Stand-up Comedy: Online User Engagement Patterns and Attitudes

Sneha Ashok

Scholar, School of Communication, Manipal University,
Karnataka, India. snehaash@gmail.com

&

K. Padmakumar

Head, Department of Corporate Communication,
School of Communication, Manipal University, Karnataka, India.
fmkumar@gmail.com

Abstract. Stand-up comedy has become a popular genre on digital spaces and online viewing platforms such as Netflix and Amazon Prime, and the comedians are also using social media platforms to share content and connect with their audience. In the present study, the digital space is examined as an equalising ground, offering the opportunity to upload content in a cost-effective way and the nature of online engagement between young adults and stand-up comedians is investigated. To measure the social media user attitudes toward stand-up comedians, a survey is conducted. Findings indicate user engagement and interactivity play a role in determining the nature of communication and gratifications obtained by the users online. Users are found to engage both actively as well as passively with online content. About 95 percent of the respondents gain information pertaining to stand-up comedians through social media and only a minor fraction from other sources like television, radio, newspapers and magazines. Females are more active engagers while males consume digital content passively.

Introduction

With the need to be connected in today's world, the internet is more than just a medium of communication. The growth witnessed by broadband adoption came hand-in-hand with multiple other innovations that have successfully increased the utility, fun, satisfaction and consequential factors of life online (Horrigan, 2011). Word-of-mouth communication has long been an efficient and trusted method to disseminate information. Social Media has taken to being an extension and digital explosion of traditional word-of-mouth communication. Development of technology has made it possible for anyone with access to the internet to be a part of social media (Patil et al, 2013).

Miller et al. (2016) define social media as *"the colonisation of the space between traditional broadcast and private dyadic communication, providing people with a scale of group size and degrees of privacy that we have termed scalable sociality,"* stating, however, that this is a fluid definition as social media does open room for group and community interactions. Taking this point forward, it can be understood that social media is a digital platform that enables users to not only make new connections online, but also reiterate and establish online, their preexisting offline connections and relations (Venkatraman, 2017).

User engagement is the different ways in which digital content engages users as well as how users engage and interact with content within the social media spectrum. The Social Media Engagement model defines engagement as a heightened mental state, dividing it into two components of individual involvement and personal meaning. Fan et al. (2016) in their study on interactivity, engagement and technology dependence define the term engagement as a status of involvement that is created as a result of the process of interactivity, which is integral to investigate the forerunners that instigate engagement and the impact of this engagement on users.

The users' response on digital platforms is received either from another human being or from a technological device on a given media platform. Action-reaction and command-response connections are components of interactivity. The process of interactivity gives the user an opportunity to make decisions that in turn opens up a selection of responses. Further, interactivity has the capability to support active, swift and effective interactions between technology and its users (Fan et al., 2016).

User-generated content makes for a considerable proportion of user engagement wherein users interact with brands and personalities on social media sites through self-produced content. User-generated content refers to

content that is produced and shared by users of a given media platform. Gangi (2016), in his study, said that the future of businesses banks on user-generated content to create new systems of value and competitive leads. Further, large portions of interactivity online take place in the form of content created by users. In the realm of stand-up comedy online as well, user engagement and interactivity play a vital role. Stand-up comedy is a form of performance art that reflects society and its happenings with the elements of humor and satire. Comedy, as a performance art, is an important information as well as entertainment tool, and therefore, needs to be studied (Rutter, 1997). The digital media platform is where user engagement with relation to stand-up comedy is currently growing and is therefore an interesting area of research. As pointed out by Oliar and Sprigman (2008) "*Making a living in stand-up comedy takes hard work*" and comedians today have found ways to engage and interact with their audience through social media platforms even in the absence of a physical brand location or a stage.

Problem statement

Young adults have been identified as the largest population accessing video content online, with comedy and humour topping the list as the most frequently accessed genre on the digital space with 50 percent of adult internet users watching comedy online (Purcell, 2010). Social media is, therefore, increasingly becoming a platform wherein users access, interact and engage with stand-up comedy related content. The advancement in technology over the recent years and steady as well as rapid growth of digital media has brought changes in many spheres; one such domain is that of stand-up comedy. Stand-up comedians are shifting largely to the virtual space, with strong presence across social media platforms and online viewing platforms. The virtual world provides an equalising platform for different stand-up comedians by giving each of them equal freedom to upload their content to the online space. Social media provides users a platform to interact and engage conveniently with stand-up comedians of their choice. Further, it is seen that among the internet users, 82 percent are young adults aged between 18 and 29 who use Facebook on a regular basis and that three out of ten among the urban population use twitter frequently (Duggan, 2015). User engagement and interactivity hence play a vital role in determining the nature of communication as well as gratifications obtained by the users on the online platform. The purpose of this research therefore is to quantitatively examine

the nature of online user engagement among young adults in terms of interacting with stand-up comedians' content on social media Platforms.

Literature review

In a study of internet usage patterns among students and understanding the relationship between internet usage and positive youth development published in Search, Joorabchi et al. (2013) noted that a relationship does exist between gratification obtained from the use of the internet and the attitude of the students towards the internet. This study is significant as it analyses the role of internet usage dimensions in the light of Usage and the gratification gained thereafter. The study revealed that most students use the internet to search for information and that to them, the internet proved to be a strong knowledge base, therefore reflecting a positive outlook towards the same. This study is significant as it highlights the positive attitude of students towards the internet and that a certain dimension of gratification is gained through engagement with the online medium.

