

Covidly humorous memes: coping, social cohesion and power dynamics of humour during the pandemic in Morocco

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Abstract

The analysis of memes posted on Moroccan Facebook pages during the first wave of Covid-19 pandemic shows that the use of humour by Moroccans is not only motivated by achieving mirth but it also vehicles critical views about issues of common concern debated in the digital public sphere. Some of these memes were used to cope with fear and uncertainty. However, most memes harboured mixed feelings about the situation and were used for social control and the expression of conflict and resistance, addressing issues of behaviour, governance and communication. This article uses a social semiotic approach to analyse the collected memes (460 from personal and communal pages) as a multimodal discourse in terms of context, culture, and media affordances. This article contends that the study of these memes can be a key to understanding how Moroccans used humour to cope with danger and radical uncertainty, build identification and strengthen social cohesion. It also highlights the polyvocality of humour in times of the pandemic and the gradual shift from inclusive, conformist and sympathetic humour to disparaging, exclusive and challenging humour as the pandemic lingered, consensus began to crack, social control was challenged and injunctive norms were replaced by survival values. The results show how these memes are indicative of the way humour changes mechanisms and functions in terms of contingent motivations.

Keywords: memes, Covid-19, Morocco, motivation, functions.

1. Introduction

A three-month national lockdown took effect on 20 March, 2020 in Morocco when the World Health Organisation legally recognised the Covid-19 virus as a pandemic. The government passed laws imposing restrictions on movement and gatherings and when the number of cases increased, people perceived the virus as a threat to health and human life. Consequently, people experienced fear, stress and anxiety. Uncertainty about when and how this pandemic would end made these feelings stronger. Meanwhile, Facebook user-generated memes revealed a tendency among Moroccans to use humour to cope with fear, boredom and uncertainty. The use of humour

framed other pandemic-related topics such as the control of social behaviour, social inequalities, poor social services, the inefficacy of the government or the manipulation of the masses and disinformation. As the collected data in this paper show, humour is effectively a mode of online communication used by Moroccans to express personal attitudes and mixed feelings about serious social and political issues at a time when fear, anxiety and radical uncertainty were rife among them because of the pandemic.

The role of humour as a parallel mode of communication was manifest on Facebook, and it was used for different ends: psychological relief, social control and cohesion, and expression of conflict and resistance (see Kuipers 2008: 371-373). Apter (2001) argues that in order to experience humour, one needs to be in a particular motivational state called paratelic, where one prefers to feel a high level of arousal (excitement). The reversal from anxiety, fear and uncertainty to a paratelic state of excitement and mirth through humour does not seem to be evident in the times of a real, persisting crisis. There was a clear overlap between the paratelic state and other metamotivational states among Moroccan Facebook users.

Though generating a feeling of excitement and mirth, memetic humour does much more than simply amuses as it can address serious social and political issues and operate within a situation of psychological stress that makes the reversal to mirth coupled with overtones of the absurd, self-deprecation and bitterness. Humour, as it was experienced by Moroccan Facebook users, is the expression of mixed feeling of apparent mirth, bitterness, aggressiveness, and self-mockery. It is true that humour provided an outlet for them to release tension caused by worry and fear and “subconsciously overcome sociocultural inhibitions” (Meyer 2000: 312), but at the same time this humour represented a mechanism of social control and expression of conflict and resistance where aggressive disparagement against the maladaptive and the villain was at work. While the relief theory maintains that humour as a defensive process operates by displacement “by finding a means of withdrawing the energy from the release of unpleasure that is already in preparation and transforming it, by discharge, into pleasure” (Freud 2010: 1807), conflict theories of humour acknowledge the positive reinforcing functions of humour for the ingroup, yet pointing out that “in the context of intergroup relations humor was more like a weapon: an expression of aggression and resistance” (Kuipers 2008: 373).

This article approaches humour as it was practised during the pandemic by Moroccan Facebook users in a way that highlights its dynamic form, functions, topicality, and the mixed emotions the users experienced in an apparently paratelic state. The analysis of the Facebook memes supports our approach and gives evidence of this particular use of humour in the time of crisis. What makes it also particular is the use of cultural and semiotic resources, media affordances and power dynamics to frame the use of humour and its effects. It can be argued that humour is a dynamic form that changes over time in response to circumstances and that it is expected to be funny and distracting but a tendency to use contentious, disparaging humour is remarkably high in the Moroccan context. Despite economic liberalisation and growth in Morocco, recent studies on Morocco agree on the failure of politics in making the benefits from economic achievements redistributive among all the citizens and regions and contend that the economic growth is self-serving to the dominant elites. Social disparities, chronic poverty, unemployment and dysfunctions in social services are still a real challenge to the Moroccan government and makes the country vulnerable in times of a pandemic (Cavatorta & Merone 2020; Fatih 2019).

This paper investigates the use of humour by Moroccans on Facebook during the pandemic. It focuses on the motivations of humour, its functions and mechanisms. The major aim of this research is to suggest a possible correlation between the changing motivation and the functions of humour in that humour could trigger the reversal to a paratelic state and fulfil the psychological need for relief, coping with fear and worries and solidarity in the beginning of the pandemic, but as the pandemic lingered and the situation worsened, the motivation shifted to

the desire to make fun of equals and control their behaviours, or challenge and question the government policies, and thus the divisive functions of humour were dominant and the latter became more aggressive, subversive and disparaging.

2. Motivation, functions and mechanisms

Humour, used in this article as an umbrella term for laughter-generating forms, is a complex phenomenon that should be approached from different perspectives. When dealing with humour in the time of pandemics, wars and crises, many researchers investigate the motivation, structure and functions of humour (Davies 2001; Kuipers 2005; Bischetti et al. 2021; Zekavat 2021). Incongruity itself cannot be humorous unless one is in a playful state that is called “paratelic” (Apter 2001: 6). In a serious state, called telic motivational state, we perceive incongruities as “dissonances, ambiguities, stupidities, and illogicalities” (Apter 2001: 23). In a paratelic motivational state, we construct and enjoy these incongruities in a form that is called in reversal theory “cognitive synergies” (Apter 2001:23). In order for an experience to be humorous, Martin and Ford argue that “(A) person must experience a cognitive synergy in which the second interpretation of a stimulus or event involves diminishment from the first interpretation” (2018: 70). By escaping the laws of logic, diminishment makes the experience of incongruity funny and enjoyable.

