

The Reflection of Society in Udom Taephanich's Stand-Up Comedy

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Abstract

This mixed-methods research investigates the social reflections and audience perceptions in Udom Taephanich's stand-up comedy show, "Deaw 13" or "No. 13". Content analysis of the show reveals 13 topics of social, cultural, and political themes domains, predominantly employing humor based on reality. Quantitative findings showed that the audience most frequently recalled issues related to the competence of national leaders ($F_e = 37$; 30.7%), followed by criticism of political systems and figures ($F_e = 28$; 23.3%), and guidelines for appropriate living ($F_e = 11$; 9.2%). The most common reflection type, the "lantern," highlights shared societal experiences and beliefs. Deeper reflections, categorized as the "projector" type, connect to life philosophies, sociocultural dynamics, and political perspectives, demonstrating the potential of stand-up comedy to address social issues and challenge power structures. A free elicitation procedure reveals that political themes domain was most readily recalled and recognized, followed by social and cultural themes. In terms of recognition, the most notable issues were the competence of national leaders and criticism of political systems and figures ($F_e = 84$; 17.5%), followed by principles of life management ($F_e = 47$; 9.8%). The study also finds that younger audiences (Gen Z and Gen Y) exhibit more positive attitudes and behavioral tendencies towards the show than older generations (Gen X and Baby Boomers) at the .05 significance level ($F = 3.691$, Sig. < .05). These findings underscore the influence of stand-up comedy in shaping audience perceptions and the potential for utilizing humor to communicate complex social issues effectively.

Keywords: Stand-Up Comedy, Social Reflection, Media Effect, Udom Taephanich, Content Analysis, Mixed-Methods Research

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1. Introduction

Performance arts, a form of cultural communication, have a long-standing relationship with humanity, reflecting societal identities across eras (Costanzo, 2020). In the realm of communication, performance art involves a performer (sender) conveying messages through various channels to an audience (receiver) with diverse objectives depending on the performance genre.

Comedic performance, a genre within the broader category of comedy, focuses on communicating happiness, joy, and amusement, contrasting with tragedy, which delves into sorrow, hardship, and loss. Both genres are psychologically linked to human emotions, primarily serving an entertainment function across various media like theater, television, radio, film, and literature (Taflinger, 1996).

Stand-up comedy, a notable comedic performance style, resembles traditional Thai comedic performances (such as *jum-uad*, which uses words and gestures to elicit laughter) (Royal Institute of Thailand, 2011) but features a single performer directly communicating their perspectives and experiences to the audience through storytelling and humor (Zoglin, 2021). While stand-up comedy's primary function is entertainment, it can also serve other roles, such as presenting alternative viewpoints, challenging power structures, and advocating for political ideologies (Kaewthep, 2009). For example, a study on dark comedies by Joel and Ethan Coen revealed their function in presenting distorted views of society, such as the illusion of freedom outside of prison and the economic exploitation of the working class (Tamthai, 2010). Furthermore, stand-up comedy has been observed to serve as a tool for presenting diverse ideas and even as a means for political resistance (Manager Online, 2021), aligning with Kaewthep's (2009) research, which suggests that resistance is one of the communicative functions of comedy across various media.

Numerous studies have shown that performances can influence audience perceptions and attitudes on multiple levels, from knowledge acquisition and awareness to attitude formation and behavioral tendencies (Kaewthep, 2009). This research aims to explore this phenomenon in the context of stand-up comedy, positing that it transcends mere entertainment to reflect societal issues, perform various functions, and influence audience perceptions on multiple levels.

2. Research Objectives

- To study the content communication patterns in the stand-up comedy show "Deaw 13".
- To examine the reflection of social context connections in "Deaw 13".
- To investigate the audience's perception of social issues presented in "Deaw 13".

3. Review of Literature

3.1. Reflection Theory

Reflection theory, as applied to the analysis of media content, posits that society serves as the blueprint for what is depicted in the media (Kaewthep & Chaikhunphon, 2012). This theoretical standpoint suggests that society, or the "real world," is primary, while the representation of people, objects, or events in the "media world" is secondary. In essence, media content is seen as a reflection or a recording of real-world phenomena. For instance,

the depiction of the attack on the U.S. naval base by the Japanese Empire in the film "Pearl Harbor" reflects the historical event that led to World War II. Without the occurrence of this event in the real world, there would be no such depiction in the media world.

