

AN IN-DEPTH ANALYSIS OF SATIRICAL DISCOURSE IN THE CHINESE COMEDY VARIETY SHOW *ROCK & ROAST*

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ABSTRACT

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The Chinese variety show *ROCK & ROAST* has emerged as a significant cultural phenomenon. Distinguished by its incisive deployment of satirical discourse, the program addresses pressing societal issues while evoking emotional resonance from its audience. This study investigates the pivotal role of satirical discourse in the show, highlighting its capacity to foster social reflection and challenge entrenched norms. While previous research has predominantly focused on humor, this study fills a significant gap by analyzing the role of satire—more pointed and socially critical than humor—in fostering public discourse and societal reflection. Adopting a mixed-methods approach, this study draws on data from five seasons of *'ROCK & ROAST'*, employing transcription, thematic categorization, and statistical analysis. The findings reveal four primary thematic categories: injustice and social bias against women (43.75%), satire directed at men (31.25%), critique of workplace phenomena (12.5%), criticisms of social behavior and trends (12.5%). Female comedians often employ a feminist perspective to critique gender inequality, while male performers engage in broader societal commentary through satire. These divergent perspectives enrich the discourse, highlighting the varied ways in which satire articulates and critiques social realities. Furthermore, the study identifies emotional resonance as a central factor driving audience engagement, grounded in shared identities, experiences, and societal pressures, particularly among women and working-class viewers. By examining the multifaceted role of satire in *ROCK & ROAST*, this study contributes to the fields of sociolinguistics and media studies by exploring how satirical language serves as both an artistic and sociopolitical tool in contemporary Chinese entertainment. This study contributes to the fields of sociolinguistics and media studies by elucidating how satire functions as an artistic and sociopolitical force in contemporary Chinese entertainment.

Keywords: *ROCK & ROAST*; satirical discourse; Chinese comedy variety shows; audience resonance

1. INTRODUCTION

Stand-up comedy is an art form that provocatively engages with contemporary issues, challenges societal norms, and elicits laughter and reflection. Comedians strategically employ language to critique societal and political issues, exposing both injustices and absurdities. Satirical discourse, as a rhetorical device, holds substantial potential to reflect social realities by challenging existing ideals and norms (Weaver, 2012;

Stoyanova, 2021). The Chinese variety show *ROCK & ROAST*, a widely popular program among audiences, utilizes satire to address diverse dimensions of societal issues, including gender roles, social media culture, and workplace dynamics (Zhao, 2021; Huang, 2022). This study examines the use of satirical language in the show, emphasizing the interplay between social critique and audience emotional resonance. While humor in Chinese media has been explored (Zhao, 2021; Huang, 2022; Cui, 2022), the critical role of satire in *ROCK & ROAST* has received less attention. This study aims to fill this gap by focusing on satire's role in challenging societal norms and fostering public discourse.

1.1 Distinction between satire and humor

Fan (1981), quoting I.R. Galperin in *Stylistics*, noted that satire, unlike humor, serves a sharper function—not just to provoke laughter but to challenge societal norms. Satire is often more aggressive, aiming to critique with a biting tone, whereas humor may incorporate mockery but lacks the same level of directness and incisive critique. These distinctions are based on the effects of satire and humor; satire is sharper and more aggressive than humor. Lao (1982), in *On Humor*, elaborated on the relationship between satire and humor, asserting that while satire incorporates humor, it is fundamentally more intense. It is often delivered with a sharp, biting tone, creating a strong sense of ridicule. Satirists skillfully attack human shortcomings, making satire often destructive. Satire and humor frequently appear together and are not easily distinguished. Cong (2001) argued that satire relentlessly attacks and negates the insignificant or flawed aspects of its target, whereas humor offers a more lenient and lighthearted critique. Gao (2004) noted that satire involves using language to express a negative evaluation of a subject or phenomenon, and it is generally regarded as an artistic technique. Satire can be classified into indignant satire and humorous satire. This paper adopts Gao's definition of indignant satire.

1.2 Resonance

Hartmut Rosa, in his book *Acceleration: The Change of Temporal Structures in Modern Society* (2015), argues that acceleration is the defining characteristic of the temporal structure of modern society as it unfolds. This acceleration manifests in three key dimensions: technological advancements, social change, and the pace of life. Ultimately, it leads to issues such as the alienation of interpersonal relationships, the loss of meaning, and an increasing sense of boredom. (Rosa, 2015, p. 86) To address these challenges, Rosa introduces the concept of resonance, which the author defines as "a mode of relating to the world" an experiential relationship based on response rather than echo. (Rosa, 2019, p. 174)

According to Rosa (2019), resonance functions as both a descriptive and a normative concept. Descriptively, it is not only a fundamental human need but also an essential human capacity. This notion carries two key implications: first, without establishing resonance, it is difficult to consolidate both subjectivity and intersubjectivity; second, without immersion in experiences of mutual engagement and response, individuals cannot fully develop a sense of personal and collective identity in the process of identity construction. At its core, every human desire is driven by a longing for resonance, and an individual's yearning for resonance is no less significant than the desire for recognition from others or the external world (Wang, 2022a). Emotional resonance serves as a crucial mechanism for forming interpersonal connections. It is not merely the expression of emotions but rather a profound exchange and mutual understanding at an emotional level.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Existing research overview

2.1.1 Research on *ROCK & ROAST*

As one of China's most influential variety shows, *ROCK & ROAST* has garnered significant academic interest since its debut. Existing research primarily focuses on the program's humor construction, cultural implications, and audience engagement. However, it is important to note that while substantial attention has been given to these areas, there remains a gap in research regarding the satirical discourse within the program and its socio-political implications.

2.1.1.1 Rhetoric and language art

Wang and Liu (2022) explored the rhetorical strategies employed in the humorous discourse of *ROCK & ROAST*, focusing on irony, puns, contrast, metaphor, and allusion. Fang (2023) examined the rhetorical features, principles, and strategies of the show from the perspectives of discourse structure, speaker intent, and audience reception, offering insights into stand-up comedy rhetoric.