The paratelic motivational state involves an arousal that enables a reversal of emotions from boredom to excitement. However, other emotions may precede the experience of humour like fear and anger, as argued by Apter (2001: 23-24) and this can affect humour itself and the emotions felt after the reversal to excitement due to arousal. Martin and Ford contend that “Even normally negative emotions can be experienced as exciting and enjoyable when one is in the paratelic state, as demonstrated by the popularity of horror movies” (2018: 69). In the case of danger, Apter argues, people “reverse into the paratelic state and enjoy the arousal that has been caused by the danger” (2001: 22) only after they overcome it. When the danger persists, the excitement may be momentary and there is a reversal to anxiety and fear. The study of this sequence of reversals is beyond the scope of our research, as this paper is more concerned with the impact of the persistence of the fear, anger, anxiety on the memes themselves, and the mechanisms humour uses.

People experience humour after arousal is triggered by cues that prompt them to adopt a paratelic motivational state; however, while being in this state, they may adopt a negativist or mastery stances in terms of what they laugh at. They may challenge the restrictions and make fun of them, or they may hold other people up to ridicule because of their inability to conform to these rules to correct maladaptive behaviour and maintain social coherence. Alternatively, they may sympathise with the victims of the pandemic and challenge the policies of the government. Apter acknowledges these conflicts and variations by contending that “a whole kaleidoscope of changing combinations may occur” (2001: 17). Accordingly, other motivational states may colour the expression of humour in a paratelic state as a coping strategy, and give it negativist, disparaging or subversive overtones. Kuipers argues, in her study of 9/11 disaster jokes, that these jokes “speak to these mixed feelings of ambivalence, alienation, unrealness, and rebelliousness about the media culture and public discourse” (2005: 82). This ambivalence is stronger in the case of the persisting pandemic and the mixed feelings may turn humour into an absurdist or surrealist bitter irony, or into a socially or politically disparaging satire.

In the same vein, on studying humour in communication events, Meyer (2000: 323) argues that “two overall effects emerge: division and unification” and identifies four main functions of humour: identification, clarification, enforcement and differentiation. In the first case, because the audience is sympathetic to and familiar with the topic, it may experience identification with

the user of humour. In the second case, the audience has low degrees of agreement and familiarity with a humour topic, and it may receive clarification through humour use. Thirdly, an audience with some disagreement or unfamiliarity with the humour topic may experience enforcement of a social norm. In the fourth case, when in strong disagreement or with greater unfamiliarity with the issue of humour, the audience may experience differentiation (2000: 317-318). Identification and clarification reinforce agreement with a social norm and unity between communicators while enforcement and differentiation tend to be divisive as they involve disagreement over an issue or a norm.

As a major mechanism of humour generation, incongruity has been used as an explanatory model of humour since Kant (1790 [1911]) and it has been elaborated by different researchers since the 1970s. In Suls's (1972) two-stage model of humour appreciation (incongruity-resolution theory), in order to be humorous, the incongruity must be resolved. Attardo & Raskin (1991), and Attardo (1994, 2001) elaborated the notion of incongruity as the simultaneous activation of two meanings or frames of reference, representing humour generation as a three-stage model (General Theory of Verbal Humor): set-up, incongruity and resolution, and used six knowledge resources to analyse humorous lines: the script opposition, the logical mechanism, the situation, the target, the narrative strategy, and the language (Attardo 1991: 22-27)

In line, to some extent, with the cognitive methods in the study of humour (reversal theory and comprehension-elaboration theory) in which diminishment of the first interpretation by the second interpretation does not remove or resolve the incongruity but makes it trivial, Attardo argues in his study of humorous metaphors, as a linkage of two domains, that "humor always involves non-fully resolved incongruities. Metaphors, conversely, fully resolve the incongruity of the mapping between domains." (Attardo 2015: 95). For Attardo, when the connection between the two domains in the metaphorical blend is insufficient to justify the mapping, "the resolution is only partial, making the metaphor humorous" (2015: 96). The intrusion of a third domain that makes the link appropriate is what makes the metaphor humorous with a partial resolution of the incongruity.

In the study of humour, the semantic distance is, in effect, used in the cognitive methods to measure the incongruity. Martin and Ford contend that "sentences that were rated as most funny were those that showed both high between-domain distance (incongruity) and low within-domain distance (resolution)" (2018: 122). These findings mean that the more stretched the distance between words or domains, the greater the incongruity, and the less within-domain distance, the greater the resolution. In the resolution, a third meaning or domain should be used, as argued by Attardo above, to establish an appropriate link between the two incongruous domains.

Finding a resolution for an incongruity entails the use of context in the construction of actual meaning. In the comprehension-elaboration theory, elaboration refers "to the degree to which people use activated schemas to generate further thoughts, images and inferences related to the reinterpretation of an event that are not necessary for comprehension" (Martin & Ford, 2018: 75-76). The elaboration is based partly on schemas, or what Coulson (2015: 167) calls "background and contextual knowledge" which is essential to the construction of meaning. Coulson uses the notion of frame to show how an incongruity can be solved and argues that when the initial activated frame does not construct an acceptable cognitive model for comprehension, we use frame-shifting that Coulson defines as "the activation of background knowledge and the establishment of mappings between counterpart structure in the old frame and in the new one" (2015: 171). This frame-shifting reanalyses the existing elements and provides a new frame for the construction of the intended meaning.

Another type of distance involved in the production and (especially) reception of humour is the distance toward a violated norm in a humorous content. The benign violation theory

provides a different way of thinking about incongruity. McGraw and Warren (2010: 1142) argue that a violation of norms can be humorous only when it is benign, that is “acceptable” and “psychologically distant.”

The reaction of the interpreters depends on the distance they adopt toward the violated norm; they may not find the violation humorous and may feel embarrassed, disgusted, threatened or disparaged. This paper is particularly interested in how the internalised psychological or social distance affects the humorous content and the degree of violation in the presence of a persistent danger. For instance, when Bischetti, Canal, & Bambini (2021: 13) studied the appreciation of different formats of Covid-19 humour shared on social media, Covid-19 humour was described as dark and its appreciation as aversive. They conclude that “Covid-19 humor may be as funny as the average instance of humor or even funnier than that, but it has a high chance of being perceived as disturbing or aversive by many.”