Within reflection theory, there are three distinct levels of reflection (Kaewthep & Chaikhunphon, 2012):

1. **Mirror Reflection:** This level pertains to the reflection of reality based on physical appearance, behavior, shape, face, or attire. It is a straightforward representation of the external characteristics of the real world.
2. **Lantern Reflection:** This level reflects social structures and shared societal perspectives. It delves into the nuances of class differences, generational views, and other collective viewpoints within society.
3. **Projector Reflection:** This is the deepest level of reflection, focusing on social theories, ideologies, beliefs, or values. It involves a critical examination of societal phenomena through the lens of established social theories and critiques.

3.2. Ladder of Comedy

The ladder of comedy is a concept that outlines a hierarchy of humor, relating to human emotions and psychological functions (Kaewthep, 2009). Humor in various media serves a psychological purpose, such as ego release, venting frustration, aggression, or anger. Laughter acts as a safety valve, shielding individuals from painful realities. In the absence of humor, human mental well-being could be adversely affected. Therefore, humor is essential for providing temporary relief from suffering.

Thompson (1946, as cited in Kaewthep, 2009) proposed six levels in the ladder of comedy:

1. **Obscene Jokes:** This is the lowest level of humor, involving vulgar and indecent jokes.
2. **Physical Comedy:** Humor derived from physical actions, often involving slapstick or misfortunes.
3. **Situational Comedy:** Humor arising from contrived situations, coincidences, or improbable scenarios that are presented as believable.
4. **Wit and Wordplay:** Humor based on clever use of words, language, tone, or dialogue.
5. **Character Comedy:** Humor derived from impersonating others or using comedic personalities.
6. **Satire and Irony:** The highest level of humor, utilizing real-world issues, situations, thoughts, or events for comparison, mockery, satire, or sarcasm.

4. Research Methodology

This research employs a mixed-methods approach, utilizing both content analysis and audience surveys.

Content Analysis: The "Deaw 13" show (2 hours 56 minutes) is analyzed using a taxonomy to categorize content of communication patterns and examine reflections of social contexts. The analysis considers the levels of reflection, structural characteristics of the performance (content, presentation style, emotional basis), and the ladder of comedy. Data is categorized using a tally sheet.

Free Elicitation Procedure: A representative sample of 120 audience members is surveyed using a single elicitation question to assess their recall and recognition of social issues presented in "Deaw 13." Additional questions gauge their attitudes and behavioral tendencies after watching the show.

4.1. *Sample Selection*

The sample is selected from audiences of "Deaw 13," specifically those who have already watched the show. Convenience sampling is used, followed by screening for willingness to participate. The sample size of 120 is based on Korchia's (2001) method, increased sixfold for greater reliability and to compare generational differences.

4.2. *Research Instrument*

Data collection involves a free elicitation procedure with a single elicitation question: "When you think about the content you watched in "Deaw 13", what issues, stories, or topics come to mind?" A structured questionnaire is used, along with additional questions to assess attitudes and behavioral tendencies after the show. The questionnaire includes sections on demographics, the single elicitation question, and a 5-point Likert scale to evaluate attitudes and behavioral tendencies.

4.3. *Data Analysis*

Data analysis involves creating network weight diagrams of the sample's responses, categorizing them into domains, and creating a comprehensive network weight diagram for each domain. Descriptive statistics analyze the mean of attitudes and behavioral tendencies, while inferential statistics (One-way ANOVA and Spearman's rank correlation coefficient) compare the mean across generations.

5. Analysis and Results

5.1. *Content Analysis Results of "Deaw 13"*

Content analysis of "Deaw 13" reveals a diverse range of social, cultural, and political themes, totaling 13 distinct topics. These themes encompass various aspects of contemporary Thai society, reflecting the complexities and nuances of everyday life. The show's content predominantly focuses on social issues (53.84%), followed by cultural (30.76%) and political (15.38%) themes, as shown in Table 1. This distribution suggests that the show prioritizes commentary on social issues while also incorporating cultural and political elements to provide a comprehensive reflection of Thai society.

Table 1: Distribution of Themes in "Deaw 13"

Main Topic Category	Number of Themes	Percentage
Social Issues	7	53.84%
Cultural Issues	4	30.77%
Political Issues	2	15.39%
Total	13	100.00%

The analysis also reveals the show's predominant use of humor rooted in reality, drawing upon relatable situations and experiences to resonate with the audience. This approach not only enhances the entertainment value but also facilitates a deeper understanding and engagement with the social issues being addressed. The most common reflection type identified in the show is the "lantern" type, which sheds light on shared societal experiences and beliefs. By highlighting commonalities in awareness, thoughts, and behaviors, this reflection type fosters a sense of collective identity and shared understanding among the audience. For instance, the show's depiction of the respect given to elders in social ceremonies (weddings and funerals) resonates with the audience's cultural values and reinforces social norms.

