis

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

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1. Introduction

In contemporary society, employees are subjected to multifaceted pressures arising from a fast-paced work environment, intense competition, frequent interpersonal interactions, and widespread sub-health conditions (Fan et al., 2017). Recent incidents have further revealed long-standing issues in the workplace, such as excessive overtime and workplace bullying. The persistent stress has led an increasing number of people to seek effective ways to alleviate psychological burdens and balance work with mental health. In this context, stand-up comedy has emerged as a new form of public expression, providing a platform for public to voice and exchange ideas, thereby contributing to the release of social pressures to some extent (Niu & Yang, 2023). Programs such as *King of Comedy* exemplify this trend, as they skillfully integrate humor with daily experiences, rendering them particularly effective in mitigating work-related stress. Against this backdrop, this study explores mocking humor strategies in Chinese workplace-themed stand-up comedy and their impact on audience emotional resonance.

Stand-up comedy, through vivid performance and incisive storytelling, humorously foregrounds the absurdities and frustrations of contemporary professional life, thereby providing office workers with a cathartic outlet. Mintz (1985) defines stand-up comedy as an encounter between a single standing performer behaving comically and/or saying funny things directly to an audience unsupported by very much in the way of costume, prop, setting, or dramatic vehicle. This minimalist yet potent form proves effective in revealing contemporary social issues. By comically reframing concrete workplace pain points—such as cut-throat promotion tournaments and the exploitation of interns—these routines resonate deeply with office workers and catalyze pronounced emotional resonance. In so doing, stand-up comedy intensifies reality-reflection through its distinctive comic and

mediatized techniques, forging a unique chain of sympathy with its audience (Dai & Sun, 2024) that simultaneously delivers emotional relief and advances an authentic, humor-laden critique of social inequities.

Existing study has predominantly concentrated on the performative techniques of stand-up comedy humor and their attendant persuasive effects, leaving the authentic emotional resonance enacted between comedian and audience comparatively under-examined. Logi and Zappavigna (2019) initiated a social-semiotic inquiry into interactional humor within the genre, while psychological research has foregrounded the role of dialogic rhythm and facial expressions in sustaining spectator engagement (Fabiola & Spagnoli, 2009). Communication scholars have investigated how comedic discourse mobilizes publics around social issues and shapes opinion formation (Borum Chattoo, 2019), and cultural analyses have explicated the capacity of stand-up comedy to deconstruct reality and circulate value systems (Li, 2021). From an anthropological perspective, DeCamp (2015) dissected performative tactics and their persuasive leverage, whereas Filani (2017) and Aarons & Mierowsky (2017) interrogated linguistic form—yet neither pair systematically theorized how linguistic choices specifically trigger emotional responses. Consequently, the present study seeks to redress this gap by interrogating the relationship between humor strategies and emotional resonance in stand-up comedy.

Employing discourse analysis, this study explores what humorous strategies exist in stand-up comedy and how they resonate with the audience's workplace experiences. It aims to offer a fresh analytical lens on contemporary occupational realities and furnishes theoretically grounded reference points for the composition and performance of stand-up material. Not only does it enrich the theoretical framework of humor studies, but also fills the research gap in this field from a non-Western perspective. Its findings will enable comedians to more accurately calibrate their routines to audience psychology, intensify the resonance of their texts, and provide new insights into the mechanisms behind the creation and reception of localized humor.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Stand-up Comedy

Stand-up comedy is a unique form that couples psychological relief with emotional resonance, while simultaneously staging personal identity and reflecting social issues. It has been proven to be one of the main components of an enjoyable performance (Idowu, 2020). Historical accounts by Daube (2010) trace its trajectory from closed-script monologue to an interactive performance event whose primary raw materials are autobiographical narrative and real-time audience negotiation. This performative mode makes performers to render personal identity and ideology publicly inspectable (Adetunji, 2013; Furukawa, 2011; Labrador, 2004; Tsang & Wong, 2004), thereby converting the performance into a surviving fortress of personal expression (Gillota, 2015) and a public spokesperson (Walker, 1998). The resultant performance is intrinsically multi-accentual: it fuses entertainment, identity construction, and social critique within a single discursive space. By translating social issues into comic tropes, stand-up comedy enriches cultural life and promotes communal interaction.