Humour also reinforces certain norms in the face of danger, particularly those norms that enhance engagement in protective behaviour in times of a pandemic. Using the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen 1991) and the Focus Theory of Normative Conduct (Cialdini 1991), Zekavat (2021: 285) investigates how The Late Show with Stephen Colbert uses humour and satire during the time of Covid-19 pandemic “to provide information, proffer injunctive norms, and modify attitudes and subjective norms in his public audience, while exposing the inefficacy of behavioral controls and urging public authorities to adopt more effective ones instead.” Ridicule and shaming, as it is argued by Zekavat, can be used as a means of maintaining social control, forcing group members to conform to the rules that reinforce protection and safety.

However, the economic crisis made it hard for some people to perceive conformity to the rules as favourable to their own situation (attitude), and resist the social pressure exerted upon them (subjective norm) and even produce a counter-hegemonic discourse showing their inability to perform the required behaviour (perceived behavioural control). Others may use conspiracy theories to justify their resistance. Though a large part of memes activates injunctive norms – in accordance with the official discourse-informing and motivating people to change their behaviour, these norms are challenged from different perspectives and a counter-hegemonic humour emerges with counter-arguments. Holmes & Marra (2002: 70) made the distinction between humour which contributes to solidarity, humour which contributes to power, and humour which serves a psychological need. When analysing the contribution of humour to power, they distinguish between humour which reinforces the status quo (reinforcing humour) and humour which challenges or subverts the status quo (subversive humour). As with any discourse, humour can be either a reinforcement of or a challenge to the status quo. Kramer (2015: 4) highlights the role of subversive humour as a means of consciousness-raising about covert oppression and attitude change. He argues that subversive humour is a device of persuasion providing an audience a means to detect committed stereotypical beliefs, motivating appropriate emotions in the audience and engaging the audience to create meaning.

3. New media affordances, needs and perceived utility

Facebook is the social networking site most used by Moroccans. Statistics¹ show that there were 21,020,000 Facebook users in Morocco in August 2020, which accounted for 55.3 % of its entire population, in comparison to 16,865,000 Facebook users in Morocco in December 2018. In comparison with other social media platforms, 90 percent of the Internet users in Morocco used Facebook (in 2021). This shows that, in recent years, the usage of Facebook has followed an upward trend, and Facebook has become the most important social media site for Moroccans.

¹ The link to the statistics about the usage of social media by Moroccans:
<https://www.statista.com/statistics/1243924/leading-social-media-platforms-morocco/>

It marks for them a change in the way social communication happens, a change from one-directional vertical communication by mass media to a horizontal, interactive communication enabled by the new media. People feel empowered by these media because the latter meet some of their needs and enable them to participate, interact and produce posts of their own. They can reach different media platforms and have the experiences they want. Jenkins (2006: 2) calls this cultural paradigm shift in media “convergence culture” and defines it as “the flow of content across multiple media platforms.” In this new culture, people are no longer passive audiences but interact, countercheck information, comment, and generate their own posts. This culture empowered them and made them more active in a society that is described by Castells (2009: 4) as “network society,” that is “a social structure constructed around (but not determined by) digital networks of communication.

Empowered by the new media, people use their affordances to meet the needs of expression, connectivity, solidarity, recognition, critique, among other needs. The affordances of the new media are multiple but depend on how their utility is perceived by people using them. Schrock (2015: 1234) argues that “utility for particular goals can be observed, learned, or discovered.” Schrock (2015: 1231) defines affordances as relational existing “in the interaction between an individual’s subjective perception of utility and objective qualities of a technology.” Linking perception to need, he concludes that “Communicative affordances likely do not create the goal an individual is trying to achieve. Rather, they enable a new way to accomplish it” (2015: 1233).

Having access to social media platforms like Facebook in times of the pandemic, Moroccans were in desperate need of communicating news and exchanging ideas about the virus, and of social connectivity in search of solidarity and relief. They also made the platform an outlet for their critique, worries and discontent. Recent studies about the use of social media in other countries stress the role of social media to provide correct information (Abbas et al. 2021) and to tackle infodemics and misinformation about Covid-19 pandemic (Tsao et al. 2021). Other studies suggest that social media have a significant role in spreading fear and panic related to Covid-19 (Ahmad 2020; Demoyakor 2020). It has been suggested in different studies that the humorous content posted on social media demonstrates a desire to lessen the situation’s negative impact or a desire for cohesion (Amici 2020) and that these media are a window of relief with humour mitigating the feeling of tension and fear (Hussein & Aljamili 2020). Most importantly, a study of the usage of social media by young people from 24 countries during the Covid-19 pandemic shows that they create their individual crisis narrative based on the sources they use and the insights they select (Wolkmer 2021). Because the different online communities used the affordances provided by social media in different ways, and they used different sources and perspectives, they created different crisis narratives during the Covid-19 pandemic.

4. Methodology

A significant amount of data was collected from Facebook individual, communal pages and groups (most memes from Bayt Alfokaha Wa Mmarah 25.4k members/ Alam Alfokaha wa dahik, 37 k members)² (2) from 15 March, 2020 to 15 July, 2020. A non-probability sampling was adopted and it was based on the convenience of the materials collected to the goals of our research. First, the memes were selected if they contained a humour-generating mechanism like incongruity, exaggeration, parody or irony. Then, the humorous memes were selected if they

² Link to the Facebook group: Bayt Alfokaha wal Marah: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/346861945454633> .Link to the Facebook group Alam Alfokaha wa Dahik: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/714231421991705/about>.

were comprised either of the verbal or the visual (still images) or both of them and were shared on different pages and groups and with the highest number of “likes.” A netnographic approach was adopted involving the researcher’s participation, observation, daily collection of data from different Facebook pages, and revisiting the same pages to evaluate popularity and impact on the audience. The collected data were classified into categories that were coded to extract concepts and topical units. A corpus of 460 Facebook memes was selected and a content analysis was conducted to classify the content into topical units. 35 per cent of the memes are verbal texts with emoticons, memes combining picture and text represent 62 per cent but the text as a comment controls the meaning of the image, while only 3 per cent are photoshop images with no text. The selected memes were then analysed in terms of a social semiotic approach that draws largely on the semantic-functional categories that Kress & Van Leeuwen (2006) mapped from Halliday’s theory of Transitivity and its meta-functions (1994). This approach frames the multimodal discourse analysis used, which is a descriptive and analytical tool of all the semiotic modes of a text, “framed as one field, as one domain. Jointly they are treated as one connected cultural resource for (representation as) meaning-making by members of a social group at a particular moment” (Kress 2012: 38).