2.1.1.2 Sociolinguistics and pragmatics

Wang (2021) analyzed the social functions and motivations of code-switching in *ROCK & ROAST* Season 3, Yang (2021) focused on the pragmatic features, effects, and humor strategies of stand-up comedy, offering recommendations for refining comedic language use. Liu (2022) examined this phenomenon from the perspective of adaptation theory. Huang (2023) extended this research to Season 5, exploring the socio-cultural motivations behind code-switching. Additionally, Liu (2023) investigated register deviation in humorous language, shedding light on its pragmatic significance.

2.1.1.3 Cognitive and interpretation theories

Wang (2023) applied interpretation theory to analyze the cognitive processes involved in understanding verbal humor in *ROCK & ROAST*. His study provided a framework for decoding audience cognition and humor perception.

2.1.1.4 Uses and gratifications theory

Dong (2023) examined the content selection strategies in *ROCK & ROAST*, exploring how the show aligns with audience expectations and gratifies their entertainment needs.

2.1.1.5 Multimodal discourse analysis

Yang (2022) investigated *ROCK & ROAST* through a multimodal discourse lens, analyzing the interplay between linguistic elements, body language, facial expressions, and visual modalities to construct humor.

2.1.1.6 Women's stand-up comedy language

Duan (2022) applied gender linguistics and pragmatics to examine the speech patterns of female comedians in *ROCK & ROAST*, highlighting the linguistic characteristics and performative strategies that distinguish women's stand-up comedy.

2.1.1.7 Humor language in stand-up comedy

Wang (2022b) studied the mechanisms of humor across different linguistic levels, investigating how phonological, syntactic, and semantic structures contribute to comedic effect.

2.1.1.8 Program language norms and innovation

Hao (2019) analyzed neologisms in *ROCK & ROAST*, discussing their linguistic innovation, cultural implications, and psychological impact on the audience.

2.1.1.9 Application of presupposition theory in humor

Zhao (2020) applied presupposition theory to examine verbal humor in *ROCK & ROAST*, exploring how implicit assumptions enhance comedic delivery and audience engagement.

These studies collectively have offered a comprehensive view of *ROCK & ROAST*'s linguistic and rhetorical complexity, highlighting the interplay between humor, multimodal discourse, cultural innovation, and audience reception.

2.1.2 Research on satirical speech

As a multifaceted linguistic phenomenon, satire has garnered significant scholarly attention across disciplines such as linguistics, sociology, and cultural studies. Its manifestation in everyday discourse is often nuanced and context-dependent, rendering its interpretation inherently ambiguous. Researchers have examined its structural composition and functional dynamics through diverse theoretical lenses.

2.1.2.1 Cognitive pragmatics of satirical speech

Guo (2007) conducted an exploratory investigation into the definition and pragmatic strategies of satirical speech in Chinese, employing qualitative methodologies to delineate its underlying mechanisms.

2.1.2.2 Application of metonymy theory in satirical speech

Yang and Qi (2015a) incorporated the Idealized Cognitive Model (ICM) alongside key pragmatic parameters—such as, power dynamics, perceived loss or gain, and mitigation strategies—to rectify the social and cultural limitations inherent in metonymy theory. Yang and Qi (2015b) examined satirical speech behavior through the lens of event-frame theory, highlighting the inherent tension between overtly positive affirmations and their covertly critical undertones.

2.1.2.3 Relevance theory analysis of satirical speech

Fu (2007) employed relevance theory to investigate the implicit nature of satirical speech, asserting that the interpretation of satirical discourse is deeply contingent upon cultural contexts and socio-cognitive backgrounds.

2.1.2.4 Analysis of satirical speech behavior

Drawing upon Searle's speech act theory, Tang (2003) examined the structural distinctions among praise, compliments, and satire, elucidating their pragmatic divergences.

2.2 Gaps in existing research

Although previous studies have established a robust theoretical foundation, notable gaps remain. The majority of research has predominantly centered on humor mechanisms and rhetorical strategies, with comparatively less attention devoted to the intersection between satirical speech and social critique, particularly in relation to its capacity to evoke audience emotional resonance. Furthermore, despite extensive research on the cognitive mechanisms and social functions of satire, there exists a conspicuous paucity of studies that systematically apply these theoretical insights into the *ROCK & ROAST* program. This research gap hinders a holistic understanding of the role of satirical discourse within distinct cultural and sociopolitical contexts. Consequently, this study seeks to bridge this gap by critically analyzing the deployment of satirical language by performers in *ROCK & ROAST*, while elucidating the underlying socio-discursive mechanisms that contribute to its resonance with the audience.

2.3 Impact on the current study

These prior studies offer significant theoretical and methodological insights that inform the present research:

2.3.1 Rhetorical strategies in humorous language

Research on the rhetorical strategies underlying humorous language—such as metaphor and exaggeration—provides a valuable framework for analyzing satirical speech. A deeper understanding of these rhetorical mechanisms elucidates how satire captivates audiences and fosters emotional resonance through its artistic and strategic use of language.

2.3.2 Social and cultural impact

Female stand-up comedians in *ROCK & ROAST* strategically employ satirical discourse to critique gender inequality, thereby striking a chord with female viewers. This phenomenon underscores the role of satirical language as a potent instrument for social commentary and provides a sociolinguistic lens through which to examine the interaction between language, identity, and power structures in contemporary Chinese society.

2.3.3 Speech act theory

The application of speech act theory to satirical discourse in cinematic contexts offers a valuable foundation for examining satirical speech in *ROCK & ROAST*. By employing this theoretical approach, the present study seeks to explore how satire operates as a communicative act, fulfilling specific pragmatic functions within the discourse of stand-up comedy.

3. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND RESEARCH SIGNIFICANCE

3.1 Research objectives

This study investigates the sociolinguistic factors contributing to the effectiveness and audience resonance of satirical language in the television program *ROCK & ROAST*. By analyzing both the construction and reception of satire, the research aims to uncover the linguistic and social mechanisms that render satirical discourse compelling and socially impactful. The primary objective is to identify the key pragmatic and rhetorical strategies employed in the show and to examine how these elements facilitate audience engagement and interpretation.