A 2016 study on *Interactivity, engagement, and technology dependence: understanding users' technology utilisation behaviour* examined the effects of the three dimensions of interactivity on engagement, satisfaction, and dependence using a questionnaire and the data was collected from 255 users of smartphones in Korea. The research found that all three dimensions of interactivity, namely, control, communication, and responsiveness, are revealed to be significant indicators of engagement. With regard to the importance of user engagement and technology dependence, the research says that this phenomenon can be understood as an involved status that is created by the arrangement of interactivity and that it is essential to study what are the precursors that promote engagement and their impact on users' attitude and technologically inclined behaviour. (Fan et al., 2016).

Taking this aspect forward, in order to understand the role of social media Engagement as a boundary spanner, a study was conducted by Johnson et al. (2011) on the brands Amazon and Starbucks. The results of this study showed that social media Engagement has a strong positive impact on relational satisfaction and relational commitment. The study further states that it is absolutely essential for establishments to facilitate the occurrence of such online engagements utilising various tools that are available; and social media engagement cannot afford to be ignored by organisations. The study further shows a correlation between social identity and enduring involvement

stating that people with similar interests are more likely to be attracted by a certain brand and therefore involve with the organization at a deeper level (Johnson et al., 2011). Patterns in online video consumption highlight that seven out of ten internet users in the US utilise the internet to watch videos (Purcell, 2010). The viewership of comedy or humor related videos have risen steeply from 31 percent to 50 percent of adult users according to the study conducted. The surge that online video viewing has witnessed has been facilitated by the spread of facilities like broadband spreading across the globe, the increase in access and use of social media networking websites such as Facebook, Twitter and video sharing sites like YouTube and the overall acceptance of video related features by many websites across the internet (Purcell, 2010). An interesting insight of this study is that although 69 percent of the US population views videos online, it is only 14 percent of internet users that upload videos online. Further, young adults accessing videos online are drawn towards entertainment content.

Therefore it is vital to understand the users' patterns of engagement and their attitudes towards stand-up comedians' content online.

In a research conducted on the consequences of being disconnected in a broadband-connected world, it was said that the fast-paced development of communication technology has increased the consequences of being disconnected for individuals. The article looked at the aspects of digital divide and emphasised the need to take up a different framework of Digital Divide, with focus on the cost borne in the process of digital exclusion. He pointed out the stark differences over time in individual utilisation of the internet and said that around twice as many individuals access political news as well as information online in today's world as compared to 2000. In addition, above twice as many adult American citizens have opted to buy items online and have banked in the digital space. Various activities that were not known in 1999 like blogging or even social networking are now kingpins in the daily routines of a large chunk of the population as individuals access the internet in so many more methods than they did 10 years ago (Horrigan, 2011). This indicates that patterns of digital media consumption have changed over time and become more accessible, faster and engaging.

The study further states that access today is no longer stationary or tied down; the advent of laptops, net books, tablets, and smartphones hand in hand with the growth of wireless networks has facilitated overall development. The study further details that access is portable as well as

universal. Further, a survey conducted as part of the research revealed a connection between fear regarding the security of personal information and lower levels of utilisation of online resources (Horrigan, 2011).

Exploring the shift in user behavior, Salvo (2001) looked at the change in users, from being Observers to becoming Participants. Three User-Centered design practices were described and investigated in order to determine the new age ethical demands made of technical communicators. The study showcased the importance of effective collaborative design techniques that require meaningful interaction between designers and users. Further, users need to incorporate the interactive design process, although different designs quantify for varied feedback from users. We understand that the online medium today has been designed to incorporate participation and not for mere observation. (Salvo, 2001)

To understand why internet users partake in and generate digital content, Schaedel and Clement (2010) conducted a study Managing The Online Crowd: Motivations For Engagement In User-Generated Content. The study identified several relevant intrinsic and extrinsic motives for individuals to participate in content generation and further classify the users' into Active and Passive Users. The study utilized a survey to identify the difference between active content-generating media users and passive recipients, the external influences and motives that affect the user's dedication and from a management perspective, the study also looks at how companies can maximise motivation to have users actively contribute to the service. An interesting result of the study was that although Passive and Active users differed in terms of their online engagement, both groups showed no differences in terms of self-reporting ideas for improving engagement. The study (Schaedel & Clement, 2010) revealed that active users showed more frequent usage and longer hours as well as behaviourally were ready to forego other offline media, as opposed to Passive user behaviour. The study also found that social status influences the online exposure time significantly of users and that the main driver for engagement is stimulus avoidance. Apart from fun, users want to get away from daily routines and be entertained; this finding is helpful in terms of understanding user contributions. The study reveals that users look for improved learning opportunities, technical communication solutions and for wider networks to connect with existing friends and acquaintances.

This study shows that users' whether active or passive, use Online Media as a tool for relaxation and escapism.