Kress (2012: 36) defines the text as “the material site of emergence of immaterial discourse(s),” and argues that signs are motivated and that “texts realize the interests of their makers.” The analysis starts with the representation structure of the visual describing the processes (narrative and conceptual), then moves on to the interaction among the participants analysing the gaze, the frame, the distance, the perspective and the modality. Then finally the textual is analysed in comparison to the visual describing the process of meaning-making in the composition through the analysis of three elements: information value, salience and framing. (Kress & Leeuwen 2006) The analysis will be selective focusing on the semiotic features that contribute to the generation of humour.

As different semiotic modes of representation have different affordances, they give the same meaning different realisations and they all contribute partially to the meaning of the multimodal text. However, as a composition, the text generates humour in different ways and in terms of the incongruities that emerge between the different modes of the text, the visual and the verbal. The incongruities do not have meaning unless the contextual and cultural knowledge are activated because humour is inherently cultural and context dependent.

5. Thematic and semiotic analysis

Since the memes are varied in their use of multiple semiotic resources, a quantitative and qualitative examination of their content would be useful in such a way as to show how this collected data can be organised in terms of processes, themes and functions. This preliminary content analysis will present the different themes of the memes and the different uses and functions of humour. The themes were organised around three main analytical semiotic concepts that draw largely on the social semiotic approach and the analytical model developed by Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006): representation, and interaction that is subdivided into positive and critical ones. The representations in the memes of the first category (50 memes) were constructed using the conceptual and narrative processes. The focus of the conceptual process was on the representation of the virus itself as it was imagined by Moroccan Facebook users: an ugly old man, an animated microscopic creature, an animated human-like strawberry, a lethal perfume and a circular vessel. By using the narrative process, Moroccan Facebook users told the story of the virus, highlighting its Chinese origins, the invisible agents and the invested interests behind its spread in the world and in Morocco, and the allegedly planned objectives of the pandemic. All the representations revolved around certain themes like conspiracy, danger,

and corruption, and were keyed in humorous terms to serve different psychological ends, like the need to produce alternative interpretations to dissipate their fear and worries that stems largely from the uncertainty that prevailed in the first months about the virus.

In the second category (143 memes), Moroccan Facebook users tended to interact with other users by sharing their experiences, worries and their daily routines with the other users. Their memes focused on portraying their frustration and boredom due to the lockdown as it lingered and persisted, and on telling the others about certain details in their daily life: the newly-acquired habits and their hard economic situation due to the unemployment or the difficulty to move and make a living. These memes were meant to strengthen solidarity and social cohesion among Facebook users, and thus serve to unite them in the face of the pandemic. The humour generated by these memes served two functions; identification and clarification (Meyer 2000).

In the third category (267 memes), as the lockdown persisted and the negative economic effects of the pandemic began to emerge, Moroccan Facebook users tended to engage in two interactive practices: social control, the expression of conflict and differentiation and enforcement of certain norms. The memes used for social control made fun of maladaptive behaviours with a view to correcting them and enabling the community to successfully fight the pandemic. The humour targeted careless or ignorant people, as an outgroup, who do not conform to the imposed restrictions. However, given the difficulty to identify group membership among Facebook users and given that humour engages in this corrective process in the name of the whole community, this kind of humour can alternatively be interpreted at times as self-deprecating. The enforcement and differentiation functions of humour (Meyer 200) that are manifest in the practice of social control of equals shifted to a bottom-up practice of conflict and resistance in the face of the bad management of the crisis by politicians. The blame for the deteriorating economic and social life was shifted to politicians. Moroccan Facebook users made fun of the contradictions in the state policy, the delay in providing financial aid, and the inefficacy of certain measures. The consensus observed in the beginning of the pandemic began to crack as the economic and social life came to a standstill. The divisive function of humour became dominant as the lockdown persisted and the situation worsened.

All these memes are the expression of different stances. Because memes are basically imitations of other texts, ideas, or formulas, they are derivatives articulated as remixes. According to the same logic, stances are also memetic in nature. Shifman argues that “when re-creating a text, users can decide to imitate a certain position that they find appealing or use an utterly different discursive orientation” (2014: 40). As the content analysis indicates, Moroccan Facebook users choose to participate by generating memes and keying them in a humorous mode for different ends. They may choose to share their uncertainty with others, or give vent to their anger, boredom, or discontent by means of a memetic production. This does not mean that all of them imitate other stances and that the public memesphere is actually monological. As noted by Shifman above, some people may choose a different discursive orientation, thus creating another stance that contributes to making the public discourse polyvocal (Milner 2013).

5.1. Humorous representations

The memes in this category are varied in form (image macro, photo with a separate comment, text with emoticons), but all of them are representations of the virus and its origins. The representations are humorous expressions of a position of uncertainty. They draw largely on pop culture as a resource, using shared cultural schemata. They are also comments on events in the local and global contexts. For instance, representing the virus as an animated beast strawberry with an open bloodstained mouth is reminiscent of the unprecedented spread of the virus in a strawberry farm in Morocco where hundreds of women were tested positive for Covid-19. The news went viral on social media, inspiring Facebook users to create memes in different forms

and for different ends. They also shared global news and contributed to the expanding sceptical talk about the origins of the virus and the conspiracy plans that were allegedly at play.

Two memes were selected for analysis as representations (Figures 1, 2). Figure 1 is an image with a comment (Corona in Arabic) and it is memetic as the comment is constantly changed by other Facebook users by using what Yus (2019: 124) calls “ad hoc visual referent adjustment” (*italics in the original*) whereby different text are added to the same picture.

From an analytical perspective, the carrier is a face with certain attributes like old age, ugliness, a mouth left agape with menacing teeth, a head covered with the kaffiyeh (a headdress worn by people living in the Middle East) and an unusual, strange wig. The face does not keep contact with the viewer as the right eye is almost closed and the left eye is stray, stripping the face of gaze. What makes the face look uglier is the close-up that frames it and the resulting close personal distance making the physical details of the face more amplified and fear inspiring. In terms of the horizontal perspective (angle of participation), the face does not involve the viewer but the vertical angle of power places him/her in an eye-level angle, putting him/her in a face-to-face encounter with this strange figure. In terms of modality, the achromatic image links the face with darkness, and the absence of background foregrounds the details of the face, including shades.