3.2 Research significance

3.2.1 Academic significance

As one of the most influential Chinese variety shows in recent years, *ROCK & ROAST* has garnered increasing scholarly attention. While prior research has predominantly focused on humor pragmatics and rhetorical devices, relatively little has been done to systematically analyze satire within the discourse of Chinese variety programs. This study expands the research scope by examining satirical language not only as a rhetorical construct but also as a sociocultural phenomenon deeply embedded in audience interaction and reception. By addressing this gap, the study contributes a theoretical framework for understanding satire in televised entertainment, offering new perspectives for the linguistic study of Chinese media discourse.

3.2.2 Practical significance

The satirical discourse in *ROCK & ROAST* is characterized by its incisive critique of social issues, which resonates strongly with audiences. This resonance extends beyond mere entertainment, serving as a medium for social reflection and public discourse. Through a systematic analysis of satirical language, this research provides valuable theoretical and practical insights for linguists, screenwriters, and performers, equipping them with a deeper understanding of how language can be leveraged to engage audiences and provoke critical thought. By elucidating the mechanisms through which satire facilitates social critique, this study offers strategic guidance for content creators seeking to enhance the impact of their work and effectively communicate cultural narratives.

4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study adopts a sociolinguistic theoretical framework, drawing upon satire theory and resonance theory to conduct an in-depth analysis of satirical language in *ROCK & ROAST*. As a distinctive mode of expression, satire serves as a powerful tool for social critique, employing rhetorical devices such as exaggeration, irony, and role reversal to expose social contradictions, political injustices, and inequalities embedded within power structures. By critiquing these societal issues, satirical language not only unveils the absurdities of reality but also elicits emotional resonance from audiences, prompting cognitive and affective responses that encourage critical reflection on social change.

In this study, satire is conceptualized as a linguistic mechanism that challenges social injustices through sharp and incisive discourse, directly revealing concealed societal problems. Informed by resonance theory, this research further examines how satirical language in *ROCK & ROAST* fosters emotional resonance among viewers, deepening their engagement with and reflection on social issues. Specifically, the study investigates the mechanisms through which satirical language forges an emotional connection with the audience, ultimately enhancing social awareness and a sense of responsibility. By eliciting emotional resonance, satire not only critiques social realities but also stimulates self-reflection among viewers, reinforcing public discourse and fostering a collective impetus for societal change.

Beyond examining the structure and function of satirical language, this study also underscores its emotional impact within specific socio-cultural contexts. By analyzing satirical discourse in *ROCK & ROAST*, the research aims to uncover how satire influences audience perceptions and values, triggering deeper contemplation of social realities and reinforcing the communicative function of humor as both entertainment and social commentary.

5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a mixed-methods approach, integrating qualitative and quantitative analyses to investigate the structural characteristics and social-cultural significance of satirical language in *ROCK & ROAST*.

Data Sources: the primary data for this study are derived from publicly available video recordings of *ROCK & ROAST*, spanning Seasons 1 to 5. These materials provide a comprehensive dataset for examining the evolution and patterns of satirical discourse within the program.

Data Collection: to facilitate systematic analysis, video recordings were transcribed into textual format, enabling detailed discourse analysis and the identification of satirical segments. Transcription accuracy was ensured through cross-verification, maintaining fidelity to the original spoken content.

Data Quantification and Statistics: satirical language instances were systematically categorized based on thematic content, rhetorical strategies, and pragmatic functions. The study quantifies the frequency of each satirical theme and calculates its relative proportion within the overall discourse. Descriptive statistical methods are employed to reveal distribution patterns and highlight the prominence of specific satirical themes. This quantitative analysis provides an empirical foundation for identifying the structural tendencies of satirical discourse in *ROCK & ROAST*, complementing the qualitative insights drawn from discourse analysis.

By integrating qualitative discourse analysis with quantitative statistical examination, this study offers a comprehensive exploration of satirical language, shedding light on its communicative functions, social impact, and resonance with contemporary audiences.

6. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

6.1 Analysis of satirical statements in seasons 1-5 of *ROCK & ROAST*

6.1.1 Dan Li

This is hard, folks. Really, really hard. I am trying to say that we should not label each other with meaningless tags like “celebrity”, “fan”, or “public figure”. We are all just regular humans, right? Haven’t you seen the news? We might soon be ruled by artificial intelligence. However, here we are, labeling each other. What labels will AI give us? Human 1, Human 2, Human 3? However, knowing we humans, we will probably fight tooth and nail for a lucky number. Selling tags with the number 8 will become a big business among enslaved people. Thank you, everyone. I’m Human 8, Dan Li. (Season 1, Episode 1)

Plainly and straightforwardly, it satirizes the Chinese people’s superstitions and preferences regarding numbers.

6.1.2 Siwen Wang

Once a woman gets married, her career does not matter anymore. No one cares if she flies high or gets tired. Everyone just asks, “If you are not laying eggs, why are you even flying?” (Season 1, Episode 1)

This poses questions, uses metaphors, and satirizes the societal pressure on women in terms of childbirth based on conventional norms.

However, I do want to say that men are not completely useless. Their greatest strength is that they can turn you into a married woman. Thank you, everyone. (Season 1, Episode 1)

It is a straightforward narrative, satirizing the minimal responsibility men tend to take in marriage.

6.1.3 Li Yang

Table 1: Li Yang’s satirical discourse in *ROCK & ROAST* (Seasons 1–5)

