No Laughing Matters:

Struggles in Identity Work of Venezuelan

Stand-Up Comedians in Mexico City

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Master's Thesis

June 28, 2021

Abstract

Over the last twenty years, Venezuela's political, economic, and social crisis has forced more than five million people to leave the country. The harsh circumstances forced many Venezuelan professionals to seek employment opportunities abroad. In performing arts, Mexico has represented a significant destination for many artists who seek to boost their careers. Drawing on a digital ethnography, this study describes the professional experience of 11 Venezuelan stand-up comedians who migrated to Mexico City between 2015 and 2018 and identified the main struggles they faced developing their identity work in the new Mexican milieu. Identity work is a growing interest for scholars of media and communication studies and professionals in the media and creative industries, particularly now since the cultural sector requires multi-skilling and de-specialization of labor. Such working conditions increasingly rely on individualization, self-promotional strategies, effective public relationships, and networking. This research provides a significant case of study of public relationships and professional networks, as the Venezuelan comedians studied needed to build these links to develop their careers and earn a living upon arriving in Mexico City. This study argues that to define their identity work and find a balance between authenticity and integration in the new Mexican context, the Venezuelan stand-up comedians reconfigure their self-narratives and aspire to become *universal comedians*. After the first migration struggles and tensions with the Mexican audience and the comedy industry, the comedians claimed that they had to improve their utterance, understood the local audience better, and strived to tell universal stories. Moreover, they have acknowledged the importance of keeping authentic to themselves and their audience. And finally, they have implemented social media practices to stay in contact with their audience, especially podcasting which has become their primary strategy to create new comedy content and reach new audiences. This study has implications for other creative areas and performing arts in which high levels of individualization, unstructured work environment, and uncertainty are the norm. Additionally, it might be valuable for other comedians, creative entrepreneurs, and the cultural and creative media industry by providing an inside perspective of the nature and type of struggles, tensions, and

professional development strategies involved in the stand-up comedy business. Finally, the study offers insights into creative professionals' development in migration processes, especially under challenging circumstances such as the current Venezuelan political and social crisis.

Key Words:

Identity, Identity Work, Stand-up Comedy, Online Authenticity, Creative Labor

Acknowledgment

I would like to warmly thank Marielys, Saul, Amanda, Felipe, Eva, and Roco, who supported me, cheered me up, and welcomed me into their home throughout the entire project. My mom, Nidia, my academic guide and encouragement who accompanied me with knowledge, practical advice, and affection throughout the journey. Additionally, I would like to acknowledge Dr. Christian Ritter, who added a valuable perspective to the thesis with his remarks. And finally, I want to thank all the comedians – especially my dear Nadia! – who allowed me a bit of their time, made this project fun, and from whom I learned exceptional lessons through their immigration experiences.

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1. Introduction

"Stand-up comedy is arguably the oldest, most universal, basic, and deeply significant form of humorous expression" (Mintz, 1985, p. 71). According to Brodie (2014), stand-up comedy involves a context that allows audience feedback, participation, and engagement. And despite it essentially relies on the artist, stand-up comedy is a form of talk, "performed not *to* but *with* an audience" (Brodie, 2014, p.5). Although stand-up comedy is habitually appreciated for staging everyday life insights, showing uncomfortable truths about society, or presenting a unique view of contemporary events (Rappaport & Quilty-Dunn, 2020), the stand-up comedy's final purpose is entertainment, and its objective is evoking laughter (Mintz, 1985).

Good sense of humor and laughter, for me, are among the most extraordinary virtues and strengths people have. Humor and comedy are vehicles of communication and useful practices to release anxiety, tension, and insecurity (Sanz Ortiz, 2002). In this regard, Aquiles Nazoa, Venezuelan writer, journalist, poet, and humorist, states that "humor is a way of making people think without them realizing that they are thinking" (Márquez, 2013). In other words, humor can make us laugh and reflect on deep concerns at the same time. According to Lockyer and Pickering (2008), humor is essential to create relationships and interaction in society. Yet, jokes can be taken lightly in certain contexts and offend social standards in others. Humor is an essential social and cultural phenomenon that helps us to understand different societies in different moments (Mintz, 1985). In summary, humor is a tool that allows us to recognize and comprehend social and cultural practices.

There is a popular belief that Venezuelans have always shown a good sense of humor and can make a comedy out of their misfortunes. Yet, over the last twenty years, Venezuela's political, economic, and social crisis has forced more than five million people to flee the country. What is more the Organization of American States (2020) projects that it could rise to seven million in 2021. Furthermore, the diaspora is constituted by a high percentage of qualified immigrants, university graduates between 25 and 55 years of age from all professional fields. This massive migration has transformed every sector, including the cultural and creative industries that, besides the diaspora, have been affected by the collapse of the media landscape. In the last ten years, the Venezuelan government has increased and abused its power to regulate the media and has limited the number of networks that oppose its ideals (Human Rights Watch, 2020). In many cases, radio and television shows have been abruptly taken off the air, or artists have been banned from performing in theaters, venues, or

public spaces only for making anti-government comments or cracking a simple joke (Otis, 2015; Zinoman, 2019).

These circumstances have forced many Venezuelan artists to seek opportunities abroad. In Latin America, Mexico represents the second-largest entertainment and media market (PWC, 2014). It clusters numerous influential media conglomerates, such as Televisa and TV Azteca, that export content to all Latin America and part of the Unite States (Gutiérrez, 2009). In addition, Mexico City holds a significant circuit of theaters and venues, being stand-up comedy a growing activity in the city over the last years. Thus, Mexico has become an important migration end for many professionals and entrepreneurs in the media and creative industry who seek to boost their careers.

Nevertheless, migration presents numerous difficulties. When accessing the labor market abroad, most, if not all, professionals of any discipline face struggle to adjust to the new environment. However, given that the sense of humor is unique to everyone and implies a social context, a cognitive-perceptual component, an emotional response, and a behavioral vocal expression of laughter (Martin, 2003), for comedians, the integration into the professional arena involves different challenges since each country has its differential characteristics, culture, idiosyncrasy, and even its own sense of humor.

Bearing McRobbie's (2002) idea of 'network sociality' labor, the cultural sector now requires multi-skilling and de-specialization of labor, and such working conditions increasingly rely on individualization, intense self-promotional strategies, and effective public relationships and networking. Social media platforms add to this idea since they are growing in importance and transforming how professionals communicate, organize, and strategize their careers (Horst, Järventie-Thesleff, & Perez-Latre, 2019; Horst & Hitters, 2020); together with the increasing importance of online authenticity, often highlighted by social media specialists (Lim, Nicholson, Yang, & Kim, 2015). Therefore, we need to understand more about how professionals in the creative industry develop their identities around digital media. Especially the comedians who depend on social and professional networks to secure a job (Butler & Stoyanova, 2018). Networks that professionals lack when migrating.

Hence, due to the different difficulties and professional conflicts that Venezuelan stand-up comedians faced in the entertainment industry in Mexico City, in addition to the new digital strategies to which they must adapt in this new multi-skilled professional wanted era, and the growing importance of being authentic online and on stage, this study aims to understand better the struggles and challenges Venezuelan comedians faced when they

emigrated from Venezuela to Mexico City. Thus, conducting an ethnographic study of Venezuelan stand-up comedians based in Mexico City, this study poses the following research question: *How do Venezuelan stand-up comedians define and develop their personal identity when migrating to Mexico City?* In addition, two sub-questions complement this central research question: *How do they engage with digital media to develop their identity work?* And *in what ways do claims for authenticity shape their identity work?*

Identity in the media and creative industries is a growing interest for scholars (e.g., Bhansing, Hitters, & Wijngaarden, 2018; Bhansing, Wijngaarden, & Hitters, 2020; Horst et al., 2019; Werthes, Mauer, & Brettel, 2017). This increasing interest results, first, from the crisis of many traditional media companies that caused a decrease in job opportunities and career growth, pushing professionals towards entrepreneurship, and second, from the development of new technologies, mainly in the digital field, which has given rise to new entrepreneurship that is transforming the media industry (Achtenhagen, 2017). Furthermore, scholars have shown interest in determining how creative professionals define and develop their identity since media and creative industries are particularly complex (Bhansing et al., 2020). In addition, research has shown that professionals in this field challenge traditional business models (Werthes et al., 2017). Yet, little research on migration and identity work in creative industries, specifically on stand-up comedians, has been conducted.

Thereby, this study argues that in this process of defining their identity work and finding a balance between being authentic and integrating to the new context in Mexico City, the Venezuelan stand-up comedians reconfigured their self-narratives and aspire to become *universal comedians*. Consequently, by understanding comedians' identity work development, especially in challenging circumstances, this study has implications for other creative areas and performing arts in which high levels of individualization, unstructured work environment, and uncertainty are the norm. Additionally, this study might be valuable for other comedians, creative entrepreneurs, and the cultural and creative media industry by providing an inside perspective of the type of struggles, tensions, and professional development strategies involved in the professional side of stand-up comedians.

The thesis is organized into six sections. Following the introduction, section 2 provides the theoretical framework and literature review that grounded the study. First, the notion of identity is presented. Additionally, social identity, identity work, and comedians' identity are discussed. The second part of the section discusses the notion of authenticity and emphasizes the importance of it for comedians onstage and online. Finally, the third part examines the platformization of the self as this idea responses to the strategies of comedians

to develop their carrier in online environments. Section 3 presents the methodology of the research. This research took a digital ethnographic approach (Kozinets, 2010; Horst, Hjorth, & Tacchi, 2012, Ritter, 2021), primarily using in-depth interviews and participant observation, and it follows the procedures and principles of grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Eleven interviews were conducted with Venezuelan comedians who migrated to Mexico City and the comedians' digital practices observed and analyze to complement the findings. Section 4 presents a thorough description and analysis of the comedians' development in Mexico City. Finally, section 5 discusses the results considering existing research, outlines the research limitations, and suggests opportunities for future research.

2. Theoretical Framework

The notion of 'Identity' generally refers to the meanings individuals reflexively ascribe to themselves (Brown, 2015). These meanings are developed and sustained to address fundamental questions such as 'Who am I?', 'How should I lead my life?' and 'Who do I want to become?' (Brown, 2020). Alvesson, Ashcraft, and Thomas (2008) state that identity implies a particular subjectivity that drives a combination of feelings, values, and behaviors towards specific directions. Furthermore, they emphasize that identity is dynamic, sensitive to context, and evolves as the social world where it develops.

In psychology, organizational and social studies, identity explains behavior and deepens understanding of the self as it offers a framework that validates decision-making and allows the formation of solid relationships with others (Oliver, 2015). According to Alvesson et al. (2008), the study of identity seeks to develop knowledge of cause-effect relationships on personal and social conditions, like professional identity; it enhanced understanding of human cultural experiences, or how we communicate to generate and transform meaning, like how people define their identities through interactions with others; and it seeks to explain how power relationships act over agency, like the relationships between artists and producers in the entertainment industry.

Alternatively, Brubaker (2000) suggest that, as a collective, "identity denotes a fundamental and consequential sameness among members of a group or category" (p. 7); thus, it might define how individuals and collective actions can be guided by a particular understanding of self and social location. Moreover, Brubaker also proposes "self-understanding" as a second term that designates identity in which "one's sense of who one is, of one's social location, and of how (given the first two) one is prepared to act" (p. 17), essential in discussions of gender, sexuality, race, religion, ethnicity, nationalism, immigration, culture, and other phenomena involving collective identities and new online social movements such as #metoo and #blacklifematter.

Therefore, to shed light on the development of stand-up comedians and how they define their identities in different contexts and circumstances, the ideas discussed in this section guided the study. In the first part, I will preset identity work, comedian identity, as it gives the foundations to understand professional identity development and the tension that stems from these processes. Then, I will discuss the notion of authenticity since it denotes the importance of identity definition, main core of the comedians' comic identity, since for comedians to show themselves authentic onstage and online is critical. Finally, I will present

digital entrepreneurship and platformization as a response of comedians to developing their career and keep authentic to themselves and their identity.

2.1 Identity Work

Drawing on the concepts of the *social identity theory* (e.g., Tajfel, 1981; Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987), Brewer (1991) distinguishes that the identity of an individual has two parts. On the one hand, a *personal identity* which refers to the "individuated self—those characteristics that differentiate one individual from others," and on the other hand, the *social identities* which are "categorizations of the self into more inclusive social units that depersonalize the self-concept, where *I* becomes *we*" (p. 476). Moreover, Brewer asserts that personal identity and social identities can exist in an ongoing struggle, and the self-concept is "*expandable* and *contractable*" throughout diverse levels of social identity.

Kreiner and Sheep (2006) argue that identity adjusts and evolves, and it is subject to many influences, like organizations and social groups, along with individual's drive for change. Accordingly, they add that the individual's identity that develops from a relationship with a social group (with a specific social identity) can vary as individuals and circumstances influence the process of aligning identity with that of a social group (p. 1032). In the case of these Venezuelan comedians, for instance, their level of personal identity would be them as comedians who come from Venezuela, their accomplishments, comic style, and ideas that distinguish them from other comedians. Whereas their social identity would include all features and interests that the Venezuelan stand-up comedians, as a group, have in common and might distinguish them from other groups of comedians, and it can vary as the comedian's circumstances change.

In the professional facet, as individuals develop their own identities, they are also influenced by the higher levels, like organizations, in which they participate –the notion of identity as *work* (Oliver, 2015). Therefore, identity work, according to Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003), refers to "people being engaged in forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening or revising the constructions that are productive of a sense of coherence and distinctiveness" (p.1165). Identity work elicit by social interaction that raises questions of 'who am I?' and 'who are we?' (Alvesson et al., 2008). Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003) state that to answer these questions, individuals develop a self-narrative based on their context and desires to reproduce or transform their sense of self; thus, identity work focuses on becoming instead of being (p. 15). Moreover, they add that identity work narratives can be

continuously ongoing in complex and divided settings or a matter of engagement during crises or transitions in high stability settings.

Furthermore, Brown (2020) states that identity work refers to how individuals differentiate and identify themselves with others and social groups in the present, like interactions with colleagues, and during more extended periods, like when adapting to new roles (p. 6). In short, professionals are continually developing and redefining their identity according to their context and contrasting it to themselves and others. Alvesson (2001) states that professionals whose competence and results are intangible assets (as those within the creative industries) tend to struggle more to accomplish, maintain, and gradually change self-identity. Therefore, image, reputation, and managing social relationships become vital for those professionals as a substitute for the ambiguities (or intangibility) of their results and the development of identity (Alvesson, 2001). Conclusively, identity work can be understood as a process of claiming, enacting, and reacting to identities through language and practices (Beech, Gilmore, Cochrane, & Greig, 2012, p. 41) in which professionals negotiate and improve the tensions between personal and social identity (Kreiner & Sheep, 2006).