In terms of composition, the information value is represented by a top/down structure. Being more salient and attention-grabbing, the image creates an initial expectation, that of an old ugly face; however, the text elaborates on the meaning of the image and creates a second interpretation that is apparently incongruous with the initial one, giving the face an identity, that of the Covid-19 virus. The verbal “anchorage” (Barthes 1977) urges the viewer to reinterpret the image by “extension” (where “one mode provides new information on the information from the other mode” (Yus 2019: 116)) in such a way as to resolve the incongruity, by using the inferential strategy of adjusting the concept of ugliness to a microscopic virus. While the incongruity between an ugly face and a virus is the result of a high between-domain distance, the resolution of this cognitive synergy generates humour by the creation of a low within-domain distance by figuring out a third shared feature of a disgusting creature that is potentially dangerous.



Figure 1. Humorous representation of the virus in terms of pop culture (Facebook 2020)

The creation of this third meaning is reinforced by the viewer's background and contextual knowledge, namely the viewer's experience of the virus as dangerous and the representation of an imaginary creature called in Moroccan pop culture as “Lrhul” or “Bu‘u” or “Bo‘bo” which

is the equivalent of different kinds of mythical creatures used by parents to frighten their children into good behaviour (the bogeyman). Humour emanates specifically from this kind of regression that the viewer activates from pop culture and childhood memories. The violation of the social norm of respect for old people is made benign and acceptable as the violation is socially and psychotically distant, having as a referent an imagined familiar creature, regardless of the real identity of the man. The meme may alternatively be interpreted as making fun of those people who overestimate the danger of Covid-19 pandemic by downplaying its danger.

The pleasure that the viewer draws from the release of negative energy caused by these emotions, makes the narrative funny and distracting. Braniecka et al. (2019: 2) argue humour is “an effective tool for relieving depressed individuals’ low mood.” While the emotional benefits in such memes are manifest, the cognitive pleasure that the viewer gets from the representation of the virus in pop culture terms makes the virus less serious and less threatening. The accessibility of this humorous representation enhances short-lived distraction and relief.

Figure 2 is an image macro with only one text in English at the bottom of the frame. The representation structure is both narrative and analytical. It tells the story of the transmission of the Covid-19 virus from animals to humans; the actor is the cock and the target are the two politicians, Boris Johnson and Donald Trump. The process of transmission is enigmatic at first and seems strange as it contradicts the widespread hypothesis that the virus was transmitted from another animal. However, the analysis of the carriers, the cock and the two politicians, reveals a similarity that explains the transmission, namely the hairstyle of the two politicians and the messy feathers on the head of the cock. The verbal anchorage announces the discovery of the way the virus was transmitted from animals to humans but assigns the discovery to an unknown agent (they), elaborating on the relation between the cock and the two politicians. In terms of the information value structure of the pictures themselves, the frame of the cock is more salient and put on the left of the composite image, announcing the given (animals as the source of the virus), the pictures of the two politicians are less salient and put on the right, announcing the new (it was transmitted to two famous politicians). The overall frame connects the disconnected pictures and the whole meaning is keyed in humorous terms. The incongruity that arises at first by the opposition between the expectation of an unfolding of a much-debated source of the virus by probably a scientific discovery and the pictures of the politicians as a representation of an explanation is soon resolved by the creation of another meaning based on a shared physical feature.

Figure 2. The transmission of the virus from animals to humans (Facebook 2020)



Having much free time during the lockdown, Moroccan Facebook users searched for updates and top stories from local and international media and used them to create humorous memes. Boris Johnson was criticised in the British media for his rowdy hairstyle which exposed him to the mockery of the press. His scruffy hair was deemed unbecoming of a Prime Minister.³ Donald Trump was also criticised for playing down the seriousness of the virus and his hair was the object of long-time public speculation about whether his hair was real. In his coronavirus press briefing of 30 October, 2020, he said; “My hair is blowing around, and it’s mine.”⁴ This meme had circulated even before the start of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2019 with a different comment and was posted afterwards in different social networking sites like Tumblr and Twitter.⁵

Facebook users have not only represented the virus in their own terms and imagination to cope with the perceived danger of the virus but also interacted with one another by sharing ideas, experiences and emotions with a view to relieving tension and consolidating social bonds.

5.2. Positive social interactions

The previous memes show how Moroccan Facebook users represented the virus and gave it an identity and origin keyed humorously in terms of pop culture to cope with their fear and control it. The pleasure they get from humour lies in their ability to make fun of the source of their fear and worry through humorous representations and give it a virtual, symbolic blow. The second type of memes aims at laughing with others by positively interacting with them (mostly “just for fun” memes” (Moreno-Almeida 2021: 1547); people use inclusive humour to share ideas, experiences and emotions, making social bonds stronger, and relieving psychological tension due to boredom, fear, worries and change in the daily routines.

The selected meme (Figure 3) exemplifies this type of humour that seeks to relieve tension by producing a collective, inclusive and shared laughter. Figure 3 is a photoshop image macro that portrays a surrealist extension of the body outside the house through the windows. The composition mixes the real and the imaginary in a dream-like, highly condensed image. The extension of the body is a condensation of the emotions felt during the lockdown, including boredom, tiredness and worries that make people feel the strange unprecedented reality as surrealist. The rhetor includes a comment that reads: “we have grown up in the house,” intentionally playing on two different fames of meaning; growing up in age and growing up in bodily dimensions. The image is a hyperbole of the second meaning whereby the body grows out of the limits of the house and extends to the outside.

³ Casalicchio, E. “Boris Johnson’s hair shows he’s too posh to fail”. *Politico*, 9 April, 2021. <https://www.politico.eu/article/how-boris-johnsons-hair-defined-britain/>

⁴ Remarks by President Trump and Members of the Coronavirus Task Force in a Press Briefing (30 March): <https://ge.usembassy.gov/remarks-by-president-trump-and-members-of-the-coronavirus-task-force-in-a-press-briefing-march-30/>

⁵ Links to the meme in Fig. 2.