Researchers have conducted in-depth explorations of stand-up comedy from the perspectives of social communication, culture, pragmatics, etc. Borum Chattoo (2019) stated that stand-up comedy serves as a powerful tool for public influence and cultural dissemination, driving social justice transformation. Meanwhile, it leverages the Internet and technological innovation to popularize emotions, becoming a key form of social and cultural discourse and power expression (Niu & Yang, 2023). Pragmatic inquiries emphasise the co-operative nature of comic generation: comedians and audiences jointly negotiate humorous effects. Logi and Zappavigna (2021) argued that the paralinguistic resources employed by stand-up comedians to construct textual personae (impersonated characters) make a substantial contribution to the creation of humor. Filani (2021) adds that egoism enable performers to convert personal perspectives into comic capital that attracts and maintains audience engagement. Collectively, these viewpoints reveal the multi-faceted nature of stand-up comedy as a complex social and cultural phenomenon.

Stand-up comedy has garnered attention across various disciplines, yet current research remains limited. While studies have examined it from linguistic, media, and cultural perspectives (Aarons & Mierowsky, 2017; Greenbaum, 1999; Koziski, 1984; Mintz, 1985), they often fail to explore the linguistic mechanisms underlying emotional resonance. Additionally, researches predominantly focus on Western stand-up comedy's humor (DeCamp, 2015; Linares Bernabéu, 2023), with minimal exploration of non-Western humor mechanisms and cultural adaptability. To address these gaps, this study analyzes mocking humor in Chinese stand-up comedy and their resonance with audience workplace and emotional experiences.

2.2 Mocking Humor

Workplace-themed stand-up comedy presents a humorous trait based on critical reflection. As Yan (2024) notes, humor, as a subtle and profound cultural form, is based on reflection on reality and is also a new perspective for people to face reality. In the context of workplace-themed stand-up comedy, humor is used to deeply analyze workplace phenomena and social issues, reflecting performers' unique insights. Contemporary research further indicates that modern comedic expression is more reflected in the

exploration of personal inner emotions and a sense of humor (Berger, 2014). Stand-up comedians weave personal workplace experiences, emotions, and life reflections into their acts, deeply resonating with audiences. Moreover, humor serves as a unique tool for the oppressed, enabling them to mock dominant ideologies and express their frustrations (Downe, 1999). By converting workplace dissatisfactions into humorous utterances, office workers obtain a safe discursive space in which grievances can be effectively and publicly voiced.

In the past decades, research on humor strategy in stand-up comedy has gradually attracted attention. For example, Freud (2001) once proposed the concept of aggressive humor, arguing that this form of humor degrades, despises enemies, or makes them ridiculous and comedic. In addition, Logi and Zappavigna (2019) pointed out that interactional humor is a field that examines humor in real-life interactive contexts, focusing on the reactions to humor, its social functions, and its sociocultural background (Chovanec & Tsakona, 2018). It is realized through dialogic resources such as dialogism, projected voice (Bakhtin, 2010), and non-verbal expression, and can be interpreted as a negotiation of values between the comedian and the audience. Meanwhile, Heidari-Shahreza (2017) further refined analytic granularity by cataloguing language, logic, identity, and action humor as recurrent stand-up varieties. Yet, because these categories address comic effect in general terms, they leave the specific challenges and asymmetrical power relations that characterize the workplace largely untheorized.

Given these limitations, research is now needed to examine how stand-up comedians use mocking humor to critique pressing workplace issues—such as power abuse and work–life imbalance—turning workplace dilemmas into material that audiences can laugh at and reflect upon. Preliminary observations indicate that this as-yet-unmapped humorous register simultaneously ridicules workplace pathologies and foregrounds personal vulnerability, thereby offering employees a socially acceptable avenue to air grievances and engage in self-reflection. The present study therefore addresses this lacuna by systematically mapping the strategies that constitute mocking humor and by empirically explicating their impact on audience emotional resonance within Chinese workplace-themed stand-up comedy.

2.3 Research Questions

Existing study on stand-up comedy remains disproportionately anchored in Western contexts, leaving the distinctive discursive features of Chinese performances under-examined. Moreover, workplace humor remains under-explored, though both pervasive and socially resonant. Although the genre's entertainment value and critical potential are well documented, the precise mechanisms through which it elicits emotional resonance among spectators continue to warrant empirical scrutiny. Focusing on workplace narratives in Chinese stand-up comedy, the present study therefore asks: (1) What types of mocking humor strategies are there? (2) How do these strategies connect with the emotional resonance of the workplace audience? By answering these questions, the inquiry seeks to redress current gaps and to advance theoretical understanding of how mocking humor in Chinese stand-up comedy operates as an affective catalyst.

3. Methodology

3.1 Data

The dataset for this study is derived from the Chinese stand-up comedy competition program *King of Comedy*. The program premiered on iQIYI on August 16, 2024, and concluded on October 19, 2024. The program centers on stand-up performances, featuring both amateur and professional comedians competing on the same stage. The final scores of the contestants are determined by the combined votes of the judges and the audience, with the evaluation mechanism as follows: each audience member can cast one vote for the contestants, and the four judges will vote to each contestant by pushing the lamp. The number of votes awarded by pushing the lamp varies depending on the stage of the competition. The judges decide when to push the lamp based on the contestants' performances. After voting, judges provide feedback or explain their lamp-pushing decisions. The host then announces the contestant's final score.

