

Thomas Duer

5-2-22

Media Advocacy Project

Word Count: 1,465

Joe Rogan, a comedian, mixed martial artist, and overwhelmingly proficient podcaster, has built a cult-like following from his podcast called the Joe Rogan Experience. The Joe Rogan Experience, or JRE, began in his basement in 2010 and has since erupted into a platform that reaches more people than any other form of media. The podcast began very juvenile and lighthearted, featuring mostly his friends that he had made through the comedy scene. The podcast, as of today, has featured people from many different backgrounds, including people like Elon Musk, founder and CEO of Tesla, and the new owner of Twitter. A platform this powerful, one that reaches more than twice as many people as on other media, deserves to be inspected meticulously. I'd like to break down the show in its entirety, analyze the diversity in guests featured, and compare it to other forms of mass media.

The JRE is under the control of the creator, Rogan, who oversees which guests are featured on the show. In more than one way his show deviates from traditional mass media, and features guests that he finds interesting and/or in need of a larger platform. With that being said, his guest list can certainly be seen as subjective, making it especially worthy of an analysis. According to the JRE Library, a site that analyzes and computes the podcasts statistics, as of today there are 2005 episodes, about 5190 hours, for the world to watch and listen to. Furthermore, of the 2005 episodes, only 11% of the guests featured women, and just 1% were transgender. Those statistics may be seen as discriminatory against women and transgender

people, furthering the notion that women and transgenders are underrepresented in mass media. On the other hand, we must not forget to scrutinize how these people were portrayed on the show. Given the free-flowing nature of the JRE, the guests are put on a platform that allows them to control their portrayal; it is up to them to use their words to portray themselves however they might feel necessary. Rogan has had female athletes, authors, philanthropists, and even politicians on his show. A friend of his, comedian Whitney Cummings, has appeared several times on the JRE. The two have made some hilarious podcasts together, and she has expressed her gratitude to Rogan for giving her such a powerful platform. I'd like to highlight episode 1125 of the JRE, featuring Candace Owens, a black conservative political influencer and activist. The episode flows just as any other episode, however, at some point in the episode the two of them butt heads on the notion of climate change. Owens, to her own dismay, argues that climate change cannot be real. Viewers saw her composure dissipate as she got upset and boisterous on the show. The entire episode has since been removed from youtube, but a lengthy video clip of their disagreement still exists on the internet. Her lack of composure, and willful ignorance, did not represent women, or conservatives, in a positive light. She, above all, represented herself poorly, highlighting the free and open nature of the show. Rogan allowed her to use one of the biggest platforms in the world and gave her the authority to take her destiny into her own hands; a show constructed like this leaves the guests in complete control of their portrayal.

Gender underrepresentation is clearly something that should be noted and analyzed, but we must not forget the logistics of this podcast. Seeing that Rogan, a comedian and mixed martial artist, chooses who he wants to have on his show, it should not be all that surprising that certain demographics are underrepresented. Comedy, the foundation of his career and success, is a wildly popular, and still growing, form of entertainment. It is a male-dominated field and

according to researchers at ZIPPIA, is almost 89% male. MMA, or mixed martial arts, is also dominated by males, although not to the same degree as comedy. Diversity though, in its entirety, includes much more than gender.

JRE guests, and their varying ethnic backgrounds, should be considered and analyzed. Over the years Rogan has displayed his appreciation for Brazilian culture, and in particular, the heavy influence jiu jitsu, a martial art, has had on Brazil. He has had some of the most skilled Brazilian fighters on his show several times and has allowed them to explain, in some detail, their mastery of the art. Rogan has expressed interest in the way many Brazilians approach jiu jitsu, and in particular, their specific diet and training, including yoga and breathing exercises. Episode 524 features two jiu jitsu artists, American Eddie Bravo and Brazilian Rickson Gracie, discussing different techniques and methods to the art. I think this episode put into perspective the deep roots jiu jitsu has on Brazilian culture, and gave two experts a chance to discuss and compare their methods. Furthermore, Joey Diaz, a Cuban-American comedian, is a good friend of Rogan's that has been on the show 56 times. Diaz was born in Havana, Cuba in 1963, and came to the U.S. in 1968. Diaz in particular, a loud and animated comic, has represented Cuban culture in an intriguing way. He has talked about the food, music, and what it was like growing up in Santeria, a religion that originated in Africa and was brought to Cuba through slave trade. Diaz, a convicted felon, is very honest and direct in the way he describes his culture, and I think it makes the culture seem so much more raw and authentic. He even served as a translator for the JRE when Rogan invited Cuban mixed martial artist Yoel Romero on the show. Hearing about a particular background, culture, or way of life is most impactful when it comes from someone who actually lived it. Myself, and I think many other people, seek first-hand information from individuals and their stories rather than from a textbook. Diaz was able to talk about his culture

openly and candidly, just as anyone who was conversing with a friend would. The honesty he spoke with about his culture, both positively and negatively, can be appreciated through the tone in his voice.

Rogan has portrayed himself as very even-keeled since the birth of the JRE. He is celebrated as a podcaster that lets his guests speak, only chiming in when the conversation is in need of a revival. He has described himself as agnostic, someone who is uncertain, but not completely opposed to the notion of a higher power. Rogan's had guests from countless different religious and spiritual backgrounds. Reappearing guests like Ben Shapiro (Judaism), and Duncan Trussel (Buddhism) have both spoken freely of their beliefs on the show. Episode 1095 features T.J.English, an author and journalist, best known for his non-fiction work. He went on Rogan's show to promote a book on Cuban-American culture. This episode also featured Joey Diaz, who was able to add to the conversation with examples from his own life experiences. Much of the book, and their conversation during that particular episode, was about religion and secret societies of Cuba, and how they have transferred to America. They spoke of the rituals, superstitions, and influences of the religion, as well as the secret societies that deviated from the religion, like Abakua, a society of Cuban men who maneuver through life under very specific religious rules/practices. Diaz practiced Santeria as a child living in New York City. He described the impact it has had on his life, even today, although he no longer practices it. Without a platform like this, I most likely never would have heard, or seeked, first hand stories about the religions and secret societies of Cuba.

Rogan, when he began his podcast, had no idea how life changing his platform would be. The JRE library analyzed viewership of his podcast, through Spotify and Nielson, and compared his to other major media. He averages 11 million views per episode, over 7 million more than the

next closest, Tucker Carlson Tonight. His reach is undeniable, but I think It's safe to say that Rogan does not have the most diverse show in mass media. He hasn't shied away from saying his guests are people he finds interesting. Hopefully, over time, his interests will continue growing and the guests will diversify. Rogan isn't a politician or journalist looking to gain something from someone else's mistake. He has no corporations pushing for him to invite specific guests or ask certain questions. A public conversation with Rogan can make or break someone, but only that person is responsible for that. The diversity, or lack thereof, in his podcast is central to him and his interests, but his show is not monotonous; you never know what or who you'll see on the JRE.

Reference Page

Joe Rogan experience podcast stats. JRE Library. (2022, May 4). Retrieved May 4, 2022, from <https://jrelibrary.com/articles/stats/>

Stand up comedian demographics and statistics in the US - zippia. (n.d.). Retrieved May 5, 2022, from <https://www.zippia.com/stand-up-comedian-jobs/demographics/>

The joe rogan experience. Media Matters for America. (n.d.). Retrieved May 4, 2022, from <https://www.mediamatters.org/joe-rogan-experience>