In the creative industry, particularly in the performing arts, Beech et al. (2012) discuss the tensions that exist in the settings of an opera company rehearsals and how identity work serves to balance those tensions. They conceptualized three kinds of tension that can prompt identity work: First, tensions can exist between the current self and the aspirational self. For achieving the aspirational identity, the individuals rely on a collective 'product.' Yet, the enactment of the aspiration (current desire for change) contains tension that elicits ongoing identity work. Second, the tensions between a dis-identified self (an undesired identity) and identified self where the enactment of avoiding an identity can produce practices that are perceived as fitting the dis-identity. And finally, the tensions inherent in hybrid identities, such as acting as an art director and a friend, incorporate tensions of "being *close to* and *distant from* artists" (p.46). Hence, Beech et al. (2012) argue that identity work can respond to tensions that pull a person in more than one direction that can arise from the enactment of aspirational identities and moving away from dis-identities, and what is more hybrid tensions can have tension inherent within them. Moreover, they illustrate that the tensions that can prompt identity work can be a response by a process of re-narration of the self and the relational roles needed for a narrative to be accepted.

Moreover, the study of Beech, Gilmore, Hibbert, and Ybema (2016) find that indie musicians' identity work struggles did not seem to be transitory. Instead, their self-questioning was constant and unsolved; "it was not a means to an end; it was an end in itself"

(p.159). The struggles faced by indie musicians, such as the fear of being exposed or rejected by their peers or the audience, are balanced by the hope for approval and praise. Beech et al. then propose that the identities of artists take or aspire may not be a solution to a problem; instead, those identities can be problematic in themselves or elicit struggles, making artists keep working on and questioning their "selves" because these struggles act as fuel that the artists might take to their next activity. Similarly, we can argue that comedians' struggling, and experience serve as material to write their routines.

2.1.1 Identity Balance

Brewer (1991) argues that social identity stems, on the one side, from the pressure between human needs for validation and similarity to others, and on the other, from a need for uniqueness and individualization. Moreover, she states that social identity can be interpreted as a negotiation between integration and differentiation from others, where the need for deindividualization is satisfied within a group, while the need for uniqueness is met across comparisons to other groups (p. 477). Hence, Brewer's model of *optimal distinctiveness* argues that balance is reached when the need for integration and the need for differentiation are equal for an individual in any given social identity. Moreover, according to Brewer, the balance of any given social identity depends, among other aspects, on the context, and the strength of the needs is determined by cultural norms, individual socialization, and recent experience. For example, in immigration processes, in which individuals struggle to integrate into the local social identity, achieving optimal distinctiveness can be challenging to resolve due to the tension between integration and differentiation caused by extensive differences in cultural norms, language, codes, etc. In the case of comedians, comedy style, topics used, words, and cultural differences can represent a barrier to integrate, be accepted and validated, by the local audience. In the comedians' circumstance, comedy style, topics used, words uttered, and cultural differences, to name a few aspects, can represent a barrier to integrating, being accepted and validated, by the local audience.

By achieving both integration and differentiation, optimal balance reduces stress and conflict and increases well-being and satisfaction (Kreiner & Sheep, 2006). Accordingly, Kreiner and Sheep assert that the purpose and function of identity work are to find an optimal balance between not being too different and independent nor too integrated and dependent in relation to a given social identity (p. 1037). Their model illustrates that the situational and individual factors (such as internal and external identity expectation and need for

differentiation and integration) create tension in identity that individuals afterward respond to achieve the optimal balance of identity work. Moreover, they find that individuals who face complex identity demands can respond cognitively and actively to mold their aptitude in a way that allows them to preserve their own identities in a challenging environment – "often just enough to recapture their own sense of self while simultaneously losing themselves in their calling" (p.1053).

2.1.2 Comedians' Identity

Unfolding and summarizing the identity of a stand-up comedian or any social group could be virtually impossible. Literature on comedians commonly portrays them as troubled by early traumas or shaded backgrounds that influence their performances and comic identity (e.g., Stebbins, 1990), which is not always the case. Yet, I will briefly discuss some characteristics attributed to stand-up comedians concerning their work.

Brodie (2014) asserts that to be a stand-up comedian is to accept a social identity with several associations and expectations, and comedians recognize themselves as figures in culture with a professional necessity to establish their identity as a stand-up comedian, as an artist, and more importantly their point of view (p. 65). In their desire to become a performer and gain the audience's love (or hatred), many comedians assert that being a stand-up comedian is as grateful as harmful, and they put themselves in a vulnerable position on stage.

Butler and Stoyanova's (2018) previous study on stand-up comedians in the UK, for instance, affirm that comedians manage their emotions to balance the level of pleasure and pain. Moreover, they argue that comedians are more willing to bear low wages, recurrent unemployment, and uncertain career prospects in their professional lives than other creative occupations since networking and professional relationships play a prominent role in this industry. They affirm that comedians count on, and are able to, manage emotions to thrive and navigate through the business.

Moreover, Brodie (2014) states that comedians strive to establish the stand-up comedian social identity by identifying parts of themselves in the stories they want the audience to interpret; as such, "stand-up comedians are characters in their own narrative, of their own making" (p.88). Rappaport and Quilty-Dunn (2020) state that stand-up comedians are often portrayed as themselves; nonetheless, generally, it is acknowledged that the personality and viewpoints represented by the comedian are not automatically that of the comedians themselves. It is part of the performance that the audience takes the character they see as real. This process of relationship between the comedian and the audience is

conditioned by the diverse social identities of the participants' social persons in which the comedian engages in an exchange with the audience and "becomes accepted as an intimate by the audience who are in turn expecting humorous insight. Laughter becomes a sign not only of approval but of acceptance" (Brodie, 2014, p. 69-70). Thus, it is vital for comedians to look authentic, original and receive acceptance, recognition, and validation from the spectators.

Similarly, Rappaport and Quilty-Dunn (2020) find that recognition and validation from their peers are significantly crucial for comedians. Besides being genuinely the author of the material –since many comedians claim they know when a colleague is taken material they do not own or comes from others, comedians need to show themselves unique and authentic in front of their colleague. Reilly (2018) affirms that peer recognition and authenticity of a comedian comes from backstage behavior, experience, work ethic, among other things that indicate an individual's association and involvement with the community. Furthermore, Reilly finds that comedians recognize peers as authentic when comedians are perceived as "truly a comic, rather than an "actor" (who pursues stand-up comedy only to secure acting work) or a "hack" (who takes the easiest route to getting laughs and thus bookings)" (p. 944). For comedians, authenticity is the primary determinant of whom they are and whom they recognize.

2.2 Authenticity

Something can be called authentic because it is assumed that it is genuine to its essence, the truth, an emotion, or how they are expressed (van Leeuwen, 2001). Authenticity is about validity and relative to the 'norms' of a social group and the social identity attached to it (van Leeuwen, 2001). Moreover, "to say that a person is authentic is to say that his or her actions truly express what lies at their origin, that is, the dispositions, feelings, desires, and convictions that motivate them" (Guignon, 2008, p. 278). Therefore, between many meanings that can be attached to the notion of authenticity, in the broad sense, it refers to being true to oneself, to our thoughts, feelings, and actions that express our real identity, and to act in accordance with those beliefs and desires within the social construction in which we find ourselves.

Therefore, authenticity is connected to the notion of speaking up our ideas and beliefs according to our real identity. As such, to Gofman (1981, p. 226), the identity of a 'speaker' is central to any discussion of expression. He distinguishes three functions of a speaker: First, the *animator*, who voices an idea, thought or feeling. Second, the *author*, who scripts or

composes those ideas, thoughts, or feelings. And third, the *principal*, from whom the ideas, thoughts, or feelings come. According to Gofman, despite being normal to think that these three functions are always together, it will often not be the case. For instance, hosts, actors, and celebrities who present, act, or perform others' ideas, thoughts, or beliefs. Then, is there an authentic 'animator'? According to van Leeuwen (2001), if we judge by the way an animator uses their voice (for instance, their singing style), it is perceived as their 'own' way of authentically portraying others' ideas, thoughts, or beliefs. Thus, an animator can be perceived as sincere and authentic. This is particularly important in the case of the comedian who, despite generally presenting their ideas, thoughts, and beliefs on stage (they are the authors and principals of their material), as animators they need to present themselves naturally, original, and unique, therefore authentic, even if they change their utterance.

Tolson (2001) asserts that the authenticity of the celebrity as 'being yourself' in terms of creating an image of individuality, uniqueness, and differentiation in which the public person acts in a way that is not perceived as "acting." Furthermore, he recognizes that celebrities have an "inner, irreducible essence, a real self behind whatever public face, or mask, they might project" (p. 445) and separates the private versus public self. Nevertheless, he remarks that our culture is captivated by a performance in which the actor 'becomes the part' and shows signs of 'real emotion.' Likewise, Moulard et al. (2015) find that the more authentic the celebrity is, the greater success they enjoy. They also find that celebrities are perceived as authentic when they show consistency, candidness, and morality. Moulard et al. also argue that the consistency and originality of the 'public persona' are what makes a celebrity authentic. For example, in the stand-up comedy industry, artists like Hanna Gadsby with her 2018 Netflix stand-up comedy special, *Nanette*, or Aziz Ansari, with his, *Aziz Ansari: Right Now*, in 2019, in which they opened about their struggles with recent experiences about gender, race, discrimination, and personal relationships, became an instant success within the audience and the comedians due to their authenticity and uniqueness.

In the online sphere, social media experts highlight the importance of showing the authentic and establishing authenticity in online settings is key to being successful. And, as the internet evolves more and more into an influential social stage in which users, including public figures, are increasingly exposed to the opinion and the scrutiny of others, the perception of authenticity and being genuine is appreciated for those who follow you.

Online authenticity refers to the ability to show the 'true self' in social media interactions (Lim, Nicholson, Yang, & Kim, 2015). Moreover, Lim et al. claim that more and more people today have an online and offline self, and people participate in more and more

communities. Therefore, they find that the importance of the online self is growing as it becomes more and more challenging to balance the different performances of the self and be consistent and authentic.

2.3 Platformization of the Self

Part of the job of comedians is to promote themselves. Moreover, nowadays, it has become more necessary for creative laborers to act like entrepreneurs. In times of social media, digital platforms offer the stage to market themselves and build a unique personal brand that contributes to developing and their image and win more audience (or followers, in the online sphere). It should be noted that entrepreneurs in the creative industries correspondingly develop an identity work. However, their creative identity remains an essential aspect of their business identity, and creative professionals build a separate business identity that makes it easier for them to behave as entrepreneurs without neglecting their creative values (Werthes et al., 2017), their authenticity.

In the broad sense, digital entrepreneurship is a subcategory of entrepreneurship that implies the digitalization of part or all that would be physical in traditional organizations such as goods or services, distribution, a workplace, a marketplace, or some mixture of these (Hull et al., 2007). Krauss et al. (2018) argue that digitalization has improved the development of business processes, such as external communications. Moreover, despite digital entrepreneurship allows more room for trial-and-error and is more dynamic, entrepreneurial activities face noteworthy high uncertainty levels.

Similarly, and concerning to online entrepreneurship, Senft (2013) has defined microcelebrity as an online practice or behavior formed by "the commitment to deploying and maintaining one's online identity as if it were a branded good, with the expectation that others do the same" (p. 346). As such, we all fall into some sort of self-branding practices online when managing, liking, and sharing our social media profiles in an attempt to win followers or protect a particular identity.

Therefore, as self-branding is now an everyday practice, various studies in creative labor have looked at creative entrepreneurs, or microcelebrities, with established followings and their practices on digital platforms. Brydges and Sjöholm (2018) studied the dynamics of working online and the professional development of creative labor, specifically in the fashion industry. They argue that digital technologies have created new possibilities, individual expression, and professionalization resulting in new forms of aesthetic labor based on entrepreneurial and self-governed online practices (p.16). More recently, Horst et al. (2019)

have centered on the entrepreneurs' processes and communication practices throughout media platforms, the audience's response to the entrepreneurs' publications, and how they reflect on their business development regarding social media. They affirm that digital media, particularly network-oriented social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, represent a significant role in developing and defining individual entrepreneurs and their organizations' development since these technologies represent a medium by which entrepreneurs need to communicate, mediate, and strategize creatively to build their identity and develop their entrepreneurial strategies (p.8).

For example, Duguay (2019) highlights that the digital platforms generally offer free services to users, who constitute one side of the market, by incorporating user data into ad sales on the other side. Thus, professional content producers (or influencers) act as consumers and producers of content on the platform and, sometimes, also increase advertising revenue or act as mediators between platforms and brands as brand ambassadors (Duguay, 2019). Moreover, Platforms provide the context for the practices of online celebrities as they have become more and more professionalized, and with the "platformization," social media tools have extended their influence through social settings that require programmers to prepare their results as "ready platforms" (Helmond, 2015). Furthermore, Abidin (2016) posits three social media advertorial practices in which microcelebrities might fall when posting content: (1) advertorial dissemination is the most basic and generally adopted in which microcelebrities post content and followers passively receive the information; (2) advertorial aggregation that builds on dissemination content and invite followers to respond; and (3) advertorial instigation which build upon dissemination content and invite followers to produce similar content or reproduce it.

Therefore, for creative professionals, as comedians, the correct implementation of online practices represents an opportunity to market better and brand their 'selves.' Online platforms allow the development of their content, scope and give them more room to trying new creative content that can reach new audiences. Moreover, it provides a chance to position their content in more prominent stages in which they can be seen and support by commercial brands or the audience itself, as is the case of online platforms, like Patreon (www.patreon.com), Twitch (www.twitch.tv), or even YouTube, in which the viewers can financially support the content produce by the microcelebrities.

Bearing on the ideas and concepts discussed in this section, I argue that during the processes of developing and defining their identity work when migrating to Mexico City, Venezuelan stand-up comedians re-negotiate their personal (and comic) identity narratives

and social identity. In doing so, they strive to keep faithful to themselves, their personal and comic values and show themselves authentically in online and offline settings to have an ideal development of their careers.

3. Methodology

This research is characterized by its qualitative, descriptive nature, conceived to expand the understanding of Venezuelan stand-up comedians' personal and professional identity development when migrating to Mexico. To explore their narratives and observe their interactions in context, I took a digital ethnographic approach, a mixture of participant observation and in-depth interviews designed to examine how comedians understand their world, what they are doing, thinking, and saying (Delamount, 2011).

3.1 Digital Ethnography

This approach was chosen since it is a transdisciplinary, flexible method that let us understand the comedians' world in useful and insightful ways (Horst et al., 2012). Furthermore, with the access to digital media, new technology, and devices, 'the field' of research has expanded to other areas and sources of production (Horst et al., 2012). Thus, it allowed to observe and gain understanding of the developments of comedians in the digital sphere. Kozinets (2010) shortly define digital ethnography (or nethnography) as participant-observational research based in online fieldwork. Ardévol and Gómez-Cruz (2014) affirm that digital ethnography is consolidated today in the social sciences and its many research areas, such as communication and media, technology and society, and Internet studies. They assert that there are no notable distinctions between online and offline ethnographies but somewhat different conditions and forms of social co-presence. As such, digital ethnography offered new ways of opening information, specifically through online/offline engagements that required going beyond interviews to include gathering relevant online materials by actively following and participating in the social media platforms of the comedians (Postill & Pink, 2012; Ritter,2021).