Workplace narratives constitute a salient thematic strand in *King of Comedy*. Of the 134 performances broadcast, 21 (15.67%) center explicitly on occupational experiences, a proportion that signals the topic's discursive prominence. This prevalence is doubly consequential: first, workplace-related stories possess wide demographic reach, enabling rapid alignment between performer and audience; second, the intricate web of interpersonal relationships, systemic pressures and normative challenges inherent in contemporary work cultures furnishes comedians with abundant raw material for narrative elaboration. Consequently, the present study treats the workplace-related performances as an analytical entry-point through which to interrogate the processes of emotional resonance and social reflection enacted within the program.

This study constructs its corpus from the workplace-themed performances featured in *King of Comedy*. Through verbatim transcription and cross-verification of the complete performance texts, the dataset comprises 21 acts delivered by 14 comedians, encompassing narratives of workplace grievances, and grassroots service experiences that collectively illuminate the complexity

and diversity of contemporary worklife. To ensure comprehensive data integrity, all interactional details—including judges' lamp-pushing moments and their corresponding feedback—have been retained, thereby preserving the on-site contextual influences within the total corpus of 45,505 Chinese characters (30,090 English words).

To guarantee both diversity and completeness, the dataset was assembled according to the following principles: (1) only performances officially tagged as "workplace" were retained, ensuring topical coherence; (2) acts were purposively sampled to cover comedians from distinct occupational backgrounds, thereby maximizing thematic breadth and viewpoint variety; (3) all interactional features—judges' lamp-pushings, real-time feedback, and audience responses—were preserved in full, furnishing rich data for examining comedic effect, linguistic style, performance strategy, and emotional resonance within the program.

3.2 Methods

This study employs discourse analysis to address two research questions by systematically analyzing the performance texts related to workplace topics in *King of Comedy*. Discourse analysis involves identifying and analyzing language strategies, workplace issues, and emotional resonance elements in the text to reveal how the humor strategies in comedy performances resonate with workplace people emotionally.

To extract humor strategies from the 21 workplace-themed stand-up segments, this study employed a two-tier coding protocol that prioritized "direction" first and "device" second. In tier one, each entire segment was scrutinized for its primary target of criticism: if the punchlines predominantly targeted the performer himself—such as personal mistakes, shortcomings, or embarrassing experiences—the segment was labeled "self-deprecation"; if the attack was directed at an external entity (e.g., a supervisor, company rule, or industry phenomenon), it was assigned to "satire." This binary division renders the first-level categories mutually exclusive and clearly demarcated. In tier two, focusing on discursive device, all segments already tagged as "self-deprecation" or "satire" underwent a further round of coding. Three operational indices were applied: (1) whether the comic point is delivered in a straightforward manner; (2) whether an obviously fictional or exaggerated scenario is introduced; and (3) whether a third-party reference is constructed for contrast. On this basis we distinguished three sub-types—direct, imaginative, and comparative—which provide a systematic and replicable category framework for the subsequent analysis linking humor strategies to emotional resonance.

After completing the humor-strategy taxonomy, the study selected one illustrative extract for each subtype and followed two sampling principles. First, the "ubiquitous-topic" principle prioritizes issues that resonate with the broad workforce—e.g., unpaid overtime, managerial psychological pressure, and hyper-competition among peers. The closer the topic is to daily experience, the wider the audience resonance, ensuring high typicality and representativeness of the data. Second, the "diverse-perspective" principle requires cases to cover performers of varied backgrounds, preventing viewpoint bias arising from a homogeneous sample and guaranteeing a richer, more comprehensive workplace narrative. Finally, using these extracts, the study explicates the intrinsic mechanism by which the performance resonates with viewers, arguing that it achieves emotional resonance and collective identity through the concretization of workplace experiences.

Through this detailed analysis, this study not only reveals the humor strategies in *King of Comedy* and their impact on audience emotional resonance, but also provides a new perspective for understanding contemporary workplace culture.

4. Analysis

An earlier phase of this study, drawing on 21 workplace monologues from *King of Comedy*, identified self-deprecation and satire as the two dominant comic strategies. Applying the present methodological framework, the analysis proceeds by dissecting each modality in turn: performers disclose personal workplace losses through direct, imaginative and comparative forms of self-deprecation, while deploying parallel satirical techniques to censure figures of authority. The two tactics function as complementary halves of a single discursive formation. Shrouded in humor, they deliver incisive commentaries on organizational life, enabling spectators to recognize collective predicaments and to obtain psychological relief through laughter.