New Age Media has brought about many changes in user interactions and interpersonal communication. The study by Kohler et al. (2011) Return on Interactivity: The Impact of Online Agents on Newcomer Adjustment analysed the role of online agents or virtual employees in assisting existing and new customers adjust to and function with unfamiliar and new service contexts. This marketing perspective study looked at the effect of online agents within the banking industry to find that content as well as style of interaction of the virtual employee considerably impact the newcomers' adjustment process, which in turn influences the organizational performance. The paper highlighted the importance of the role and nature of user interactivity as well as content in determining an entity's overall performance. This study helped in understanding overall users' adjustment process through the usage of online agents. It emphasized the requirement of functional content and the need for it to be relevant as well as functional content in order to increase engagement. Additionally, the study also revealed that the use of social content on digital media outlets has a positive impact on user adjustment (Kohler et al., 2011).

Venkatraman (2017) in the book social media In South India outlined the existence of Homophily across social media networks, especially from an Indian context. Socio-Cultural dynamics seem to play a role in terms of bringing users together even on the digital platform; however, this choice made online in most cases is the effect of unconscious choice that is influenced by offline social circles. This may lead to the construction of separate groups of homophily and 'Online Otherness', where one group looks at another as the 'other'. This social otherness may not at all instances be an overt expression but may occur through in-group associations that are created. With the advent of the internet and rise of new platforms of digital communication, social sites like Facebook promote 'nonymous' networking. Hussain (2015) studied the creation of online identities through platforms like Facebook, through symbolic interaction. The study highlighted the construction of personal images on social media, where users put in a deliberate attempt to shape as well as maintain their profiles according to the kind of identity they wish to showcase and the self-portrayal they wish to influence. The study involved a survey of young Facebook users in the state of Assam, India, to identify themes and trends; investigated online users'

version of interpreting their self-presentation on Facebook. The study outlined that Facebook plays the role of a 'Front Stage' for individuals to construct their identities as part of their showcase before their audience base, utilizing various tools such as *"profile description, profile image, group membership, photographs, and befriending tools,"* in order to construct their identity, Hussain (2015). This study plays a significant role in helping us understand the role of virtual identity and the impact it could have on the nature of users' engagements online.

Online Behaviour can be largely impacted by the kind of engagement and amount of time spent on social media. Hoffman and DeGroot (2014-2015) conducted a digital survey of 196 individuals using a questionnaire to understand the amount of time spent on Facebook and the levels of perceived jealousy through the engagement, faced by the individual.

The study indicated multiple correlations and positive relationships between the duration spent engaging on Facebook and the perceived feelings of jealousy. Further, it was seen that these behavioural traits led to increased monitoring and surveillance behaviour. Users do engage actively across social media platforms and are behaviourally as well as psychologically impacted, though this impact can be either positive or negative.

Theoretical framework

Does social media act as an equalising platform for stand-up comedians?

With reference to elections and user engagement in politics, the theory of Equalization highlights that new media levels the electoral playing field enabling smaller political parties to compete at par with bigger parties. However, the normalisation theory suggests the contrary that the biggest party continues to dominate even within the digital space, just as it is offline (Tan et al., 2016). Applying these concepts to user engagement on social media in relation to Stand-Up Comedy, we see that new media has the capacity to create a level playing field for all the players- both big and small, but at the same time, as normalization theory highlights, the most popular stand-up comedian online is likely to dominate the digital space, just as he may in the live skit scenario. Further, even users may face the likelihood to feel more individually empowered engaging across social media; in contrast, if normalisation theory applies, it gives dominant voices among the social media users, the upper hand.

What is the nature of digital user engagement and gratification obtained?

It is relevant in understanding the functioning of social media and User Engagement as it explores patterns of usage and the motivation for recipients to use social media as well as which gratifications are then obtained through this usage. This approach highlights that active use of media content has the capacity to gratify the users' requirements. This theory has gained new significance and seen growth with the entry of the internet era, especially with the development of social media (Raacke, 2008). This theory involves 5 basic assumptions, which detailed that the audience is one that is active and their utilization of media is oriented towards a goal, the step to link need gratification with a specific medium is in the hands of the viewer, Media is in competition with other sources in terms of satisfying needs, an understanding that audiences have ample self-awareness of their utilization of media, the motivators and interests that they could provide accurate data to researchers and lastly value judgments of material across media can be analyzed only by the viewers. (Tanta et al., 2014). Looking at gratification obtained by the users, we understand that they are as many in number as the users themselves and therefore the same content has the potential to gratify different needs in different users (Tanta et al., 2014).

Research method

Objectives

- *To examine the nature of user generated content with reference to online stand-up comedians*
- *To understand the attitudes of respondents towards user engagement*

Research design

The researchers used a Quantitative Research where statistical or numerical objective analysis of data is conducted (Wimmer and Dominic, 2014). Researchers found the quantitative method of research to be the most suitable approach for this study as it provided the merits of numbers, magnitude and measurements which were integral components in assessing online engagement as the users' interactivity needed to be quantified (Berger, 2011). Survey method of research has been utilised for this study. The survey method of research was an ideal approach for the study as the researcher needed to collect data regarding social media usage patterns and trends as well as attitudes towards stand-up comedy online from the respondents, to

understand the user perspective. Further, applying the theoretical frameworks of Equalisation and Normalisation theories as well as Uses and Gratification theory, this study proposes to analyse the nature of responses received through the responses to the questionnaire.

Sampling
Selection Criteria
Adult social media users who access stand-up comedians' content online were selected for this study. Young Adults are found to be the heaviest consumers' of online video content (Purcell, 2010). Therefore, young adults between the age of 18 and 35 of all genders have been considered as samples for this study. The data was collected from the users in the form of a survey utilising a questionnaire designed specifically for the study.