Since the Internet is part of our daily lives nowadays, and we do not necessarily distinguish between online/offline relationships (Ardévol & Gómez-Cruz, 2014), I was able to follow the comedians in different contexts. Moreover, current worldwide conditions due to COVID-19 encouraged me to explore new investigation practices and courses, and digital ethnography presented an excellent opportunity to investigate and better understand the Venezuelan comedians' community in Mexico. Therefore, aside from in-dept interviews with the comedians, I took a role of participant-observer to examine and learned about the comedians' digital media practices.

3.1.1 Participant Observation

While simple observation, interviewing, and other forms of data collection are part of the digital ethnographic endeavor, what characterizes the method is the researcher's participatory approach "in the field" (Ardévol & Gómez-Cruz, 2014, p. 10). Ethnography's main activity is participant observation (Alleyne, 2018), therefore, I immersed myself in the group's online life. Participant observation displayed the online routines and practices within the group and provided important insights and reports on informal aspects of the comedians' interactions and relationships that could have been difficult to obtain during the interviews (Nørskov & Rask, 2011).

Therefore, following the recommendation of Nørskov and Rask (2011), I followed the comedians' online practices to gain a greater understanding of their communication channels. It helped me draw the relationships between the comedians and their audience, the topics discussed, and their online strategies. As audience and consumer of comedy content, especially from part of this group of comedians, I engaged and took part of the comedians' online activities in their digital platforms. My participant role included observing comedians' social media practices by studying they social media accounts, listening to comedians' podcasts, and attending to live web events. I paid special attention to moments in which they talk about their experiences as comedians, their life in Mexico, how they see themselves, their creative processes, how they interact with the audience, among other aspects. This information was useful to contrast and complement the information collected during the interviews.

For this study, the fieldwork was held for a period of a month, from March to April 2021. Primary, I observed eight stand-up comedians' social media accounts (see Appendix A). The two central sources of data were Twitter (comedians' tweets) and Instagram (comedians' posts, stories, live events, and their public comments in their accounts). Additionally, over the month, I listened to different episodes of podcasts shows (each episode between 45 to 60 minutes in duration approximately) hosted by the participants (see Appendix B).

3.1.2 In-depth Interviews

While participant observation allows the ethnographer to know the life, norms, values, and dynamics of an online community, the in-depth interview is a way to know respondents' perceptions and meanings to their actions (Ardévol & Gómez-Cruz, 2014). Therefore, in the second part of this study, a series of qualitative in-depth, semi-structured interviews were

held. As Bryman (2012) states, the interview is probably the most used method in qualitative research, and ethnography usually involves a significant number of interviews due to its flexibility. This flexibility allowed me to adjust to the challenges that arise throughout the interviews. In addition, the qualitative interview sought for in-depth information and knowledge that generally concern very personal matters, such as an individual's self, lived experience, values, and decisions, occupational ideology, cultural awareness, or perspective (Johnson, 2011). Therefore, the flexibility of the interviews allowed me to tweak the questions with each participant, considering aspects I had observed online and sometimes even contrasting their ideas with the answers other participants gave me to explore more in-depth particular experiences.

In these interviews, the comedians expressed different aspects concerning the creation of identity and professional experiences. The interviews explored three main aspects. First, the comedians' personal and professional life encompassing themes like their work history, how they started, their professional development, professional relationships, and challenges in Mexico. The second section focused on their digital entrepreneurship, social media usage, online communities, among other aspects related to online practices. Lastly, the third section focused on their experience with COVID-19, how they dealt with it, the cancelation of shows, inspiration, passion, and other topics about their professional life (see Appendix E for Interview guide).

For this study, I interviewed 11 Venezuelan stand-up comedians (see Appendix A) based in Mexico City, except two, who lived there and recently moved to Buenos Aires and Miami respectively. Most of them get most of their income from comedy-related activities. Eight men and three women between 25 and 42 years-old with careers as stand-up comedians between 2 and 17 years. These comedians have a significant fan base on their social media accounts, reaching between 25,000 to 500,000 followers on Instagram and 10,000 to 300,000 followers in Twitter. They also count with several comedy specials in YouTube that reach up to 500,000 views each.

All participants, but one, were contacted directly as I had a personal relation with a comedian based in Mexico who linked me with the other comedians. I reached the last participant through his social media.

The interviews took place between March and April 2021 and lasted an average of 45 to 60 minutes. The interviews were held online and recorded using the videotelephony software Zoom (version 5.4.7). It should be recognized that the medium chosen for the interviews may have affected the data collection and subsequent analysis, thus potentially

reducing the effectiveness of the interviews, as observation notes were overlooked (Kazmer & Xie, 2008). However, internet-based mediated interviews were suitable in this case as the participant find it comfortable and convenient. Furthermore, despite the mediated environment, all interviews were carried out without a problem. On the contrary, online interviews facilitated the coordination of meetings with comedians since it provided us more flexibility to schedule and meet, considering the geographical difference, pandemic circumstances, and the busy participants' agendas. Moreover, it also helped participants show themselves at ease during the interviews, mainly because they are used to online mediated environments by now. All interviews were conducted in Spanish, fully transcribed, and were then the object of thematic analysis.

3.2 Data Analysis

All data collected was uploaded and coded using ATLAS.ti (Version 9.0.7). It was analyzed following the procedures and principles of grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). This approach of analyzing qualitative data is well-established in media studies and it allowed to find meanings, share ideas, patterns, and themes that emerged from the text (Schreier, 2013). Thus, a series of actions were carried out following the method of Boeije (2009) of breaking down and reducing the data into grouped themes.

After transcribing the interviews and re-reading them, I started creating my first *open codes*, which offered the first overview of the data. As mentioned, interviews were held and transcribed in Spanish, however, the first open codes were written in English. Despite my first codes were a description of what the interviewee said, the process of interpreting and translating the data trying to be faithful to what was told allowed me to clearly see the most relevant ideas of the comedians when migrating to Mexico. Moreover, this process of creating the codes in English gave me a better idea to record the final results of the research. Then, I proceeded to group the main themes, to *axial codes*. These second group of codes allowed me to refine themes about the development of the comedians and better structure their migration process. After re-reading the interviews and starting the interpretation of the results, I reorganized the final main themes resulting in the three main themes of the comedians' development when moved to Mexico City (see Appendix C for Coding Tree).

3.3 Research Ethics

Since in-depth interviews often elicit highly personal information that may include the participants' personal feelings, insights, and perceptions about others or cover confidential

information about occupational aspects (Johnson, 2011), before conducting the interviews, I sent all participants an online consent form (see Appendix D for Consent form) to validate their participation in this research. This was significant to gaining access, trust, and establishing rapport with the participants as they might feel uncomfortable with the interview since they are public figures. All comedians agreed to participate, and all allowed the recording of the interviews and the use of their names in the study. Furthermore, no participant in the study is underage, so that no ethical concern could arise in this regard. Similarly, since data collected online is publicly available, no ethical concern could emerge.

4. Results: The Identity Work Development of Venezuelan Comedians in Mexico City

Historically, migration has represented new opportunities for growth as an individual and a professional, even more, when people are swamped in a deteriorated social, political, and economic environment. Thus, for many Venezuelans, migration represents a chance to reach a better future. For the group of Venezuelan stand-up comedians in Mexico interviewed, it is not different. For them, in addition to the personal problems they faced in the country, the entertainment industry in Venezuela is restricted and was stopping them from continuing their professional growth. For example, Daniel, a 29-year-old who graduated as Public Accountant, but nowadays is dedicated to the comedy world and copywriting, and who counts with six years of experience as a stand-up comedian, mentioned that staying in Venezuela was breaking him apart. For him, emigration was a matter of emotional health:

> *"To be honest with you, I had no reason (for choosing Mexico City as my destiny), it was more about 'feelings.' Coming to Mexico, beyond the difficulties of living in Venezuela, giving my daughter a better future, and all the rational reasons, I felt that Venezuela was diminished and that feeling gave me a pain in the soul. It was as if we were getting further away from everything" (Daniel, 29 years old, 2 years in Mexico).*

Moreover, according to this group of comedians there is a big gap between the Venezuelan comedy industry and the world. On the one hand, due to structural aspects such as the lack of public or private spaces or media outlets where they could show their work – additionally to all the limitations of having one of the worst internet connections in the world. And, on the other hand, political and social aspects such as media censorship, government restrictions, and social involution, which limits them when creating more edgy and innovative comedy content. Nadia, a 39-year-old Business Administrator, who switched her career to the performing arts since the mid-2000s when she started doing improv theater and then stand-up comedy in 2010, mentioned that for many Latin American comedians, Venezuelan comedy is unknown:

> *"I was invited to a Hispanic festival in Australia. There were two Colombians, a Mexican, a Chilean, and me. They all had Netflix specials, except me, the Venezuelan. And when I arrived there, I felt the comedians were like, 'what is this girl going to perform? What will the Venezuelan comedy be like?' […] When I performed and showed them videos of other Venezuelan comedians, they were surprised of our*

comedy quality [...] Venezuelan comedy is like in a capsule, and it has its very own style. And, you also need to add other aspects, as the involution of the country [...] overall, there is a delay in topics used in comedy and how comedians address them but there is a lot of technical quality because there were a few of us in a large country, and we were performing in a lot of shows too fast because we were the same people performing in the same places" (Nadia, 39 years old, 3 years in Mexico).

Thus, in the pick of the Venezuelan diaspora, Mexico was –and still is– one of the favored destinations for all type of artists in Latin America. The reasons indicated by the comedians are numerous. First, they stressed that Mexico has one of the most developed entertainment industries in the region, with a large market that provides the ideal conditions for accelerated professional growth. Second, Mexico has a prosperous audiovisual industry and serve as base in Latin America for audiovisual companies such as Comedy Central and Netflix, which also opens opportunities for script writing, acting, or hosting audiovisual productions. Third, Mexico has a relatively low living cost, and, nowadays, it has less turbulent social conditions than other countries in Latin America. Finally, for many comedians, the presence of other Venezuelan comedians, artists or producers in the country prompted them to choose Mexico as their destination since this in some way gave them the possibility and 'serenity' of arriving in a country with some sort of network that would help them adapt to the new professional context.

However, they remarked that the process was more difficult that they had expected. Bobby, who is an Industrial Engineer, with 17 years of experience in stand-up comedy, nowadays dedicated mostly to producing comedy shows, concerts, and conferences in Mexico and Venezuela, and more recently online, mentioned that he had never been as unstable (probably the name of his next show, he said) as when he migrated:

"I had never experienced instability. I was born in a good family, I went to a cool school, my father is a doctor, we were not millionaires, but we were always okay, I never lacked anything. I studied at the Simón Bolívar University, I am an engineer, a comedian and I always did well... Now... hahahaha... during migration, everything changes. Your ground moves, and you don't have the stability columns that you had in your home country" (Bobby, 42 years old, 6 years in Mexico).

Indeed, migration processes imply changes and adjustments that can turn out to be arduous personal battles, even more so when, in part, many of these comedians left their country without really having wanted to. In the following pages, I will highlight how Venezuelan comedians redefined their identity narratives and developed professionally when they migrated to Mexico. Moreover, I will point out the write digital or communication strategies they use to connect with the audience and the most significant challenges they faced.

Image 1. The Stand-up Comedians. Daniel Enrique, Nadia Maria, and Bobby Comedia performing at Woko Comedy Club in Mexico City (Snapshots retrieved from Instagram @comedia.burda)

4.1 Identity Shock: Who am I as a Comedian?

Most of the comedians interviewed come from the Venezuelan capital, and in addition to the reasons mentioned above, many of them claim that the similarity of Mexico City with Caracas lured them. However, when they arrived in the Mexican scene, they received the first shock. The routines were not working, nobody was laughing, and they were performing in empty bars. They tried the Mexican scene with ups and downs but quickly they got frustrated and many of them resigned. For instance, Nadia mentioned that for her performing in the Mexican stand-up comedy circuit was "completely heartbreaking," and Daniel said that he "got depressed" for a while because he finally felt it was not his audience. Likewise, Nacho, who has more than ten years of experience performing, and who has been one of the comedians who has suffered the consequences of the abuse of power by the Venezuelan government by being harassed because of his controversial shows, mentioned that after colliding with the Mexican industry, he made the practical decision to no longer perform in the Mexican circuit:

"Look... the first year and a half here, half of the time I have been living in Mexico, there was no single stand-up comedy bar where I did not perform. I performed from Monday to Sunday […] I made really good friends, very cool people. But the stand-up in Mexico is not the best place for us, in my opinion, because it is still very closed for foreigners […] So, I got over that stage of having to prove myself to people. Seeking validation from Mexican comedians was at some point part of the plan. But then it turned to: 'why do I have to do this?' and I decided not to participate in the Mexican comedy circuit anymore so I could focus on other projects." (Nacho, 34 years old, 4 years in Mexico).

Most of the comedians interviewed have a large following on social media and a significant audience that follows them to every show in Venezuela and appreciates them. In addition, they have the confidence to approach the most important comedy bars in Caracas and feel at home. However, after their arrival in Mexico, they quickly realized that none of that mattered, which generated great frustration. Many comedians claim that fame is not a tradeable currency that can be used when moving to another country. They realized that fame stays in their home country.

Thus, when they made their first attempts on the Mexican scene, the tensions resulting from the clash between different social characteristics and styles were decisive, which generated much of the frustration and identity struggle of the comedians. Firstly, they learned that they need to *start over*. Much of the routines and, more importantly, notoriety was no longer relevant. Second, *cultural and language barriers* resulted to be more important that they expected. And third, there was –and to some extent, there is still– a *disconnection between them, the public, and local comedians*.

Image 2. The Stand-up Comedians. Chucho Roldán, Estefanía León, and Nacho Redondo performing at Woko Comedy Club in Mexico City (Snapshots retrieved from Instagram @comedia.burda)

4.1.1 Starting Over: I'm Not for Open Mics Anymore

Firstly, it is necessary to note that various groups can be distinguished from the comedians interviewed. First, the comedians with the longest careers, for whom the stand-up was their primary source of income in Venezuela. Second, comedians who, in addition to stand-up comedy, made a large amount of their income from other activities related to comedy and entertainment. And new comedians, who were starting their career in the stand-up comedy scene in Venezuela and understood that the Mexican scene was an excellent opportunity to start. Despite these differences in trajectory, all comedians agreed that when arriving in Mexico, in one way or another, migration took them back professionally, and they had to start over.