4.1 Self-deprecation in stand-up comedy

Self-deprecation is a discursive strategy whereby performers voluntarily expose their own shortcomings, errors, or embarrassing experiences, adopting a light-hearted and humorous tone to mock themselves. Its rhetorical core lies in transforming the self into a comic target, thereby eliciting audience empathy and laughter. Rather than genuine self-denial or self-harm, the device emphasizes the acceptance and humorous resolution of personal flaws. Within workplace-oriented stand-up comedy, three recurrent variants can be identified: direct, imaginative, and comparative self-deprecation. Collectively, these forms demonstrate comedians' capacity to convert individual inadequacies into shared comic capital while offering incisive, humorous commentaries on the lived realities of worklife.

4.1.1 Direct self-deprecation

Direct self-deprecation denotes a discursive mode in which performers articulate their own shortcomings, inadequacies, or embarrassing experiences through frank, unembellished disclosure, eschewing exaggerated scenarios or external points of comparison. The core of this strategy derives from its authenticity and directness: comedians employ plain, direct language to highlight personal flaws, convert them into comic material, and thereby secure audience empathy and laughter.

Extract 1:

小罗：然后我之前有另外一份正经工作，辞职的原因是因为那个工作强度太大，身体吃不消了。我辞职之前做了一次体检，你知道那个体检报告，如果指标偏高的话，在数字边上不是有个向上的小箭头吗？我打开我的体检报告，几乎
所有箭头都向上。我以为我升级了。(20240816)

Xiao Luo: So, I used to have a decent job, but I quit because the workload was just too intense and I couldn't take it anymore. Before I resigned, I had a medical check-up. You know those medical reports, right? When the indicators are too high, there's an upward arrow next to the numbers. Well, when I looked at my report, almost all the arrows were pointing up. I thought I had been upgraded.

In Extract 1, the comedian Xiao Luo's performance presents a quintessential case of direct self-deprecation. First, Xiao Luo addresses the subject without circumlocution, directly attributing his resignation to excessively high work intensity that resulted in abnormal indicators on his medical report. He employs no external comparisons or exaggerated scenarios, instead focusing squarely on his personal situation. By starkly stating that "almost all the arrows were pointing up," he vividly illustrates his compromised health condition, subsequently reframing this ostensibly alarming result through a naive interpretation. His self-deprecating remark—"I thought I had been upgraded"—transforms a health crisis into the absurd concept of leveling up in a game. This approach maintains authenticity and directness while simultaneously defusing an awkward situation through humor.

Secondly, the performance acutely captures a universal pain point among contemporary professionals. It starkly reveals how high-pressure work environments erode employee health, reflecting pervasive occupational issues such as excessive overtime and intense work-related stress. The phrase "the workload was just too intense and I couldn't take it anymore" transcends individual rationale for resignation, resonating as a shared dilemma among many workers. The "upward arrows" on the medical report serve as a potent symbolic representation of the tangible damage inflicted by work, instantly recognizable to anyone who has endured the exhaustion of burnout.

Finally, the performance elicits strong empathy by engaging multiple emotional dimensions. Primarily, it taps into shared anxieties about health—every professional has experienced trepidation awaiting medical results. Secondly, it articulates the powerlessness felt when balancing work and well-being—the paradoxical mindset of persisting in harmful work conditions despite awareness of the consequences. Ultimately, it offers catharsis through humor: the metaphor of "upgrading" not only conveys the performer's resilience but also provides the audience with an emotional outlet to process their own anxieties. This technique of levity addressing gravitas allows the audience to release pent-up pressure and concerns through laughter.

4.1.2 Imaginative self-deprecation

Imaginative self-deprecation is a comic strategy in which the performer inserts the "real self" into a manifestly fictional role or scenario, thereby generating an absurd contradiction between actual identity and the fictional identity. The device rests on two sequential operations: first, the construction of an overtly imagined figure or situation that displaces direct self-disclosure; second, the enactment of inappropriate, incompetent, or maladaptive behaviors within that fabricated frame. The resulting gap between the authentic self and the fictional construct renders the performer's shortcomings indirectly visible, and the irreconcilable contradiction between the two planes becomes the primary source of humor.

Extract 2:

刘旸：我为了抢段子，我被车撞了都没关系。我骑着单车去开放麦，然后路上一辆卡车嘣把我撞了，护士把我的残骸捡到救护车上，捡的时候也不会耽误我抢段子，我会掏出我的段子本给护士说别管我，拿着这个，去开放麦，上台念出来。就说是刘旸先讲的。(20240913)

Liu Yang: I was so eager to grab a joke that even getting hit by a car wouldn't stop me. I was riding my bike to the open mic when a truck suddenly hit me. The nurse picked up my remains and put them in the ambulance, but even then, I wouldn't miss the chance to grab that joke. I'd pull out my joke book and tell the nurse, "Forget about me, just take this to the open mic and read it out. Say it was Liu Yang who told it first."

