

Comedy as a Creative Industry (11.09.21 – 6 pm)

Comedy is a multi million dollar industry the world over, with artists selling out arenas such as the T-Mobile, O2, and MGM Grand on a regular basis – events that hundreds of thousands attend to let loose, share a laugh, and just have a good time. In Pakistan, this phenomenon seems to have slowly been pushed out of the mainstream over the years, particularly after the political turmoil of the 1980s. This webinar aims to initiate a discussion on the potential of comedy as a driver of joy, shaper of culture, and catalyst for socioeconomic prosperity – and to debunk myths surrounding the topic, including the notion that those who engage are fools, misfits, heretics, incompetents, etc. Comedy has historically served crucial purposes, including as a tool for challenging the status quo, for bringing definition to societal values and norms, and for creating a platform upon which a variety of arts – including theater, music, film, and storytelling – can all come together to captivate audiences that can forget about their troubles for a while. How can Pakistan facilitate its comedians, especially in a time of disruptive digital media technologies that are reshaping the landscape?

Shehzad Ghias Shaikh is a Fulbright Scholar (majoring in Theater), a Karachi-based standup comedian responsible for shows including the Imran Khan Roasts, ‘Dirty ka Daddy’, and more; a social commentator, and host of the rapidly growing podcast, The Pakistan Experience. Shehzad will be discussing the comedy landscape in Pakistan, in terms of its evolution over time and current form – and the manner in which it interacts with new digital technologies (especially post-COVID) such as streaming services (YouTube, Soundcloud, Spotify, etc.), social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram) and payment services (Patreon, GoFundMe, etc.). He will also delve into the interplay of comedy and politics, describing its efficacy in changing popular perceptions on important topics such as misogyny, transphobia, religious persecution, economic inequality, etc. Lastly, Shehzad will be sharing ideas on how he believes comedy, including its stand-up variation, can be mainstreamed in Pakistan and serve as a popular source of entertainment – a counterweight to TV dramas, political news shows, and cricket.

Akbar Chaudry is a stand-up comedian, YouTuber, musician, TV show host at Dawn, and artistic director at Lolwaalay. Akbar will be exploring how comedy shapes culture. Pakistan’s history is full of entertainers such as Umer Sharif, Moin Akhter, Farooq Qaiser (Uncle Sargam), and more contemporary artists including Taimoor Salahuddin (Mooroo) and Ali Gul Pir. He will be talking about the industry, debunking myths about comedy, delving into revenue models, sharing thoughts about contemporary Pakistani audiences, and discussing the need for diversification within comedy – whereby a combination of arts (music, theater, film, etc.) must be incorporated into one’s approach in order to broaden audiences. He will also be discussing the viability of stand-up comedy in Pakistan, whether it holds up against films and TV shows, and how it can be promoted/facilitated through policy and infrastructural interventions such as the setting up of comedy clubs and other cultural centers.

Younis B. Azeem is a stand up curator and emerging young comedian from Islamabad. He was both the creator and moderator of Stand Up LUMS - a semester long series of a no holds barred stand up comedy on the LUMS campus. Younis has also performed extensively across Lahore and Islamabad: he was the first comedian to headline at the Beaconhouse Margalla Flagship campus of Islamabad, and has headlined two separate festivals at LUMS. He has also actively performed and curated shows at Chailogue, Mocca and Strictly Social. Younis currently lives in New York City where he is a Fulbright Scholar pursuing a Masters in Creative Writing at The New School. Younis will be delving into what inspired him to take up comedy as a LUMS student, the hurdles he faced in trying to enter the fray as a young comedian, what opportunities were available to him (and through what avenues), the revenue streams he tapped into, and how he believes other emerging comedic talents could be facilitated.

Shehzad Ghias Shaikh

Comedian and Podcaster



Akbar Chaudry

Comedian and Musician



Younis B. Azeem

Comedian and Writer