They remarked that there are basically two routes that comedians can take when arriving in Mexico City to develop their career as comedians. One is to build a local audience, and the other is to organize shows aimed mainly at a Venezuelan audience. Both options have advantages and disadvantages. On the one hand, although it is easier, performing only for Venezuelans limits the scope of the comedian since the audience of Venezuelans in Mexico is relatively little. On the other hand, when performing in the Mexican scene, in bars and open mic shows, the comedians stated they had found resistance from the public and local comedians. Venezuelan comedians said that this resistance is due to cultural and language obstacles that I will explain later.

It is important to mention that open mics are events generally organized by bars in which any comedian who wants to participate can do so. At these events, comedians sign up on a list, and when their turn comes, they have between five to fifteen minutes to present a routine. These events are created for new comedians to perform, get experience, and get seen or for comedians with more experience who are interested in trying new material. Curiously, the interviewees mentioned that these events take four to five hours long in Mexico City, and sometimes they had to wait up to three hours to present a five-minute routine.

Thereby, the comedians with the longest career quickly decide to simply leave aside the route of the open mic shows in the Mexican comedy circuit. For Venezuelan comedians, this dynamic, which they had already experienced in their beginnings in Venezuela, seemed tangled, and for them, that step of participating in open mics had already passed. They stressed that they are not for open mics anymore. In addition, after facing the difficulties and the clash with the public and the local scene, even though at first for them it was essential to develop good relationships with Mexican comedians, they realized that they did not have the

need to receive the approval of the Mexican comedians. Therefore, they decided to resign and focus on producing content differently or "touring with a one-man show throughout Latin America, the United States, and Europe," as Nacho mentioned. Similarly, Jose Rafael, who is a Dentist by profession but holds more than 12 years of experience in the comedy industry, said:

> *"I was one of those who tried open mic shows (in Mexico City). I went to an open mic, and they almost kicked me off stage. I don't have the need to go through that, I'm a guy who has toured, and I have an audience. So, I don't have to try to please Mexicans, changing a whole style of comedy and having to adapt it to a 5-minute format when I already had four solid shows. Two of half hour and two of 80 minutes. So, I said, 'wait, it isn't here, this isn't my way'" (Jose Rafael, 39 years old, 3 years in Mexico).*

Led had a similar opinion to Jose's. Led has more than 12 years of experience as a comedian and is one of the best-known young comedians in Venezuela for hosting a couple of television shows, including the famous satirical show from E Entertainment Television, *The Soup* (Venezuelan edition), and *Chataing TV* (a comedy show that was taken off the air by government pressures). He said:

> *"I realized that it was literal like starting over. Not in the sense of starting from scratch at the technical level, because you already know how to stand-up, you already know how to speak in front of an audience. But you have no audience. If you don't have an audience, you can't make a living from doing stand-up. Because you have to make a living of open mics, those kinds of things don't really pay off. So, I made a pretty pragmatic decision. I don't have time for this. That's it. I don't have 10 years of my life to try to build a Mexican audience. I already have an audience" (Led, 36 years old, 3 years in Mexico).*

On the other hand, the second group of Venezuelan comedians is perhaps the group that, professionally, faced more difficulties. Not having a large, solid base of followers or the same possibilities of touring outside of Mexico forced them to build –again– a new audience in Mexico. However, after the first shock with the Mexican scene, they abandoned their participation in open mics for a while. Daniel ads that "many of Venezuelan comedians tend

to disappear from social media for around one year while they reconnect with their comedy" and adjust it, in some way, to the new context. Additionally, Estefanía mentioned that despite having good and bad performances, she could not connect with the Mexican audience, "I had a bad time performing in Mexico," so she is barely performing nowadays. Chucho, editor-in-chief of the well-known Venezuelan satirical web portal *El Chigüire Bipolar* [The Bipolar Capybara], and who has more than nine years of experience on stage, adds:

> *"I feel that open mic shows aren't attractive for the audience. In those shows perform comedians that are completely unknown, people who do not attract public, so the shows are empty […] therefore, there is a big clash between the fact that I had been doing comedy in Venezuela for a few years and I had to start again along with unknown comedians in empty bars. I even performed for two people. On the positive side, it trained me. Now I feel I can perform on any stage, and I'll be just fine."*
> *(Chucho, 34 years old, 3 years in Mexico).*

Finally, for comedians who were starting in the Venezuelan scene, it was easier to adapt to the Mexican comedy circuit. They recognized that the Mexican scene was an excellent opportunity to develop their careers. Despite the difficulties they may encounter, all Venezuelan comedians agreed that the scene in Mexico is gigantic, diverse, and provides opportunities to get started and grow quickly in the comedy industry. For comedians who are willing to start from scratch and go through all the difficulties that the profession entails, the Mexican industry is perfect starting point. Even more for new comedians who are more willing to go through the usual tough processes of the stand-up comedian career.

David, mostly known in Venezuela for his street food vlog, received a backlash arriving in Mexico City when one of his videos went viral because he walked around the city and went into several stores while he was allegedly affected with COVID-19. After clarifying the situation –and lying low for a while, he kept working in his career and remains very optimistic about developing his stand-up comedy career in Mexico City. He adds that he is one of the most active Venezuelan comedians in the local circuit:

> *"Mexico is great to grow my YouTube content. And the comedy industry is great too. When I arrived, I performed in the same stage with people who had appeared on Netflix or Comedy Central. Here, you usually go to a bar where comedians are trying new material, and you see important Mexican comedians there, like everyone else.*

That seemed great to me. In Mexico, they appreciate more the shows where comedians try new material and open mics are more professional, which I like." (David, 32, 2 years in Mexico).

In contrast with the rest of the group, Paula, the youngest and less experienced stand-up comedian of the group interviewed –but with an extensive career in the Venezuelan national radio, is very optimistic about her comedy development in Mexico:

"I arrived blank page to Mexico, and I really came to discover what I wanted, how I felt, who I was as a comedian here. The process of discovering my voice in Mexico was super organic. I came with a material which I didn't feel one hundred percent comfortable with. I arrived in Mexico, and it was like realizing that the material I had didn't work, it wasn't good, I didn't feel comfortable with it. So, I had to start from scratch. [...] I did not have an audience in Venezuela, so I started my stand-up comedian career here" (Paula, 25 years old, 2 years in Mexico).

Furthermore, the income to establish themselves in their first months in Mexico was also a major point of consternation for all the comedians. They found it necessary to look for a job that would help them settle in the city to give them 'peace of mind.' Some of them even worked in jobs not related to comedy for a while. Although most of them worked, eventually, in jobs associated with the creative industry, such as advertising agencies, writing for television shows, or social media content managers for a few brands. While having a side job represented some financial flexibility, for them, this meant going back professionally in some measure, and they needed to sacrifice some of the time dedicated to their comedy. For instance, they said:

"I lived in Mexico three and a half years. Of which the first months, I literally did nothing. I was trying to do things, I was always having meetings with people, I was trying to get things done. I did some little projects. I wrote scripts. But it was a very tense lifestyle. I had nothing for sure, no project was long, everything was uncertain. When I got the job writing for Chumel (Torres)'s HBO show, it was a relief. It was necessary, and I had to assume it to have a steady income and to continue taking care of my family and myself [...] I perceived it as a lifesaver while I was trying to take off

again. But I didn't want to be there being part of a group of writers and doing so for someone else" (Led).

"I arrived and got a job in an advertising agency... which went bankrupt. But it went broke after I left... hahahaha... Well, I worked there for 7 months, I needed the income while getting the contacts to perform in Mexico" (Jose Rafael).

Thus, the comedians indicated that the first months are the most challenging. They faced a new environment and start performing in a scene outside of their comfort zone. Many had different expectations and conceived the Mexican market, being so large, as a market that was easier to approach and where they would have many more opportunities. However, the fact of being a huge market with great variety also meant that the competition was tripled, and the comedy codes changed. For many starting over and making a name and an audience in this environment was not an option. They asserted that it takes a lot of time and emotional fatigue that they were not willing to walk again, which led them to re-evaluate their strategy to develop as comedians in Mexico.

4.1.2 Cultural and Linguistic Differences: Do I need to Change My Accent?

As mentioned earlier, one of the main reasons why comedians asserted that they encountered resistance in the Mexican scene was the cultural differences with both the public and the style of comedy. Generally, it is expected that foreign comedians face significant challenges to build an audience in the new country they arrive in. Usually, an audience prefers local comedians for how they speak, their topics in the routines, or the affinity with the culture. However, Venezuelan comedians assert that the differences in style between Mexican and Venezuelan comedy are extensive, and it represented a huge, frustrating barrier to take down. For instance, they say:

"When I leave Venezuela, all the processes of migrating and everything that one experiences when emigrating, as a human being, affected me too much. And finding myself in a place where they didn't understand me, where I just felt like I wasn't clicking with the public in any way was very frustrating" (Nadia).

"I once talked to Eduardo Salles. He was the editor of Pictoline and Cinismo Ilustrado [Illustrated Cynicism], I really like those web sites [...] And he told me that

there were three divisions in Latin American comedy. He mentioned the southern comedy, which is the Argentine and Chilean style. I think it is more marked by the Argentine style, which has a very clear style. The Caribbean style, which includes Venezuela, Colombia, and Panama. Our style. And the Mexican itself. I think it's true. I do believe that Mexican comedy has its own stamp that makes it completely incompatible with the Venezuelan style" (Chucho).

Furthermore, upon arriving in Mexico, the Venezuelan comedians find a very different audience, which, according to the comedians, does not like listening to certain comedy routines, for instance, dark humor or misfortune. What is more, they affirmed the Mexican audience is very nationalistic –and some say innocent, and they enjoy more listening to jokes related to the local idiosyncrasy. In addition, for some Venezuelan comedians, Mexican comedy has a North American style to construct jokes. Nadia mentioned that the Mexican comedy "consists of a premise, a joke, and the punchline" with which the Mexican public is more familiar. She adds that "the Venezuelan style develops from storytelling and is more conversational" (the Caribbean style, as Chucho noted). They also add that Venezuelan comedy tends to be more surreal, referring to the fact that they often use phrases or words that may not be so explicit or direct, but rather play with the audience's imagination. Daniel illustrated it like this:

"When you say an odd phrase, all Venezuelans understand it. It is typical when Venezuelans say things like, "look who's coming," and you don't name the person, you just keep talking using funny codes, "it seems that he came riding a horse," and you are really trying to make fun of his boot, for example. So, you play around using analogies of horses and things like that. In other words, we go to the collective imaginary very fast, and people cannot follow that style here. Of course, I believe our codes are complex" (Daniel).

In addition to the cultural barriers, the comedians encountered another problem they might have not expected: the audience did not understand what they were listening to. They realized that they needed to talk slower, articulate every word carefully, and change terms so the Mexican audience could understand them. The Venezuelan comedians do acknowledge that they talk too fast and badly. Nacho said, for instance, "I had to change a lot the way I speak, the way I construct sentences, I have to speak slower. We speak very badly!" He adds

that we, Venezuelans, use words and phrases from the Venezuelan jargon –and sometime curse too much, and even though sometimes they thought they would be understood, they faced an audience that had different codes and pace. Victor mentioned similar opinions. Victor is a Computer Engineer and stand-up comedian with more than ten years of experience on stage and writing comedy. He lived three years in Mexico and now he moved to Buenos Aires. And despite being stutterer, he said he needed to speak slower so the Mexican audience could understand him:

"In Mexico, unlike Argentina, you have to adapt more the style because Mexicans modulate every word. All words need to be well pronounced. Mexicans talk like that and hear like that. That's why when they impersonate us, they sound like Cubans because that's how they hear us. Because one mispronounces the words. So, if you mispronounce one word, they don't understand you because they think you are saying other word. If you are going to stand-up in Mexico, you need to pronounce every word and speak slower. And that, naturally, changed my style because made it slower" (Victor, 32 years old, 3 years in Mexico).

Thus, comedians began to question their comedy during the first months after migrating as they considered that if the public was not laughing, it was their fault. It was a difficult moment of self-examination and frustration, and many of them tried to change their style and way of speaking. However, when trying to do so, they felt unnatural and uncomfortable using Mexican words. As they explained, comedians need to look as natural as possible on stage. Although it is a comedy character, they need to look comfortable and natural, so the audience can relate to them, and that was not happening. In the same way, as Brodie (2014) and Rappaport and Quilty-Dunn (2020) warned in their findings on comedians, for Venezuelan comedians being authentic represents the essence of their comic identity, otherwise they are out of place and uncomfortable, it leads them towards bad performances and rejection, from themselves and from the audience. So, for them, it was a process of rediscovering their comedian identity, and they realized they needed to start developing a comedy for the Mexican audience without changing who they are, their style, or their accent.

4.1.3 Disconnection with the Local Comedians

At firsts it seems that there is certain disconnection of the Venezuelan comedians from the Mexican comedians. Although this is not necessarily bad, it could influence the

development of Venezuelan comedians in the local market. For instance, in the comedians' social media accounts, I observed that Venezuelan comedian tend to work and interact mainly with fellow nationals. When I asked, the said it was either for convenience or due to creative compatibility. According to them, there is no integration with local comedians. Many insist that because the Venezuelan audience in the city is little, Mexican comedians do not have an interest in working alongside Venezuelans since it does not represent professional development for the Mexican comedians. They said:

> *"For any Mexican comedian, 95% of his audience is Mexican. Since there aren't so many Venezuelans in Mexico City, the Mexicans aren't interested in that public... So, if they work with you, it is a favor. And that's annoying. From my perspective, I'd do the same unless it was a Mexican comedian friend of mine"* (Victor).

> *"I felt a certain incompatibility with the comedians here that, for example, I never felt in Venezuela. When I was with a group of comedians in Venezuela, I always felt very comfortable and creatively very similar. However, I learned that, perhaps, it has to do with the people of this area of Mexico. I feel that the people of central Mexico have a different style, they have a different way of speaking. And, for example, it happened to me that my friends became the Northerners of Mexico. Because I feel like they are much more like the Venezuelan idiosyncrasy. They get less offended by jokes"* (Chucho).

However, that does not indicate that they have bad relationships with Mexican comedians. In fact, Venezuelans and Mexican comedians have worked together in some projects, some comedians said that Mexican comedians give opportunities. For instance, Booby said that "they open the door for you at the beginning," however, he adds that "you have to earn your position and, if you're good, they invite you to comedy events when they see you work hard." Furthermore, for women comedians there is a support network in Mexico, a sisterhood. The women comedians interviewed are divided in this respect. On the one hand they think it is good, to some extent, because they have a lot of support from other women comedians. But, on the other hand, they want to be seen as comedians, and not as a "woman comedian." They said:

"They invited me to a stand-up workshop with a very, very good and well-known woman comedian in Mexico, named Myr Ramírez. I met Grecia there and other comedians and I found a crew of women who were encouraging me, and I began to sign up in open mics [...] I had the super privilege of joining a group of friends and women who supported me. For example, Grecia was one of those that told me, 'You can't yell at the Mexican, you can't be mean, you can't be pointing out people, people come to have a good time and you're very tough, you're very rude, you're very loud.' And I understood. It's something I still struggle with on stage" (Paula).