Satirical segments from stand-up comedy sketches	Style of expression and satirical content
1. Sometimes, you know, while doing this, you start mumbling like you are picking rose petals. However, I am picking pigs, you know? It is like, “He loves me. He loves me not. He loves me. He loves me not. Oh, come on, push out another one! He loves me! (Season 2, Episode 4)	Straightforwardly, it satirizes some women who expect to win a man’s love by having children, hoping he will change his mind and fall for her.
2. My dad just needs to do one thing—be himself. He does nothing all day; he just sits on the couch being himself. He loves being himself so much, so why doesn’t he try rap? My mom can even do welding, but my dad will not go near the pigsty. He says he is always out, bringing home germs that might infect the pigs. Can you believe it? He is worried about infecting the pigs, not me or my mom. (Season 2, Episode 4)	Straightforwardly, they mock men for not taking on family responsibilities.
3. Can you understand how sad I felt? I was the prettiest in our family; my mom told me so, and she would not lie to me. You know, ordinary-looking girls love watching idol dramas. They give us confidence, making us think, What is so great about you? You are just a side character. I am the lead of this story because I look exactly like the lead in idol dramas—plain and not very smart. (Season 2, Episode 5)	Straightforwardly, it satirizes the idolization of negative female stereotypes in soap operas.
4. I do not know why some people have so much free time. They see someone proposing on the street and stop to watch, even though they know nothing about the guy. They irresponsibly encourage the girl to marry him. Next time, instead of yelling, “Marry him!” you should shout, “Endure it! Do it for the kids!” Girls should be cautious in relationships; they can be dangerous, especially during breakups. I have seen news stories where a guy pushed his girlfriend out a window because she wanted to break up. (Season 2, Episode 6)	Straightforwardly, it satirizes the advice given to women facing domestic violence, encouraging them to endure it.
5. You know, men are wonderful and incredibly mysterious. You can never guess what is in their little heads. How can someone so ordinary be so confident? On this stage, I have seen all kinds of odd-looking male performers, but none ever thought, “Should I get some cosmetic surgery before appearing on TV? (Season 3, Episode 5)	Straightforwardly, they ridicule men for their excessive self-confidence.
6. You might think someone is just here to vent their problems, but no, they are trying to learn something from you. Moreover, you will teach them the most important lesson: men are trash. (Season 3, Episode 5)	It straightforwardly uses a metaphor to mock men who love to give advice.

Table 1: Li Yang's satirical discourse in *ROCK & ROAST* (Seasons 1–5) (continued)

Satirical segments from stand-up comedy sketches	Style of expression and satirical content
7. I envy supermodels, not for their taste, but their amazing, flat bodies. I wish I had that kind of body; it seems so cool, showing a person with real backbone. Their bodies scream disdain for men. When they walk by, it is like they are saying, "What are you looking at? The more you like something, the less I will have it." (Season 3, Episode 7)	Straightforwardly, it satirizes men's superficial expectations of women's appearance.
8. Being brave enough is enough. Beyond that, it is reckless. This year, I learned a crucial lesson: never mock men lightly. If you have to, only mock the successful ones because you will never know how crazy, hysterical, and unreasonable a man can get when his life is not going well—basically, acting just like a woman. (Season 4, Episode 2)	Using a straightforward metaphor, it mocks men who engage in online harassment.
9. Why do I always fall for the worst men? I think I can change them. I look ordinary, but I am super confident. No matter how much you warn me, even if you say the guy is a murderer or a war criminal, I will still think, "That is because he has not met me yet. Let me transform him!" I just want to devote myself. Call me Kua Fu chasing the sun, Nuwa mending the sky, Li Yang marrying a man. (Season 4, Episode 8)	Straightforwardly, it satirizes some women who specifically seek partners with lower qualities.
10. I am tired of wondering every day if he loves me. I want a certain life, knowing that he does not love me but can never leave me. It is secure. After getting married, the pain is gone—I do not have to meet new men. I am done pretending to be interested in their useless trivia just to make them happy, which only leads to severe psychological trauma. Waiter, bring me another whiskey. Women always have to serve others, no matter where we are. (Season 4, Episode 5)	Straightforwardly, it satirizes women who stay in loveless marriages just for the sake of stability, while men enjoy talking and boasting about their supposed extensive knowledge. Women, in response to men's boasting, can only comply.

According to Table 1, it reveals that Li Yang's satirical performances employ sharp, direct language to critique gender stereotypes, male irresponsibility, and societal expectations of women. Her routines often draw from personal experience and resonate strongly with female audiences by exposing patriarchal norms through biting humour. The satire is characterized by straightforward delivery and feminist undertones, establishing a powerful emotional connection with viewers.

6.1.4 Yan Yi, Yan Yue

Table 2: Satirical discourse of Yan Yi and Yan Yue in *ROCK & ROAST* (Seasons 1–5)

Satirical segments from stand-up comedy sketches	Style of expression and satirical content
1. People expect women to wear formal makeup at work, but no one asks men to have a formal six-pack. Our makeup has to be light enough to seem like we are not wearing any, making people think we are naturally this flawless. (Season 2, Episode 4)	Straightforwardly, it satirizes society's harsh standards for women's appearance.
2. Reading too many of those articles makes you think anybody hair on a girl is embarrassing, especially armpit hair, which supposedly makes guys dizzy and nauseous. If armpit hair is that off-putting, why don't girls use it for self-defense? Walking at night, just be ready to raise your arms if trouble comes. (Season 3, Episode 1)	Straightforwardly, it mocks the strict standards men impose on women's looks.
3. Imagine if, when Prince William proposed to Kate, Kate's mom popped out of the back of the carriage and said, "You are 30 now, just settle for this bald guy." (Season 3, Episode 4)	Straightforwardly, it satirizes the societal expectation for girls over thirty to settle in their romantic pursuits.
4. A new show about independent women is called "Nothing But Thirty." I watched it for 30 minutes, just the gif of a slap scene. Why do modern independent women's dramas still have slap scenes? Aren't they afraid the husband might find a stronger woman? Whenever two women appear on TV, one has to slap the other—be it the wife slapping the mistress or the queen slapping the concubine. Older women can slap younger women without consequences? If so, let us stop making these shows. Watching these, it seems like slaps make women more independent, so when two independent women meet, they first compare slapping records. "How many have you slapped? I have slapped ten. I have yanked thirty wigs." "Impressive." (Season 3, Episode 9)	It straightforwardly satirizes the misguided perception of women, leading to the portrayal of independent women in Chinese media who still face accusations of being a "third party" in relationships.
5. All the switches in my house are voice-activated. To turn off the lights, I just shout, "Yanyi, turn off the lights." Eventually, I got Siri to do it. So now, I shout, "Siri, tell Yanyi to turn off the lights." I always give in because a woman's greatest joy is the joy of giving. (Season 4, Episode 3)	It straightforwardly satirizes the expectation for women to handle all domestic responsibilities tirelessly.
6. All women seem to have to get prettier before working. Even in the anime we watched as kids, the female leads had to transform into beautiful warriors before fighting. So, we fear being seen as mere decorations in the workplace, like a female fragrance enhancing the atmosphere. While others do stand-up, we are just hostesses, saying, "Welcome!" (Season 4, Episode 4)	Straightforwardly, it satirizes society's demanding beauty standards for women and the lack of appreciation for women's contributions in the workplace.
7. It feels like women cannot be near pockets. Why not? We will not tarnish them. Pockets are not ancestral graves. (Season 5, Episode 2)	Through questioning and metaphor, it satirizes the absence of pockets in women's clothing and the feudal customs preventing women from entering ancestral graves.

