Stand-up Comedians' Ridesharing Narratives on TikTok: Insights into New Interactional Norms

The on-demand ride services have drastically changed with the advent of the so-called "sharing economy," enabled by smartphones and their networked potentials (Anderson, 2016). As users have shifted from taxis to using more app-verified ridesharing services such as Uber and Lyft, so too have consumers' expectations about their in-car interactions with their drivers. In light of this social turn, stand-up comedians have begun to use narratives about their ridesharing experiences as a source of humor; in many cases, relying on performative voicing (Vásquez, 2019) to enact for their audience their previous conversations or interactions with Uber or Lyft drivers.

A total of 15 short video clips from TikTok were selected from a larger dataset, which was created by searching the platform using the hashtags: #standupcomedy #ridesharing, #Uber and #Lyft. Through iterative cycles of close reading and coding (Saldaña, 2013), a dominant theme of relational ambiguity emerged. In other words, comedians' narratives shed light on how passengers often express contradictory stances with respect to how friendly and familiar – versus impersonal and professional – they expect their driver to behave.

Humorous narratives often feature explicit statements asserting individuals' respective roles in this asymmetrical transactional relationship, typically drawing on the theme of drivers being reliant on passengers' tips and thus subject to accommodating passengers' unexpected whims. In these cases, Uber/Lyft drivers are often racialized (DeCamp, 2017), or performatively voiced as immigrants with foreign accents. I argue that comedians' narratives may illuminate newly-formed norms of ridesharing, which would encourage the public in their meaning-making process and work through their collective anxieties for this novel social practice.

Keywords: stand-up comedy narratives, performative voicing, humor, ridesharing apps

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