"Well, ladies comedian nights are a space where women can feel safe and try but at the same time, I don't know ... I feel like they are patronizing... Why would there be a space for women only? Why not open more spaces in general and have more male and female comedians mixed in?" (Estefania, 29 years old, 2 years in Mexico).

In addition, recently, it is more common to find Venezuelan comedians being invited to podcasts in Mexico, or the Venezuelan comedians inviting them to their projects. This is a phenomenon that popped up with the COVID-19 pandemic where comedians, Mexican and Venezuelans, needed to find new ways of reaching new audiences and using social media shown a new opportunity. Chucho mentioned that he worked with Ricardo O'farrill, a Mexican comedian, and had a great experience working with him because they balanced their skills. He said:

"We did a series of YouTube videos with Ricardo O'farrill called La Otra Pandemia [The other Pandemic], we worked with him and it was incredible because I feel that he had not experienced our writing and comedy style within the Mexican industry in general [...] I'm not saying that we are comedy experts, but I think we are in tune with comedy. That helps us because here they are much more in tune with production. A Venezuelan production is never going to beat a Mexican one because they have been doing it for years on a scale that Venezuela has not" (Chucho).

Thereby, after the first struggles with the local audience and Mexican comedian many comedians changed their strategy. They understood that they need to reconfigure themselves and change their comedian identity narratives to develop their careers optimally in the new context. For example, they commented:

"You need to understand your place in Mexico and embrace it. This is my reality. Understand that you must de-configure and reconfigure yourself according to the 'software' of the moment. You have to update yourself, basically" (Paula).

"Forget who you are for a while! I'm going to rephrase it, forget a little where you come from. Nobody cares what you lived through. That is my point. Nobody knows who Diosdado Cabello is, nobody cares about that shit! You know that because they put it in your brain for as long as you can remember [...] the world doesn't care... I mean, don't bother talking about the specific misfortunes you experienced, talk about global misfortunes. Take away your identity. Unfortunately, remember that for Venezuelans, the identity that each of us have as a Venezuelan is 'the victim' because we all suffer grossly. It is the poverty, it is the constant 'nonstop' pain in the ass of getting food, getting medicine. So, unfortunately, to a whole generation of Venezuelans, that's what makes us Venezuelan" (Nacho).

In contrast to the study of Beech et al. (2016) that propose that the identities musicians take or aspire may not be a solution to their struggles but rather that those struggles serve as fuel that the artists might use in their next activity, the Venezuelan comedians seem to agree more about focusing on solving those struggles and finding a healthy balance. Despite those migration struggles serve as material for writing new jokes. To some extent they agreed that they needed to forget about their background for a while to create new material. As Kreiner and Sheep (2006) illustrate in their optimal balance of identity work model, comedians needed to find an equilibrium between their comic identity and the aspire identity that would help them integrate their new social construct and keep themselves different and authentic.

4.2 The Importance of Finding the Audience

After the first clash with the Mexican industry, the comedians interviewed mentioned that they went through a tough process of introspection to understand what they wanted to do, how they want to do it, and how to address the audience. For instance, Nacho mentioned that when Venezuelan comedians met, they talked about the "challenges of finding a way to 'break' the Mexican audience." But first, they had to understand who they wanted to speak to. They needed to define their audience.

4.2.1 Different Audiences to Target

As I mentioned earlier, upon arriving in Mexico, the Venezuelan comedians had difficulties performing in front of the Mexican audience, and not having a large audience of Venezuelans implied that they need to find who to address to. In that sense, comedians employ various strategies to continue performing on the local scene. Some of them tried to create content for the Mexican and the Venezuelan audience separately while finding a middle ground in which they can address both audiences. For instance, Victor says:

> "It is complicated when you already have a career in your own country because if you are going to start doing comedy in Mexico, then you start doing Mexican comedy, and that's it. But, since I had a Venezuelan audience, which I had to take care of, I was walking on two sides of the road and making Mexican humor and doing Venezuelan humor. That was quite complicated. Also, if a Venezuelan comedian in Mexico creates content for Mexicans, then you are rowing alone because the problem is that your social media is 95% Venezuelan audience. So, when you start doing comedy for Mexicans, you are talking to no one" (Víctor).

As Victor mentioned, beside the live audience, in social media the circumstances are a little different since the comedians face different publics. And in addition to the Mexican or even international audience, for them, there are two different Venezuelan audiences as well. On the one hand, Venezuelans who reside in Venezuela, a significant audience that they do not want to neglect because it represents a large audience willing to pay for digital content, with whom there is also a certain nostalgia and, sometimes, 'responsibility' to entertain. On the other hand, Venezuelans abroad, with whom perhaps they identify more, and therefore, there is an affinity in terms of what they live and to whom it may be easier to address at times. For instance, Paula said:

> "Many people from Venezuela still follow me and, sometimes, they don't understand that I am already in another mindset. There is a lot of nostalgia, they expect me to be a comedian who speaks to the Venezuelan who emigrated, to the Venezuelan who is there (in Venezuela), and not from my perspective now... and that makes me feel a little guilty. Right now, I am talking to Mexico because it is the country where I live, it is the country that gives me work. So, I am always faced with that dilemma. I can

come up with a very funny joke, and I don't say it because I think, 'this is not going to be understood by Mexicans,' which in the end is what I want, that they get my jokes and consume my content" (Paula).

Therefore, the comedians comprehend that, in part, after living many years abroad, the Venezuelan audience in Venezuela is an audience that they do not understand anymore. As happens with the Mexican audience, it is difficult to make comedy for an audience they no longer understand. This division is something that they are still struggling with, and they try to create content for both groups. Nonetheless, as I will explain later, for the comedians, this also represents a challenge that makes them develop their comedy and their communication skills, so they aspire to be understood by any audience.

4.2.2 Open Mics are a Necessary Evil

Open mics are the most efficient way to develop professionally in comedy. In Mexico City, it is particularly important since it represents a great opportunity to be seen by a producer from an important media outlet, meaning a massive opportunity to boost the comedian's career. However, as mentioned above, it is a complicated route that every comedian must go through. Moreover, as I mentioned earlier, it was easier for the new Venezuelan comedians in Mexico since they were willing to start building a name and an audience. And despite the difficulties experienced by longtime comedians, not all of them stopped participating in open mics. Many kept doing stand-up comedy in bars and open mics with ups and downs. Staying active would give them an opportunity to be seen and little by little gain an audience, recover confidence in the Mexican scene, and becoming more involved in the local idiosyncrasy. As well, performing in open mics represents a networking opportunity to try to create alliances with local comedians. For instance, they say:

"You have to be involved in the scene from below and is from open mic and bars that you can enter (in the Mexican scene). That way in Mexico is more efficient, but you must earn your position. And, well, let's say I started using it after receiving a lot of resistance trying to perform on my own" (Bobby).

"Usually, at shows, while you wait to perform, you run into other comedians who are waiting in the same place. So, you talk to them, see the humor they present on stage,

measure how much it resembles your humor, and try to relate with those comedians.
That's the way you create bonds" (Victor).

"My strategy was to do two things in parallel. I started making stand-up for
Venezuelans to feel that I was doing things while I regained the security of getting
into a Mexican open mic with jokes built here, with the experiences that happen to me
here. It was almost a full year of understanding that I could speak Venezuelan; I just
had to know how to communicate" (Nadia).

Beside open mics, they produced shows only for Venezuelans. And for example,
Daniel and Chucho produced *Comedia Burda* (see Image 1 and Image 2 above for reference),
a show aimed at the Venezuelan audience in Mexico. According to the comedians, this
strategy had primarily two purposes. First, it would allow them to create ties with local bars
since, as they indicate, these shows attracted a significant number of Venezuelans to the
venue, and it generated revenues to the bar owner. Second, the experience of returning to the
stage and performing in front of a mixed audience, mostly Venezuelan, helped them regain
confidence and try new material adapted to the local environment. Daniel adds:

"I realized that I was lost, I was performing in bars in front of 30 Mexicans. At some
point I felt that absolutely nothing was happening, I wasn't building a name, and I
wasn't doing anything on social media. I wasn't addressing to anyone. So, I thought,
'here in Mexico there must be Venezuelans, I know comedians, I like being a host, I
think I can produce something,' and I started producing a show called 'Comedia
Burda.' We had several shows and the Venezuelan public that lives in Mexico
responded. In general, Venezuelans here are financially stable. I think that helped to
sold-out all shows and create a good relationship with the bar owner. So, in a way
that helped improve my self-esteem and set a precedent with bars. And that helped, at
least to open a lot of doors. We were more comfortable and relaxed. And now, in open
mics at least, I'm constantly performing" (Daniel).

Similarly, to Butler and Stoyanova's (2018) previous study, the Venezuelan
comedians experience shown that despite all inconvenient and arduous process open mics
represent, they need to manage their emotions and embrace the process as it means an

opportunity of networking and building ties with the local audience and more importantly with Mexican comedians and promotors.

Sadly, when they were taking off again, the COVID-19 pandemic arrived. For most of them, the circumstances presented an opportunity to invest time on themselves and reinvent their routines. Despite the difficult situation, it was a 'valid excuse' to avoid the Mexican scene for a while and take some time off. Or resign to the stand-up comedy completely, as Chucho did: "I'm happy because I have an excuse to never have to go back to the damn open mic I hated." Afterwards, he said that he decided to stop performing, "if I have this feeling, it means I don't want to do stand-up again. So, I ended up accepting it. It was a though process." Not all comedians are so radical, but they all agreed the lockdown was a 'good' moment to dedicate time and energy to the new digital projects they were already undertaking before the pandemic and grow their online audience.

4.2.3 Social Media is an Opportunity

Social media is a job! It's what most comedians emphatically assert. And although it is a great tool, essential to promote their work, they would like to do so without using social media to a large extent. Most of the comedians from this group do not enjoy social media whatsoever. Though, they acknowledge that social media platforms are unavoidable, even more, when a large part of their audience is in Venezuela, where all traditional media are limited, and the only way of reaching them and a new audience is using digital tools. For example, some of them commented:

> *"Now, I have a love-hate with social media because after spending a year working on me, my spirituality, my energy, my peace, there are many things that I can't stand on social media. So, at this moment, I am rebuilding myself in some way to see how I face social media as a comedian" (Nadia).*

> *"I enjoy it, but it is a job. In other words, I would like not to need social media. I would like to do it when I want it to and not because I need them to reach a new audience. But that's the job, it's part of the job" (Victor).*

> *"One hundred percent a job, and I enjoy it zero. At this point in my life, I don't enjoy ever tweeting or posting anything. I mean, it has completely lost its charm. That's why every time, I tweet less and post less. Because it interests me less and less. I use social*

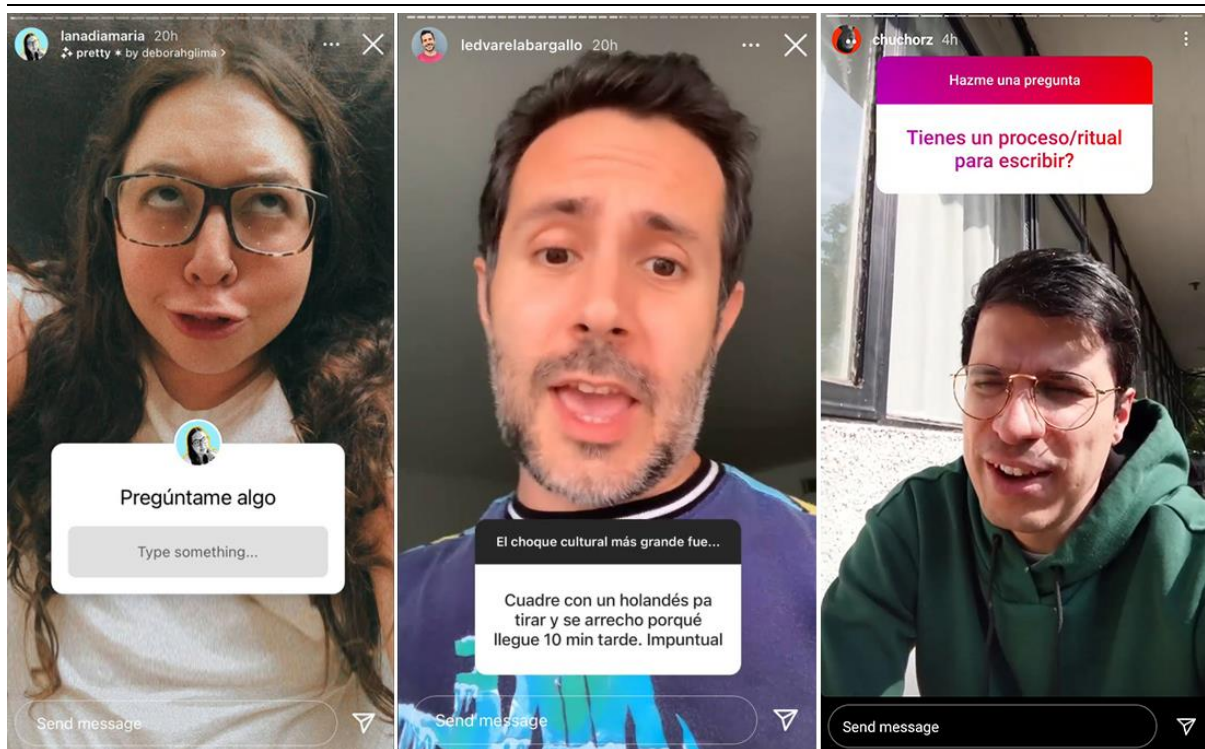*media because it is my way of saying, 'here is another episode of my podcast' or to announce my shows'' (Led).*

Image 3. Comedians' online practices. Using Instagram's tools, like "ask me a question," a regular practice of the comedians is inviting followers to interact with. **Left picture:** *"Ask me something".* **Center picture**: *"The biggest cultural clash,"* answer: "*I set a date to have sex with a Dutch, and he got angry because I was ten minutes late."* **Right picture:** *"Ask me a question,"* answer: *"Do you have a process/ritual for writing?"* (Retrieved from Instagram: @lanadiamaria, @ledvarelabargallo, @chuchorz).

It would be difficult to assert if the rejection of social media has something to do with age (as it seems that the youngest comedians were more leaning to say that they enjoy social media to some degree), the constant pressure of having to generate new content, the uncertainty that might result from being scrutinized by the audience or media about everything they share online, or the sum of all. They commented that social media can be, on the one hand, very helpful as it is an excellent space for trying new jokes or sharing creative material and ideas, and on the other hand, it can be a dangerous place where the feedback they receive can make them feel overwhelmed. However, they say it is necessary to promote their work, try some jokes, interact, and reach new audience.