Table 2: Satirical discourse of Yan Yi and Yan Yue in *ROCK & ROAST* (Seasons 1–5) (continued)

Satirical segments from stand-up comedy sketches	Style of expression and satirical content
8. We researched why women's clothes lack pockets. It is to maintain the silhouette. Men find curves attractive because they follow fluid dynamics. So, when women go out for late-night snacks, they attract all kinds of grime, smoke, dust, and sometimes even men's hands. (Season 5, Episode 2)	Straightforwardly it satirizes the focus on male-centric aesthetics in women's fashion, neglecting practicality for women.

As Table 2 clearly illustrates, Yan Yi and Yan Yue use nuanced, metaphor-rich satire to critique gender inequality, unrealistic beauty standards, and domestic burdens placed on women. Their performances blend humor with feminist critique, gently challenging societal norms while maintaining a conversational tone. This subtle delivery style resonates with female audiences, fostering reflection through relatability rather than confrontation.

6.1.5 Xiangyu Tang

Because I have been that kind of kid from someone else's family since I was little, I am the first full-time female master's degree holder in our village since the founding of the People's Republic of China. It is not to look down on part-time students, nor is it to look down on male master's degree holders. How much did this matter make a splash? Our family even held a meeting, qualifying me to offer incense to our ancestors. (Season 5, Episode 2, Part 1)

It is plainly stated, satirizing the prohibition of women from entering ancestral graves.

6.1.6 Hulan

This phenomenon is often called "bad money drives out good money," but when you look at those people, you feel that it is not bad money driving out good money; it is more like counterfeit money driving out the real deal. (Season 5, Episode 6, Part 1)

It is plainly stated, satirizing the workplace's ostracism and suppression of talented individuals.

Also, those guys who send cheesy pick-up lines to girls, do you know which wine gets you drunk the fastest? "Being with you for a long time" is so nauseating; your wine not only gets you drunk quickly but also makes you throw up easily. (Season 2, Episode 6)

Plainly stated, it is male satire on some nauseating courtship methods employed by other males.

6.1.7 Ruochen Wei

My favorite thing is playing the role of an angel in my social media circle, showcasing how much I love everyone and being kind and compassionate. The specific approach is to repost things about lost children. Maybe when I lowered my head to post this in my social media circle, a child was struggling and crying in front of me for a minute, then dragged into a car. However, I do not need to know which direction to go; anyway, after reposting this social media post, I am one step closer to kindness. I was single until last week, and now I have a girlfriend. We often talk on the phone for hours because I speak very slowly. (Season 1, Episode 7)

It plainly satirizes people's indifferent bystander mentality, where the first reaction to an event is to post it on social media.

6.1.8 Rock

There is always that group of people who keep telling you how wonderful their every day is, right? With their breakfast, the first ray of sunlight in their house, their little cat, and the gym. I also had breakfast; I basked in the sun. I even opened a gym. Why am I not happy? What is the problem? Is it because of the cat? I cannot believe that people with exciting social media posts are enjoying life. Because when I am enjoying something, I cannot be bothered to post on social media. I will not suddenly take out my phone when I am deeply involved in telling jokes to you all, right? Like now, taking a selfie with everyone? 3, 2, 1, not bad. (Season 2, Episode 1)

It is stated as a question, satirizing people showcasing their refined lives on social media.

6.1.9 Jianguo Wang

Some people, not even 20 yet, are already holding a thick book on Machiavellianism, flipping through it like they are deciphering some ancient secret. I cannot tell if it is dark or not. All that thickness, and they manage to read it cover to cover. How badly do you want to go down the wrong path? Moreover, they read it so diligently, turning each page so slowly that, in the end, they learn to change faces faster than flipping pages. What kind of nonsense is that? (Season 3, Episode 9)

Straightforwardly, it satirizes some young people learning crooked methods.

6.1.10 Xiao Bei

Let me tell you the truth, ladies. After experiencing it, our first reaction as guys is not to think about how tough it is for women. We just think, "Thank goodness, I am a guy. I want to be a man forever, you know?" (Season 4, Episode 5, Part 2)

In a straightforward manner, it mocks men for not empathizing with the pain of childbirth.

6.1.11 Mian Wang

Put it down, girl. I do not need a bottle opener. Don't you know why men have two rows of teeth? Come again, put down your phone; you do not need to search online to tell me something I do not know. Cancer, do you think I do not know how to treat it? (Season 4, Episode 7)

Through rhetorical questioning and a straightforward narrative, it satirizes the male desire to save face.

6.1.12 Meng'en Yang

Meng'en Yang, making his first appearance in the third season and being the last performer in this episode, passionately critiques and satirizes the attitude of clients in the workplace: their unreasonable demands, low cooperation, and irrational behavior. The audience responds with enthusiasm and applause. Phrases like "Only a grandson would make so many unreasonable demands to his grandfather" and "The client is not the father; he is the grandson! While the contractor is the grandfather!" (Season 4, Episode 7) strike a chord with the audience. Meng'en Yang wins first place with 150 votes, directly advancing to the top 18.

In the eighth episode of the fourth season of the talk show, Meng'en Yang satirizes the workplace trend of adopting English names.

1. The workplace is too dangerous. I have done many jobs before, and I found out I am the kind of person who does not cut out for a 9-to-5. I do not understand any of the rules in this workplace. First, I do not understand why everyone must have an English name at work. I went to a media company before, and during the new employee induction, their English names were all so extravagant—names like Stella, Emily, and Crystal. Those names sound like the protagonists in foreign films. Moreover, my English name is Bob. After they introduced everyone, I felt awkward being Bob. Bob sounds like the dog Stella raised. (Season 4, Episode 8)

It mocks leaders for enjoying flattery and giving arbitrary commands in the jokes.