Type of Sampling
A purposive sampling method was chosen for the study as the research required exploratory data from specific users of social media.

Tool and Administration
The variables in the study include:
- *User engagement*
- *User-generated content*
- *User attitude*

In order to measure the following variables, a questionnaire consisting of demographic, psychographic as well as perceptual questions titled *'Stand-up Comedians and Online User Engagement'* was designed. A pilot study was conducted with 20 participants. The questionnaire was shared with the participants individually to obtain responses and feedback, in order to clear discrepancies, if any. In order to determine the validity of the questionnaire, the same was shared with six experts in the field of social media and those part of the media industry. The questions were reviewed and the questionnaire was edited prior to data collection. Amendments were then made to the questionnaire based on the feedback from the pilot study and the experts, further to which the questionnaire consisting of 40 questions was shared with 300 social media users. Valid responses with accurate data were received from a total of 250 samples consisting of an equal distribution of males and females i.e. 125 each; remaining responses were excluded from the

study as they were incomplete. The data was collected from the respondents who are all specific social media users and those who access stand-up comedians content on a digital platform.

Findings

The major findings of the study can be categorised into the following six categories: (1) Social Media Consumption (2) Online Usage Patterns and Stand-Up Comedians (3) Online Responses and Stand-Up Comedians (4) Accessibility and Online Stand-Up Comedy (5) Expression Of Views and Discussion Online and (6) User Gratification and Social Media.

Social media Consumption

Table 1 **Media platforms through which users gain the most information regarding stand-up comedians**

Platform	Percentage
Newspapers or e-news papers	2
Television	2.8
Social Media Networks	94.8
Radio	0.4

It may be inferred from Table 1 that 94.8 percent of respondents gain information pertaining to stand-up comedians through social media networks. Only 2.8 percent mentioned television as a source of information, while two percent mentioned newspapers or e-papers and 0.4 percent said they gained most information over the radio. As many as 117 out of 125 males said social media is their main source of information regarding stand-up comedians while 120 of the 125 female participants responded the same.

The data indicates that social media is the largest source of information regarding stand-up comedians with a majority of users, 237 of the 250 participants, gaining information through social media networks.

Table 2 **Time spent in a week using social media**

Time spent in hours	Percentage
0-3	14
4-6	19.6
7-9	28
10+	38.4

Table 2 indicates total time spent by respondents online in a week. As many as 90 out of 125 females have responded that they use social media for over 7 hours in a week, while 76 out of 125 males have responded that they use social media for over 7 hours in a week. It is indicative that females spend more time on social media as compared to males.

Table 3 **Frequency of social media usage**

Frequency	Percentage
2-5	6
6-9	11.6
10-13	19.6
14-17	15.6
18+	47.2

A total of 83 women out of 125 participants have said they access social media over 14 times in a week while only 74 out of 125 males have said they access social media over 14 times in a week. Therefore, there is a visible trend that women access social media more frequently than men.

From figures 2 and 3 we infer that women tend to spend more of their time on social media and access social media Networks more frequently as compared to their Male counterparts.

Table 4 **Change in television viewing patterns with
the growth of online stand-up comedy**

Response	Percentage
Television viewing has reduced with influx of digital	51.5
Television viewing has not reduced with influx of digital	32.4
Cannot Say	16.4

It can be inferred from Table 4 that 51.2 percent of the respondents have said that their television viewing has reduced as they access stand-up comedians' videos online. About 32.4 percent have said that their television viewing has not reduced due to digital media. About 16.4 percent have remained neutral regarding the change in media platform usages.

Online Usage Patterns and Stand-Up Comedians
Table 5 **Source of information about Stand-Up Comedians**

Source	Percentage
Word of mouth	12
Social media	79.6
Newspapers/magazines	0.4
Television	4
Radio	0

When asked how they got to know about stand-up comedians, as indicated on Table 5, 79.6 percent of the respondents said that they got to know about stand-up comedians through social media and 12 percent say word of mouth. Therefore most respondents learnt about stand-up comedians through various social media networks. Further, it was observed that Kenny Sebastian is the most-followed comedian on social media, being the choice of 43.2 percent of respondents, followed by Biswa Kalyan Rath, being the choice of 14.8 percent and 14.4 percent choosing Kanan Gill.

Table 6 **Methods adapted by social media users to engage and showcase interest online towards stand-up comedians**

Action/ Method of Engagement	Percentage
Liking Posts	78.8
Tag friends on posts online	62.4
Subscribing Online	55.2
Research online to find additional information	40.8
Send post links as private messages to friends	38.8
Sharing Posts	32.4
Commenting	14.4
Contact the Stand-up Comedian	6

Table 7 **Reason why social media users watch stand-up comedy videos online**

Reason	Percentage
Entertainment	61.2
Overcome boredom	6.4
Peers suggestions	3.6
Gain knowledge	1.2
Infotainment	2.6

It can be inferred from Table 7 that 61.2 percent of social media users access videos uploaded by stand-up comedians as a means of entertainment. 27.6 percent of the sample have said that they access these videos as a means of infotainment i.e. a combination of information and entertainment.