On Instagram, for instance, it is a common practice to use the Instagram *question* feature attached to the *stories* posting options. Led, comments that "it's an easy way to create content and engage with the audience." "For me it's enough," he adds. Not only him, but all comedians also tend to use that feature frequently (see Image 3). They also interact with the

audience using the *live* feature. They add it takes little time and it there is no need of showing they everyday life.
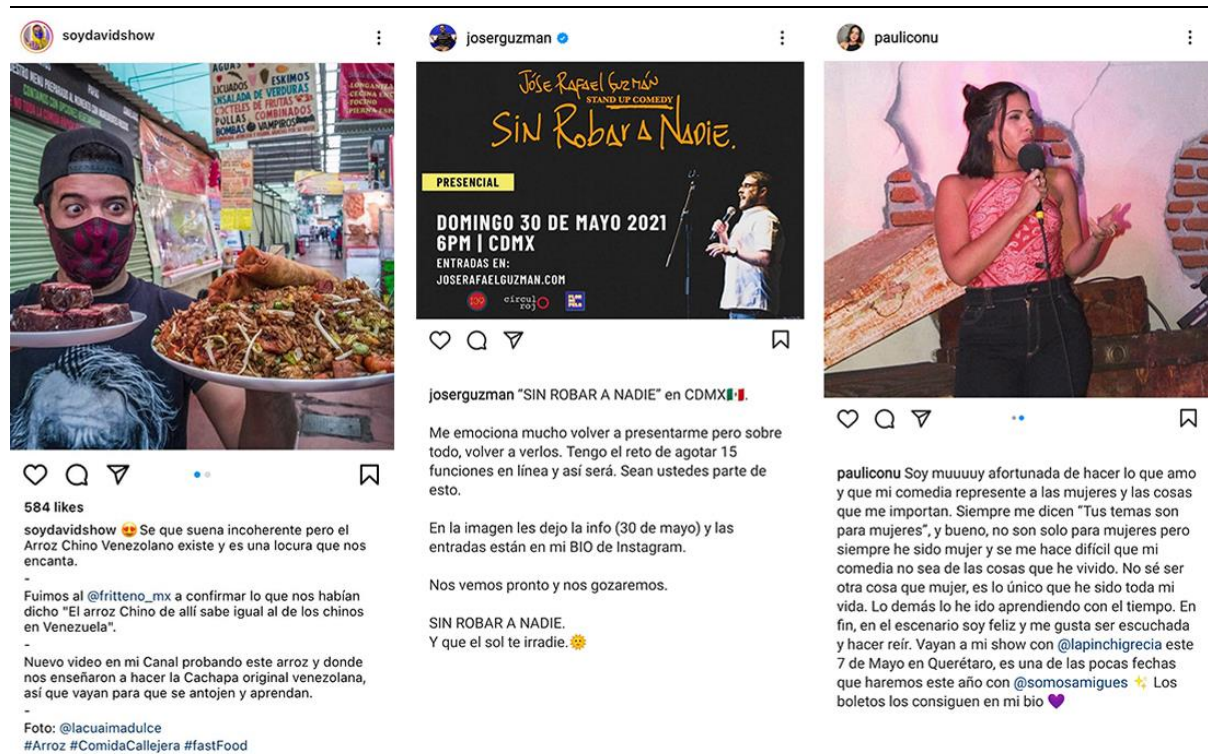

Image 4. Comedians' online practices. Comedians generally publish content in social media –primarily– to promote their stand-up comedy shows, web show, podcasts, or any other project thy are in. **Left picture:** *"I know it sounds unusual, but the Venezuelan Chinese Fried Rice exists and it's crazy that we love it. We went to @fritteno_mx to confirm what we had been told 'the Venezuelan Chinese Fried Rice there tastes like the one the Chinese cook in Venezuela.' New video in my channel trying this rice and where they thought us how to cook the original Venezuelan Cachapa. So, go to get enticed and learn".* **Center picture**: *"'Sin Robar a Nadie' [Without Stealing Anyone] (name of the show) in Mexico City. I'm excited about returning to the stage but mostly to see you all again. I have the challenge of selling out 15 shows in a row and I'll do it. Be part of it. In the image you can find the info (May 30) and the tickets are in my Instagram BIO. I'll see you soon and we'll enjoy each other. Without Stealing Anyone. And let the sunshine in".* **Right picture:** *"I'm fortunate for doing what I love and that my comedy represents women and things I care. People always say, 'your topics are for women,' well, they aren't for women only, but I've always been a woman and it's difficult that my comedy isn't related to the things I have lived. I don't know how to be something else. I've been a woman all my life. The rest, I have learned with time. Anyway, on stage I'm happy and I enjoy being heard and make people laugh. Go to my show with @lapinchegrecia this May 7 in Queretaro, is one of the few shows we'll do this year with @somosamigues. You can find the tickets in my bio."* (Retrieved from Instagram: @soydavidshow, @joserguzman, @pauliconu).

In that sense, the comedians assert that they show themselves as they are on social media –with some reasonable adjusts, such as not sharing too much about their personal life, family, and friends– and they do not change much about their opinions. For instance, Jose Rafael, says "there is not much difference. There is a little more self-control in the way I express online." Brodie (2014) also discusses this. He argues that comedians generally present their comedian persona according to their ideas, beliefs, and thoughts otherwise they would not look authentic. In their accounts, for instance, they try to be honest and authentic with the audience. Yet, they primarily dedicate them to promoting their work, and little is

seen about personal matters (see Image 4). Generally, social media accounts serve as a portfolio, and a space to share what they are doing professionally. Furthermore, they do acknowledge that they would like to participate more in social media and create different content. But most of them agreed that they do not have the time. In contrast, others do not want to participate too much online. Nacho even mentioned that, "now, part of the 'coolness' is to keep a little bit offline" and not showing too much of their personal life.

In that sense, podcasting emerged as a strategy in which they can show their comedy, stay relevant, and is a way to reach new audiences. Moreover, it also helps them lessen the pressure of constantly worrying about creating content for other platforms like Twitter or Instagram. Podcasting, for them, is a tool that surges as the logical answer to create comic content after all difficulties of migration. Podcasting helps taking care of the Venezuelan audience, building a new community of followers, and it also represents an opportunity for income and networking:

> *"With the appearance of the podcast, the obligation that I had for Instagram and Twitter has turned easier. Before, I was much more active. Right now, I don't have that need, that urge to speak quickly about something that is happening because I do it on the podcast. There, I have an audience" (Nacho)*

> *"When the idea for the podcast came up, I thought it was an opportunity to do something where I would spend my time much better, it will immediately translate into profit, and it is still comedy. I'm more comfortable there […]Then if we want to do a live episode of the podcast in a theatre, I'm sure it will work. And I'm not saying it in a commercialist way, obviously, but it's like... I'm a comedian, I'm not a stand-up comedian. I don't care if I must change in two years if the podcast died and it's time to undertake another project or do something else in comedy. I'll ride that wave to do comedy too" (Chucho).*

Moreover, the comedians believe that podcasting benefit them to show who they are since it is a different format, less structured to stand-up comedy. Podcasting is more conversational, and a setup where they can talk and develop their ideas about the world in general. And for instances, some of them said that podcasting has helped creating a better image of themselves in front of the public and keep themselves as they are, podcasting is a

good media to be authentic, which is something they try to achieve to show a real side of themselves to the audience.

Image 5. Comedians' online practices. Podcasting as strategy to reach new audiences. Podcast episodes are broadcasted in video or audio-only platforms like YouTube, Spotify, Google Podcast, Apple Podcast, etc. **Left picture:** *"The human is an Animal #97 – Estefania's day."* **Center picture**: *"A journey thought Venezuelan accents."* **Right picture:** *"The most powerful secret societies: Who control them?"* *(Retrieved from YouTube: El Humano es un Animal [The human is an Animal], El Cuartico [The Little Room], Escuela de Nada [School of Nothing]).*

In general, podcasts are about all sorts of topics. It can be trending social conversations, or culture, technology, lifestyle, etc. (see Image 5). The comedians try to discuss universal issues. They avoid as much as they can using Venezuelan argot or Venezuelan references, so all audiences from different countries can follow and understand the conversations. In case they use Venezuelan jargon or references, they tend to explain what they meant. They also try to avoid Venezuelan political or social discussion. Mainly for two reasons, as they explained on some occasions: one, people listen to them for entrainment and do not want to listen to the problems in Venezuela; two, most of their listener are out of the country so they might not be related to what's happening in the country anymore.

In summary, to develop their career and manage the tensions steamed from the first shock with the Mexican industry, the comedians deconfigure and reconfigure their comedy to understand where they were failing and how to approach the Mexican scene. For many, leaving the stage and dedicating themselves to other jobs for a time helped them to reflect on their identity as a comedian, their passion for comedy, and the stand-up comedy. On the one hand, and despite the difficulties, many comedians eventually return to open mics already understanding and adjusting their comedy to the new context. On the other hand, others decided to produce comedy content from different angles. Thereby, digital tools such as

podcasting emerge as good practice to show the best they can give and develop their identity work and stay authentic to their thoughts, ideas, and beliefs.

4.3 Identity Work Renegotiation: The Universal Comedian

One of the most compelling aspects that emerged from the conversations with the comedians was that despite all the inconveniences they encountered on their professional path in Mexico, a large part of the struggles was (and still is) with themselves, with their comedian identity narratives. They claimed that when they arrived in Mexico City, they evaluated many of the things they took for granted, such as the importance and value of their audience and their 'fame.'

4.3.1 Identity Reconfiguration

Comedians asserted that they wanted nothing to do with Venezuela, including the Venezuelan audience –and it was a mistake. Perhaps, much of this due to the circumstances in which they had left their hometowns and the country social and political conditions that led them to 'spurn' all aspects related to Venezuela. For them, migrating symbolized conquering a new audience. And, as mentioned before, many agree that when they crashed with the Mexican industry, they founded necessary to examine their identity as comedians and forget about their background so they would be able to adjust to the new context. So, this very process led them to reassess their status as comedians. Led, for instance said:

> *"It was a very crazy mental status, before migrating I would think 'I have to live in the place where my audience lives.' Which is also a mistake because it is not like that now. Rather, people have an audience in all parts of the world [...] When I began to value my audience again and to understand that from my audience, I could continue, not only to live on my comedy, which is the best, but to work on my comedy and continue to grow and continue giving more of myself. It changed the conception of my own life. For me, migrating was what ended up turning me into a comedian [...] Migration made me value the audience I already had. As soon as I went back to stand up, I sold out everything and could live on what I was doing, but immediately. That made me greatly appreciate the people who follow my comedy, who consume it, who watch it, who enjoy it. I did not value it before. It is the truth. Because I was totally focused on succeeding in Mexico" (Led).*

This process of reflection and reevaluation of their comic identity led them to understand that rather than change their accent or style, they had to adjust their delivery and communicate better their ideas, beliefs, and thoughts (therefore their comedy) to the audience. On the one hand, appreciating and working with the audience they already had. On the other hand, understanding the local culture and idiosyncrasy would help them tell better stories in which the audience could be involved and invested. Daniel commented in this regards the following:

"It is important to stay for a while and breathe the country. And it is a process that everyone must go through. And especially when you leave your country is slightly force way. There is a feeling that I did not want to leave at all. That feeling hits you for a while and I think you must try to overcome it if you want to succeed in the local market […] I think that if you adjust a couple of things, you can do well. Obviously, you must know the locality. Not knowing the locality is a failure […] You have to find a way to make your problem interest them" (Daniel).

But, despite understanding that they need to readjust their comic identity narratives, they also realize, as mentioned, that it was important to keep authentic. As Nadia mentioned, they do not need to adapt their comedy to the Mexican style or change who they are. The comedians need to work in base of their reality, and show themselves authentic. She said:

"I was forgetting and rebuilding... not adapting what I had to a sort of Mexican-ish style but doing new things that will help me to be on stage […] Now, based on my reality, I am writing without neglecting the fact that I am a Venezuelan because I can write about how traumatic it is for me that people don't understand me because of how fast I speak. And there I am, neither quitting to be Venezuelan nor quitting to belong to Mexico. It is the way […] Migration helped to develop my career... It is helping it because you reinvent yourself and you already have more options to do more things. In other words, I finally understood it as… I feel that emigrating, the pandemic and the new digital tools are new opportunities to do something different" (Nadia).

Thereby, for the comedians it was important to understand that they needed to let go a bit of themselves, for a while, to reconfigure their comic identity and work towards narratives

that let them assimilate and get recognized in the new social context they were in. But, keeping truthful to themselves and their comic narratives and values.

4.3.2 Professional Development and Universalization of Jokes

As previously mentioned, according to the comedians, migration has helped them grow professionally and develop as better professionals. For them, the tensions of migration and the need to achieve a balance between their identity, who they want to be, how they want to show themselves, and the context in which they are developing their comedy have 'forced' them to develop new strategies and writing better stories that everyone can comprehend and enjoy. They believe that migration has helped them to be more wide-ranging and universal comedians. They said for instance:

"I have more universal themes. Also, I already understand the importance of locality. That is, I already know what things I should know about the localities to be able to make better humor for the local audience" (David).

"You create a delivery, which is perhaps more complete than the one I had before or is more universal in my judgment" (Nacho).

"I feel it might be stupid, but it takes time to analyze whether the joke that he is telling on stage is not the most basic observation that Mexico has. Once you internalize that, I think it's easy to translate your jokes and make you understand" (Daniel).

Moreover, many acknowledged that leaving the comfort zone of their hometown has led them to grow more quickly and improve their comedy, since being at home in front of an audience that understood them, in addition to the limitations of the country, kept them trapped. For them migration also represented an opportunity to grow and take advantage of the new challenges. They also remarked that migration encourages comedians to preserve better the Venezuelan identity. The need of communicating themselves better and creating better stories, comedians mentioned that they pay more attention to the features that characterize being a Venezuelan. In doing so, the audience from Venezuela feel related and people from other countries can understand. Thus, trough comedy they are able to export and universalize the Venezuelan identity, culture, values and issues.

Therefore, after learning that the audience did not understand them, identifying their audience, finding the methods to communicate their comedy, and internalizing that they had lost their authenticity by changing their style and way of speaking, to some extent, the group of comedians interviewed has unraveled the professional tensions generated from their migration process. In this way, to achieve an optimal balance between moving where they wanted to and moving away from unwanted identities and narratives (Beech et al. 2012), the comedians *reconfigured* their identity work and narratives and aspire to develop their comedy towards a universal language or code that all audiences can understand and approach the comedian they want to stage in order to boost their careers (online and on stage) in Mexico City and internationally.