In Extract 2, comedian Liu Yang's performance serves as a paradigmatic example of imaginative self-deprecation. Firstly, the performance meticulously aligns with the two fundamental mechanisms of this comedic strategy. The performer begins by constructing an entirely fictional extreme scenario—being reduced to “remains” after a truck collision while still giving last instructions about his comedy material in an ambulance. This clearly surreal narrative framework establishes the premise for incongruous self-deprecation. Subsequently, within this fabricated context, he deliberately manufactures multiple layers of contradiction: a moribund individual prioritizes the ownership of his comedic material over medical salvation; medical professionals tasked with preserving life are instead recruited as messengers for joke delivery. The stark disparity between authentic human needs and fictional behaviors, coupled with the absurd dissonance between imminent mortality and professional dedication, generates potent comedic tension.

Secondly, the performance offers a profound reflection on the alienation of values in contemporary workplace culture. Through this absurdist narrative, Liu Yang indirectly critiques the distorted professionalism prevalent among modern workers—an alienated state where work outcomes supersede individual well-being. This portrayal not only reveals the intense competition within creative industries but also mirrors widespread occupational anxieties. The performer's extreme preoccupation with intellectual property attribution further exposes the reality of individuals being reduced to mere instruments of productivity in modern organizational structures.

Finally, the effectiveness of this performance stems from its resonance with collective workplace experiences. It engages viewers through shared recognition of professional pressures—while exaggerated, the depiction of life-risking dedication reflects authentic aspects of modern work life. The audience's laughter derives from simultaneous recognition of this professional ethos and awareness of its inherent absurdity, creating cathartic release. Furthermore, the performance stimulates critical reflection on pathological tendencies within contemporary work culture, prompting consideration of how to maintain concern for personal well-being while pursuing professional achievement.

4.1.3 Comparative deprecation

Comparative deprecation is a form of self-deprecation where performers compare themselves with a reference object that is clearly superior to themselves in order to highlight their own inadequacies or shortcomings, thereby creating a humorous effect. The device is contingent upon the introduction of a third-party benchmark. By means of this comparative displacement, discrepancies in status, competence, or achievement are thrown into sharp relief, allowing the audience to apprehend incongruity and experience comic effect.

Extract 3:

南瓜：但外卖这个行业也没有前两年那么好做了，因为做的人越来越多了，甚至有好多 大学生现在出来也送外卖，跟人抢饭碗。这些大学生怎么说呢，当年高考就被他们淘汰过一次了，怎么现在毕了业又来跟人竞争，追着人砍。(20240824)

Nan Gua: But the food delivery business isn't as easy as it was a couple of years ago. More and more people are getting into it, even college graduates are now delivering food and competing for the same jobs. What can you say about these college students? They eliminated me in the college entrance exam back then. And now, after graduation, they're competing with me again, as if they're chasing me with a knife.

In Extract 3, the comedian Nangua effectively utilizes the core technique of comparative self-deprecation by introducing a well-defined third-party reference group—college students. The performance applies a two-tiered comparative structure to reinforce its self-deprecating effect. The first comparison occurs in the academic domain, where Nangua acknowledges being “eliminated by them once in the college entrance examination,” openly admitting his disadvantage in educational competition while establishing groundwork for subsequent analysis. The second comparison operates in the professional sphere, as he observes that college students “now graduate and come to compete in our industry,” skillfully converging the previously parallel trajectories of these two social groups.

The routine further reflexes the sociological phenomenon of college students entering food delivery services, visually demonstrating both the tightening job market and intensified social involution—where highly educated individuals are compelled to enter basic service industries, thereby constraining the occupational space of original workers. Nangua's comedic narrative gives voice to widespread concerns among ordinary workers, articulating a pervasive sense of professional insecurity wherein even seemingly low-threshold occupations like food delivery no longer offer stability. Moreover, the performance reveals a persistent survival pressure characterizing modern society: competitive selection has evolved from periodic mechanisms (e.g., national exams) into a perpetual and inescapable marathon.

The performance resonates profoundly because it accurately captures contemporary existential anxieties. Delivery workers recognize the brutal reality of diminishing opportunities; college students identify with self-deprecating humor about credential devaluation; all working people relate to the powerlessness of being trapped in endless competition. For the broader audience, the exaggerated metaphor of “chasing me with a knife” vividly depicts collective societal anxiety amid widespread involution, enabling viewers to achieve profound identity recognition and emotional catharsis through wry laughter.