Table 8 **indicates responses regarding patterns and preferences of engagement of social media users**

Reason for online engagement	Yes	No	Cannot Say
Information and knowledge is gained through Online activities of stand-up comedians	56.8	18.8	24.4
Online Stand-Up Comedy videos serve as a means of entertainment	94	3.2	2.8
Understanding Current Affairs and Trending Scenarios is easier through the works of stand-up comedians Online	61.6	17.2	21.2

6.3 Online responses and stand-up comedians
Table 9 **Methods of response used by respondents during online interaction**

Method of response	Yes	No	Cannot Say
Actively watches stand-up comedians' videos online and access their pages on social media	82.8	7.2	10
Shares stand-up comedians content through/on personal social media accounts	46.8	34.8	18.4
Comments to posts uploaded by stand-up comedians on social media	34.8	52.8	12.4
Subscribes to at least one stand-up comedian's page/channel on social media	76.8	19.2	4
Watches stand-up comedy online without subscribing to the channel	57.6	19.2	23.2
Participates in online events and contests hosted by stand-up comedians	21.2	59.6	19.2
Social media as a means to engage with stand-up comedians	86	4	10
Effect of stand-up comedians' responses on respondents' social media activity	45.2	19.6	35.2
Passive online engagement of respondents to stand-up comedy	43.3	33.2	23.6

6.4 Accessibility and online stand-up comedy
Table 10 **Accessibility and online stand-up comedy**

Accessibility	Yes	No	Cannot Say
Social media makes stand-up comedy more easily accessible	92	3.2	4.8
Comedy content is accessed frequently online	36	46	18
Stand-up comedy online is more need specific	48	23.6\	28.4
Social media drives easier connections with stand-up comedians	70	9.6	20.4
Social media enables fans and followers of stand-up comedians to connect with each other	61.2	14	24.8
Online stand-up comedy has lesser human connect compared to On-Stage stand-up skits	42	27.2	30.8

6.5 Expression of views and discussion online
Table 11 **Responses with regard to expressing views and online discussions**

Method of expression	Yes	No	Cannot Say
Content uploaded online by stand-up comedians is discussed on virtual communities	32.8	52	15.2
Content uploaded online by stand-up comedians is discussed offline with friends and other enthusiasts	80.4	12.4	7.2
Online platform helps in voicing views and communicating with ease with stand-up comedians	55.6	14	30.4
Interacting with stand-up comedians through social media Platforms is more comfortable as opposed to facing them personally	33.2	25.6	41.2
Social media provides confidence in voicing opinions	37.2	28.8	34
People use social media to publicly express views regarding stand-up comedians	28	53.2	18.8
People use social media to freely interact with stand-up comedians	22.8	58	19.2

6.6 User gratification and social media
Table 12 **User gratification obtained through social media**

Gratification	Yes	No	Cannot Say
There is a feel good factor interacting with stand-up comedians online	34.4	20.8	44.8
Internet users look forward to seeing posts by stand-up comedians on their social media feeds	59.6	20.4	20
Social media fulfills curiosity about stand-up comedians	51.2	27.2	21.6

It can be inferred from the above findings that social media users do engage with stand-up comedians online, actively or passively through various methods. Additionally, it can be inferred that different users have different needs that are gratified through various methods of engagement.

Discussion

This study focuses on the aspects of user engagement on social media platforms in terms of interactivity as well as user-generated content, in relation to stand-up comedians. The study explores the ways in which users

choose to react, take interest and interact with content in terms of videos, posts, tweets and images stand-up comedians share on their social media platforms. With Young Adults being identified to be the largest population accessing video related content on the internet as well as comedy and humor being the most frequently accessed genre within the digital Space (Purcell, 2010), it becomes important to understand how and why these individuals access the internet space. User engagement plays a pivotal role in determining kind of communication and provides gratifications to the users.

The launch of 3G and 4G internet services and mobile internet being provided at higher speeds at lower costs by various service providers has increased the flexibility and ease of access of social media and the internet greatly. These facilities and technological boosts have today made digital content accessible to large sections of society that were unable to be in touch with this information earlier. The primary objectives of this study are to examine the nature of user-generated content with reference to online stand-up comedians and to further understand the attitudes of respondents towards user engagement with reference to stand-up comedians' digital presence. The study throws light on the patterns of social media consumption of digital media users, the patterns and trends in their usage of social media for the purpose of engagement and the various methods of responses adapted by the users' in order to engage with the digital content uploaded by stand-up comedians. The study also explores accessibility of stand-up comedians' content in the social media space and ways adapted by users to access this content online. With social media providing a platform for users to voice their opinions and views, this study looks at the attitude of users towards expressing their views and partaking in online discussions. Further, the study tries to identify the gratifications obtained by the user through his/her engagement with social media.

The major findings of the study can be categorised into six categories, moving from social media usage patterns towards users' gratifications from the usage of social media. In terms of consuming social media and patterns of social media consumption, the study indicates that 94.8 percent of the sample population gains information pertaining to stand-up comedians through social media networks and only a minor fraction from other sources like television, radio, newspapers and magazines. As reiterated by Horrigan (2011), in his study, the fast-paced development of communication technology has now increased the consequences that one faces, being disconnected

within a world influenced by digital media. The data indicates that social media is the largest source of information regarding stand-up comedians with a majority of users gaining information through social media Networks. It can be inferred from the study that more than half of the social media users use the internet for more than seven hours in a week.