5. Conclusion

This research pointed out the experience of 11 Venezuelan comedians who migrated to Mexico City between 2015 and 2018 and identified the main struggles they faced in developing their identity work in the new context. As the main finding, it is determined that Venezuelan stand-up comedians, in the process of developing their careers, defining their identity work, and finding a balance between being authentic and integrating to the new context, renegotiate their personal and comic identity narratives and social identities. Furthermore, they aspire to become universal comedians to develop their careers (online and on stage) in Mexico and internationally, including the Venezuelan audience. In doing so, they strive to keep faithful to themselves, their personal and comic values and show themselves authentically in online and offline settings to have an ideal development of their identity work.

The findings and analyses contribute to broader discussions of identity work in the creative industries, online authenticity, and digital strategies in multiple ways. In the process of integrating and developing their identity work, the comedians needed: First, to improve their utterance, understand the local audience, and how to tell universal stories with which all audiences can identify. The analysis of the interviews allowed us to verify that in professions related to performing arts, specifically with humor, as explained by the experts, the social context, culture, and emotional response are influential in achieving a rapid adaptation and incorporation into the work environment. In fact, upon arriving in Mexico, one of the main reasons why comedians asserted that they encountered resistance in the Mexican scene was the cultural differences with both the public and the style of comedy and an audience that did not understand what the comedians were saying. They realized that they needed to talk slower, articulate every word carefully, and change terms so the Mexican audience could understand them. After learning that the audience did not understand them, identifying their audience, finding the methods to communicate their comedy, and internalizing that they had lost their authenticity by changing their style and way of speaking, to some extent, the group of comedians interviewed unraveled the professional tensions generated from their migration process.

Second, they needed to stay authentic to themselves and the audience. During the renegotiation of their comic identity narratives and social identity, for comedians was essential to remain faithful to themselves. And they mentioned that they show themselves authentic online and offline settings. Similarly to Bolton and Boyd's (2018), Reilly's (2018), and Rappaport and Quilty-Dunn's (2020) research, this study finds that in the comic industry,

being authentic and building sustainable social and professional networks are critical pieces to have an ideal development of the comedian career. And for instance, Venezuelan comedians opted for participating in the Mexican open mic scene despite all difficulties and professional setbacks it might represent.

And third, they needed to develop their social media practices to stay in contact with their audience. In this sense, podcasting emerged as a strategy to show their comedy, stay relevant, and reach new audiences. It also helps them lessen the pressure of constantly worrying about creating content for other platforms like Twitter or Instagram. Thus, podcasting surged as the logical answer to create comic content after all difficulties of migration and keep creating content for the Venezuelan audience, building a new community of followers, and it also represents an opportunity for income and networking.

Finally, in contrast to the study of Beech et al. (2016) that propose that the identities musicians take or aspire may not be a solution to their conflicts but rather that those conflicts serve as experiences that artists might use in their next performances, the Venezuelan comedians seem to be more focused on solving the tensions that prompt identity work and find a healthy balance. Notwithstanding, the migration struggles serve as material for writing new jokes. Comedians wanted to find an equilibrium between their comic identity and the aspire identity that would help them integrate their new social construct and keep themselves different and authentic.

To conclude, this study has some limitations that offer opportunities for further research. First, it is worth mentioning that not being in Mexico City represents a limitation since attending stand-up comedy shows on the local circuit could nurture the results regarding the live feedback of the Mexican audience with foreign and local comedians. In addition, most of the stand-up comedians interviewed belong to the same social and professional network; thus, they might share similar beliefs, ideas, or experiences about moving to Mexico City and the Mexican comedy industry. Future research could study other Venezuelan stand-up comedians based in different cities worldwide and comedians from different nationalities based in Mexico City. Further study of a wider group and a better representation would make it possible to extend the findings or validate them. Moreover, given that the age of the comedians could be a differential reason in terms of their digital practices, further research could consider exploring comedians' social media practices regarding age. Finally, since podcasting emerged as the primary tool for comedians to promote their work, further studies could focus on comedy podcasts' parasocial phenomena and digital authenticity.

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Appendix

Appendix A. Participants

Name	Age	Years lived in Mexico	Years as Stand-up comedians	Profession	Occupation	Social Media Twitter / Instagram
Chucho Roldán	32	3	9	Journalism	Writer, Comedian	*@chuchorz / chuchorz*
Estefanía León	29	2	6	Journalism	Writer, Comedian	*@estefyleon / estufania*
Daniel E. Pérez	29	2	6	Public Administration	Writer, Comedian	*@eldanielenrique/ eldanielenrique*
Nadia Maria M.	39	3	10	Business Administration	Content Manager, Comedian	*@lanadiamaria / lanadiamaria*
Paula Díaz	25	2	2	Journalism	Producer, Comedian	*@pauliconu / pauliconu*
Nacho Redondo	34	4	10	Journalism (Did not finish)	Writer, Comedian	*@nachored / nachored*
Jóse R. Gúzman	39	3	12	Odontology	Writer, Comedian	*@joserguzman / joserguzman*
David Show	32	2	4	-	Writer, Video Editor, Comedian	*@soydavidshow*
Led Varela	36	3	12	Architecture (Did not finish)	Writer, Comedian	*@ledvarela / ledvarelabargallo*
Víctor Medina	32	3	10	Computer Engineering	Writer, Comedian	@nanutria / soynanutria
Bobby Comedia	42	5	17	Industrial Engineering	Promotor, Business Entrepreneur, Comedian	@bobbycomedia / bobbycomedia

Appendix B. Podcast Shows Analyzed

Podcast	Host	Link
Escuela de Nada	Nacho Redondo, *Chris Andrade** and *Leo Rojas**	*https://www.youtube.com/c/EscueladeNada*
El Cuartico Podcast	Chucho Roldán, Daniel E. Pérez and Estefanía León	*https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCS1u11uPQ CrGwhfiQwceayA*
Somos Amigues	Paula Díaz and *Grecia Castillo**	*https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC30TuJU_ DOVSxHBmn4rjm6A*
El Abominable Podcast	Daniel E. Pérez and *Sebastián Gutiérrez**	*https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCeac_5sAZJ C0PrZkqRKjANw*
El Humano es un Animal	Jóse Rafael Guzmán	*https://www.youtube.com/c/JoseRafaelGuzmán*
El Super Increible Podcast	Víctor Medina	*https://www.youtube.com/c/nanutria*
Bla, Bla, Bla	Led Varela	*https://www.youtube.com/c/ledvarela*

* Not participants in the interviews

Appendix C. Coding Tree

Identity Struggles: Who am I as a comedian?		
• I didn't want to write for others • I feel incompatible with mexican comedians • I feel out of place in the Mexican scene • I felt unnatural changing my comedian character • I realized I didn't need the approval of mexican comedians • I was afraid of the Mexican audience • I was frustrated at my first shows in Mexico • I was frustrated because it was not my audience • I was frustrated when migrating • I was in denial when I moved to Mexico • Migration made me feel anxious and apprehensive • Staying in Venezuela was hurting me emotionally • You generally disappear from social media for a year when migrating	**Star over**	**Identity shock: Who am I as a comedian?**
Migration takes you back professionally		
• I needed to be humble talk with Mexican promoters • I needed to start stand-up comedy from scratch in Mexico • I performed in empty bars • I rebuilt my comedy to Mexico • I resigned myself to performing in bars in Mexico • I stopped doing stand-up comedy in Mexico • I was frustrated at my first shows in Mexico • I was frustrated because it was not my audience • I'm not for open mics anymore • I'm not interested about building a Mexican audience • It must be hard starting from scratch • Stand-up comedy from scratch takes too long • Starting from scratch again makes you feel sad • You can make your comedy work in Mexico, but you start from scratch • You generally disappear from social media for a year when migrating • I didn't have an audience to address in Mexico • I performed in empty bars • Mexican comedy industry is limited for foreigners • Migration broke me apart from Venezuelan colleagues in Mexico • Migration takes you back professionally • Venezuelan comedy is confined • Venezuelan comedy is unknown in Latin America • Well-known Venezuelan comedians do not perform in open mics in Mexico • You need to like Mexican comedians		
Money prior comedy		
• Finding time to do other projects is difficult • I didn't want to write for others • I needed other income out of necessity • I felt overwhelmed economically • I needed other income out of necessity • I was financially struggling • It was difficult to be businessman a comedian at the same time • Other jobs besides comedy • Side job as the main source of economic income • Creative jobs beside comedy		
• Cultural differences • Different styles of writing and producing comedy content • I couldn't understand the Mexican audience • I feel incompatible with mexican comedians • I felt uncomfortable changing my accent • I lost the fear of talking to the mexican audience after a while • I needed to adjust all my stand up • I perceived resistance in the Mexican market • It is difficult to communicate with the audience without offending • It is difficult to make laugh someone that doesn't understand you • Lack of support among women in Venezuela • Mexican audiences do not enjoy tragedy in comedy • Mexican comedy has a North American style • Mexican comedy has its own style	**Cultural Differences**	

• Mexican comedy is old fashioned • New digital media industry keeps the same work processes as legacy media • The audience don't want to listen to about the problems in your home country • The mexican audience enjoys when a foreign talk about their idiosyncrasy • The Mexican comedy industry is very nationalistic • There are more spaces for women comedians in Mexico • There's a clear networking between women comedian in Mexico • There's a significant difference between how women and men comedians are perceived • Venezuelan comedians are disconnected from the Mexican public • Venezuelan comedians must incorporate Mexican ideocracy in their routines • Venezuelans have a surreal sense of humor		
• Changing your form of speak is a mistake • Different utterance • I felt uncomfortable changing my accent • I felt uncomfortable using mexican words • I felt unnatural changing my comedian character • I need to speak slower • I needed to adjust all my stand up • I needed to improve my communication skills • Need to modify the the delivery and words • Venezuelans speak badly • You need to try to translate your comedy to the Mexican public	**Different Utterance: Change my accent?**	
• For Mexican comedians it is not attractive to work with Venezuelan comedians • I feel out of place in the Mexican scene • I perceived resistance in the Mexican market • Mexican comedians give you a opportunities • Mexican comedians perceive Venezuelan comedians as arrogant • Mexican comedians see venezuelan comedians as professional competition • Mexican comedy industry is limited for foreigners • Mexican comedy industry see venezuelan comedians as outsiders • The Mexican comedy industry is tangled • Venezuelan audience in Mexico isn't large • Venezuelan comedians don't work with Mexican comedians regularly • Venezuelan comedians need to understand there is a big industry in Mexico • You need to like Mexican comedians	**Disconnection with the local comedians**	
• Different audiences to address to • I address to the mexican audience • I created content for Venezuelan and for Mexicans • I didn't have an audience in Venezuela • I didn't have an audience to address in Mexico • I didn't want to have anything to do with Venezuela	**Different audiences to target**	**Finding the audience** (Understanding the audience, Identity Work develop around the audience?)
• I had good and bad experiences in open mics • I made shows only for venezuelan audience • I performed in empty bars • I resigned myself to performing in bars in Mexico • I'm not for open mics anymore • Open mic shows as a form of networking • Open mic shows last too long in Mexico • The Mexican comedy industry is tangled • Venezuelan audience in Mexico isn't large • Venezuelan comedians gave up • Well-known Venezuelan comedians do not perform in open mics in Mexico	**Open Mics are a Necessary Evil**	
Social Media is Unavoidable		
• Audience feedback online can be dangerous • Audience feedback online is essential • Different Identity on social media • I don't enjoy social media fully • I enjoy social media • I wish I didn't need to use social media • I'd like to use more social media tools for promo but I don't have the time • Impact of social media on finding gigs • Social media are a form of reaching new audience • Social media are a job • Social media are a promotional tool • Social media are a tool to try material • Social media are exclusively professional	**Social Media is an Opportunity** (Identity development in the context of digital media)	

• Social media are key to communicate my ideas • Social media are the main source of economic income • Social media helps build resistance against negative comments • Social media influeced my perspective about myself • Social media is how I kept connected with comedy • Social media pay my rent • Some influence from the audience's feedback online		
Podcasting is Booming		
• Podcasting as a form of networking • Podcasting have lessen the pressure of generating content on social media • Podcasting helped me to reach new audiences • Podcasting is a best way of investing time to produce comedy • Podcasting is a easier way of communicate to the audience you have already • The podcast has helped to change the perception people have about me		
Streaming Stand Up has no sense		
• Streaming shows are an opportunity • Streaming shows are fine, but I prefer live shows. • Streaming stand up doesn't work • Streaming stand up has no sense • Uneasy about streaming stand-up comedy		
• Coping with migration on stage • I am the same on and off stage • Different Identity on stage • I didn't want to have anything to do with Venezuela • I do not change my identity but my delivery • I found a comedian voice in Mexico • I lost my identity as comedian when migrating • I thought I needed to be in the same place where my audience was • Migration changed how I perceive myself • Migration is a war against ourselves • Migration made me value my audience • You need to forget your background for a while when migrating • You need to know who you are to know what is funny • You need to reconfigure yourself	**Identity Reconfiguration**	**Identity Work Renegotiation: The Universal Comedian** (a "universal" identity work)
• Comedians develop their careers faster in Mexico • Having and outsider perspective is useful • I lost the fear of talking to the Mexican audience after a while • I came to Mexico to study • I couldn't say I change with migration; I just find new material to write about • I had a good experience working in Mexico • I rebuilt my comedy to Mexico • Mexico has a well-developed comedy and entertainment industry • Mexico represents a great opportunity to develop professionally • Mexico represents a great opportunity to develop professionally and economically • Mexico represents a professional boost in Latin America • Migration helped my comedian development • Migration made me be more independent and develop faster • Migration will help Venezuelan comedians better tell their stories • Migrations has encouraged comedians to preserve Venezuelan identity • Moved to Mexico to develop career • Stand Up comedy open mics are more professionalized in Mexico • Stand up was my main income for a while in Mexico • The Mexican comedians are consolidated • Venezuelan comedians in Mexico have helped give a different face to the crisis in Venezuela	**Professional development**	
• I have a universal delivery on stage now • Need to create comedy for different audiences • The value of the universalization of jokes • The value of understanding the idiocracy of the locality • You need to build a universal comedian	**Universalization of joke**s	

Appendix D. Consent Form

Consent Form

Title of the project
Struggles in Identity Work: Understanding the Challenges of Venezuelan Stand-Up Comedians in Mexico City.

Investigator's name
Samuel Hernández M.

Purpose of the study
This study aims to understand the challenges Venezuelan comedians face when migrating to Mexico, what digital practices and what professional strategies during COVID-19 they adopt to develop their careers.

Procedures
By agreeing to participate in this study, it is a good idea to participate in an interview lasting approximately 45 to 60 minutes. The interview focuses on your opinions and experiences. Generally speaking, the interview questions will cover work experience, migration and career challenges, digital media practices, and coping with COVID-19.

Your participation is voluntary, therefore, you are not obliged to answer some questions if you do not want to and you can interrupt the interview at any time.