4.2 Satire in stand-up comedy

Satire is a comic strategy whereby performers, through a light-hearted yet incisive tone, mock or expose the shortcomings of external entities—individuals, practices, or phenomena. Rather than outright denigration, its core lies in highlighting contradictions, absurdities, or deficiencies via acute observation and witty formulation, eliciting laughter that prompts critical reflection. Characterized by playful teasing and heightened comedic color, satire delivers a tempered critique of social realities or behavioral patterns within a relaxed performative frame. In workplace-oriented stand-up comedy, three recurrent types are observed: direct, imaginative, and comparative satire. These forms merge humor with insight, furnishing performers with an entertaining yet critical lens through which to interrogate organizational life.

4.2.1 Direct satire

Direct satire is a discursive mode in which performers, grounding their material in empirically observable phenomena, deploy sharp, unvarnished language to confront and indict a clearly delimited target—be it an individual, behavior, or institutional practice. It often does not rely on exaggerated fiction or roundabout comparisons but confronts the core contradiction head-on, pinpointing its absurdity or unreasonableness. While the delivery may be colored by affective stances such as anger or helplessness, the account retains factual accuracy and resists hyperbolic vilification, thereby preserving credibility. This head-on strategy, distinguished by its precision and verisimilitude, facilitates immediate audience recognition and enables a potent yet temperate critique of social or personal misconduct through humor.

Extract 4:

翟佳宁: 我永远忘不了我在杭州加班的记录, 就是连续 加班加俩礼拜到下半夜凌晨四点。就什么感觉呢? 朋友们, 你们听过一句话没有? 科比说的, 你见过凌晨四点的太阳吗? 我看俩礼拜了呢! 凌晨四点根本就没有太阳。 (20240831)

Zhai Jianing: I'll never forget my record of working overtime in Hangzhou. I worked overtime for two consecutive weeks until 4 a.m. What was the feeling? Guys, have you ever heard a saying? Kobe said, "Have you ever seen the sun at 4 a.m.?" I've seen it for two weeks! There's no sun at 4 a.m. at all.

Zhai Jianing's performance exemplifies a quintessential case of direct satire. Commencing with his personal narrative—“working overtime in Hangzhou”—and directly addresses the prevalent workplace phenomenon of excessive overtime. His language is straightforward and unadorned. The assertion “working overtime for two consecutive weeks until 4 a.m.” presents factual information in a plain and simple way, devoid of intricate complex comparisons or fictional scenarios, yet it delivers a powerful impact. Additionally, he amplifies the humorous effect of direct satire by deconstructing Kobe Bryant's famous quote, “Have you ever seen the sun at 4 a.m.?” He astutely observes that “there is no sun at 4 a.m. at all,” sharply revealing the contrast between inspiring words and harsh reality, demonstrating the incisive nature of direct satire.

This performance profoundly exposes the pervasive overtime culture within the workplace. Drawing upon his authentic experiences, Zhai Jianing critiques the erosion of personal life engendered by prolonged working hours and highlights its aberrant and inhumane characteristics. Concurrently, he subtly satirizes the distortion and inefficacy of certain widely disseminated inspirational narratives within the actual workplace milieu, thereby reflecting the substantial disparity between these narratives and the genuine experiences of office workers.

In terms of eliciting emotional resonance among the audience, this performance successfully activated collective empathy by employing straightforward language to convey highly authentic content and familiar scenarios. Numerous office workers share analogous “nightmare experiences” of working late into the night. Zhai Jianing's narrative transcended personal grievance, evolving into a spokesperson for collective emotions, enabling the audience to recognize their own experiences with a wry smile and immediately comprehend this sense of absurdity and exhaustion, thereby fostering an emotional connection of being understood amidst humor.

4.2.2 Imaginative satire

Imaginative satire refers a comic strategy in which performers refrain from explicit denunciation and instead relocate the target of critique to an overtly fictional, identity-displaced, or logically absurd scenario. Through hyperbolic reconstruction of reality, they

generate a pronounced gap between the factual and the fantastical, thereby exposing the irrationalities and absurdities embedded in the original situation. The audience, confronted with this exaggerated disjunction, is able to infer the performer's underlying evaluative stance and critical intent. Characterized by heightened dramaturgy and imaginative language, the device may appear nonsensical on the surface; yet, by cloaking serious socio-critical claims in comic form, it constitutes a humor technique that fuses estrangement with diagnostic penetration.