It is indicative that females spend more time on social media as compared to males and additionally that the frequency of access of social media is higher among women than men. This insight in terms of social media consumption is essential in terms of understanding the time users spend accessing information on social media networks as well as their choice and willingness to engage with the media platform for a considerable number of hours in a given week. Further, the study also highlights a considerable reduction in television viewing time as users prefer to access video content of stand-up comedians online. Understanding online usage patterns on social media highlights trends in engagement and content generation by and for the users. The study by Salvo (2001) looks at the change in users, from being observers to becoming participants and that online medium today has been designed to incorporate participation and not for mere observation.

The results of the study support and indicate that social media is the largest source of information for users, and users prefer to engage with social media content by liking posts, videos and tweets as well as subscribing to channels and social media pages; users prefer to tag their friends on posts on media and show interest in searching online for more information about their preferred artist, however, they do not take as much interest in sharing or commenting on the content online or create digital fan pages for their preferred artists. This indicates patterns in how users choose to engage on social media platforms. It is observed from the study that users actively go on to social media platforms as they find it a valuable source of entertainment, infotainment and a knowledge-rich space with online stand-up comedy providing them infotainment across themes like education, employment, current affairs, politics and the like, all of which are enjoyed by the users.

The growth of digital media has led to increased interactivity and methods to engage with online content. As per the study by Schaedel and Clement (2010), there are several intrinsic and extrinsic motives that influence individuals to engage and generate content online and users were further classified into 'Active users' who played a dynamic role in generating content and engaged online and 'Passive users'. The results of the study show

that users engage online both actively as well as passively with stand-up comedians' content online. It is found from the study that large sections of the users actively watch stand-up comedy videos online with more than three quarters of them subscribed to at least one stand-up comedians' social media platform; though interestingly more than half of the respondents said they preferred to watch the videos online without subscribing to them. Close to half of the users of social media have said that they are interested to read updates and watch videos uploaded by stand-up comedians but do not make efforts to share, comment on or respond to them. Additionally, respondents said they do not prefer to participate in events or contests hosted by stand-up comedians online. This indicates a strong pattern of Active as well as Passive users who engage differently with content shared on social media platforms. An important finding despite the divide in active and passive users is that 86 percent of the users did feel that social media is the fastest way to engage online and close to half of the users said that receiving responses from stand-up comedians on their posts, comments or shares would encourage them to actively engage more often.

With the rapid growth of mobility and digital content access, it is seen that accessibility of video and other online content has increased. It can be inferred from the study that with the increase in accessibility of social media, the methods as well as reasons to access social media by the users are diverse. About 92 percent of the users in the survey felt that social media has made stand-up comedy more accessible than it was before. It is also interesting to note that more men than women access stand-up comedy related content online, although as a whole it is observed that women access social media more than men. Majority of the respondents said that social media drives easier connections with stand-up comedians, with many responses that said content on social media is more tailor made and specific. It can be inferred that social media enables users to access more specific information by optimising searches and tailoring content.

The study by Kohler et al., (2011) emphasises the requirement of functional content and the need for it to be relevant as well as functional in order to increase engagement. Responses from the study draw into these specifics of relevant and functional content, with respondents agreeing that social media provides them with more interest specific content, which could be a major reason why most individuals prefer to gain most of their information from digital media. Further, more than half of the respondents

feel that social media enables fans and followers to come together by providing a platform for them to connect with one another; although some feel the human touch to Stand-Up Comedy is lost when the same is transferred to the digital platform. However, less than half of the respondents feel that the human connection is reduced, while the rest of them do not feel this loss or remain neutral to it.

With social media increasing the space for users to voice themselves, the digital medium could serve as a platform for users to express their views and have discussions online. Venkatraman (2017) outlines the existence of Homophily across social media networks. This social otherness may not at all instances, be an overt expression, but may occur through in-group associations that are created. This observation could reflect on the users' responses in terms of discussing content on virtual platforms; more than half of the respondents disagreed to discuss content uploaded by stand-up comedians, on virtual communities. Although these virtual communities do stem from homogeneity of interest in stand-up comedy, the participants may not be from the same offline social groups. The idea that online choices are influenced by offline social circles is reiterated as 80.4 percent of the users said they discuss content uploaded online by stand-up comedians with friends and other enthusiasts offline.

Hussain (2015) studied the creation of online identities through platforms like Facebook, taking place through symbolic interaction. This idea of image construction is reflected in terms of choices users make to voice their opinions and publically state their views about stand-up comedians online; more than half of the users said that they can voice their views and opinions with more ease online and may not be able to do the same face to face. This response could be a result of choosing to maintain a certain online social image, as more than half of the users said they do not directly interact with stand-up comedians online and prefer to just watch or read their content online and like them as well as share it with friends.

Social media plays an important role in gratifying various needs and wants of its users. Online behavior and attitudes of users can be largely influenced by the kind of engagement experience as well as amount of time the users spend on social media. Hoffman and DeGroot (2014-2015) indicate multiple correlations and positive relationships between the duration spent engaging on social media platform, Facebook and the perceived feelings of jealousy. As supported by the study, it is seen that users do obtain different

levels of satisfaction as well as gratification from engaging online, which is why they choose to access and interact with digital content.