In addition to the "lantern" type, the show also utilizes "mirror" and "projector" reflections. "Mirror" reflections realistically depict situations and behaviors, providing a straightforward representation of societal realities. For example, the show's portrayal of the challenges faced when using public restrooms in Thailand reflects a common experience for many audiences. On the other hand, "projector" reflections delve deeper, connecting to life philosophies, sociocultural dynamics, and political perspectives. This is evident in the show's critique of consumerism and its encouragement of a simpler, more meaningful life.

Table 2: Distribution of Humor Types in "Deaw 13"

Humor Type	Number of Themes	Percentage
Character Impersonations	39	27.86%
Situational Comedy	28	20.00%
Wit and Wordplay	28	20.00%
Satire and Irony	28	20.00%
Physical Comedy	14	10.00%
Obscene Jokes	3	2.14%
Total	140	100.00%

The humor in "Deaw 13" is predominantly derived from character impersonations (27.86%), followed by situational comedy, wit and wordplay, and satire/irony (20.00% each), as

depicted in Table 2. These higher-level forms of humor contribute to the show's intellectual appeal and social commentary. The frequent use of character impersonations allows Udom to embody different perspectives and satirize various social roles, while situational comedy, wit, and wordplay create humorous scenarios that underscore the show's social commentary. Satire and irony are employed to expose the absurdities and contradictions within Thai society, prompting the audience to question prevailing norms and beliefs. While physical comedy and obscene jokes are less frequent, they still play a role in diversifying the comedic elements and catering to a broader audience.

5.2. Reflections of Social Context Connections

The content analysis underscores the show's ability to effectively reflect and communicate real-world social contexts. The reflections are firmly grounded in reality, allowing the audience to easily connect with the content and recall shared experiences and events. For example, the show's discussion of modern dating practices through apps like Tinder reflects a prevalent phenomenon in contemporary Thai society. This grounding in reality enhances the show's credibility and relevance, making the social commentary more impactful.

The predominance of the "lantern" reflection type further emphasizes the show's focus on shared societal experiences. By highlighting common struggles, aspirations, and beliefs, the show creates a sense of solidarity among the audience, fostering a collective understanding of the social issues being addressed. This shared understanding can potentially lead to increased awareness and engagement with these issues beyond the realm of entertainment. For instance, the show's portrayal of the frustrations associated with attending funerals and the Qingming festival resonates with many audiences who have experienced similar situations.

The deeper "projector" reflections, while less frequent, are crucial in elevating the show's social commentary. By connecting to life philosophies, sociocultural dynamics, and political perspectives, these reflections encourage the audience to think critically about the underlying causes and consequences of the social issues presented. For example, the show's critique of the Thai political system and the capabilities of its leaders prompts audiences to reflect on the broader implications of these issues for society.

5.3. Free Elicitation and Additional Question Results

The audience survey results provide valuable insights into the impact of the show on audiences' perceptions and attitudes. The findings reveal that political themes domain is the most readily recalled and recognized (40.03%), followed by social themes domain (38.84%) and cultural themes domain (21.13%). This suggests that the political commentary in "Deaw 13" resonates strongly with the audience and is more likely to be remembered and discussed, as shown in Figure 1. The high retention or memorable (recall and recognition) of political themes may be attributed to their immediate relevance to the audience's lives and the ongoing public discourse surrounding these issues.