-<https://ladyoftheteaandblood.tumblr.com/post/187331851734/porterdavis-last-year-the-world-only-had-one>

-https://twitter.com/bgv_online/status/1166718321552691202

-<https://twitter.com/KVihanto/status/1241280781319917568>



Figure 3. Surrealist “just for fun” meme (Facebook 2020)

The incongruity between the two frames is resolved, albeit by surrealist exaggeration, by a local logic referring for justification to the lack of physical activity and may-be excessive eating, and the boredom felt by people during the long-time lockdown with the newly acquired habits. The feeling of extension is stimulated by the psychology of boredom and given a surrealist dimension to generate laughter through exaggeration. The surrealist condensation of the feeling of boredom due to the lockdown is meant to produce collective shared laughter and mirth that relieve tension and make social bonds stronger. The excessive physical growth is a dream-like surrealist displacement of the feeling of boredom that prevailed gradually as the lockdown persisted to a physical phenomenon.

5.3. Exclusive humour and the expression of conflict

While the previous type of memes does not attack explicit targets and focuses on enhancing solidarity and relieving tension to help people cope with stress and the perceived dangers of the pandemic, the memes in this category use humour to laugh at and make fun of others for two specific ends: social control and the expression of conflict and resistance.

In the first wave of the pandemic, people were panic-stricken and were more concerned about their safety. Though they might be uncertain about the nature of the virus and its potential dangers, most of them abided by the laws of restrictions and urged other people to do so, out of precaution. Bergson’s notion of corrective laughter serves as a mechanism of social control whereby people who do not align with the restrictions are punished by shaming and ridicule. This mechanism is highly effective in a traditional culture where shame is an overriding means of control and punishment. The distinction between shame culture and guilt culture made by the anthropologist Ruth Benedict was more operational in Morocco where shame culture has been intensified by social media; social behaviour is put under constant observation and critique. In Morocco where the shame culture prevails, people dread being criticised openly on social media because they do not want to be condemned and excluded, and, on the contrary, they are encouraged, like all social media users all over the world, by the affordances that social media provide to cherish a narcissistic desire to be praised and loved.

Nevertheless, though social media is used to regulate behaviour through the mechanism of inclusion and exclusion, people do not always abide by the restrictions. They may be motivated to respect them for their safety in response to injunctive norms (laws) and to existing descriptive norms (most people wearing masks and respecting social distance), but their motivation may weaken in terms of their ability to respect normal conduct (perceived behavioural control). Viewed from the perspective of the theory of planned behaviour, the behaviour of a lot of Moroccans, as it will be demonstrated by memes, depended on other non-motivational factors like unemployment and lack of resources, among other factors. Their ability to conform to

normal conduct was compromised by other factors, and they were viewed by other ingroup members as unjustly criticised (for example, asking poor unemployed people to stay at home while no financial support is offered to them). From the perspective of the focus theory of normative conduct, some people activated survival values and norms rather than respecting injunctive norms as the lockdown persisted.

A lot of Facebook users made fun of the maladaptive behaviour that was due to the lack of awareness, difficult material conditions, being ashamed of testing positive for Covid-19, perceived frustration etc. Figure 4 exemplifies such maladaptive behaviour. It is an image macro portraying people in a queue waiting for their turn, and instead of standing and respecting the social distance, they put their shoes, sandals or other stuff to observe the queue and sat down in total disrespect for sanitary measures. The text explains the scene and the comment reads: “The Ministry of Health has had a stroke” (health officials were shocked). The situational irony in this real event highlights some people’s inability to respond positively to injunctive norms. Although the administration put marks on the floor to organise the queue in respect for sanitary measures, people grew tired of standing and decided to wait in a maladaptive way. The incongruity in this irony is between the expected (ideal and normal behaviour) and the actual, generating humour at the expense of those maladaptive people.



Figure 4. Meme making fun of maladaptive behaviour (Facebook 2020)

Such memes give voice to a widespread public condemnation of the lack of awareness and discipline (due to different variables like illiteracy, poverty and uncertainty) but disregards the non-motivational factors that make people unable to follow the restrictions. These memes are inherently dialogical, harbouring contrasting perspectives. Though these factors are made less salient in this meme, the untold finds an outlet in other memes that condemn perceived villains of the pandemic. People who cannot distance themselves socially from the targets of these memes find other personified scapegoat villains to make them bear the responsibility for such maladaptive behaviour; for instance, in Figure 4, the administration is blamed for not offering seats and shelter for the people, leaving them wait for a long time under the sun. Alternatively, the meme may be viewed as the expression of a self-deprecating humour, being critical of the lack of discipline in the Moroccan culture in general.

Moroccans were dissatisfied with the government's intervention and discontent reached a peak. Paez & Pérez (2020: 603) argue that “epidemics are personified in heroes, villains and victims.” The personified villains for Moroccans were politicians, media and international institutions (WHO) who were accused of inefficacy and manipulation. Figure 5 is a conventional template on social media, using a picture of a famous sit-com comedian, Hassan El Fad, known for his witty humour, accompanied with a quote assigned to him. The quote reads: “I asked somebody about his feeling when he received financial support from the government due to the pandemic without working for it. He said that he felt like a representative in parliament.” His picture is a cue for the viewer to reverse to a paraletic state; however, the resulting humour harbours negativity and serious criticism. The quote is a disparaging understatement that says more than it actually announces, insinuating that MPs are not acting properly in the times of crisis, albeit receiving large sums of money.



Figure 5. Meme disparaging politicians (Facebook 2020)

Political satire is an attack on targets in the name of ideal norms and is practised on behalf of the community. In Morocco, blame-shifting and scapegoating alter the workings of satire in terms of political contingency (Mifdal 2016: 54-56); satirists change targets in terms of the ongoing situation. The deep state (Makhzen) gained more popularity and authority during the crisis, and satirists targeted only elected politicians for dysfunctions (in social services) though they were not directly responsible for them. The dysfunctions were structural and chronic due to the economic policies of the deep state itself since the 1980s.

Figure 6 is an image macro designed in the same way as the previous one. However, this meme can be described using the notion of relay (Barthes 1977) whereby the text and image do not say the same thing and they have here a relation of divergence (“the meanings of text and picture contradict each other and convey new information out of this contradiction” (Yus 2019: 121)).



Figure 6. Humorous parodic meme of WHO's recommendations (Facebook 2020)

It features a picture of the president of WHO and a headline announcing a breaking news that reads: "The World Health Organisation recommends washing water before drinking it." The meme uses an absurdist content and tone to counteract the manipulation allegedly practised by international institutions to serve the interests of pharmaceutical companies and global dominant elites. The representation structure of the image is analytical and narrative. The president of WHO is a carrier of certain attributes that make him an authority in the domain of health. A well-dressed expert explaining apparently in meticulous terms, and using specific gestures to reinforce the scientific validity of his declaration. In narrative terms he is an actor whose job is to provide his audience with accurate information to make them feel alert but secure. His gaze is not directed at the viewer, and implicitly shows that he is concerned with making his message reach other addressees.