According to the Users and Gratification Theory, the active use of media content has the capacity to gratify the users' requirements. With the development of social media and the era of the internet, this theory has gained increased relevance (Raacke, 2008). This theory as detailed previously has five basic assumptions; the content shared on social media platforms have the potential to gratify different needs of users, differently.

From a theoretical standpoint, the results from the study support the Uses and Gratification approach, wherein the media use of the audience is goal oriented; they do access social media as they find it to be informative and entertaining and the initiative to obtain gratification through social media is taken up by the audience. Social media does compete with other traditional mediums to gratify its users; namely in the case of stand-up comedy, it is seen that live on-stage skits still do compete with video-based shows online, both of which bring varied levels and type of gratification. In terms of being self-aware of the media they use, their interest and motives, the respondents of this study are well aware that they use social media as a platform to engage and interact with stand-up comedians as their needs to be entertained, gain information as well as motives to engage with stand-up comedians is gratified through their actions; more than half of the respondents said social media fulfills their curiosity about stand-up comedians. In terms of value judgments, it is seen that the audience does place value on the content shared by stand-up comedians on social media platforms, which is why they choose to actively follow them and engage with their content online, with more than half of the respondents indicating that they look forward to seeing posts by stand-up comedians on their social media feeds. It can be noted here that different users of social media, engage differently with content posted online- some active and some passive; additionally, social media is individualistic in gratifying the needs of specific users, as results from the study show that men have more of a feel good factor interacting online with stand-up comedians as compared to women.

Further, understanding the dynamics of digital media, we see that it has brought changes in many spheres, with one such domain being stand-up comedy. Stand-up comedians are shifting largely towards virtual spaces from on-stage events, with strong presence across social media platforms and online viewing platforms like Amazon Prime. The virtual world provides an

equalising platform for different stand-up comedians by giving each of them equal freedom to upload their content to the online space in order to be viewed by their audiences. This shift from real to virtual worlds though gradual, is phenomenal, with more users as well as stand-up comedians being added each day. Social media provides a level ground for all stand-up comedians, big and popular artists as well as upcoming artists to upload and share content at par with each other supporting the theory of equalisation.

However, it is not in all cases that content is represented sans bias even on social media platforms. The existence of content optimizations, paid posts, sponsored posts and so forth, normalises the effect of equality by letting some parties dominate over the others, as the normalization theory suggests. The normalization theory details that the biggest party continues to dominate even within the digital space, just as it is offline. This holds true in the realm of stand-up comedy with more popular stand-up comedians dominating the social media space, just as they may in the live skit scenario; this can be supported by findings of the study which show that respondents prefer more popular artists like Kenny Sebastian and Kanan Gill, over comparatively less popular stand-up comedians. Even from a user perspective, the users may feel more empowered to engage across social media, with the medium providing them a level ground of confidence and comfort, as indicated by the study. However, some users have a more dominant voice over others, giving them an upper hand in the scenario.

Conclusion

Social media provides a nurturing environment for the showcase of talent, as highlighted by the equalising theory and gives users a platform to interact and engage conveniently with stand-up comedians of their choice. Therefore, the phenomenon of some artists being more popular than others may come into play; some artists tend to gain more virtual hits, enjoy increased likes, shares and subscribers due to improved virtual branding. This can be a result of better media optimisations, key search links, sponsorship shares or even paid promotions. Therefore, even social media does provide a wider playing field as compared to other media, cannot, at all instances be seen as an equalising platform. This recent phenomenon of shifting from real to virtual has been nurtured by the growth of technology and intellectual property through development of various spectrums. The rise of mobile internet and 3G as well as 4G data connectivity has widened the possibilities for

performers and artists, by providing them with a wider stage with unlimited audience access. This opening out into public spheres has helped many individuals build brands of them; a phenomenon commonly known as virtual branding. Stand-up comedians with the help of social media are able to reach out and engage with so many more audience groups of diverse societal spheres, which may not have been possible with only offline stage performances. Social media has helped increase the audience base for these artists as well as enabled them to gain celebrity status through digital popularity and virtual interests of their audiences.

Having said that, it cannot be nullified that all aspects of on-stage events can be replicated by online digital video shows; users do feel that the element of human touch as well as face to face interactions is lost when it comes to the virtual world. Therefore, even though social media does provide a wide stage for Artists and the like to construct celebrities of them sans nepotism, the phenomenon of live stage events and shows are still here to stay, as the two complement each other in multiple ways. Offline, stage shows provide audiences a space where they can have face to face human interactions with artists, wherein the spontaneity of jokes are not lost to digital manipulations. At the same time, the social media space proves to be a huge boon to both artists as well as audiences alike, by providing a highly mobile, flexible, cost-effective platform to perform as well as access shows respectively at one's convenience. Additionally, providing a space for users to engage, interact and generate content.

Scope for further research
- *There is still a dearth of extensive studies on specific strategies and uses of digital media by stand-up comedians in the Indian context*
- *A comparative study on the user-engagement with reference to stand-up comedians can be extended to an international context*
- *An extended study could also be conducted to examine the exclusive strategies of the stand-up comedians on social media*

References

Alfarid Hussain, S. M. (2015). Presentation of self among social media users in Assam: Appropriating Goffman to Facebook users' engagement with online communities. Global Media Journal: Indian Edition, 6, 1-14.

Berger, A. A. (2019). Media and communication research methods: An introduction to qualitative and quantitative approaches. Sage Publications.