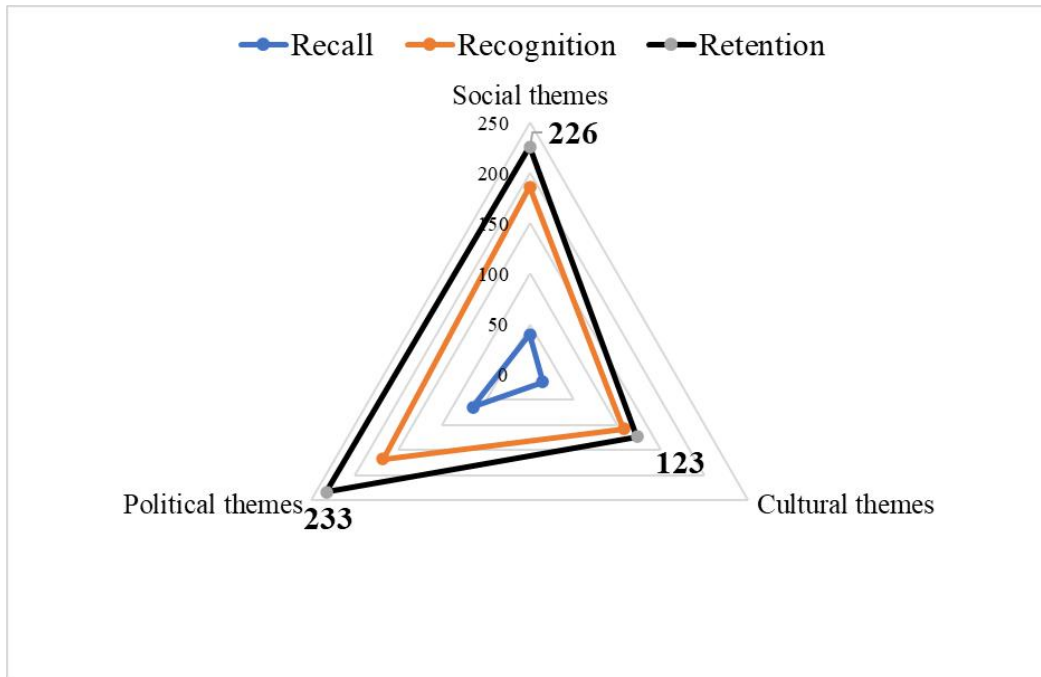


Figure 1: Frequency Weight of Recall, Recognition, and Retention in "Deaw 13"

The survey also reveals generational differences in audience perceptions. Younger audiences (Gen Z and Gen Y) exhibit more positive attitudes and behavioral tendencies towards the show than older generations (Gen X and Baby Boomers), as shown in Table 3. This finding aligns with the observation that the show's content and humor are tailored towards a younger demographic, who may be more receptive to its social commentary and critical perspectives. The positive attitudes among younger audiences suggest that stand-up comedy can be an effective tool for engaging and influencing this demographic on important social issues.

Table 3: Mean of Attitude and Behavioral Tendency by Generation

Generation	Mean of Attitude and Behavioral Tendency
Gen Z	4.56
Gen Y	4.09
Gen X	4.09
Baby Boomer	3.72

Furthermore, the survey results indicate that the show's impact extends beyond mere entertainment. The high scores on understanding and valuing social issues (Mean = 4.14, SD = 0.737), agreeing with and supporting the performer's views (Mean = 4.20, SD = 0.784; Mean = 3.98, SD = 0.845), and willingness to change opinions and engage with social and political news (Mean = 4.01, SD = 0.948) suggest that the show has the potential to stimulate critical thinking and promote civic engagement. However, the moderate score on the intention to change personal behavior (Mean = 3.39, SD = 0.938) highlights a potential gap between attitude change and behavioral modification, warranting further investigation in future research.

5.4. Hypothesis Testing Results

The research hypothesis posited that generation (age group) is associated with attitudes and behavioral tendencies after watching "Deaw 13." The results of a one-way ANOVA test revealed a significant difference in attitudes and behavioral tendencies among different age groups ($F = 3.691, p < .05$). Post-hoc tests using the Least Significant Difference (LSD) method further clarified these differences.

Specifically, the Baby Boomer generation exhibited significantly less positive attitudes and behavioral tendencies compared to both Gen Z ($p = .012$) and Gen Y ($p = .043$). Additionally, Gen X also showed less positive attitudes and tendencies compared to Gen Z ($p = .004$).

These findings are further supported by a Spearman's rank correlation coefficient analysis, which revealed a significant negative correlation between age and attitudes/behavioral tendencies ($r = -0.297, p < .05$), indicating that younger audiences tend to have more positive attitudes towards the show's content and message. This finding suggests that stand-up comedy may be a particularly effective tool for engaging and influencing younger audiences on social and political issues.

In summary, the hypothesis testing results confirm that age plays a significant role in shaping audience perceptions and responses to "Deaw 13." Younger generations, particularly Gen Z, are more receptive to the show's message and exhibit more positive attitudes and behavioral tendencies compared to older generations. This highlights the importance of considering generational differences when analyzing media effects and tailoring communication strategies to specific age groups.

6. Discussion

The findings of this research provide compelling evidence of the significant influence that stand-up comedy can have in shaping audience perceptions and effectively communicating social issues. The show's ability to resonate with a diverse audience, particularly younger generations, underscores its potential as a tool for social commentary and change. The predominance of social and political themes, coupled with the use of higher-level humor, suggests that stand-up comedy can be a powerful platform for raising awareness and fostering critical thinking about societal issues.