2. Do you know the feeling of meeting with a clueless boss who pretends to know everything and tries to give orders? It feels like you are a superhero, saving the world. Your colleagues are what? The Hulk, Captain America, Thor. Everyone is stressed out, and your boss suddenly comes out with a sentence: "Makabaka bikakabaka boing." (Season 4, Episode 8)

Using rhetorical questions and metaphors, and by employing sharp and direct language without tact, Meng'en Yang expresses his frustration in the jokes about work. Although there are few punchlines, the show's passionate venting brings the audience joy. This becomes a distinctive style of performance for the actor.

6.2 Themes and linguistic styles of satire

An analysis of 32 satirical performances reveals a diverse range of societal themes, with gender dynamics, workplace culture, and contemporary social trends emerging as dominant focal points. Nearly 80% of the satirical content revolves around gender issues, highlighting the significance of gender disparities and deeply rooted stereotypes in shaping societal discussions, particularly among younger audiences.

1. Injustice and social bias against women (43.75%)

Comprising 14 instances, these critiques spotlight the multifaceted inequalities women encounter in marriage, the workforce, and beauty standards. Women frequently face societal pressure to compromise in romantic relationships or to view childbirth as a means of maintaining marital stability. Societal expectations surrounding female appearance remain stringent, and the "male gaze" continues to dictate the framing and assessment of women's images. In professional settings, women's competencies are frequently undervalued.

2. Satire directed at men (31.25%)

Encompassing 10 instances, this category takes aim at men for shirking responsibilities across societal and familial spheres, such as passivity in marriages and evasion of household chores. Men's interpersonal conduct is often characterized by overconfidence and clumsy, inappropriate, or even inept courtship tactics. Additionally, some men display violent propensities.

3. Critique of workplace phenomena (12.50%)

With 4 instances, these entries lay bare detrimental workplace dynamics, like the sidelining of skilled individuals in favor of those skilled at sycophancy. Dominant parties (e.g., clients) are prone to exploiting subordinate groups, perpetuating an unhealthy power imbalance.

4. Criticisms of social behavior and trends (12.50%)

Also consisting of 4 instances, these critiques spotlight the erosion of authentic emotional connections, spurred by the quest for an idealized online persona on social media platforms. The societal fixation on certain numbers mirrors a blind adherence to outdated traditional beliefs.

In the expression of gender critique, male and female stand-up comedians exhibit significant differences. Female performers typically draw on individual experiences and a female perspective, focusing on societal injustices and discrimination against women, and advocating for women's rights. In contrast, male performers tend to approach the issue from a broader societal and cultural perspective, reflecting on and critiquing male behaviors and attitudes. This difference reflects the varying societal roles and expectations of gender, while also revealing the diverse perspectives and ways gender is expressed through satirical language.

Among the most prominent satirical comedians in the show are:

1. Li Yang
2. Yan Yi and Yan Yue
3. Meng'en Yang

Meng'en Yang is often referred to as the female version of Li Yang due to their similar comedic styles, characterized by bluntness and sharpness, focusing more on critique than humor. Unlike many comedians who prioritize entertainment, Yan Yi and Yan Yue emphasize feminist themes. Although their routines incorporate satire, their softer delivery style somewhat diffuses its sharpness.

Li Yang's satire centers on feminist themes, and her bluntness directly challenges male authority, provoking a significant backlash from men. In contrast, Yan Yi and Yan Yue's milder approach did not elicit such a strong reaction from the male audience. Meng'en Yang's routines focus on workplace issues, such as critiquing clients, adopting English names, and bosses' incompetence, resonating deeply with the audience.

6.3 Emotional resonance of satire

For a stand-up comedian, the ability to generate audience resonance is a crucial determinant of success. Emotional resonance enables individuals to feel understood and cared for, providing support and encouragement during difficulties or challenges. Beyond humor, stand-up comedy resonates with audiences by articulating emotions, viewpoints, and attitudes that validate their experiences and foster a sense of understanding.

6.3.1 Establishing points of resonance

Resonance manifests itself on two levels: cognitive, characterized by intellectual agreement with the core arguments, and affective, marked by deep emotional involvement. The prerequisite for resonance is psychological resonance, aligning thoughts, emotions, and intentions. In spoken cognitive resonance, this alignment occurs naturally, without external intervention. When it occurs, audiences exhibit heightened engagement, displaying enthusiasm and a sense of emotional fulfillment. Effective verbal communication hinges on identifying points of resonance with the audience, rendering the discourse engaging and relatable. This entails articulating ideas that align with audience perspectives, fostering both attentiveness and receptiveness.

As a communication system, oral expression operates in a continuous "output-feedback" loop. Participants alternately play the roles of "controller" and "controlled," allowing the system to self-regulate. Speakers need to consider their audience's perspective, shaping their speech accordingly. The thought process develops along two lines: the speaker's own position, situation, thoughts, and feelings, and the audience's

position, situation, thoughts, and feelings. Throughout the exchange, speakers adjust their words based on the audience's actual and potential reactions to achieve resonance.

Emotional experience is key to creating points of resonance. Interpersonal relationships are always interwoven with interactions between people, generating various emotions. Emotions are experiences of whether objective things meet one's needs, desires, and views. Strategic emotional engagement enhances verbal expression. In aesthetic theory, the concept of 'summoning structure' posits that literary works present an interpretative framework, inviting audiences to integrate their own experiences to co-construct meaning. In verbal communication, focusing on the content of expression allows for deep resonance, elevating "information sharing" to "cognitive consensus," achieving a transition from "joyful resonance" to "mutual understanding."

While receiving information, participants engage their experiences in the expressed content, triggering cognitive resonance and forming experiential communication and inner dialogue. In constructing the discourse, speakers should excel at creating content that narrows the distance between themselves and the audience, increasing the relevance at the public level. This means aligning the speaker's thoughts and cues with the audience's pre-structures (knowledge and experience). For instance, constructing problem-based scenarios can activate resonance points by fostering shared concerns and selecting perspectives of mutual interest, thereby facilitating emotional engagement and dialogue. Understanding the audience's psychological makeup and experiences is crucial for evoking resonance and enhancing communication effectiveness.