The top-down information value structure of the composition contrasts the ideal/normal (the illuminating role of WHO) and the real/abnormal (the confusing recommendations of WHO). The incongruity is framed in absurdist terms as the text opposes the first script of expertise with a meaningless recommendation. The resulting humour relieves the tension created by anxiety and reveals the extent to which Moroccans were distrustful of the contradictory recommendations that they receive from experts, and the dominant media narratives. Satire becomes absurdist when the reality has become itself meaningless and confusing.

6. Discussion

The analysis of the collected Internet memes from Facebook pages has shown that Moroccans used humour in the times of the pandemic for different ends: to relieve tension and overcome fear and worry due to Covid-19 by humorous representations, to interact with others and build identification and social cohesion, and to criticise maladaptive people and disparage inefficient politicians and expose their manipulative discourse. The memes of social control and the expression of conflict largely outnumber the other two categories (267 memes), which shows that Moroccans grew more concerned with the management of the crisis and critical of the maladaptive behaviour and the policies enacted to counteract the effects of the crisis in terms of communication, economy and governance.

However, the study of these memes revealed a lot of facts about actual social and cultural everyday practices in terms of the construction of values and the participation in the digital public sphere. Gardiner (2000: 43) argues that “the values and meanings that most directly shape our lives emerge from the existential demands of daily living and our immediate interpersonal relationships.” Internet memes may be indicative of some of the values that Moroccans live by in times of crisis. Though they strived to respect sanitary measures, they actually activated survival values rather than abiding by the injunctive norms when their living conditions forced them to give the priority to subsistence and immediate needs (money, food, schooling of children). Figure 7 shows the real concerns of Moroccans who focused more on providing the needs of their family than respecting sanitary measures (Moroccans have to buy a sheep for the religious sacrifice day).



Figure 7. Photoshop meme disclosing humorously the real concerns of an ordinary man (Facebook 2020)

The inability to control their behaviour in accordance with the injunctive norms stems from the lack of resources for minimal subsistence. Humour was the expression of a dialogical discourse that recognises the necessity of conforming to laws but highlights the impact of social inequalities on people’s ability to live during the crisis. People who have the necessary resources for living (The Haves) criticised those who have almost nothing (The Have Not), for not conforming to rules (Figure 4). The latter or the ones sympathizing with them targeted the villains like local politicians and international institutions (Figures 5 and 6). Consequently, when evaluating motivation, it can be argued that humour achieves an incomplete arousal as it is often imbued with negativity, resentment and aggressivity (267 out 460 memes). Though humour, as a discourse, can seriously participate in promoting issues of common concerns, the analysis of memes shows that it cannot only reveal existing power relations and struggles within the Moroccan society but also contribute to the evaluation of social behaviour, norms and political institutions. Its mechanisms of disparagement can discredit politicians by exposing their inefficacy and challenge norms that disregard people’s needs, real concerns and worries.

Moroccans posted memes on a public platform and participated in a public debate about the pandemic and related issues. These memes are viewed by some scholars as the products of digital amateur activism engaged in politics in an alternative way representing “a digital nonmovement forming a black parliament” that opens up “debates that challenge dominant political discourses” (Moreno-Almeida 2021: 1561). Their contribution to the public debate, though drawing largely on pop culture, cannot be cheapened as memes can really be a “key for the understanding of social and cultural processes” (Milner 2013: 2360), and even offer

alternative forms of understanding and perspectives. It is actually a form of critical resistance in an authoritarian regime that has become more aware of the role of digital media after the Arab Spring and takes them seriously, especially when such memes become viral. Though humour cannot be a real force of change in formal politics, its effects “should be rather measured in terms of long-term cultural and political change” (Mifdal 2015: 48), by challenging imposed norms and creating new values. Holmes and Marra (2002: 66) argue that humour can be used to subvert the status quo and “at least, symbolically, destabilize power relations in different social relationships.”

Conversely, Kuipers (2008: 374) distinguishes between political humour in repressive and open societies and contends that in the former “the humor of those without power tends to be clandestine and relatively toothless.” In the same vein, Davies (2010: 10) denies any effect of humour on the reality and contends that “The jokes’ importance lies not in their effects or long-term consequences, for jokes produce neither of these.” Their importance lies, according to him, in the insights they give us into the particular society in which they are invented and articulated. It can be argued that humour does not alone effect an immediate change in the social and political order; other variables should be taken into consideration like virality of memes and public pressure. While humour can raise consciousness and correct stereotypes (Kramer 2015), it needs other factors to be more effective. Social media are likely to contribute to the effectiveness of humour, when, for instance, some humorous memes go viral and gain wider support from the public. In effect, when online political satire in Morocco exposed the inefficacy of politicians and the dysfunctions of social service institutions, this critique of social services went viral on social media and urged the king to adopt a more inclusive social security system.

Moroccan Internet memes are culturally specific in that the distribution of different semiotic modes and their contribution to the general interpretation of the memes show that the Moroccan culture still recognises writing as a mode of control and reduces the role of image to illustration and amplification (with dozen memes as exception). In picture-text combination in terms of the collected data as a whole, the picture is often more salient but rarely generates humour independently from the text (except Figure 7 with no verbal anchorage, and Figures 3 and 4, where the verbal is redundant or at least predictable, and where humour is generated specifically in terms of what is expected from context or background knowledge); in most cases, and contrary to these exceptions, it is the text that elaborates on the meaning of the picture, creates an opposing frame or script and disambiguates between the two meanings to resolve the incongruity with an ad hoc visual referent adjustment (Figures 1, 2, 5, 6).