The interview material will be used exclusively for academic papers. The interview will be recorded to record the information unless the interviewee expresses otherwise.

Potential benefits
Participation in this study will not generate any financial or other benefits. Your participation can help provide insights that could be valuable for future research, academic literature, or other comedians, creative entrepreneurs, and the cultural and creative media industry in general.

Results
The results will be shared in the form of presentations, reports and academic publications.

Confidentiality
Your privacy will be protected to the maximum extent permitted by law. No personally identifiable information will be reported. Also, only trained research staff will have access to your answers.

The investigator will store the audio recordings, forms, and other documents created or collected as part of this study. Changes in this regard will be previously informed to the participants.

Right of withdrawal and questions
If you decide to stop participating in the study, if you have questions, concerns or complaints related to the research, please contact the principal investigator: Samuel Hernández M. (522896sh@eur.nl) or supervisor: Christian Ritter (csritter@eshcc.eur .nl).

Declaration of consent
Your signature indicates that you are at least 18 years old; have read this consent form or have it read to you; His questions have been answered satisfactorily and he voluntarily agrees to participate in this research study. You will receive a copy of this signed consent form.

Name   **Date**

Appendix E. Interview Guide

How old you?

What is your academic background?

How long have you been living in Mexico?

Why Mexico?

What was your plan to develop professionally in the Mexican comedy industry?

    What was the best thing about moving to Mexico?

    What are the biggest professional challenges for you?

    How have you faced those challenges?

Do you have another job besides comedy?

    Did it have to do with comedy?

    Does it help you develop your career as a comedian in any way?

How did you manage to cope with those moments when you weren't doing what you wanted to do professionally in comedy?

How do you perceive the Mexican comedy industry is for Venezuelans?

    What challenges do comedians have?

    How they manage to perform in shows?

    What is the relationship with the promoters, and other local comedians?

Why don't we see so many collaborations with Mexican comedians?

Would you say that you have developed a different identity as a comedian?

    How different do you think your character is as a comedian?

    How do you balance that?

Do you need or need to change something about your style as a comedian or yourself in Mexico to act?

*Tell me about what it is like to be a woman and a comedian in Mexico?

Do you think that in any way financial aspects affect your comedy or style?

    How do you balance your art or creativity and the economics of the business?

    How do you add value to your work?

How did you learn to value your work?

What role does social media play in communicating your ideas or developing your career as a comedian?

    How do you develop, cultivate or communicate with your audience?

    With these new channels to communicate, what has become easier? What works well?

    (Podcasting or Vlogging, for example)

Is social media a job or do you enjoy it?

How do you balance your public image with your personal life?

What are some of the challenges of showing yourself online?

How do you face those challenges?

Do you think audience feedback somehow shapes your comedy?

What are some of the career challenges you have faced during the pandemic?

What are the main changes for you?

How do you handle the frustrations (if any) of circumstances with your career?

Has anything changed in your comedy during this time?

What strategies are you taking to deal with it professionally?

What role do you think comedians play in establishing a new normal?

How do you define your professional career as a comedian?

As a comedian, how do you think your career has changed since the migration?

What do you think a Venezuelan comedian has to do to develop successfully in the local Mexican comedy?

Do you want to add something else?

Appendix F. Fragment of Observation Protocols

DANIEL ENRIQUE

"If so many people who follow me and recommend me to see certain content, and if the people you follow look like you. Well, the people who follow me look like me. So, it would be rude from me not to listen to their recommendations. Thus I decided to see their recommendations, even though I don't consume much of that content" *(min. 30)*

El Abominable Podcast de Sebas y Dani (2021, March 16). 74. Episodio Libre [Podcast].
https://anchor.fm/abominablepodcast/episodes/74--Episodio-Libre-esmg3l

16/03/2021, 23:03

NACHO

Through Instagram live Nacho talks with his followers. This is something that he usually does on a regular basis, and he spends 30 to 45 minutes each time. He generally talks to his followers about whatever the followers ask him about and he gives his opinion. Nacho answers any type of question, generally questions that seem interesting to him. He speaks on this occasion about the comedians who remain in Venezuela and who really does not know them. He, too, comments on his process in writing his comedy routines, next plans for his Podcast, haters in social media among other things. He is generally quite approachable but at the same time plays a quite belligerent role. In this regard, Nacho says in Live that part of that attitude that he plays is for comedy. He says, "For the sake of comedy, I often say or show many things that I am not necessarily living. I give the image of belligerent or hostile. But those who know me know that I am not.

06/04/2021, 20:06

NADIA MARIA

IG Live comments wit @paquenosconquistan Spain podcast
https://www.instagram.com/tv/CNVTdmpIBUT/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link

Nadia is a guest on an Instagram Live of a Spanish podcast hosted by comedians. On it, she comments about her experience in Mexico and how she had to adapt her way of speaking a bit to do comedy in Mexico. Among other things, she also talks about the topics she uses and not uses to do comedy. Nadia comments that she does not like to do political humor. She says it's something she doesn't do because she doesn't like it and because she doesn't want to be labeled as a political comedian.

She also talks about how nowadays people might feel offended more easily by some jokes, and how people feel more attacked by humor because they make it personal. For this reason, she has had to change his humor a bit since humor in Venezuela is more direct and less sensitive. For example, in Mexico, Nadia comments

that she has had to be more diplomatic when making jokes because "the Mexicans are a little more apprehensive."

She also talks about the comedians who emigrate and advises visiting all venues that have open mic since it is the only way for them to see you. She also says not to doubt everything comedians have learned in their country of origin and maintain humility because nobody knows you. Finally, she says that comedians must absorb as much as they can of the local comedians, idioms, and culture.

Appendix G. Fragment of Interview Transcripts

Interviewed: Nacho Redondo
March 19, 2021
7:00 PM (Amsterdam Time)
Digital Mediated via Zoom

Age: 34
Profession: Journalism (did not finish)
Years in Mexico: 3
Years doing Stand-up: 12

Instagram nachored | 169K
Twitter @nachored | 109K
Podcasts Escuela de Nada *[School of Nothing]*
 @escueladenada | https://www.youtube.com/c/EscueladeNada | 164K

Transcript *(Segment)*

[…]

00:02:30 Researcher
And how did you perceive the local Mexican industry towards Venezuelan comedians?

00:02:45 Nacho
Look... the first year and a half here, half of the time I have been living in Mexico, there was no single stand-up comedy bar where I did not perform. I performed from Monday to Sunday. I tried to… I always had a route, on Mondays it was in this bar, on Wednesdays in that other part, on Thursdays in such a part... to performing a lot and to meeting the comedians here.

I made really good friends… very cool people. But the stand-up in Mexico is not the best place for us, in my opinion, because it is still very closed for foreigners. They treat you very well, they are very cool… but there comes a time when, if you are very present, they start to… like "you are not from here" … not very directly, but very indirectly.

So, I got over that stage of having to prove myself to people... seeking validation from Mexican comedians was at some point part of the plan. But then it turned to: "why do I have to do this?" … and I decided to break apart a little from the stage of Mexico to be able to focus on other projects.

In fact, Mexico is a very quiet place to do that. You can ask any Venezuelan comedian in Mexico that. They can tell you that they are doing better doing shows in Chile than here, for example. Or in Argentina, or in the United States… and I decided not to participate in the Mexican comedy circuit anymore so that I could focus on other projects..

Here they try a lot of new material, but I prefer to go to Miami, which is 'next door,' and try new material in Miami… and see how things are working there. It is a very, very competitive market and very, very difficult here.

00:04:59 Researcher
And when you were entering the Mexican circuit, how did you get involved?

00:05:04 Nacho
I was ... I was just going to comedy bars. In other words, the day I arrived in Mexico I perform that same day.

00:05:07 Researcher
And did they know you?

00:05:09 Nacho
No. I just show myself in the place. I was fortunate that at that time, for example, Natutria (Victo Medina) already had a little time here and he helped me a lot. He explained me how the industry works. So, we were trying that terrain together, even though he had a little more time here than me. But it was basically…. You go (to the bar) early, you sign up on a list...

00:05:45 Researcher
Was that paid?

00:05:48 Nacho
No, no... none of that was paid... very few were paid. And right there, some of the Mexican comedians would look for you on Instagram and say, "But what is this? Is he famous?" ... That used to happen a lot... And you would perform with comedians who had one or two years showing up and I had more than seven! ... The audience would understand the difference quickly. But... many (comedians) are very jealous, the Mexican is very jealous of his place, and of what they have built... So, sometimes... maybe it is only my point of view… but sometimes one perceives the feeling of threat. Which is very absurd, and it is very immature because the truth is there is room for everyone.

00:06:33 Researcher
And your way of facing that challenge was resigning from the scene in Mexico?

00:06:46 Nacho
At that time, I was doing well, and I had sold-out shows in Colombia, in Chile, in Argentina, and in the United States on my own... And a lot happened and I basically with a lot of help from therapy as well, honestly. Because... I mean, I thought, "why is it so hard?" ... Well, it was hard for me... this was a conversation between all of us (Venezuelan comedians), I don't know if it's something that matches whoever you spoke to before on this topic.

It happened to us a lot that we comedians would meet... and I have talked a lot about this with many Venezuelan comedians... Mexico is difficult to crack (decipher)... And... don't get me wrong, I would sold-out my show here. I've done *Descapacitado* here four times and it gets crowded. But, if there is like a, "this is not your place" … it is very tacit, never frontal or anything like that, but there is something like a… I used to go to an open mic a lot, where all Mexican comedians go and very few treated me very well. They were all like very distant and one is trying to get close to them, you know... And I would love to be

closer to them as friends, but I decided to move away. And I said, "Why the hell am I going to worry about sold-out Monterrey if I already sold-out Atlanta!"

00:08:17 Investigator
And speaking of that, how is the relationship with Mexican comedians, and why is there not so much relationship between local and Venezuelan comedians?

00:08:30 Nacho
Very little. You know that Mexico gives me the impression that it has a feeling of brotherhood of like camaraderie, very similar to that of Venezuela, at the time, to tell you 2015, 2014, when we were all in the same place and there was like a healthy competition, I'm not going to tell you that there wasn't, because if there were like two very marked groups of comedians in Venezuela, it was like... showing the others who was funnier and so on... very silly, but also very healthy, never there was like... it wasn't ugly.

But here, the group of Mexican comedians are very united. And they open you many doors. But when you talk to them and show them your 'credentials' as comedian and you tell them that you just came from touring with your show... I think that's the breaking point ...

Being big in Mexico is another problem because this is a real country. Here is a stable economy and here is what all of us would have probably enjoyed from Venezuela. If Venezuela were not so shitty... This ... where it would not be necessary to be thinking about internationalizing in any way, because you have everything that your job pays you .. not what your country gives you, what your job gives you.

All the comedians here who have made a great career in much less time, of course. Precisely, because the conditions do exist so that it grows fast and grows well... with a lot of work, yes, Mexican comedians work very hard, that is undeniable.

But you drop one of these guys in the middle in the United States and nothing happens. That's like that scale. Like that, yes, the truth is that I can't sold-ou Monterrey, but they in Chile can't do anything either, not even in Spain. So, there's like ... a little bit of that resentment.

But the truth is that, to me ... I have not had bad experiences with Mexican comedians, on the contrary... many have been apathic, I am not going to say that they are bad or anything ... But many have been very cool. And with many I have a very nice relationship.

00:10:56 Researcher
And when you were on the Mexican circuit, did you change your style to adapt?

00:11:09 Nacho
It was crucial! The first time I performed here, I said, I'm coming with the "big guns." And I took out my most *damn* routine and nothing... nothing. It had happened so long since someone had told me to get off stage... And it happened to me… it happened no so long ago. That was the last day I performed up like that. I said, "I won't show up more here"… because I felt that there was something else there…. I am one of those who believes that it is never the fault of the audience. You should be able to make everyone laugh. But there is something… there are some odd barriers that I would not like to qualify because it would

sound very extreme, but there is a… "this guy is not from here". And it's okay, I mean, no… it's obviously ugly, but it's the way… eh, I think it's cool to face the challenge.

But yes, I had to change a lot the way I speak, the way I construct sentences, I have to speak slower. We Venezuelans speak very badly! very bad! We speak bad, bad, bad! We eat consonants, we speak very fast, we do not consider that the jargon is not understood. There are people who ... I have seen (Venezuelan) comedians that go up on stage and say *"no marico porque tu sabes que yo soy burda de arrecho"* (using Venezuelan slangs) ... and no one understood that! nothing! Not a word! And I realized that when I started dating Oca, my girlfriend is Mexican and we have also been together for two years... I understand it day by day and that helps me a lot.

But of course, you must change a lot, you must sacrifice a lot of your delivery to be able to perform. So, you must create a new delivery, which is perhaps more complete than the one I had before or is more universal in my judgment.

[…]

00:37:49 Researcher
What do you think a Venezuelan comedian must have to develop in the local Mexican comedy?

00:37:58 Nacho
Forget who you are for a while! I'm going to rephrase it, forget a little where you come from. Nobody cares what you lived through. That is my point.

"That I" … "that the toilet paper"... That doesn't matter! Nobody cares about that! Nobody knows who Diosdado Cabello is, nobody... nobody cares about that shit! … You know that because they put it in your brain for as long as you can remember.

Nobody cares about that shit, the world doesn't care ... I mean, don't bother talking about the specific misfortunes you experienced, talk about global misfortunes. Take away your identity... unfortunately, remember that for Venezuelans the identity that each one has as a Venezuelan is the victim because we all suffer grossly. It is the poverty, it is the constant *"nonstop"* pain in the ass of getting food, getting medicine. So, unfortunately, to a whole generation of Venezuelans, that's what makes us Venezuelan.

I don't feel like a Venezuelan comedian. I am a comedian! Period. So, there are people who take advantage of that a lot, we say it a lot in *Escuela de Nada* (the podcast). The reason we don't touch on these issues is because life goes on, you moved and what the hell are you going to do? Are you going to keep complaining and finding out how the governor of Monagas is called? That does not matter anymore! nobody cares about that shit. You know someone from another country, and you will not be able to sit down and explain what CADIVI is. That does not interest anyone! So, yes, you need to forget where you come from and forget a little who you are because the identity that we have as Venezuelans, unfortunately, is deposited there. And make the *'you'* of the world grow, not the *'you'* of Venezuela.

That's what I think a comedian needs to do… Anyone! Not even a comedian. Anyone who leaves the coutry. It is exploring who I am in the world, not who I am in Venezuela.

I wish all the people who emigrated find their place on the planet ... it sounds *hippie* but getting who you are on the planet opens many doors for you and broadens the way you perceive the world. You will automatically do better because you take off that burden of victimization ... Very justified!

And look… I also could sit every day and think who I could have been in Venezuela if Venezuela were a real country. I bet I would be a damn celebrity! That if I can tell you. And not just me, all my colleagues! Everyone!

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