Extract 5:

门腔：实习生小杨做了两个月就辞职了，老板居然还有脸找他离职面谈。老板说：“小杨来来来，你在这里两个月成长了多少？”“十岁。”“有没有收获？”“结节。”(20240824)

Men Qiang: An intern named Xiao Yang resigned after just two months, and the boss actually had the audacity to ask him for an exit interview. The boss said, “Xiao Yang, come here. How much have you grown in the two months you’ve been with us?” “Ten years.” “Did you gain anything?” “A nodule.”

The Extract 5 from Men Qiang is a typical example of imaginative satire. By exaggerating the real-life scenario of “exit interviews”, he constructs an absurd situation where the boss, merely two months post the employee’s internship, interrogates about “growth” and “achievements”. The intern’s responses—“ten years” and “a nodule”—completely deviate from common sense. Through the deliberate misalignment of identity and logic, using exaggerated and absurd language and the stark contrast between reality and fiction, he achieves a critical commentary in a humorous way.

This performance sharply exposes various negative phenomena in the workplace. On one hand, it satirizes the formalism prevalent in some corporate management, which disregards the genuine sentiments of employees. On the other hand, it highlights the dual detriment to both the psyche and physique caused by intense work—using “ten years” to imply the overwhelming exhaustion felt within a brief period of time, and using “a nodule”—a specific symptom—to indicate the tangible harm to health engendered by workplace stress. These elements collectively depict a highly stressful and intense workplace environment.

In terms of eliciting emotional resonance among the audience, this performance successfully triggered widespread collective identification through its highly dramatic expression. Audience members who have analogous experiences of being managed or working under excessive pressure could readily recognize their own real-life situations from this seemingly exaggerated performance, thereby achieving emotional release and psychological compensation through laughter, and attaining deep-level resonance and reflection.

4.2.3 Comparative satire

Comparative satire denotes a discursive strategy in which the performer juxtaposes the target of critique with one or more reference points that share logical, attributional, or contextual affinities. Through this comparison, the flaws, contradictions, or value-deficiencies of the original object are foregrounded, engendering a humorous yet critical effect. The mechanism hinges on the deliberate creation of contrast: by illuminating discrepancies in rationality, logic, or moral worth, the comedian enables the audience to perceive the irrationality of the critiqued phenomenon more readily, thereby intensifying both the penetrative force and the empathetic resonance of the satire.

Extract 6:

陈述：一提到学习和工作，都是那种正面的词汇，都充满了赞美之情，比如废寝忘食，孜孜不倦，天道酬勤。一提到休息，好吃懒做，游手好闲，V我50。你就感觉从小学学的那些知识也没有什么鼓励休息的，它只有孙权劝学，没有孙权劝觉。(20240927)

Chen Shu: Whenever learning and work are mentioned, it’s all positive words, full of praise, like forgetting food and sleep, being diligent and tireless, and hard work pays off. But when it comes to rest, it’s all about being lazy and idle, loafing around, and give me 50 yuan. It seems that all the knowledge we learned since primary school doesn’t encourage rest. There’s only Sun Quan Encouraging Study, but no Sun Quan Encouraging Sleep.

This performance adeptly employed comparative satire, utilizing semantic juxtaposition and cultural references to unveil workplace phenomena. The performer contrasted positive terms such as “forgetting food and sleep” and “being diligent and tireless” with negative terms like “being lazy and idle” and “loafing around,” thereby highlighting the disparate evaluations society holds for work and rest. This contrast not only constructed comedic conflicts but also revealed the inherent value biases and logical contradictions within workplace culture.

At the level of revealing workplace phenomena, the performance directly pointed out the excessive emphasis on diligence and the systematic neglect of rest in modern society. Through the cultural lens of “Sun Quan Encouraging Study” but not “Sun Quan

Encouraging Sleep,” the performance further reflected the long-standing cognitive imbalance from educational institutions to the workplace. These phenomena are specifically manifested as the normalization of overtime culture in the workplace, the marginalization of rest rights, and the neglect of the physical and mental health of office workers.

Ultimately, this performance elicited a profound emotional response from the audience through humorous contrasts. Many professionals grappling with the challenges of intense work pressure and lack of rest could find parallels to their own experiences in this performance. The performer transformed personal experiences into a collective narrative through the method of comparison and humor, allowing the audience to gain emotional release related to the unbalanced equilibrium between rest and work while laughing, thereby achieving emotional resonance with the performer.

4.3 Summary

Self-deprecation and satire constitute the two principal comic strategies through which stand-up comedians articulate workplace experiences. Each mobilizes a distinct expressive trajectory to evoke audience identification and emotional resonance. Self-deprecation entails the voluntary disclosure of personal failures—ranging from health impairment induced by excessive overtime to repeated competitive setbacks—delivered in a register of calculated vulnerability. This apparent candor collapses psychological distance, affording spectators both cathartic laughter and the collective recognition summarized in the utterance “I am the same.” Satire, conversely, targets external entities—colleagues, supervisors, corporate policies, or the broader culture of work—through sharp or absurd critique that exposes structural absurdities and contradictions, thereby prompting listeners to reflect upon their own quotidian labor situations.