The research also highlights the importance of considering generational differences in media effects research. The varying attitudes and behavioral tendencies across generations, as evidenced by the significant difference in mean scores between Gen Z (Mean = 4.56) and older generations (Gen X: Mean = 4.09, Baby Boomer: Mean = 3.72), suggest that media messages may be interpreted and internalized differently based on age and life experiences. This finding has implications for the design and delivery of media content aimed at specific demographics, emphasizing the need to tailor messages to resonate with the target audience's values and experiences.

The negative correlation between age and attitude towards the show ($r = -0.297, p < 0.05$) further reinforces the notion that younger audiences may be more receptive to the show's social commentary and critical perspectives. This may be due to their heightened awareness of social and political issues, as well as their familiarity with the comedic style and cultural references employed in the show. Understanding these generational differences is crucial for

developing effective communication strategies that can bridge the gap between different age groups and foster a more inclusive and informed public discourse.

7. Observations and Implications

7.1. Incongruity Between Presented Issues and Audience's Retention

The content analysis reveals an interesting discrepancy between the quantity of issues presented within each thematic category and the audience's retention of those issues. While social issues constitute the largest category (7 themes), they are not the most recalled or recognized by the audience. Conversely, political themes, despite being the smallest category (2 themes), are the most readily recalled and recognized (40.03%). This suggests that the salience and relevance of the issues, rather than their mere quantity, play a crucial role in audience retention.

The prominence of political themes in audience recall and recognition can be attributed to two main factors. Firstly, political issues, particularly those concerning the capabilities of national leaders, are of paramount concern to the public as they directly impact their livelihoods and the overall direction of the country. Secondly, political issues often involve conflict and controversy, making them more engaging and memorable for the audience. The show's humorous take on these issues may further amplify their retention by creating an emotional connection and stimulating discussion.

7.2. Generational Influence on Attitudes

The study's findings highlight the significant influence of generational differences on audience attitudes and behavioral tendencies towards the show. Younger audiences (Gen Z and Gen Y) exhibit more positive attitudes and are more likely to be influenced by the show's message compared to older generations. This suggests that stand-up comedy, as a form of entertainment and social commentary, may be particularly effective in engaging and mobilizing younger audiences.

This generational divide can be attributed to several factors, including differences in values, life experiences, and media consumption habits. Younger generations may be more attuned to the show's humor and cultural references, making them more receptive to its message. Additionally, they may be more open to challenging traditional norms and beliefs, making them more likely to engage with the show's critical perspectives.

The implications of this finding are significant for communication strategies aimed at promoting social change. By understanding the generational nuances in media reception, communicators can tailor their messages to resonate with specific age groups, thereby maximizing their impact and fostering a more inclusive and participatory public discourse.

7.3. "Deaw 13" Analysis Through the Communication Process Model

Analyzing "Deaw 13" through the lens of the S-M-C-R communication model provides further insights into the show's effectiveness:

1. **Sender (S):** Udom Taephanich, as the sender, strategically selects real-life situations and social experiences to craft his message. He employs high-level humor, character impersonations, and thought-provoking comparisons to engage the audience and deliver his social commentary.
2. **Message (M):** The show's message is multifaceted, encompassing social, cultural, and political themes. It not only highlights societal problems but also offers potential solutions, encouraging critical thinking and self-reflection among the audience.
3. **Channel (C):** The show is disseminated through both live performances and online streaming on Netflix, reaching a broad audience across different demographics and geographic locations. This multi-channel approach maximizes the show's reach and impact, allowing it to transcend the limitations of traditional performance spaces.
4. **Receiver (R):** The audience actively engages with the show, interpreting its message and potentially applying it to their own lives. The positive attitudes and behavioral tendencies observed in the survey suggest that the show effectively influences audience perceptions and fosters a willingness to engage with social and political issues.

The show's success can be attributed to the sender's skillful encoding of the message through humor, the relevance and resonance of the content with the audience's experiences, and the effective utilization of multiple channels to reach a wide audience. The active engagement of the audience further reinforces the show's impact, demonstrating the potential of stand-up comedy as a tool for social commentary and change.

8. Conclusion

In conclusion, this research provides a comprehensive analysis of the social reflections and audience perceptions in Udom Taephanich's "Deaw 13." The findings highlight the show's effectiveness in communicating social issues through humor based on reality and its potential to influence audience attitudes and behaviors, particularly among younger generations. The study also underscores the importance of considering generational differences in media effects research and suggests avenues for future research in this field.

9. Limitations and Future Research

This study is limited by its focus on a single stand-up comedy show and a specific cultural context. Future research could expand to other comedic performances and diverse cultural settings to examine the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, investigating the long-term impact of stand-up comedy on audience attitudes and behaviors would provide valuable insights into its potential for social change.

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