Duggan, M. (2015). The Demographics of Social Media Users. Retrieved December 09, 2016.

Fan, L., Liu, X., Wang, B., & Wang, L. (2017). Interactivity, engagement, and technology dependence: understanding users' technology utilisation behaviour. Behaviour & Information Technology, 36(2), 113-124.

Di Gangi, P. M., & Wasko, M. M. (2016). Social media engagement theory: Exploring the influence of user engagement on social media usage. Journal of Organizational and End User Computing (JOEUC), 28(2), 53-73.

Hoffman, T. K., & DeGroot, J. M. (2014-2015). Communicative responses to Facebook jealousy: The effects of information overload in romantic relationships. *Journal of Communication, Speech, and Theatre Association of North Dakota*, 27, 15-22

Horrigan, J. B. (2011). What are the consequences of being disconnected in a broadband-connected world?. Daedalus, 140(4), 17-31.

Johnson, P. R., Bazaa, U., & Chen, L. (2011). The new boundary spanners: Social media users, engagement, and public relations outcomes. In 61st Annual International Communication Association Conference, Boston, MA.

Joorabchi, T. M., Hassan, M. S., & Osman, M. N. (2013). Relationship between Internet usage and positive youth development in Malaysia. SEARCH: The Journal of the South East Asia Research Centre for Communication and Humanities, 5(2), 37-64.

Köhler, C. F., Rohm, A. J., de Ruyter, K., & Wetzels, M. (2011). Return on interactivity: The impact of online agents on newcomer adjustment. Journal of Marketing, 75(2), 93-108.

Miller, D., Costa, E., Haynes, N., McDonald, T., Nicolescu, R., Sinanan, J., … & Wang, X. (2016). How the world changed social media (p. 286). UCL press.

Oliar, D., & Sprigman, C. (2008). There's no free laugh (anymore): The emergence of intellectual property norms and the transformation of stand-up comedy. Virginia Law Review, 1787-1867.

Sajithra, K., & Patil, R. (2013). Social media–history and components. Journal of Business and Management, 7(1), 69-74.

Purcell, K. (2010, June 02). The State of Online Video. Retrieved July 20, 2017, from *http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2010/State-of-Online-Video.aspx*

Raacke, J., & Bonds-Raacke, J. (2008). MySpace and Facebook: Applying the uses and gratifications theory to exploring friend-networking sites. Cyberpsychology & behavior, 11(2), 169-174.

Rutter, J. (1997). Stand-up as interaction: Performance and audience in comedy venues (Doctoral dissertation, University of Salford).

Salvo, M. J. (2001). Ethics of engagement: User-centered design and rhetorical methodology. Technical communication quarterly, 10(3), 273-290.

Schaedel, U., & Clement, M. (2010). Managing the online crowd: Motivations for engagement in user-generated content. Journal of Media Business Studies, 7(3), 17-36.

Tan, T. H., Tng, Y. H., & Yeo, A. (2016, May). Normalization versus Equalization Effects of the Internet for Political Parties: Singapore's General Election 2015

as a Case Study. In E-Democracy and Open Government (CeDEM), Conference for (pp. 84-95). IEEE.

Tanta, I., Mihovilović, M., & Sablić, Z. (2014). Uses and gratification theory–why adolescents use Facebook?. Medijska istraživanja: znanstveno-stručni časopis za novinarstvo i medije, 20(2), 85-111.

Venkatraman, S. (2017). Social Media in South India (p. 256). UCL Press.

Wimmer, R. D., & Dominick, J. R. (2014). *Mass Media Research An Introduction* (10th ed.). Andover u.a.: Wadsworth, Cengage Learning. ISBN:10: 81-315-2628-3

Sneha Ashok is currently a Public Relations executive at Adfactors PR. She holds a Master's degree in Media and Communication from Manipal Academy ofHigher Education. Graduated with a triple major in Communication and Media, English and Psychology from Christ University, Bangalore, her interests lie in exploring public relations and marketing in the newage. She is also passionate about fine arts, technology and digital design.

K. Padmakumar is the Head of the Department of Corporate Communication at School of Communication, Manipal Academy ofHigher Education, Manipal, where he teaches courses in radio production and other media-related subjects. Prior to his academic work, he spent ten years in commercial radio (Sun TV Network, Radio City 91.1 FM, India) in positions ranging from RJ to show producer to Programming Director. During this time, he hosted prime-time shows. He was conferred with the 'Young Communicator Award by SIMC (Category Radio 2008), and was also the recipient of the 'Whatte Champ' award (Innovation and BusinessImpact), Radio City.

He visited Hochschule Bremen, Germany for a period of three months, on a DAAD Fellowship and conducted classes in International Media Systems.
He was invited as a Plenary Speaker for the Asia Media Forum, held in Incheon, South Korea in 2013. Recently, he was invited as a Speaker for Broadcast Asia, June, 2015 held in Marina Bay Sands, Singapore to talk about the transformation of media and communication in the Indian context.

He has conducted several radio workshops in universities and colleges In India and abroad. He has presented his research papers at various international conferences in Norway, Germany, Singapore, Seoul, Malaysia, Indonesia, Colombo and Dubai. He also did a short stint as a news anchor with a private TV network.
His areas of interest include Farm Communication, Commercial Radio Production, Community Media, Corporate Communication and Marketing.