Tsakona (2009) adopted the General Theory of Verbal Humor (GTVH) framework to analyse cartoon humour and the interaction of the verbal and the visual in the production of humour. Though the analytical framework was applied on cartoon humour, the same framework can be used to analyse the interaction of the verbal and visual means. The following categories distinguish between three modes of the generation of humour in the analysed memes:

1. Memes based on verbal humour: where the script opposition stems mainly from the text (Figures 5 and 6) and where the picture plays only a supportive role in the production of humour by providing contextual cues about the situation. The scripts opposed in Fig. 5 are the actual one involving the useful financial aid to the needy people and the impossible one which is the feeling of being an MP because of the aid; this opposition is constructed by the activation of a false analogy and the use of exaggeration to compare the needy people and MPs. In Figure 6, while the picture sets the scene and creates an expectation (the normal as the serious speech of a man of authority), the text breaks the expectation raised by the picture by introducing an absurd tip (the abnormal) concerning the protective measures against the Covid-19 pandemic. The difference between these two examples lies in the contribution of the background knowledge provided by the

picture. While in Figure 5, the picture of the comedian involves an arousal that enables a reversal of emotions from boredom and fear to humorous excitement but does not contribute to the script opposition which is constructed by the text itself, the picture in Figure 6 contributes to the script opposition by introducing an expectation that the text contradicts. However, the background knowledge could possibly be activated without the use of the picture and only by the mention of the source of the quote which the picture just illustrates.

2. Memes based on the verbal and visual humour: in Figures 1 and 2, the collaboration between the verbal and visual is essential to the production of humour. The omission of one of them may create ambiguity and divergent interpretations. The visual metaphor in Figure 1 activates two domains (a fear-inspiring ugly old man and a dangerous virus). The resolution of the opposition between two different scripts is partially resolved by a third domain represented by the background knowledge (the figure of the bogeyman/Bu‘u from pop culture) which makes the metaphor humorous. In Figure 2, the simile between the cock and the two politicians seems incongruous, yet the text resolves the incongruity conveyed by the juxtaposition of the pictures by an exaggerated explanation.
3. Memes based on the visual humour: Figure 7 is the most explicit example as there is no verbal comment on the picture. The picture reverses the role of the thermometer from the actual (measuring temperature) to the nonactual (unfolding people’s worries). In Figures 3 and 4, the verbal is redundant and does not contribute significantly to the resolution of the script opposition between the possible (gaining more weight, feeling bored due to the lockdown) and the impossible (absurd growth of the body) in Figure 3, and between the normal (people respecting sanitary measures) and the abnormal (non-conformity to these measures) in Figure 4. Exaggeration and contradiction are visually explicit making the text, by and large, redundant.

While Kress & Van Leeuwen (2006: 26) maintain that images are coded and structured and are not just naturalistic representations used for illustration in the way Barthes (1977: 34) argued, they are fully aware that “Until now, language, especially written language, has been the most highly valued, the most frequently analysed, the most prescriptively taught and the most meticulously policed mode in our society.” The analysis of the relation of the image and the written language in this article shows that this is also true in the Moroccan culture to some extent and much work has to be done to promote a new visual literacy where the image is viewed as structured and coded and not a mere illustration of the verbal. Being basically oral and narrative, the Moroccan pop culture and the humour it generates give much prominence to the verbal (spoken or written) in the construction of meaning even in combinations that include the visual, while acknowledging the power of the image as an illustration or evidence, but not as a coded semiotic entity.

One last point deals with the psychological dimension of using humour in times of the pandemic in the Moroccan context. Though Moroccans share the same fear with the rest of the world, their reaction to the pandemic is imbued with past experiences of times of crisis, real (psychological and economic) needs, beliefs and culture. Moroccans used humour to cope with fear and worry or as a self-defence mechanism in cases of helplessness, guilt and excessive worry; however, some specific details should be noted. In his discussion of how “cabin fever” phenomenon can be handled during the pandemic, Blackman (2020: 123) argues that it “can be handled through discussion, verbalization, and sometimes humor.” It is true that Moroccans used humour as a defensive reaction in search of distraction and relief using mostly representational memes about the virus and the daily routines, especially during the first two months (March and April, 2020); however, as the pandemic lingered, the worries became varied and multiple (late April and May, June, 2020). Moroccans grew more concerned with

subsistence and survival, especially those who lost their jobs or the needy. Humour became other-oriented, fraught with aggressivity and disparagement, at times self-deprecating but most often resorting to a blaming, scapegoating mechanism. When Moroccans got used to the lingering fear, their humour was motivated by mixed feelings and used for different ends as it has been explained earlier. Moroccans who believe that “too much chagrin causes laughter” (a famous maxim in Moroccan pop culture), laughed but bitterly and nervously. The paratelic state maintained the arousal necessary for the creation and enjoyment of humour, yet this motivational state that harboured positive feelings like sympathy with others and enhanced positive interactions with them in the beginning of the pandemic, was gradually imbued with negativity towards the rules and the status quo, and mastery towards the others. This shift was context dependent and responsive to contingency.

7. Limitations

The current research focuses on the analysis of memes and the potential implications of their meaning making process; however, it does not really evaluate the actual effect of these memes on people’s behaviour, or their psychological effect on people interacting with them. The analysis is concerned with what these memes do but not with their actual effects on people. Nevertheless, the semiotic analysis of memes is indicative of the potential effects of this kind of communication and the resources it uses to disseminate ideas, norms, values and the way these are negotiated, challenged or replaced. It also draws a real picture of how ordinary people participated in public debates using the resources made available by popular culture, including humour, in a context where these people were denied access to official media and institutions and where serious debates are often manipulative and sustain the official discourse and the dominant narratives.

8. Conclusion

In this paper, Internet humorous memes were examined in terms of their motivation, functions and mechanisms. Moroccans produced humorous memes in an environment where uncertainty and fear were dominant in the beginning, and used humour as a coping mechanism to relieve tension, and strengthen social relations and cohesion. Inclusive humour was then dominant and served to unite people (identification) and provided them with information about the pandemic (clarification). As people could gradually cope with their fear of the virus and were overwhelmed with information, misinformation and fake news, their motivation changed and they were more concerned about their survival in the face of the harsh economic situation intensified by the lockdown. The analysis of the memes posted in this period showed that humour was motivated by the desire for mastery and control of maladaptive behaviours of equals (enforcement of norms), as well as a tendency to engage in bottom-up conflict and resistance against the government, making politicians accountable for the lingering crisis (differentiation and conflict). Humour became more divisive and shifted from the creation of mirth and amusement as a coping mechanism to a critical other-oriented disparagement of the perceived social villains and subversive challenge of the implemented policies. This study has indicated that a positive correlation between the change in the motivation and in the functions of humour is made visible in the ways humour was used in the two different periods.

Further research on this possible link between the motivations, functions and mechanisms of humour is needed to give more evidence of how humour, as any discourse, changes strategies in response to contingency, and especially in extreme cases of fear, uncertainty and instability.

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