



DARK HUMOUR AS A COPING MECHANISM

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Abstract:

Dark humour also known as black humour is comedy which discusses difficult situations which are considered taboo or too serious and painful. The aim of this review paper is to understand the use of dark humour as a coping mechanism. This paper compares and studies the post traumatic situation and the rise of dark humour as a method to cope by the population. It also discusses the impact of this kind of humour and its relevance at present.

Keywords: Dark humour, Coping mechanism, Pandemic.

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Introduction:

Dark humour is one of the most difficult humour to understand and few possess it. It discusses taboo subjects which are usually not talked about. It includes morbid situations like death, disease, disability, deformity, political corruption, racial stereotypes, human sexuality, poverty and war in a comic sense. The goal of this kind of humour is to amuse people primarily but it also provokes serious thought about situations which are not openly discussed.

Research links dark humour to intelligence as it requires higher cognitive abilities to comprehend the humour in it.

The oldest work on dark humour was noticed in the works of Jonathan Swift. His famous essay, *A Modest Proposal* discusses how the Irish could solve their economic problems by selling their children as food to the rich. But the public became more aware of it only after the release of the book called 'Black Humour' in 1965. It was an anthology novel which was written by Edward Albee, Thomas Pynchon, and J.P. Donleavy.

With the recent pandemic, black humour has again taken its stance. Many researchers have discussed the importance of dark humour to keep up with the difficult times. We can observe this humour mostly in social media platforms. There are mixed reactions to this kind of comedy as it discusses sensitive topics which may not be suitable for every individual. They may be plain tasteless and insensitive to some.

While there are other ways to cope with difficult situations, the use of dark humour has been a common and amusing one. It leaves the population with a sense of shock while also addressing the difficulties. Comedians, artists, movies etc have been using such morbid humour to educate the population and make them aware about real life scenarios otherwise not discussed.

It has the ability to make a bad situation even worse if used in a wrong time. It is a difficult sense of humour and is used sparingly due to lesser tolerance to it in the population. On the other hand it also promotes positive well-being as we discuss more complex topics which need to be talked about.

Review of literature:

The aim of Ulrike Willinger's (2017) study was to find distinctive groups of subjects with respect to black humour processing, intellectual capacities, mood disturbance and aggressiveness. It was

conducted on a total of 156 participants which comprised of 76 females and 80 males. The cartoon test was used for assessing black humour, Vocabulary test was used to measure verbal intelligence, nonverbal intelligence was measured using the Number-Connection Test, mood disturbances were measured using the Zerrsen Mood Scale and aggressiveness was measured using the Questionnaire for the Measurement of Aggressiveness Factors. Results revealed that subjects with higher preference of black humour showed high values with respect to intelligence while subjects with average intelligence high mood disturbance and high aggressiveness showed low comprehension and preference to it.

Another study focused on citizen storytelling and online participation exploring black humour during the pandemic with the death of politicians in Zimbabwe and South Africa. It concluded with Jackson Mthembu's death using dark humour to celebrate his life in South Africa while it was seen as a failure in coping with the pandemic as ordinary people celebrated the death of politicians in Zimbabwe.

Anna Sheftel's article discusses the role of dark humour in the recent violence of Bosnia-Herzegovina's War. Another such article highlighted the use of humour as a coping mechanism with the travel bans during the Covid-19 pandemic. The study used thematic analysis of interviews before and during lockdown consisting of 245 people. The second study did a hashtag analysis on Instagram and TikTok. Results showed the use of humour to cope with the high levels of stress and uncertainty during the pandemic.

Ruth's paper researched the use of dark humour among diagnostic radiography in Diagnostic Imaging Department in the East of England. Results showed that it was used by them only with their colleagues to let off steam.

Sarah's article (2015) focused on the use of black humour as coping mechanism for paramedic students. It highlights the use of this humour among colleagues of the paramedics and why they do so. The aim of another article was to analyse dark humour in post terrorist attack in Nice. It focused on the linguistic forms and socio-pragmatic functions of this humour.

The aim of Erhan's article was to understand the use of exploited internet memes which showed dark humour to cope with negative effects of quarantine.

Dark humour can also be used for not very dire situations as well. A study highlighted the use of humour to cope with stress among social work students. It was done on 32 undergraduate students. The results showed that measured 'liking humour' had a positive correlation with stress symptoms while social use of humour indicated lower levels of stress.

It plays a vital role when it comes to difficult situations like war, pandemic, etc. A study showed the use of humour as a coping mechanism Vietnamese prisoners of war. Approximately 62 Vietnam POWs were interviewed. It showcased the positive correlation between humour and resilience.

Another study was a large scale research on the emotional response to Covid-19 humour during the pandemic lockdown in Italy. Multimodal digital humour was studied with four types of stimuli namely covid verbal, covid meme, covid strip and non-covid verbal humour. Results showed that women with increasing age were more averse towards the humour while individuals coping well with the situation found it funny and were less averse towards it.

We get access to such humour through social media. The aim of one paper was to analyse the jokes related to black humour during the pandemic and their effects on different cultures.

Another study talks about the importance of jokes and satire during the gossip, fake news, conspiracy theories, etc during the confusion of the pandemic. The dark humour shown through cartoons in media have helped raise awareness to the happenings.

The aim of yet another study was to explore the use of humour during the lockdown in pandemic. The ad hoc questionnaire was used on a non-clinical sample of 106 Italians. Results showed that maximum content shared showed a desire to lessen the negative impacts and more cohesion.

Another study aimed to seek the correlation between humorous coping style and physical health. It was conducted on 51 college students and the Situational Humour Response Questionnaire was used. There was -0.34 correlation between the two which showed that people using humour to cope were comparatively healthier.

As seen from the multiple research studies and articles above, dark humour played a crucial role to cope during tragic life situations. In recent times, the pandemic had led to a rise in dark humour

comedy being displayed through social media which not only was a cause of amusement and relief among the people but it also helped spread awareness about the situation. It has also been seen that use of humour as a coping technique keeps and individual healthy (Carroll L James, 1992) therefore lesser aversion to exposure to such humour is more beneficial than harmful.

Comprehension of dark humour can be difficult hence it also indicates higher intelligence in people who understand it and use it. It has been effectively used as a stress relieving source even if the situation is not as dire. Media has been a strong source of information transfer through which we can access such humour and better understand it. The more we appreciate such humour the more we can cope with adverse situations.

Conclusion:

From the above study we can conclude that humour is an effective way to cope. The use of dark humour during difficult times as shown in the research evoked positive feelings which helped the individual cope with it. Lesser aversion to this humour has shown positive effects on the population. Therefore although dark humour is a controversial comedy which can be taken either positively or negatively by an individual, it is a relevant and effective coping technique to feel better about a tragic situation while also spreading awareness about it. Further research and attention must be given to the importance of dark humour as it might be more effective than just motivational speeches. The world needs humour to move forward and be healthy.

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