6.3.2 Reasons for resonance

In the process of building emotional resonance, the alignment of identity, background, and experiences between the performers and the audience becomes one of the core drivers of emotional resonance. The majority of comedians in *ROCK & ROAST* come from ordinary professional backgrounds, with notable exceptions such as Qimo Zhou, the director of Beijing Stand-up Comedy Culture Media Co., Ltd., and Li Xueqin, a major shareholder in a cultural media company based in Shenyang. The demographic profile of these comedians (Figure 1)—predominantly aged 22 to 40 and possessing at least an undergraduate degree—closely mirrors that of their audience, reinforcing their relatability and potential for resonance.

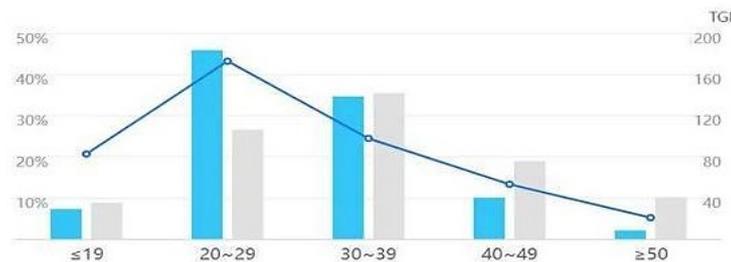


Figure 1: Audience age distribution of *ROCK & ROAST*
Source: TopMarketing (2022)

As a member of the working class, the audience recognizes that the workplace constitutes a significant aspect of daily life. Consequently, grievances regarding employers, clients, and corporate management often strike a particularly strong chord with audiences. Among the performers in *ROCK & ROAST*, Meng'en Yang distinguishes herself through her satirical critique of clients, a theme that resonates deeply with working professionals.

The prominence of gender-related issues in stand-up comedy can largely be attributed to the substantial proportion of female audience members. Comedy consumption is particularly prevalent among individuals aged 18 to 29, with women comprising 65% and men 56% of this demographic (Gou, 2023).

As access to education expands and economic independence among women increases, there is a growing demand for platforms that amplify female voices. Under the influence of feminist discourse, women in patriarchal societies often experience suppression, particularly in their ability to express discontent openly. Stand-up comedians who boldly critique and satirize male behavior provide a powerful outlet for this frustration, fostering a profound sense of resonance among female viewers.

Women's workplace experiences are uniquely challenging, as they not only contend with capitalist exploitation but also endure relentless scrutiny regarding their appearance, a consequence of entrenched patriarchal norms. Moreover, societal expectations regarding maternity place an additional burden on women. The forthright satire of these systemic oppressions offers female audiences a sense of validation and emotional relief, reinforcing the significance of gendered discourse in stand-up comedy.

The widespread appeal of *ROCK & ROAST* can be largely attributed to the comedians' adept selection of themes that resonate with contemporary audiences. By addressing issues of systemic injustice and societal anxieties, the show functions as a conduit for public catharsis. In particular, satire targeting workplace dynamics reflects the aspirations of younger generations for improved working conditions, career advancement opportunities, and economic stability.

Social media, as a central aspect of modern life, exacerbates personal insecurities by fostering relentless comparisons between curated online personas and lived realities. This phenomenon is encapsulated in comedian Rock's observation: "I feel like I live worse than a pig or a dog." His remark poignantly captures the existential distress stemming from economic stagnation and societal pressures. Likewise, satirical critiques of superficial social behaviors and performative self-presentation highlight contemporary anxieties regarding increasing self-absorption and emotional detachment.

Similarly, the lampooning of men's clumsy and often overconfident courtship behaviors reflects broader apprehensions regarding modern romantic relationships. These comedic critiques serve not only as entertainment but also as a mirror reflecting underlying societal tensions. The shared lived experiences of comedians and their audiences—particularly in terms of social class, age, education, workplace challenges, and economic pressures—foster a profound sense of identification and resonance, reinforcing the role of stand-up comedy as a medium of social critique and collective emotional expression.

6.4 Discussion

6.4.1 Critical analysis of key findings

1. Satirical language as a medium for social critique

The satirical discourse in *ROCK & ROAST* extends beyond comedic entertainment, serving as a lens through which societal contradictions are examined, and public discourse is stimulated. Unlike traditional rhetorical analyses that primarily focus on linguistic techniques, this study highlights the critical role of satire in addressing themes such as gender dynamics, workplace culture, and cultural traditions. For instance, Li Yang's gender-based satire challenges dominant male narratives, while Meng'en Yang's critiques of workplace norms illuminate the lived experiences of the working class. These instances underscore satire's ability to reflect and critique prevailing social structures.

2. Gendered satirical expression and its social ramifications

Female comedians in *ROCK & ROAST* strategically employ satire to articulate feminist perspectives and critically engage with systemic gender inequalities. Li Yang's performances, for example, not only resonate deeply with female audiences but also stimulate broader societal debates on gender power structures. Meanwhile, Yan Yi and Yan Yue adopt a more subtle linguistic approach, demonstrating the diverse ways in which satirical language contributes to discussions on gender. This variation in satirical style underscores the nuanced ways humor intersects with gender discourse.

3. Direct satirical expression and communicative efficiency

Male comedians in the show frequently utilize direct, unembellished language to deliver satire, which minimizes the audience's cognitive effort in interpretation while enhancing the immediacy of message transmission. Meng'en Yang's sharp critiques of workplace culture, for example, resonate swiftly with audiences due to their direct and relatable nature. This finding highlights how the clarity and accessibility of direct satire can enhance its communicative effectiveness in addressing social issues.

4. Emotional resonance as a catalyst for social reflection

Beyond its linguistic and rhetorical dimensions, satire in *ROCK & ROAST* functions as a mechanism for fostering deep emotional engagement with audiences. By drawing upon personal and collective experiences, comedians establish a sense of shared understanding, particularly on issues related to gender inequality, labor conditions, and social mobility. When satire evokes strong emotional responses, it not only entertains but also prompts reflection, reinforcing its role as a vehicle for social critique.

