Overview:

Illustrating the use of humour to boost public speaker appeal and how the truth is commonly revealed through humour. Examining why we trust those who make us laugh, and what compels some comedians to turn serious issues into material for jokes. As well as exploring how humour opens a dialogue for topics normally ostracized by society.

We begin with the question “Why are comedic public speakers so likeable?”. Humorous people have been known to be intellectual thinkers, those who bend the rules of the world to ‘find the funny’ in everyday life. According to Henri Bergson, laughter keeps us “in touch with a living ideal”, with laughter acting as a warning to the negativity of repetition and the mundane. Being able to take this mundane and morph it into entertaining stories takes a noticeable amount of cognitive ability, a trait closely associated with resourcefulness. Being able to take unattractive information and compel it engagingly is key to having more people understand your argument, thus becoming more inclusive. Public speakers are nothing without the crowds’ support, and to gain that support the crowd must first trust the intellectual ability of the speaker: this is where comedy comes in. Lowering someone’s’ guard through well-timed jokes allow public speakers to give some breathing room between talking points, letting the listener process what is being said in a more approachable manner. By doing this the public speaker is allowing the audience to become part of the discussion, through laughter or silence the speaker can gage the reactions and continue to work their way around the neutrality of the audience. With this approach, the speaker is framing the interaction as a level playing ground, giving some power to the crowd which eases tensions. Having the crowd on your side is a powerful thing, it enables the speaker to touch on a variety of topics without immediate backlash, even bad news is taken in a more understanding matter. Furthermore, the release of serotonin will imprint the speaker’s speech into the minds of the listener. To illustrate this all, we look at the Toastmasters International: 2019 World championship of public speaking. First, second, and third place all had corresponding number of laughs, with first having the most and so fourth. From this we can infer the more comfortable a crowd is the wider the topics being joked about can be, and what is a broader topic than the truth?

In comedy, truth has always been a hot topic, with so many different walks of life how can someone express their version of the truth and expect the majority to see the humour in it? When we take an objective truth and examine it under the lens of comedy, we can test the limits of that truth, stretching the bounds of what is acceptable, and in doing so discover some new truths along the way. Being able to play with such topics makes us reevaluate the social norm and brings light to issues otherwise other looked. Bill Burr’s stand-up bit about the first lady is a prime example of how comedians take what is familiar to us and start poking holes in its logic. It starts with Bill expressing how being the ‘First Lady’ is not a real job, that the president was elected and that their spouse should not have any say in diplomatic relations; immediately the crowd goes from bursts of laughter to dead quiet. This is a direct objection to the norm of what that job stands for, a norm that many in the crowd held without realising it, until It was challenged. Bill continues by addressing the fact that in the future when the first woman president is elected, their spouse, no matter the sex, will be deemed as the ‘First Lady’. It puts into question how these roles were set up, how they could perpetuate a norm of straight male presidency coupled with a straight female first lady, unknowingly ostracizing a large portion of the population from pursuing such political positions.

In closing, we can see how comedy can be used in different ways; from gaining a crowds appeal, to opening our minds up to new perspectives. Comedy gives us a channel in which we can explore these topics fully, while simultaneously safeguarding us from the pit falls of other forms of communication. In the words of Steve Allen “Humor is a social lubricant that helps us get over some of the bad spots.”, and nowadays humour is all we have.