Although both devices are cushioned by humor, they simultaneously advance serious social criticism and interrogate dominant values. The comic frame mitigates the heaviness of the topic, pre-empting didactic rigidity while facilitating affective release. By juxtaposing authentic narratives with hyperbolic comparison, performers generate surface-level laughter that ultimately guides the audience toward a recognition of their shared workplace predicaments. Emotional resonance and ideological negotiation are thus accomplished “with a smile,” rendering the stand-up performance simultaneously entertaining and critically charged.

5. Discussion

5.1 Major Findings

Through a comprehensive discourse analysis of workplace-themed stand-up comedy performances in *King of Comedy*, this study reveals that mocking humor is predominantly manifested through two primary strategies: self-deprecation and satire. Self-deprecation encompasses three forms—direct, imaginative and comparative self-deprecation—while satire manifests as direct, imaginative and comparative satire. These rhetorical strategies effectively function by depicting prevalent workplace dilemmas, including excessive overtime, workplace inequities, and psychological stress, thereby enabling audience identification with their personal experiences. Self-deprecation is a technique widely used by many comedians (Heidari-Shahreza, 2017), establishing psychological closeness by revealing personal struggles, while satire uses humor as a weapon to attack ideas, behaviors, systems, or individuals (Bore & Reid, 2014), providing an outlet for criticizing common workplace issues. Ultimately, these strategies collectively facilitate emotional catharsis and psychological resonance through the medium of humor.

5.2 Implications

This groundbreaking study yields profound theoretical and practical implications that extend beyond the realm of academic discourse. Theoretically, it pioneers an innovative analytical framework that revolves around two pivotal dimensions—self-deprecation and satire—which are meticulously subdivided into six distinct subtypes, thereby providing a sophisticated and nuanced tool for deconstructing humor in Chinese stand-up comedy. This comprehensive framework not only bridges the research void concerning non-Western humor forms but also enriches our understanding of comedy's multifaceted role in social commentary and cultural critique. Furthermore, by illuminating how diverse humor strategies cultivate emotional resonance, the study redefines stand-up comedy, elevating it from mere entertainment to a powerful medium that facilitates emotional catharsis and fosters collective identity, thereby making substantial contributions to the fields of emotion studies and media theory. Practically, the findings offer invaluable, actionable guidance for content creation and performance, shedding light on how various techniques—such as establishing rapport through self-deprecation or enabling catharsis via satire—can be strategically harnessed to deepen audience connection and amplify thematic impact. Consequently, comedians and writers can leverage these insights to refine their artistic decisions, ultimately crafting work that resonates more profoundly with contemporary audiences and leaves a lasting impression.

6. Conclusion

This study systematically investigates the specific strategies and emotional resonance mechanisms of two distinct forms of mocking humor—self-deprecation and satire—through a comprehensive analysis of 21 workplace-themed stand-up comedy segments from *King of Comedy*. The research demonstrates that both self-deprecation, which targets the individual, and satire, which critiques external entities, transform personal experiences into collective emotions through highly relatable workplace narratives, thereby achieving collective catharsis through laughter. This mechanism not only highlights the unique role of humor in mitigating workplace stress but also mirrors the shared perceptions of contemporary office workers regarding phenomena such as overtime work and intense competition.

From a theoretical perspective, employing discourse analysis as the methodological framework, this study elucidates the distinct functions of self-deprecation and satire in fostering emotional resonance: self-deprecation diminishes identity distance by revealing personal shortcomings, while satire fosters consensus through external critique. Both forms provide a novel explanatory framework for understanding how humor alleviates social pressure within the domestic workplace context. On a practical level, the findings offer valuable insights for comedians—by strategically alternating between self-deprecation and satire based on different workplace pain points, and by adjusting techniques such as direct statements, exaggerated imagination, or comparative juxtapositions, comedians can more effectively reduce the psychological distance with the audience, thereby enhancing textual resonance and performance impact.

Admittedly, this study is confined to a single platform and season, and does not encompass a broader range of regions or performance styles. Future research could incorporate audience surveys and multi-platform data to further validate the explanatory power and extensibility of this study. In conclusion, mocking humor is not merely a comedic technique in stand-up comedy but also an emotional conduit that reflects workplace realities and connects individuals with society. Understanding and skillfully utilizing this conduit can help pave the way for public expression that combines critique and healing within high-pressure workplace cultures.

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