5. Pragmatic adaptability and cultural embeddedness of satire

The effectiveness of satirical language in *ROCK & ROAST* is closely tied to its alignment with contemporary Chinese socio-cultural realities. The show's humor, while lighthearted, often engages with complex social issues, provoking cultural introspection among audiences. This interplay between satire and social critique highlights the cultural adaptability of comedic discourse and its potential to function as a reflexive medium within public discourse.

The findings of this study reveal several novel insights compared to previous research on satirical discourse in *ROCK & ROAST*. While past studies primarily focused on humor mechanisms (Wang & Liu, 2022; Fang, 2023), multimodal discourse strategies (Yang, 2022), and linguistic deviations in comedic language (Liu, 2023), this study expands the scope by highlighting satire as a distinct linguistic and socio-political force. Unlike earlier analyses, which often examined humor in isolation (Zhao, 2021; Cui, 2022), this study underscores how

satire critically engages with gender power structures and workplace inequalities, thus resonating deeply with the audience's lived experiences. Furthermore, previous research has explored the cognitive and pragmatic aspects of satirical speech (Guo, 2007; Yang & Qi, 2015a), yet these studies have not systematically applied such insights to *ROCK & ROAST*. This study fills that gap by demonstrating how satire not only amuses but also provokes social reflection through emotional resonance (Fu, 2007). Additionally, while earlier research acknowledged the role of feminist discourse in comedy (Duan, 2022; Huang, 2023), this study provides empirical evidence of how female comedians employ satire to subvert patriarchal narratives, a phenomenon that has not been extensively analyzed before. In contrast to studies that viewed satire as an isolated rhetorical device (Tang, 2003), this research positions it as an essential mechanism of socio-discursive engagement, aligning with the audience's socio-political consciousness. Therefore, while this study builds upon existing literature, it advances the discussion by situating satire within the broader framework of societal critique and emotional resonance, demonstrating its significance beyond humor in contemporary Chinese entertainment.

6.4.2 Future research directions

1. Comparative cross-cultural analysis

Future research could explore the use and impact of satirical language in different cultural contexts, examining how sociopolitical environments shape satirical expression and audience reception. A comparative approach would provide deeper insights into the universality and cultural specificity of satire as a communicative tool.

2. Audience reception and interpretation

Further studies could investigate how various audience demographics, including different age groups, educational backgrounds, and ideological orientations, interpret satirical language. Such research would shed light on the diverse ways in which satire is received, understood, and responded to in different social groups.

3. Digital dissemination and amplification effects

With the increasing role of social media in shaping public discourse, future studies could examine how satirical language is disseminated, adapted, and reinterpreted in digital spaces. Investigating how online platforms influence the reach and impact of satire would contribute to a broader understanding of its evolving role in contemporary social commentary.

7. CONCLUSION

As a popular program, *ROCK & ROAST* has successfully attracted a wide audience. Through incisive satirical language, its performers address various aspects of society, evoking profound resonance among viewers.

Female stand-up comedians, offering a distinct feminist perspective, expose injustices within patriarchal society. Yang Li directly challenges male discursive power, provoking verbal retaliation from men and emphasizing women's firm stance in the verbal arena. Yang Meng'en, focusing on workplace issues, lampoons the plight of the working class, striking an emotional chord with the audience. The widespread attention to women's issues can be attributed in part to the large female viewership, as well as to the program's provision of an outlet for the suppressed emotions of women in a patriarchal society.

Through diverse satirical strategies, male stand-up comedians provide distinctive perspectives on contemporary social issues. By primarily employing concise and straightforward satirical methods, performers articulate facts clearly, producing a chilling and serious effect that amplifies the power of the satire. By avoiding excessive rhetorical devices, the satire becomes more direct and concise, thereby increasing its potential to resonate with the audience. This direct approach is also a key factor in attracting viewers.

In comparison to the studies discussed in the literature review, this study uncovers the unique role of satirical language in *ROCK & ROAST* and its function within social culture, offering new perspectives and empirical support for the field. Unlike previous studies, which typically focus on universal humor characteristics such as joke structure and universality, this study specifically examines the use of satirical language within the socio-cultural context of China, particularly its role in critiquing social phenomena and articulating audience emotions—an area that remains under-researched. By filling this research gap, this study provides valuable insights into the role of satire in contemporary Chinese comedy.

A key finding of this study is that the satirical sketches in *ROCK & ROAST* serve significant social functions, particularly in criticizing social injustice, addressing politically sensitive issues, and reflecting on cultural phenomena. This challenges the dominant trend in humor research, which typically focuses on the construction and effects of humor, with less attention given to the role of satirical language as a tool for social criticism. Through a detailed analysis of representative sketches, this study demonstrates that satirical

language is not merely a form of humor but also a potent means of cultural critique, playing an essential role in discussions of social and political issues.

The empirical analysis of satirical sketches within the program *ROCK & ROAST* demonstrates a detailed examination of various societal issues. The distribution is as follows: The empirical findings indicate that 43.75% of the sketches focus on gender roles and societal expectations, exposing systemic biases against women. Additionally, 31.25% critique male behavioral patterns, particularly their reluctance to take responsibility and their problematic interpersonal conduct. Workplace dynamics are discussed in 12.50% of the sketches, emphasizing issues such as favoritism and power imbalances. Additionally, 12.50% of the sketches critique contemporary social behaviors and trends, particularly the decline of authentic connections due to social media and adherence to outdated beliefs. These findings highlight the program's capacity to engage with social issues through satirical language and its potential to stimulate public discourse and encourage social reflection. This study extends previous research by highlighting the often-overlooked critical function of satirical language in comedy.

In conclusion, this study, through careful data analysis and interpretation of representative sketches, reveals the multiple functions of satirical language as a tool for cultural critique in *ROCK & ROAST*. In addition to this, it underscores the value of satirical language in articulating social concerns and fostering audience resonance. The findings offer new directions for understanding the relationship between comedy and society and provide a foundation for future empirical research.

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